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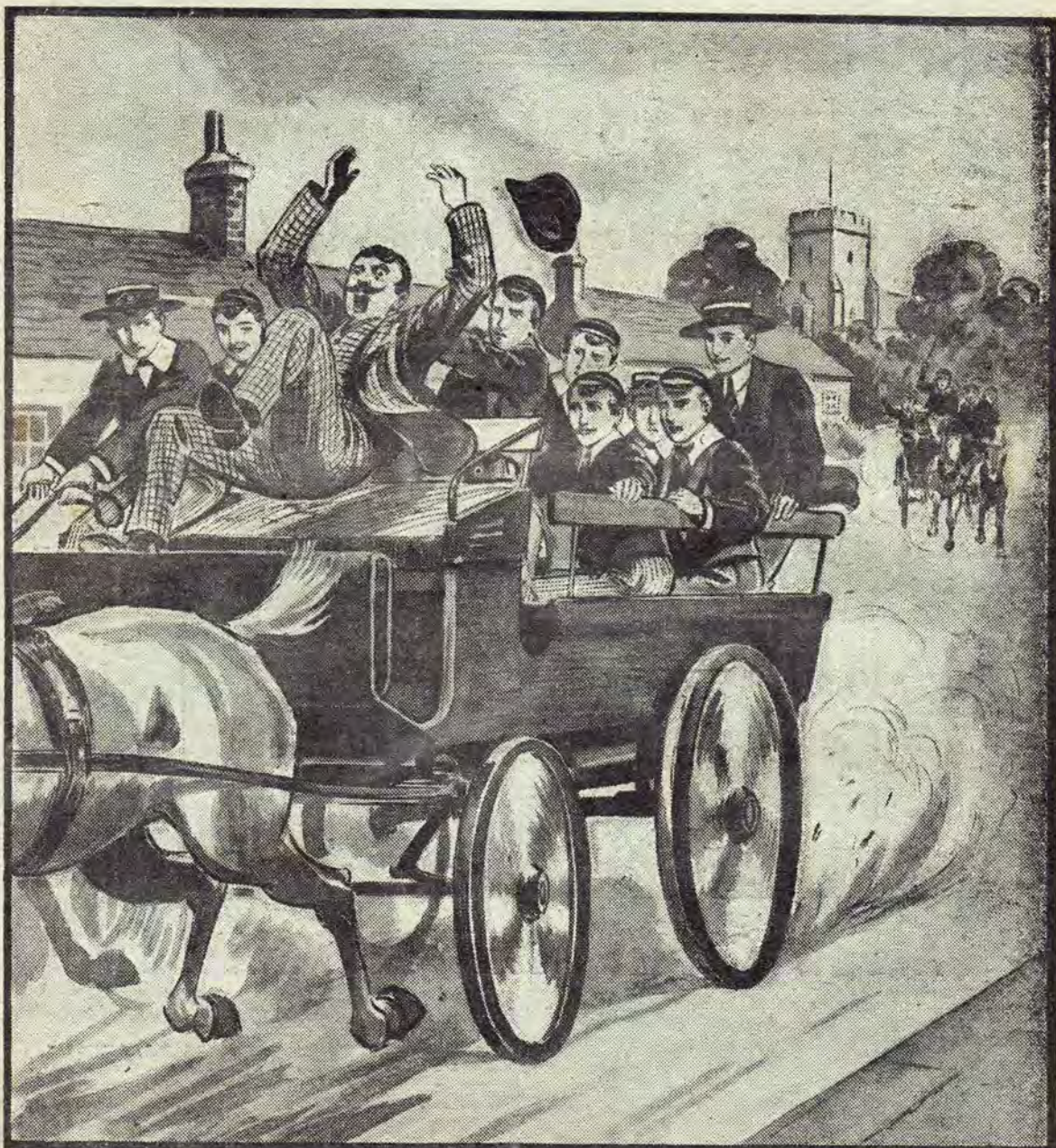
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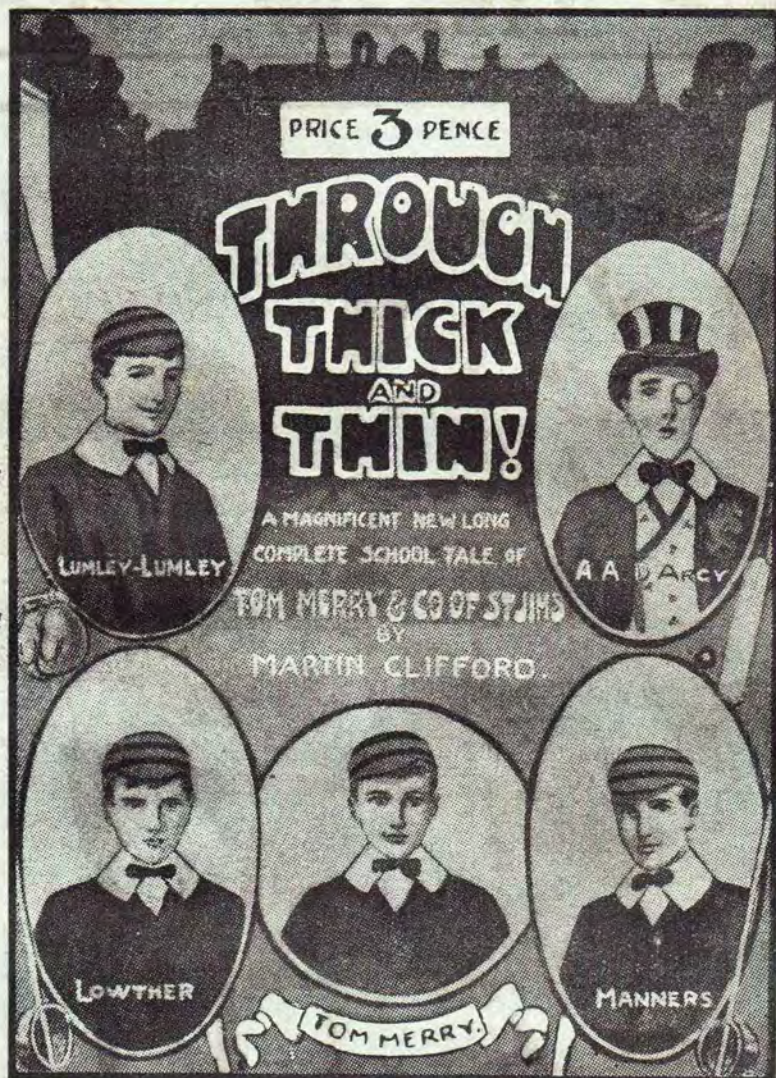
Vol.
8.
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"Stop!" yelled Tom Merry, as he whipped up his horses in a desperate attempt to catch up with the brake in front. "You're being fooled!" Harry Wharton and Squiff grasped Lasker, and dragged him back into the brake, and Bob Cherry snatching up the reins, pulled desperately at the horses! (An exciting incident in the grand, long, complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's contained in this issue.)

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LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!

A Grand Long, Complete Tale of the Juniors of St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



CHAPTER 1. A New Departure.

"**L**EVISON, by Jove!"
"What's the little game?"
"What do you want?"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—uttered those surprised exclamations together. They had reason to be surprised.

The Terrible Three had gone down to the nets for cricket practice after lessons. King Cricket, as Monty Lowther expressed it, was on his last legs. King Football was already on the horizon, so to speak. But one very important fixture—the return match with Greyfriars School—was still before the St. Jim's juniors, and so they were still very keen about the great summer game.

Tom Merry was very careful to see that no member of his team neglected regular practice. And other fellows, who hoped for a chance of being included in the junior team at the last moment, were very assiduous. Consequently, there was always a goodly crowd of juniors at the nets after lessons.

But the sight of Levison of the Fourth in flannels, and with a bat under his arm, was surprising.

For Levison of the Fourth was a slacker of the first water. He never played games if he could help it. His attendance on the cricket-ground being strictly limited to the exact length of time that was compulsory. He much preferred lounging about the quad with his hands in his pockets, or smoking cigarettes behind the woodshed, to joining the other juniors on the playing-fields. Levison, like his pals Mellish and Crooke, affected to despise cricket, and professed to regard running after a ball as a sheer waste of time and energy.

At the same time, Levison averred that he could play as good a game of cricket as anybody, if he chose to take the trouble and waste his valuable time upon such trivial pursuits. A statement which Tom Merry & Co. took the liberty of doubting.

Apparently Levison had made up his mind, for some unknown and mysterious reason, to take the trouble to show what he could do.

For here he was, arrayed in flannels, with his bat under

Next Wednesday:

"**THE FIGHTING PREFECT!**" AND "**A BID FOR A THRONE!**"

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his arm, ready for business. Hence the astonishment of the Terrible Three.

"Always playing some little joke," remarked Monty Lowther. "But I don't quite see the point of this one, Levison. What are you going to do with that bat?"

Levison knitted his brows.

"I'm going to bat with it," he replied.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

Levison stared at him angrily.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded.

"Your little joke—ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not joking!" said Levison savagely.

"Excuse me. I thought you were," said Lowther politely, "and it's only decent to laugh at a chap's jokes, even if you don't see the point. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Levison, flushing with anger. "I suppose I can practise if I like? Do you want to keep me out of it?"

"Certainly not!" said Tom Merry at once. "Shut up, Monty! If Levison really wants to take up the game, he's more than welcome. It will be a jolly good thing for him!"

"Better than smoking cigarettes, anyway," said Manners, with a sniff.

"I've chucked smoking," said Levison.

"My hat!"

"It's bad for the wind," explained Levison: "and if a chap is going to be a cricketer, he needs all his wind."

The chums of the Shell stared at Levison in amazement. His statement was quite correct, of course, but it was the last thing they had ever expected the cad and slacker of the Fourth to say. Truly, if Levison was giving up his "rotten" ways, and taking to decent and manly pursuits, it proved that the age of miracles was not past.

"But what does it mean?" said Lowther, in wonder. "You never turn up for cricket excepting when you have to, and then you lounge through it without getting any good out of it. Why this sudden change, my infant?"

"I can play cricket if I choose," said Levison. "I dare say I could do quite as well as some of you swanking bounders in the junior eleven. I don't see why I shouldn't play in the junior eleven, for that matter."

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Yes, and in the Greyfriars match next week too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

"Look here—"

"Excuse me. Wasn't that another joke?" asked Monty innocently.

"No, it wasn't!" growled Levison, biting his lip. "If I shape well enough, Tom Merry ought to put me in the team—unless he's determined to keep the places for his own friends, as some of the fellows think."

Tom Merry frowned.

"You know that isn't true," he said. "The places in the team go to the best men, whether they're my pals or not. I don't like you, Levison, and you know it, but if you could bowl better than our bowlers, and bat better than our batsmen, I'd shove you into the team, if I had to stand out myself to make room for you. But you know you can't do it, so what's the good of talking rot?"

"Give me a chance to show what I can do, then," said Levison. "I've played cricket before, and I only want a bit of practice. I'm not a fool at anything. You call me a slacker at lessons, but I could make rings round you at Greek, for instance. And you fellows don't know the alphabet."

"I know you're a clever beast," admitted Tom Merry. "You've got brains enough to make your mark, if you were decent enough to try. You've never tried. But if you want to take up cricket, I'm willing to help you all I can; and I'm jolly glad to see you doing it. I can't help suspecting that you're trying to pull my leg, that's all."

"Well, I'm not. I mean business. And I can play too! Just try me, that's all! Send down a ball or two, and see if I don't stop them."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'll put you to the test," he said. "Not that I'm a top-hole bowler, by any means. If you could stop Fatty Wynn's

bowling, for instance, I think I might give you a chance for the eleven. But get to the wicket, and let's see what you can do."

"Right-ho!" said Levison, with unaccustomed briskness.

Levison went to the wicket, and Tom Merry took the ball. Manners and Lowther looked on with smiling faces, and a good many fellows gathered round to watch the new and unaccustomed sight of Levison, the slacker of the Fourth, at the wickets. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6, had just arrived on the ground, and they stared at the unexpected sight.

"What's the little game, dear boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We've come down here to practise, Tom Merry, not to watch you playin' the giddy goat."

"Levison's going to show us how W. G. Grace did it in his best days," explained Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, get it over, and let's get to work," said Blake.

"Play!" chirped Lowther.

But the juniors could not help noticing that Levison's position at the wicket was quite businesslike. In spite of his careless neglect of practice, and his professed contempt for the game, it was evident that he had some knowledge of cricket. Levison was, as a matter of fact, a decidedly clever fellow, and he could do most things that he set his mind to, and he could easily have made his mark in his Form if he had chosen to turn his talents in a right direction. But he was not built that way, and he had seldom or never made any attempt to "go straight" and play the game.

Tom Merry was smiling as he delivered the ball. He expected to see it scatter the stumps at once. But he was destined to be surprised again. Levison was watching for the ball, and he cut it away in quite a masterly manner.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Well done, Levison!" said Arthur Augustus cordially. "I could not have cut that ball away better myself, bai Jove!"

Blake fielded the ball, and tossed it back to Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell sent it down again, more carefully this time, and again Levison snicked it easily away.

"Wonders will never cease!" murmured Lowther. "The duffer can bat—after a fashion."

"Try what you can do!" sneered Levison.

Lowther took the ball. Lowther was a change bowler in the eleven, and he knew a good deal about bowling. But Levison knocked the ball away quite easily. It was a surprise for the onlookers. There was evidently more than they had suspected in the slacker of the Fourth.

"Well, hi!" exclaimed Figgins of the Fourth, arriving on the ground with Kerr and Wynn. "Levison, by gum! What is Levison playing cricket for?"

Figgins & Co. of the New House were as surprised as the School House fellows. Monty Lowther tossed the ball to Fatty Wynn, the champion bowler of the junior eleven.

"You give him one, Fatty."

"Right you are!"

Levison looked grim and serious now. If he could deal with Fatty Wynn's bowling, he had the chance he desired—of figuring in the junior eleven.

But it was very difficult for batsmen like Tom Merry and Kangaroo of the Shell to deal with Fatty Wynn's bowling, and it was quite beyond Levison's powers, clever as he undoubtedly was.

Fatty Wynn sent down one of his best, and the ball broke in at an unexpected angle, and the next moment the stumps were knocked over.

"How's that?" grinned Figgins.

"Try that again!" exclaimed Levison, scowling.

"Anything to oblige!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

He tried it again—with the same result. His bowling was altogether too strong for Levison. Levison's brow grew blacker and blacker. Again and yet again he called on Fatty Wynn to send another ball, and each time the fat Fourth-Former knocked his bails flying.

"Dash it all, that's enough!" exclaimed Blake impatiently. "You're only playing the giddy ox, Levison. You know jolly well you can't play Fatty's bowling!"

"Once more!" said Levison, gritting his teeth.

"We're wasting time!" growled Herries.

"Once more, I tell you, hang you!"

"Oh, give him another, Fatty!" said Tom Merry.

Fatty Wynn grinned, and gave Levison another. The ball spread-eagled the wicket, and Levison uttered a furious exclamation. Then, without a word to the juniors, he strode away from the pitch, gritting his teeth, his hand clenched on the cane handle of the bat till his knuckles showed white.

Tom Merry & Co. looked after him in wonder.

Why Levison should want to take up cricket at all was a

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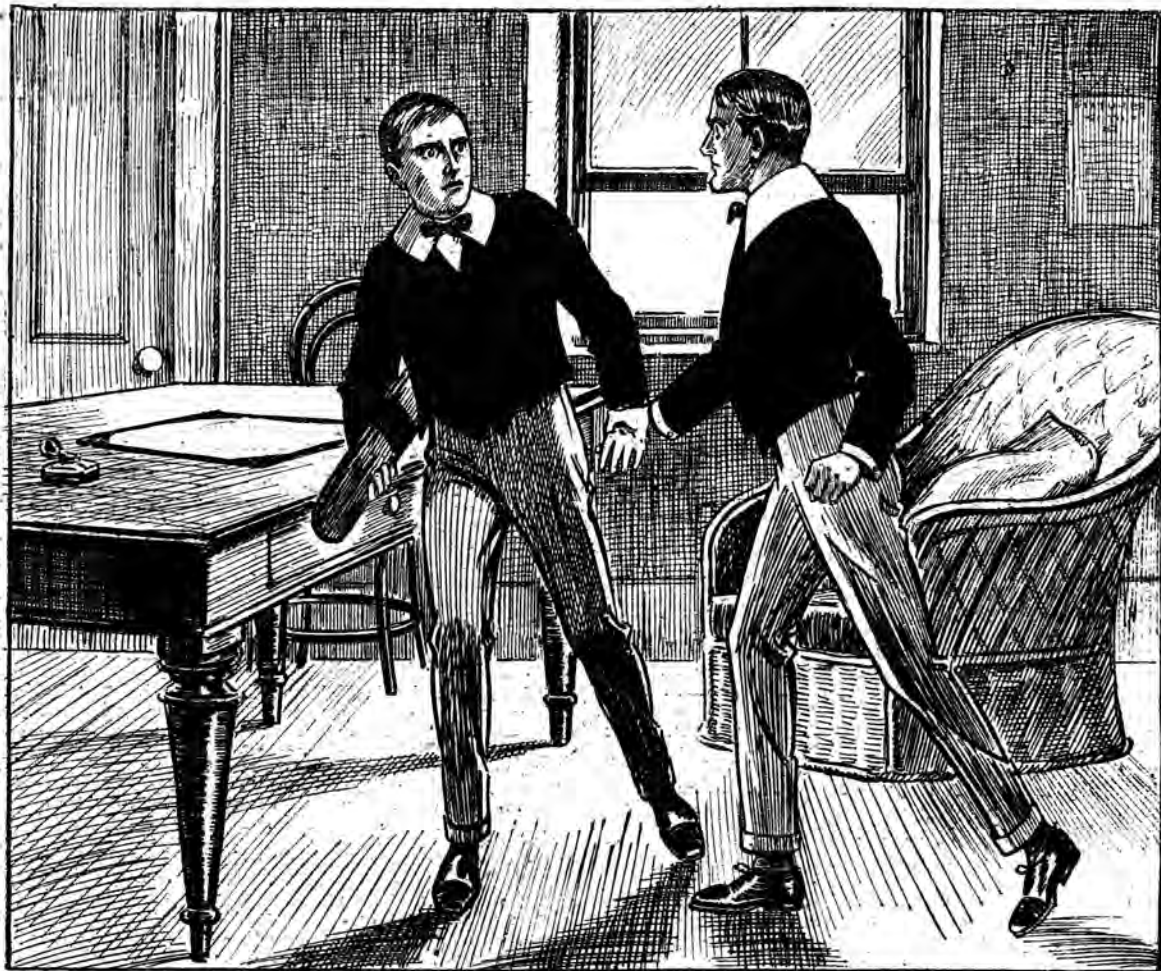
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Levison's face went white as Lumley-Lumley put his hand on the table drawer to open it, and he leaped to stop him. Lumley-Lumley simply jumped in surprise. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "Let that drawer alone," said Levison. "What do you want there?" (See Chapter 8.)

mystery, and how he could expect to play such bowling as Fatty Wynn's, when he was quite out of practice, that was another mystery. And why he should be so furious at his failure—that was mystifying too. The juniors thought they knew Levison pretty well, but they utterly failed to understand this new development in him.

But cricket was the order of the day, and the juniors plunged into their practice, and soon forgot all about Levison of the Fourth and his new and peculiar ambition.

CHAPTER 2. Very Mysterious.

"ALL serene, I think!"

Tom Merry made that remark at the tea-table in his study in the Shell passage. Dusk was falling over the school and the old quadrangle, and the Terrible Three had come in to tea. Tom Merry had a fragment of paper on the table-cloth beside him, and a stump of pencil in his hand, and a wrinkle in his brow. There was a list of names on the paper—the names of the chosen eleven for the Greyfriars match.

"Pass the jam!" said Monty Lowther. "What's all serene, my son? Wherefore that wrinkle in your noble brow?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"I've made up the list," he said. "I don't think I can make it better. We've got to beat Greyfriars this time, you know. They beat us on their ground, and we simply can't allow them to come here and walk over us. They were in fine fettle last time, and I've had a letter from Wharton, and he says they've got a new man, too—a regular corker at

cricket, from some Colony somewhere or other where they grow cricketers. We've got to put our best foot foremost this time, my sons. What do you think of this list?"

"Pass the jam!" said Lowther imperturbably.

"Blow the jam! Listen to this!"

Tom Merry read out the list:

"Merry, Lowther, Kangaroo, Reilly, Blake, D'Arcy, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and Redfern." Sorry I've got to leave you out, Manners, old man—but—but you see—"

Manners grunted.

"All right," he said. "If you can't put me in on my form, I don't want you to put me in as a pal."

"Well, you see, young Reilly has been coming on so jolly well," said Tom Merry. "I've got you down as a reserve, old chap!"

"Good! Then I hope Reilly will break his leg, or his neck, or something, before next week," said Manners.

"There will be plenty of grumbling, anyway," said Tom. "Blake thinks that all his study ought to be in the team; but we've got better men than Dig and Herries, though they're good enough for ordinary matches. But this is a special match. Figgins, too, thinks there ought to be more than four New House fellows in an eleven, which is—"

"Rot!" said Lowther.

"Exactly; only Figgy doesn't see it in that light. And Hammon, and Lumley-Lumley, and Kerruish, and Dane, and Glyn, and Lawrence, and Owen, and a blessed army, in fact, all think that I'm an ass for not playing them on such an important occasion. D'Arcy minor of the Third thinks he ought to be in too, and he's told me that if I don't play him he washes his hands of the result."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, his hands could do with a wash—that's generally the case in the Third," grinned Lowther. "Seems to me you

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NEXT
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"THE FIGHTING PREFECT!"

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Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

can't improve on that list, Tommy. Now that's settled, perhaps you'll pass the jam."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" sang out Tom Merry.

It was Levison of the Fourth who came in. He was an unaccustomed visitor to Tom Merry's study, and the Terrible Three were surprised to see him. The cad of the Fourth was not on good terms with the Terrible Three—or indeed with anybody who was not of his own stamp. But Levison was not aggressive, as usual. His manner was very subdued and extremely civil.

"Not interrupting you?" he asked.

"No," said Tom Merry cheerily; "we're only having tea." Then, remembering that Levison was taking up cricket, and had declared that he had given up smoking, Tom went on with a cordiality he had never before shown towards the cad of the Fourth. "Squat down and join us, Levison. Plenty for four!"

"Yes, do!" murmured Lowther politely.

Levison shook his head.

"Thanks; I didn't come to tea," he said. "I—I want to speak to you, Tom Merry, if you can spare me a few minutes."

"Certainly; pile in!"

Levison glanced at Manners and Lowther, and hesitated. They understood his glance, but they did not feel inclined to leave their tea unfinished to oblige Levison. Tom Merry understood it, too, and he spoke bluntly:

"Out with it, Levison. I've got no secrets from Manners and Lowther, and I don't want to have any. Whatever you've got to say to me, they can hear."

"Oh, all right!" said Levison, after a slight pause. But he did not go on.

"Get it off your chest!" said Monty Lowther, looking at him curiously. "If it's another of your precious sweepstakes, Levison, you've come to the wrong shop. We don't allow Tommy to dabble in such things."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "Levison knows better than to suggest anything of that kind to me."

"It's nothing of that sort!" said Levison, flushing.

"Nothing to do with horses—eh?" said Lowther sarcastically.

"No, no!"

"Well, if it's above board, I don't see why you want to see Tommy alone, without his kind uncles to look after him."

"Ass!" said Tom. "Go on, Levison!"

"It's about the cricket," said Levison at last. "I've told you that I'm taking up cricket again, and—and I mean it."

"Glad to hear it," said Tom Merry, at once. "If there's anything we can do to help you, you can rely on us. Is that what you wanted?"

"Yes, in a way. Look here, I'm going to slog hard at practice, and I can play if I choose," said Levison. "I—I want a chance of playing for School!"

"In the junior eleven?"

"Yes."

"Well, I must say at once that that's rot!" said Tom. "I know you're clever, and you bat better than I expected, but you've slacked too much. You can't expect to make up for all that lost time in a few days. Jolly queer you should get this idea into your head just at the end of the cricket season. Still, you'll be in good time for football, if you are really taking up games."

"I don't want to play footer," said Levison. "I want to play cricket—and I want specially to play against Greyfriars next week."

"Well, it's impossible. The team's made up, for one thing."

"But a better player—"

"You're not a better player, nor so good, nor anything like it."

"I'm going to work hard, and if I show I'm as good as Kerr or Figgins, for example—"

"I couldn't turn them out to make room for you unless you were better, and that's not likely to be the case. You won't be as good, for that matter, nor anything like it. Blessed if I quite understand you, Levison!"

"You must be dreaming dreams, Levison, dear boy!" said Lowther. "About time you woke up—what?"

"I—I've got an important reason for wanting to play," said Levison. "I'd rather speak to you alone about it, Tom Merry."

"I dare say you've got a reason, but I don't see that you need tell me, as it can't make any difference," said Tom. "Anyway, I won't hear it alone; I won't have any secrets with you. You can't blame me, when I know you so well. You're too deep for me, and I admit it, and you may be trying some trick or other for all I know. You see, you're making me speak plainly."

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"I know you're down on me," said Levison bitterly. "Now that I want to do the decent thing you don't believe me."

"Well, I'm willing to believe you; but you can't go into the junior eleven. That's out of the question. I must say it's like your cheek to ask it, when you've neglected cricket all through the season."

"I—I didn't know then—"

"You didn't know what?"

"What I know now," said Levison, with a strained look on his face. "I—I— It's a serious matter for me!"

"Blessed if I can see it," said Tom Merry, much puzzled. "How can it be serious for you whether you get into the junior eleven or not? You don't care for cricket, and you've never cared for our record."

"It isn't that."

"I could have told you that it wasn't that, Tommy," said Monty Lowther drily. "Levison never cared for cricket, or for the matches, and he doesn't care now. He's got an axe to grind, that's all."

"I don't quite catch on," said Tom Merry. "From what I make out, you've got a reason for wanting to play in the junior eleven, apart from any interest in the game?"

"Ye-es."

"Well, do you think that's a reason why I should put you in?" demanded Tom Merry indignantly. "I think you must be dotty. If you don't care for cricket, and don't care whether we win or not, you're the last person in the world to want to wedge yourself into the eleven."

"It means a lot for me. I don't want to jaw over my private affairs before a crowd." Here Levison looked at Lowther and Manners again. "But—but if you knew—"

"I don't want to know," said Tom Merry. "I can't help thinking, Levison, that you're trying to take me in, somehow. Anyway, you can't go into the eleven. I can't understand why you want to see me alone, and I don't want any of your secrets."

"I understand, though," said Lowther grimly. "Levison thinks you are soft enough to be got round, if he gets you to himself. Isn't that it, Levison?"

Levison bit his lip, and Tom Merry laughed.

"That's not much of a compliment to my brains," he said.

"Anyway, soft or not, I shouldn't be likely to put a duffer into the junior eleven, when we're going to meet a team like Wharton's lot from Greyfriars. It can't be did, Levison; that's final!"

"But if I show you I can play—better than another—"

Tom Merry looked impatient.

"If you show me that you're better than any fellow in the eleven you shall have his place, if it's my own!" he said.

"But, as that's all rot, we needn't discuss it!"

"Very well," said Levison quietly.

He left the study.

"Well, that takes the cake, and no mistake!" said Tom Merry. "Levison is jolly mysterious. But what awful cheek—to think of getting a place in the eleven, when he's shirked cricket all the season! I can't help thinking he's pulling my leg, but he seemed in earnest enough too. But he's such a frightful Ananias—"

"Ananias wasn't in it with him," said Manners. "I'd like to see you putting that worn in when you're leaving me out—that's all!"

"Well, it won't happen."

"And we're not going to have that clever beast getting round you in a private interview, either, my son Thomas!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "You're altogether too soft to deal with a chap like Levison. Your uncles are going to look after you!"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom, rather crossly. He was conscious of the fact that he erred upon the side of good-nature, and that he found it difficult to say "No." But in such a matter as making up the eleven for an important fixture, good-nature had to be set entirely on one side.

"We'll keep a fatherly eye on you, my son," said Lowther, wagging his head sagely. "Won't we, Manners?"

"We will—rather!" assented Manners.

"You'll get a dot in your fatherly eye if you turn it on me!" growled Tom Merry. "Do you think I'm ass enough to risk losing a match to please anybody? Go and eat cake!"

"Thanks! I prefer cake," said Lowther cheerfully. "Pass the cake, my boy, when you've done letting off fireworks at your old pals!"

And Tom Merry laughed, and passed the cake.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison the Cricketer.

"T'S vewy remarkable!" Thus remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the most elegant junior in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, a couple of days later.

Arthur Augustus had jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and

was watching Levison of the Fourth, amid a crowd of other fellows, equally interested.

Levison was slogging away at batting.

Levison's new departure amazed the School House fellows, and they never grew accustomed to seeing him on the cricket-ground.

But Levison almost seemed to live there now.

It was amazing. The slacker, the smoker, the sneak—the most unpopular fellow in the House—seemed to have turned over an entirely new leaf.

Every minute that Levison had free from lessons, almost, was spent on the cricket-ground. He had taken to coming down half an hour before the rising-bell clanged out in the morning, and bowling steadily at a wicket all by himself in the summer dawn, and the astonished fellows would find him there when they came down.

When Kildare or Darrell or Langton or any of the mighty batsmen of the Sixth wanted a junior to fag at bowling, Levison was always ready to offer.

Hitherto, Levison had always avoided that duty, though most of the juniors were glad to take it on, for there was much to be learned from watching Kildare at the wicket.

Kildare himself was greatly astonished when Levison first offered to fag at bowling for him, but he good-naturedly let him do so, and Levison did not seem to tire of it. His new departure made a good impression upon the captain of St. Jim's, who told him frankly that he was glad to see him bucking up at last.

And there was no doubt that two or three days had made a considerable improvement in Levison's form.

He was undeniably clever, he was now unusually fit physically; he had a clear eye, a steady head, and a quick arm.

And constant practice made a great difference to him. It was unfortunate that he had taken up this new idea almost at the end of the cricket season. If it had come earlier he would really have had a chance of playing for his House if not for the school.

Tom Merry & Co. were quite ready to encourage him. And Levison, in his desire to get into the good graces of the skipper of the junior eleven, seemed to have dropped all his aggressive, insolent ways, and the hitherto incessant sneer had departed from his thin lips.

"It's weally vewy remarkable," repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I nevah expected to see Levison puckin' up like this! It must be a giddy miwacle!"

"He's improved a lot, too," remarked Figgins of the New House. "This afternoon he stopped some of Fatty's bowling."

"And he took my wicket this morning," observed Herries. "He asked me to let him bowl to me, and blessed if he didn't down my wicket!"

"He's certainly getting on," said Tom Merry, with a nod.

"What's the matter with him, Mellish?" asked Monty Lowther, turning to Percy Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth, who was Levison's study-mate and chum. "Is he ill?"

Mellish shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"Blessed if I know," he said. "I thought it was spoof at first; but he seems to be keeping it up. Must be an ass to take all that trouble for nothing! Every blessed minute now he comes down here fooling about at cricket!"

"Weally, Mellish—"

"The best you can do is to go and do likewise, Mellish."

Mellish sneered.

"Catch me!" he said.

Jack Blake was bowling to Levison. Blake was one of the bowlers of the junior eleven, and he was accustomed to seeing wickets go down before him. But Levison was keeping his end up in great style. The juniors watched him in growing surprise. If Levison could improve so quickly when he took a little trouble over the game, it was a thousand pities that he had neglected it so long for less worthy pursuits—that was the general opinion.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "You don't seem to be able to deal with him, Blake, deah boy. Let me twy him with my yorkah."

Blake sniffed and threw the ball to Arthur Augustus. He threw it rather suddenly, and it caught the swell of St. Jim's upon his noble chest, and D'Arcy gave a howl.

"You uttah ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus went to the bowling crease, and treated Levison to his celebrated yorker. Levison cut it away with perfect ease. Arthur Augustus followed the flight of the ball with his eyeglass, in great surprise.

"Bai Jove, that was distinctly good, Levison!" he exclaimed. "We shall make a batsman of you one of these days, bai Jove!"

"Sooner than we make a bowler of you, anyway!" grunted Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Don't overdo it, Levison," said Tom Merry good-naturedly. "You're liable to go stale, you know, if you pile it on too much at once."

Levison nodded, and came off the pitch. With his bat under his arm, he walked away with Mellish. Mellish regarded him very curiously.

"Coming up to the study?" he asked.

"What for?"

"I've got some smokes—"

Levison shook his head at once.

"None for me, thanks—not till after the Greyfriars match, anyway!"

"Oho!" chuckled Mellish. "Then you're not keeping this up for good—eh, what?"

"Between ourselves—no," said Levison, grinning. "But what do you think of my cricket?"

"I never thought you had it in you," confessed Mellish. "I know you can do most things you set your hand to, but I never thought you'd shape at cricket like that. But what are you doing it for? You must have a motive. You don't like it."

"I've got a motive. I've got to play in the Greyfriars match next week."

"Got to?" said Mellish, in wonder.

"I mean it means a lot to me. I've simply got to work it somehow."

"You haven't an earthly."

"Why not?" demanded Levison warmly. "I tell you I can play cricket as well as any of them, only I've been ass enough to get out of form. But with another week of hard practice, I shall be all right."

"Tom Merry won't give you a place in the team."

"He said he would, if I was better than any chap who's got a place in it now."

Mellish gave a sneering laugh.

"It was safe to say that! You won't be!"

"I hope I shall be—I think I shall be!" said Levison.

"Tom Merry won't admit it if you are! Any member of the team who was dropped to make room for you would make a pretty row about it, I know that; and Tom Merry wouldn't face it, for the sake of a fellow he dislikes. You couldn't expect it."

Levison gritted his teeth.

"If I don't get fair play, somebody will suffer for it!" he muttered. "I tell you this means a lot to me. More than you understand. You know I've been pretty hard up ever since my father went on the rocks in his business, and now—"

He paused abruptly.

"And now—" said Mellish inquisitively.

"Never mind!"

"You don't expect to make anything by playing in the junior eleven, surely? There's no money in that."

"There may be—for me!"

"Blessed if I can see it!"

"Tain't necessary for you to see it," said Levison coolly.

"Hallo, there goes Kildare! Coming over to Big Side to watch him batting?"

"No jolly fear!" yawned Mellish.

"Well, I'm going!"

"You'll find all the smokes gone when you come in!"

"Hang the smokes!"

Levison followed Kildare of the Sixth to Big Side; and Mellish, after a stare at him, shrugged his shoulders, and strolled into the School House. The "smokes" were consumed by Mellish and Crooke and Pigott, without the assistance of Levison—and the black sheep of the School House discussed the strange and unaccountable conduct of their pal with unending amazement and resentment. They were as surprised as Tom Merry & Co. by Levison's extraordinary new departure.

"Looks to me as if he is turning goody-goody, like Lumley," Crooke remarked. "Lumley-Lumley used to be one of us, and Tom Merry and the rest got him in their hands, and turned him into a spoony like themselves. Looks to me as if Levison's going the same way."

"No fear!" said Mellish. "Levison's awfully deep—he's playing it on them for some reason. Blessed if I can guess what, though!"

"He doesn't like Tom Merry any more than he likes cricket!" growled Crooke. "He might be thinking of letting the side down in the match, if he could wedge into the eleven. That would be a facer for those rotters. But he hasn't an earthly chance of getting into it."

"Not an earthly!" agreed Mellish. "I suppose he'll chuck up this rot sooner or later!"

But Levison did not chuck it up.

Every day he was down early at practice, and every spare hour was spent on the playing-fields—he had less and less to do with his old pals, and Tom Merry & Co. began to look more and more kindly upon him. They began to believe that

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the change in him was genuine, and that he meant business, and they were surprised to see the wonderful improvement in his form at cricket.

But though Tom Merry helped him, and commended him, he made no secret of the fact that Levison, as his old pals had declared, had no chance of getting into the junior eleven for the Greyfriars match—not an earthly!

CHAPTER 4. Levison's Fix.

"H! Fancy meetin' you!" Tom Merry stopped abruptly, as the rough and threatening voice broke on his ears.

The dusk was falling over Wayland Common. Tom Merry had walked home with Brooke of the Fourth, the day-boy at St. Jim's, and he had stayed at Brooke's place to tea, so the evening was coming on when he walked back to the school. The figure of a flashily-dressed man, with a very "loud" necktie, and a bowler hat worn rakishly on one side of his head, came out of the shadows of the trees beside the footpath, and stopped directly in front of the junior. Tom Merry had no choice about stopping.

He recognised the man. He was a rascally character named Lasker, who earned a more or less honest living in billiard-saloons and on the racecourse, and who had transactions, as Tom knew, with some of the "fast" set at St. Jim's, notably Cutts of the Fifth. Tom Merry & Co. had had their rubs with Mr. Lasker on more than one occasion; and Tom Merry could see at once that this meeting with the rascal in that lonely spot meant trouble for him. Mr. Lasker had a big stick in his hand, and an extremely ugly look on his face.

"Quite a 'appy meetin'," said Mr. Lasker.

Tom Merry looked at him steadily.

"Let me pass!" he said.

"Lots of time," said Mr. Lasker, with a chuckle. As he spoke, a strong scent of mingled tobacco and whisky was wafted to the junior before him, and Tom Merry made a step backward in involuntary disgust, which showed pretty plainly in his face. Mr. Lasker's expression became uglier, and he took a tighter grip on his stick.

"Very 'igh and mighty, ain't we?" said Mr. Lasker, between his discoloured teeth. "But we'll take all that out of you, Master Magnificent Merry! I'm goin' to give you such a 'iding that you won't want to meddle with me any more, like you 'ave done!"

"I've stepped in to stop some of your rotten dirty tricks, and I'd do the same again, and will, if necessary," said Tom. "Now get out of the way and let me pass."

"Any 'urry?" sneered Mr. Lasker, without moving.

Tom Merry did not reply. He made a movement to walk round the squat figure planted in his path, and Mr. Lasker made a movement, too, to intercept him. Tom Merry clenched his hands.

"If you don't get out of my way, I shall shove you out!" he said determinedly.

"Shove away!" said Mr. Lasker, with an evil grin.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed, and he strode straight at the billiard-sharper. Mr. Lasker swung up his stick, with the evident intention of bringing it down upon the junior; but Tom Merry was too quick for him. He dodged under the stick, and drove his clenched fist under Mr. Lasker's jaw with such force that the rascal staggered back blindly, with a yell of pain.

But he recovered at once, and grasped the junior before he could get away, his hot, odorous breath almost sickening the boy as it fanned his face.

"I'll smash yer!" the rascal muttered between his teeth.

Tom Merry struggled fiercely; but he was in the grasp of a man almost twice his weight. The stick came down across his shoulders with a heavy lash.

Just as Mr. Lasker struck that blow, there was a patter of swift feet on the footpath, and a junior in Etons came dashing up.

The sharper was grasped from behind, and dragged off the Shell fellow, and sent crashing into the bush beside the path. He disappeared into the bushes with a yell.

Tom Merry turned quickly to the junior who had helped him, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Levison!"

"I saw him tackle you," said Levison of the Fourth. "Come on! Better get clear before he goes for you again. He's half-tipsy, and he's dangerous with that stick."

"Right-ho!"

Mr. Lasker was struggling and growling in the thickets, and the two juniors walked away quickly in the direction of St. Jim's. Tom Merry disdained to run. He did not want a fight with the tipsy ruffian, but he would not run from him. But Mr. Lasker had apparently had enough, for he did not pursue them.

"Jolly glad I came by," said Levison, as they walked on.

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"I'm glad you did, too!" said Tom Merry. "He was too big for me, especially with that stick. I'm much obliged!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Levison carelessly. "Any St. Jim's chap would have stood by another, I suppose, against a rotter like that!"

Tom Merry nodded. It was true enough, but it was unexpected from Levison. Levison seemed full of surprises lately. For Tom Merry more than suspected that Levison was one of the St. Jim's fellows who had betting transactions with Mr. Lasker. Certainly he knew the man—Tom Merry was certain of that; and it was rumoured in the Lower School that Levison sometimes paid surreptitious visits to the Green Man to play billiards with him. Just now Levison seemed to be throwing over his old habits and his old associates with a vengeance.

"You're rather far afield, aren't you?" said Tom. "We sha'n't be back in time for locking-up. I had a pass out, as I was going to tea with old Brooke."

"I have left it rather late," said Levison, peering at his watch in the dusk. "I've been for a run across country—nothing like it for getting fit!"

"Quite right!" said Tom, more and more surprised. "You'll get lines for being late for calling-over, though."

"Never mind the lines," said Levison cheerfully.

"I'll help you do them," said Tom. "It was lucky for me you came up just then. Very lucky!"

He did not add that he was rather surprised at the pluck Levison had shown in "chipping" in. That would have been rather ungracious, under the circumstances.

They walked on for some minutes in silence. Levison appearing deeply buried in thought. As they turned out of the footpath into Rylcombe Lane, he spoke.

"You've seen me at cricket lately, Merry?"

"Yes; you're getting on rippingly."

"I've stood up to Fatty Wynn's bowling."

"Yes."

"And I've taken Blake's wicket."

"It was jolly good," said Tom. "Pity you've left cricket alone so long, when you seem to have quite a turn for the game, if you exert yourself. I hope you'll keep it up!"

"I mean to!" said Levison. "But there's not much fun in keeping up practice unless a chap has a chance to play in a match!"

Tom Merry frowned a little. He hoped that Levison was not about to make his old request over again, for it was awkward to refuse him, after the way Levison had just chipped in, in the encounter with Mr. Lasker. Tom Merry had only one answer to make if he did—the same answer as before.

"Well, we wind up the season with a final House match," Tom said, after a pause. "Possibly I might be able to put you into the team for that, we have to have eleven players from the House. If you keep on as you've started, I mean."

"What about the Greyfriars match?"

"I've told you that's impossible, Levison. It's a School match, and one of the toughest matches we play. They beat us on their ground. It's up to us to beat them when they come over to St. Jim's. Dash it all, if you get into a House match, after neglecting cricket so long, you can call yourself lucky!"

"I want to play in the Greyfriars match, though; I've special reasons."

"You told me so before," said Tom, feeling extremely uncomfortable. He could not help realising that Levison was purposely tackling him on this subject while he was alone with him, hoping to take advantage of his good-nature, and free from the interference of Manners and Lowther. And the thought that Levison regarded him as "soft," and easy to be got round, was not flattering to Tom's self-esteem. But after the service Levison had just rendered him, he felt that he could not speak out with his usual plainness.

"I'm going to tell you my reason," said Levison quietly. "I've got an uncle, an old chap who has just come home from South Africa. He's very keen on cricket, and all kinds of games, and he's rich. You know about my pater having had bad luck in business—well, I've got a good deal to expect from my uncle if I please him. A good tip, at least, and most likely an allowance if he approves of me. But he likes a fellow who plays games—a chap who goes in for sports, and keeps himself fit, and that kind of thing." Levison's lip curled in his old way as he spoke, but in the darkness Tom Merry did not observe the sneer. "Well, I'm bucking up. I want to please him; it means a lot to me. And—he's coming to see me at St. Jim's!"

"I see!" Tom Merry understood now. It was not a change in Levison that had caused the sudden change in his conduct; it was his old nature at work again, and his new departure was a trick, quite in Levison's line—a trick to gain favour with a rich uncle, who would have nothing to do with him if he knew the kind of fellow he really was.

"You understand?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I understand. I suppose all this means that you are going to deceive your uncle, and make him think you're the kind of fellow he would like you to be—and when he's gone, you'll drop it all again."

"Ahem! Not—not exactly. I—I've taken up cricket quite in earnest," said Levison, realising that he had been a little too frank. "I'm going to stick to it. I really mean business!"

"Oh, good!"

"Well, Uncle Bulkeley is coming down on Wednesday, the day of the Greyfriars match," went on Levison. "I want him to see me playing in the junior eleven—see?"

"I see. But—"

"That will have the proper effect on him. Of course, he will talk to the Head and to my Form-master about me; but if he sees me playing in the School team, he will be satisfied, whatever he may hear about me. It may mean a lot to me—a very great deal. You know I'm hard up. So now you see why I specially want to be in the team. You admit that I've picked up a lot at cricket. I sha'n't disgrace the team if you play me. I'll promise you to play the game of my life. Will you give me a chance?"

Tom Merry flushed. Levison was practically asking him to risk the School match, for the purpose of helping him to deceive his uncle, though Levison did not seem to look at it in that light himself.

"I can't do it," said Tom shortly. "You're not up to the form of the junior eleven."

"Even if I wasn't, a cricket match isn't so important as my prospects in life," said Levison. "You might stretch a point, when you know how I'm fixed. It may mean almost everything to me."

"It's impossible. Look here, Levison, I understand you too well; you want to pull the wool over your uncle's eyes, and you want me to help you. I think it's a rotten cheek to ask me to help you tell lies, for that's what it amounts to!" broke out Tom Merry angrily. "I suppose you don't see how rotten it is. But it can't be done. Don't say any more about it."

Levison bit his lip hard.

He controlled his temper with an effort. He could not afford to quarrel with the captain of the junior eleven.

"Listen to me," he said, in a low voice. "It's necessary, I must play in the match. My uncle has heard some things about me, and he's written on the subject. He's got an impression that I'm a slacker and a ne'er-do-well, and—a rotter generally. He's asked the masters for a true report of them, and they haven't minced matters. But I've soaped him over all right so far. I've told him that I'm a cricketer, and that he can see me play when he comes to the school. If he sees me play a good game, it will be all right. And—and, to tell you the whole bizney, I've let him believe that I'm a member of the School junior eleven."

"My hat!"

"It was the only way," muttered Levison. "The only way I could counteract the things he's heard about me. And—and I expected to be a member of the team, you know; I meant to slog hard, and—I can generally do anything I set my mind to. I depended on you to give me fair play if I turned out all right. Of course, there hasn't been much time, but you can't say I've lost an hour. You see what it will do for me if old Bulkeley comes to see the match, and—I'm not in the team. I didn't expect him down so soon when I told him that whopper, but he knows all about our matches, and he answered that he wouldn't miss seeing me play in the Greyfriars match, and nothing will keep him away on Wednesday. So you see what it means to me."

"I can't help it. You shouldn't tell a lie, and you can't expect a decent chap to back you up in telling lies."

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Levison's eyes glittered.

"If I don't play, he will bowl me right out!" he said.

"I must say it will serve you right. You ought not to have told him a lie."

"It's all very well to preach, but I've got a lot at stake," said Levison bitterly. "If—if I don't play—if I make out that I'm crooked, for instance—will you keep it up to him that I'm a member of the team?"

Tom Merry flushed angrily.

"Keep it up to him? Tell him barefaced lies, do you mean, if he asks me a question? Certainly I won't!"

"Then—you won't help me in this fix? I've just helped you in a fix."

"I can't help you in a fix you've got into by telling lies. You can't expect it. I'd speak a bit more plainly, too, only, as you say, you've just helped me. You've no right to ask anything of the sort. Don't say anything more about it."

And Tom Merry quickened his pace. They were drawing near the school now.

"But—but—" Levison choked back his rage, remembering that he dared not quarrel with the skipper of the team. "But—but if I keep on with the cricket, and—and get on, will you put me down as a reserve?"

"If you're good enough, I will; but there won't be any chance of your playing. We've got a good many reserves already, all better form than you."

"Some of the players might get crooked—you never know. You'll put me down as a reserve, at least?"

Tom Merry hesitated a moment. He felt mingled contempt and compassion for the wretched trickster whose habitual trickery had landed him in so difficult a situation. It seemed impossible for Levison to run straight, and the continual difficulties he was involved in by his cunning seemed to give him no lesson.

"After all, I've taken a lot of trouble, and—and I've quarrelled with my own friends, through taking up this new line," said Levison. "I think you might give a chap some encouragement; what I'm doing is not easy."

"Well, that's so. I might put your name down as a reserve; but I warn you there isn't any chance of your playing. Manners and Herries and Dig and Hammond and Lawrence and Owen are all reserves, and they would come first if reserves were wanted."

"Still, it's something," said Levison. "You promise me that?"

"Yes, for what it's worth."

"Thanks!"

They had reached St. Jim's now, and they separated as they entered the School House. Levison went to his study, and threw himself into a chair, his eyes glittering, his brows lined with thought.

"It's something," he muttered. "Not much—but something; and if one of the players should get crooked, one or two of them, perhaps, there's a chance—"

CHAPTER 5.

Arthur Augustus Has Bad Luck.

"TOOSHAY!" said Digby.

Crash, crash!

"Tooshay!"

Arthur Augustus paused, and lowered his foil. He took his eyeglass in his left hand, his right being occupied with the fencing-foil, and with some difficulty jammed it into his eye, and turned it upon Digby.

"Pway what do you mean by that remarkable observation, Dig?" he inquired. "I am quite sure that that is not an English word. I have touched you twice, Blake, dear boy, and you are beaten!"

"Tooshay twice!" said Dig. "I was counting!"

Herries, who was sitting on the study—which had been dragged into a corner to give the fencers room—chuckled. Digby was a great French scholar, and he had a way of introducing French expressions into his conversation which would have been very effective if the French had been comprehensible to anybody but Dig himself. But as a rule it wasn't.

"He means touch, very likely," remarked Herries. "I believe that's something like the French for touched!"

"I said tooshay, and I mean tooshay!" said Dig obstinately.

"You weally ought to have an interpretwah, dear boy, when you are speakin' Fvench," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a chuckle.

"Oh, come on!" said Blake. "Is this a fencing match or a jawing match, Gussy? If it's a jawing match, I know you'll win hands down."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Allez!" said Digby.

"What does he mean by allez, I wondah?"

"Allez means go, you fathead!"

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"Then why can't you say go, Dig?"
 "French expressions are always used in fencing," said Digby loftily. "You'd better get Monsieur Morry to give you some extra toot, you chaps, if you don't understand a few simple words like that."

"I don't suppose Moss would understand 'em, either," remarked Herries.

"Oh, tais-toi!" said Dig.

"What! What do you mean by taytwah?"

"That means shut up."

"Does it? Sounds to me more like a vegetable," said Herries, with a shake of the head. "Sure it ain't French for potato?"

"You silly ass!" roared Dig.

"Come on, Gussy!" said Blake, giving Arthur Augustus a gentle tap on the chin with the end of his wooden foil.

"Ow, bai Jove! You ass! I am weady!"

And they recommenced. Arthur Augustus was a very graceful fencer, and certainly he did it very well. The somewhat heavy wooden foils the juniors used were not, as Arthur Augustus had remarked, much good to a really topping fencer like himself, but he was always willing to give his chums instructions in his fatherly manner. Blake, as a matter of fact, thought he could fence, and he didn't want any instruction from Arthur Augustus. Still, there was no denying that D'Arcy's guard was perfect, and that he had not been touched, while Jack Blake had twice been what Dig called "tooshay."

Crash, crash, crash!

The chums of study No. 6 were going it hammer and tongs now. Blake certainly put more energy than skill into his fencing, and if the foils had not been sound and strong, they would probably have flown into splinters. But Arthur Augustus kept a cool and smiling face. And once again Dig chirruped that Blake was "tooshay."

"Sowwy, deah boy! I weally twust that that little tap did not hurt you—!"

"Tain't so jolly easy to hurt me, you ass," growled Blake. "We ain't as soft as dough in Yorkshire, where I come from. Still, I admit you can fence, though you can't do anything else excepting select fancy waistcoats and top hats."

"Weally, Blake—"

There was a tap at the door, and Levison of the Fourth came in. Blake threw down his foil with a grunt.

"I give you best, Gussy!"

"That's all wight, deah boy. I was only givin' you some instruction."

"Oh, rats!"

"Would you like some instruction, Dig?"

"Bow-wow!"

"And you, Herries—"

"Oh, I should knock your head off!" said Herries. "Try Levison, he can fence."

Arthur Augustus looked at Levison. The slacker of the Fourth was smiling his most agreeable smile as he stood just inside the study. Up to quite lately Levison's entrance into Study No. 6, would have elicited from the owners a brief and unmistakable remark, such as "Get out!" or "Buzz off!" But since Levison was turning out so decent lately, to all appearance at least, Study No. 6 had decided to tolerate him, and at least to be civil to him.

"I heard you at it," said Levison. "I looked in to see you. I'm rather good at fencing myself—not so good as Gussy, of course."

Arthur Augustus smiled benignly.

"Pway, take the foil, deah boy," he said, "I should weally like to meet a feneah somethin' like my form. You are an awfully clevah beast, Levison—you can do lots of things, but I didn't know you could fence."

"Oh, only a bit," said Levison. "But I'm going to take it up again, as an exercise. It keeps the muscles in good condition, and that's a good thing for a cricketer—and I hope to turn out a cricketer."

"Good luck to you!" said Blake cordially.

Levison took up Blake's foil, and measured with D'Arcy, and they started. Digby stood by to count the touches in his weird French, and Blake perched himself upon the table beside Herries, to look on. To tell the absolute truth, Blake would not have been sorry to see Arthur Augustus taken down a peg or two at fencing.

And it was plain at a glance that Levison knew how to handle the foils. It was curious how many gifts the cad of the Fourth had, and how, with them all, he had never succeeded in being anything but a slacker and a waster. Arthur Augustus found that Levison was not nearly so easily "tooshay" as Blake, and he had to exert himself before he gave Levison a light tap.

"Tooshay!" said Dig.

Then Levison exerted himself. The foils seemed to move like lightning. Arthur Augustus gave ground, and then recovered it, and Levison was lightly tapped on the arm again.

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Then what followed happened like a flash. Levison's foil whipped through the air, and Arthur Augustus staggered back with a yell of pain. He dropped his foil, and clasped his right wrist with his left hand.

"Ow, ow! Bai Jove! Ow! Great Szott! Ow!"

Levison looked very concerned.

"I hope I haven't hurt you, D'Arcy," he exclaimed quickly. "I—I'm afraid I made rather a reckless slash—I didn't mean to catch your wrist—"

"It's all wight, deah boy," gasped Arthur Augustus, with an effort. "Don't mench! Accidents will happen! It hurts wathah, that's all! It will be alright soon."

"I'm awfully sorry—"

"Pway, don't mench, deah boy!"

Blake shot a quick, suspicious glance at Levison. He slipped from the table, and took D'Arcy's wrist and examined it, and lowered his brows. There was already a lump forming, and D'Arcy's face was pale with pain. The blow had been almost hard enough to crack the bone, but fortunately it had not been so bad as that. But it was quite certain that Arthur Augustus would not be able to handle a pen again—or anything else—for a week or so at least.

"Bai Jove, it hurts!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't look so wowwied, Levison, deah boy—you couldn't help it, and accidents will happen! I think I had better go and bathe it. Bai Jove! I shall have to twy to wite with my left hand now—I sha'n't be able to use that hand! Ow!"

"I can't say how sorry I am."

"Gussy won't be able to write," said Herries, looking at the swollen and discoloured wrist, "and he won't be able to handle a bat any more than he can a pen. This means that you're crocked for the Greyfriars match, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus jumped, and for a moment he forgot the pain in his damaged limb. The match with Greyfriars School was on Wednesday, and it was already Monday. Arthur Augustus would certainly be unable to either bat or to bowl on Wednesday.

"Bai Jove! How uttally wotten!" ejaculated the swell of St. Jim's. "I have forgotten that. There will be a regular muck up now. I was going to take no end of wickets with my special yorkah, and now I sha'n't be able to bowl—and I sha'n't be able to make any centuwty this time."

Blake grinned. Arthur Augustus was as likely to make a century against the Greyfriars bowlers, as he was to fly into the air.

"Come along and bathe your fin," said Blake. "You're going to have a top-notch bump there for a week to come. You are a clumsy ass, Levison!"

"I—I'm awfully sorry—"

"Pway don't be distwessed, deah boy—I know it was an accident, though it was particularly unforch at this moment," said Arthur Augustus kindly; and he followed Blake from the study.

Levison quitted Study No. 6 soon after him. There was a strange glitter in Levison's eyes, a glitter that would have aroused suspicion if the juniors had seen it. Suspicion, indeed, was already aroused in one mind. Herries, as a rule the most unsuspicious of fellows, was very suspicious now. Herries never would trust Levison, for the simple and excellent reason that his bulldog Towser disliked the cad of the Fourth. Herries relied upon Towser's sagacity, and in this case it was certain that Towser's judgment was quite reliable.

"Rotten unlucky accident for Gussy," said Dig. "It was tooshay, and no mistake."

"If it was an accident!" grunted Herries.

Dig looked startled.

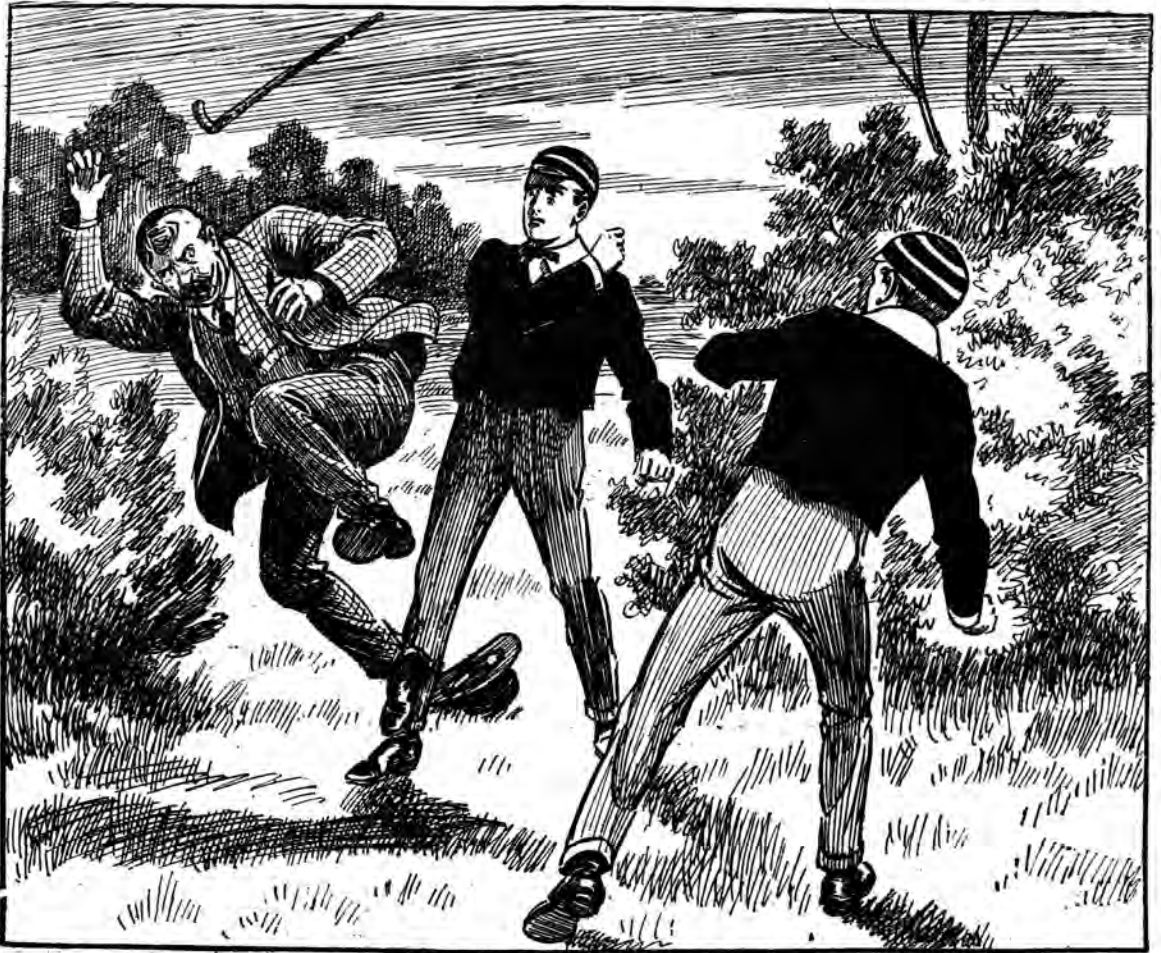
"You don't think surely—?"

"Well, perhaps it's rather a rotten thing to say," confessed Herries, "but I don't trust him. Towser can't stand him—and Towser knows! And he's been so jolly keen on getting into the team. And now Gussy will have to stand out—"

"Phew! And Tom Merry has put Levison's name among the reserves," said Dig, with a whistle. "But we're reserves, and we come first! If Tom Merry should put that fellow in, and leave us out, he would jolly well have Study No. 6 on his neck."

But Tom Merry did not think of doing so. When Tom Merry heard that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had got himself crocked, he crossed D'Arcy's name off the list posted up on the school notice board, and wrote that of Manners over it. He did not even think of Levison of the Fourth in connection with the vacancy in the team.

ANSWERS



Just as Lasker struck at Tom Merry there was a patter of swift feet on the footpath, and a junior in Etons came dashing up. Mr. Lasker was grasped from behind, dragged off the Shell fellow, and sent crashing into the bushes. (See Chapter 4.)

CHAPTER 6. Under Suspicion.

"COMING down to cricket?"

Tom Merry asked Levison the question, as the juniors came out of the Form-rooms after lessons the following morning. Tom Merry was mindful of the help Levison had given him in his tussle with Mr. Lasker, and he was doing his best to keep down his dislike for the cad of the Fourth. That he would not help him in the deception he intended to practise on his uncle, if he could, was settled—there was to be no talk of that. But so far as cricket went, Tom was more than ready to help him.

Levison nodded cheerily.

"Yes, rather," he said. "I'll give you chaps some bowling, if you like. I've been hammering at the wicket for an hour before brekker this morning."

"Well, you certainly seem to be going it," said Manners.

"I'm doing my best," said Levison modestly.

And he walked down to the cricket-ground with the Terrible Three and a dozen other fellows.

Levison had certainly "picked up" on his bowling of late. He sent down a few to Tom Merry which the junior skipper found it difficult to stop. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked on, with a bandage round his bruised wrist, and a doleful expression on his face. Arthur Augustus was a true sportsman, and he had not uttered a word of reproach to Levison for the accident in Study No. 6, but he was feeling very acutely his enforced retirement from the eleven that was to meet Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars.

"By Jove, you're getting on!" said Tom Merry, coming away from the wicket at last. "I never thought you'd pick up like this, Levison. You try him, Manners."

"Right ho!"

Manners went to the wicket and faced Levison's bowling. Manners was looking a little grim. He had been put into the

junior eleven in D'Arcy's place, and he meant to show that he was fitted for it, and that a fellow like Levison could not take his wicket. Levison sent down three or four, but he found Manners all there. The Shell fellow was a steady and reliable, though not a brilliant bat. There was no "fluff" about his style, but he could always be depended upon to keep his end up.

Levison's eyes began to glitter.

He caught the ball again as it was fielded and tossed back by Kangaroo, of the Shell, and gripped it hard in his right hand.

Again he took a little run, and the ball came down like a bullet from a rifle. But Levison seemed to swerve as he delivered the ball, and it came up from the pitch, not for the wicket, but for the batsman. Manners was looking out, but he was not looking out for that. If it was done by intention, it was certainly very skilfully done. The ball struck Manners' left shoulder with such terrific force that the junior uttered a cry of pain, and staggered back and fell.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat, Manners!" Tom Merry ran to his chum.

"Manners, old chap!"

"Oh!" gasped Manners. "Oh, crumbs! The clumsy ass!"

His face was contorted with pain.

Levison came running along the pitch, his face very concerned.

"Not hurt, Manners? Did it hit you?"

"Did it hit me!" howled Manners. "Do you think I sat down for fun, you silly idiot? Of all the bungling duffers—"

"I'm sorry!"

"Lot of good being sorry now!"

"You must have been in front of the wicket!"

"I wasn't in front of the wicket, and you know it!" snapped Manners.

Levison flushed.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY—**"THE FIGHTING PREFECT!"** A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Well, I—I—" "Pway don't be watty, Mannahs. Accidents will happen in ewicket."

"Too jolly many accidents, I think!" growled Herries. "This is Levison's second accident, and it's time he stopped it."

Levison gave him a startled look. Herries returned it with a glare. Herries was an extremely outspoken fellow, and he did not conceal his distrust of the cad of the Fourth. Lowther had whipped off Manners' jacket, and Tom Merry was examining his shoulder. There was a big black bruise forming there, and Tom Merry knitted his brows as he saw it. The injury might have been very serious, and as it was, it was evidently very painful, and Manners was hopelessly "crooked."

"Looks bad for to-morrow," said Monty Lowther, with a low whistle.

Manners groaned.

"To-morrow! I sha'n't be able to play to-morrow! My shoulder will be as stiff as a poker to-morrow, and I shall just be able to crawl out and see the match, I suppose. What an ass I was to bat against the blundering fool!"

"I—I couldn't help it!" muttered Levison. "I—I didn't—"

"I'm not saying you did it on purpose!" growled Manners. "But I know you've crippled me for the match with Greyfriars, and you can't expect me to take it smiling, I suppose."

Manners rose with Tom Merry's assistance, and walked angrily away, his face twisted with pain.

When the juniors came in to dinner, Herries joined Tom Merry.

"Manners won't be able to play for Greyfriars," he said abruptly.

"I suppose not."

"You'll have to put in another reserve."

"Yes."

"It won't be Levison?"

"Levison!" said Tom Merry. "Oh, no!"

"He's a reserve, you know," said Herries, with a snort,

"and I fancy he rather expects to step in Manners' shoes."

Tom Merry looked at him quickly.

"You don't suspect—"

"Yes, I do," said Herries bluntly. "I don't trust him an inch—not a quarter of an inch. He knocked out Gussy last night, and now he's knocked Manners out. He's making room for himself in the team. That's my belief!"

"I—I can't believe it! It's too utterly rotten!" said Tom, drawing a deep breath. "I can't believe that—even of Levison. Anyway, he's not going into the team. I'm going to put Dig's name down."

"Oh, good!" said Herries, relieved. "So long as he doesn't wedge into the eleven, that's all right. And if any more accidents happen—"

"There won't be any more, Herries. I can't think it's anything of the sort. It's too rotten!"

Herries sniffed. He had his own opinion, and he kept to it. Tom Merry looked very thoughtful during dinner. It was a wretched suspicion, and he was not willing to believe it, even of the cad of the Fourth. And yet, remembering the duplicity and unscrupulousness Levison had always displayed, he knew that it was quite possible that Herries was right. After dinner, Levison came up to him as the juniors left the dining-room. Tom Merry was making for the notice-board, and he had taken out his pencil.

"Putting a new name down, I suppose?" Levison remarked.

"Yes," said Tom shortly.

"Mine, I hope?"

"No, not yours."

Levison bit his lip hard.

"You can't give me a chance?" he said, in a low voice.

"Hardly! We don't want any of the Greyfriars fellows crooked when they come here to-morrow," said Tom Merry.

"You needn't put me on to bowl. I don't pretend to be able to bowl like Wynn. But I should do very well at the wicket."

"Dig would do better, I hope."

"Digby!" said Levison. "So Digby's got the place?"

His eyes glittered.

"Yes," Tom Merry reached up to the paper pinned on the board, where the list of the junior eleven was written, crossed out Manners' name, and wrote "R. A. Digby" over it. Levison watched him with glittering eyes, his teeth hard set. "The fact is, Levison—I may as well speak plainly—even if you were fit for the place, I shouldn't be in a hurry to give it to you after what you've done."

Levison started.

"Do you think I did it on purpose?"

"No, I don't think so. But I'm sorry to say that it is suspected. Anyway, it would be a bit too thick to reward

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you for crippling Manners by giving you his place in the team."

"An accident!"

"Yes, yes; I know. But it's settled. Dig's name is down, and that settles it!"

And Tom Merry walked away. And Levison, driving his hands deep into his pockets, strode out into the quad, his face pale with suppressed rage.

CHAPTER 7.

A Precious Pair.

"YOU'LL have to try again!"

Levison started.

He was seated on one of the old oaken benches under the elms in the quadrangle, his hands deep in his pockets, his brow wrinkled with deep and bitter thought. Crooke's voice broke abruptly upon his meditations. Levison looked up with a scowl, to see the cad of the Shell regarding him with a derisive grin.

"Thinking it out?" asked Crooke, with a chuckle.

"What do you mean, hang you?"

"I mean that I advise you, as a friend, to drop it," said Crooke, seating himself on the bench beside Levison. "It won't do!"

"What won't do?"

"You can't squeeze into the eleven. Do you know what Herries is saying right and left?"

"Hang Herries!"

"He's saying that you damaged D'Arcy last night, and Manners this afternoon, on purpose, to get their place in the eleven."

"It's a lie!"

"You'd better tell Herries so," remarked Crooke, with a grin. "A good many of the fellows seem to agree with him. You see, your reputation's not good, Levison. Any other fellow could play these tricks without being suspected, but you can't. They know you. And I advise you, as a friend, not to try it again. If another member of the team gets crooked, and you have a hand in it, it won't be suspicion any longer. It will be a dead cert, and you'll land yourself into trouble."

"I know that, confound you!"

"And there isn't an earthly chance of your wedging into the eleven. If you dropped a bat on Dig's head and crooked him, Tom Merry would give his place to Herries, or to Lawrence of the New House. There wouldn't be a ghost of a chance for you."

"I know it—now."

"Blessed if I see what you're taking all the trouble for!" said Crooke. "Look here, we're pals, Levison. Why can't you tell me what the little game is? I'm as much up against those rotters as you are. What do you want to get into the eleven for? To let down the side in the match?"

"Nothing of the sort. I'd play the game of my life if they'd put me in, and I think I'd help the school to win, too," said Levison savagely. "But they won't give me a chance. I can see that now. I can't expect fair play from them."

"You can't expect to get a place in the team by crocking the players one after another, you mean!" chuckled Crooke.

"Oh, rats!"

"But if you're not going to play them a trick in the match, what do you want to be in the eleven for?"

"I'll tell you," said Levison desperately. "I've told Tom Merry. I thought it might influence him a bit. He's generally good-natured, but he won't help me out in this. A lot depends on my playing in the match. My Uncle Bulkeley is coming to see it, and he's a silly old duffer who's keen on cricket and games and rubbish, and he's heard that I'm a slacker and a waster—that's how he puts it, confound him!—and the only way I could make a good impression on him was by setting up as a cricketer and a sportsman generally. He's rich, you see, and I've got a lot to expect from him. And—and I reckoned I should be able to wedge into the eleven if I tried hard. I don't generally fail when I make up my mind to do a thing, and I've told him I'm in it, and he's coming down to-morrow to see me play for the school."

Crooke whistled.

"My only hat! You've landed yourself this time."

"I felt certain I could work it to get into the eleven."

"But you can't."

"It seems not now. I've tried hard enough. I helped Tom Merry last evening when he was set on by a rough, and in common decency he ought to show some gratitude."

Crooke laughed.

"Did you get the rough to set on him, ready for the heroic rescue?" he grinned.

"Perhaps I did," growled Levison sullenly. "But Tom Merry didn't suspect that. It went off all right, and if he had any gratitude in him he would give me a chance in the match. But he won't. Now I'm dished. The only thing I can think of now—" He paused.

"You can't get into the team at any price," said Crooke, with a shake of the head.

"I know that now."

"Can't you put your uncle off? Tell him the match is postponed."

"Can't be done. He knows some of the masters here, and he'd come down, anyway. The old fool knows all about our matches, and takes a silly interest in them. After what he'd heard about me the old duffer was inclined to wash his hands of me, I know, and I brought him round by pretending that I was in the school junior team. My Form-master's told him I'm a slacker at lessons, but I've explained that by the calls on my time as a member of the eleven."

"Oh, crumps! That was piling on the agony! If you had wedged in it would have been all right, but now—why, it will be a clean bowl out. Unless you can keep the old chap from coming here—"

"I can't. He knows Railton, and he's coming to see him as well as me."

"Then it's all U.P.," said Crooke. "I've always told you, Levison, that you're too jolly deep; you over-reach yourself, you know."

"There's just one chance," said Levison. "I could hood-wink him yet if—if the match didn't come off to-morrow after all."

Crooke stared.

"But it will come off," he said. "I suppose you're not thinking of asking Wharton to scratch at the last moment to please you?"

"Of course not," said Levison irritably. "But if the match comes off I'm ruined with my uncle. That's a dead cert. If there's no match he won't expect me to be playing in it, of course. Tom Merry's as good as told me I can play in the House match afterwards; that comes off in a week's time, the last match of the season. If I could tell my uncle that this match is off, and ask him very earnestly to come down and see me in the House match next week, it would be all serene. But if this match comes off without my playing in it I'm done. He will know I lied to him."

"You could make out you were crooked, and standing out of the match for that reason," suggested Crooke.

"N.G! He'd speak to the cricketers on the subject—he doesn't trust me, hang him!—and he might suspect it was fishy. Anyway, if he merely happened to say it was hard lines on me being crooked and left out, somebody would blurt out at once that I never was in the team. Then all the fat would be in the fire. If the match is played he will see it, and jaw to the players. If it isn't played it's all right; nothing need come out, especially as I shall tell him I'm playing in the House match next week. But how am I going to stop the match? It's my only chance, and how the deuce can I work it?" And Levison wrinkled his brows again.

"It's a big order," said Crooke. "I'd help you if I could. I'd like to see those rotters dished; it would be a regular facer for them if the match could be stopped. They've been looking forward to it a long time. Greyfriars beat them over there, and they are awfully keen to get even. But you can't work it, Levison. I know you're clever, but it's too thick; you can't do it. Why, they get here in the morning, and you'll be in the Form-room all the morning. Only the members of the eleven have the whole day off for the match."

"I could get the morning off," said Levison moodily. "They know old Bulkeley is coming down, and I could pitch a yarn about going to meet him. Lathom would give me leave for that. But—but—"

"What are you thinking of, meeting the Greyfriars team on their way here, and turning them back with some whooper or other?" asked Crooke. "My dear chap, it can't be done. They wouldn't believe you. You forget that you used to be at Greyfriars yourself, and the fellows there know you, and they wouldn't take your word if they know you."

Levison gritted his teeth. Crooke was quite in sympathy with his object, but he could not forbear giving his "pal" a little thrust or two. But it was quite true, Levison had been a Greyfriars boy before he came to St. Jim's, and he had left an unsavoury reputation behind him at Greyfriars. He might pitch ever so clever a tale to Harry Wharton & Co., and they would probably not believe a word of it.

"They'd telegraph here, anyway," said Crooke, "and Tom Merry would wire back that it's all right. So it's no good pretending to take a message from Tom Merry to Wharton about putting off the match, or anything like that. Besides, they'd expect it to be in writing."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes; I'd forgotten," said Crooke, understanding the shrug. "You can imitate anybody's hand; you came near being sacked once for imitating Brooke's handwriting."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Levison. "Can't you help me? Haven't you got anything to suggest? Look here, I tell you old Bulkeley is rich, and if I please him it will be a good thing for me. I owe you some money—"

"You do!" said Crooke, with emphasis.

"Well, I should settle up in full after I'd seen my uncle, if I work him the right way. And I might be able to screw a good allowance out of him; I think I could. Only if I'm given way, and he knows I've lied to him, he'll wash his hands of me. Hang him!"

Crooke reflected.

"There's one way," he said at last. "It's risky, but—"

"I don't care for the risk. What do you mean?"

"Suppose Wharton got a letter in the morning from Tom Merry—in Tom Merry's handwriting, I mean—telling him that there's influenza in the school, or something, and therefore the Head has asked him to put off the match."

Levison started.

"That would keep them away," said Crooke. "There's plenty of time for the letter to get to Greyfriars in the morning, but no time for Wharton to send an answer back before to-morrow night. Of course, he would write back, and then it would all come out. The match would be dished—you'd succeed there—but you'd be suspected, and you'd have to face the music."

Levison set his teeth.

"I'd face the music all right," he said. "They would know I had done it; and it would mean an awful tagging, I know—"

"It would mean worse than that if it came to the Head."

"It wouldn't come to the Head," said Levison confidently.

"They're not sneaks. They'd handle me themselves, and make me sit up. But I could stand that, and my uncle would be gone before the truth came out."

"And what a giddy surprise for them when the Greyfriars team failed to turn up!" chuckled Crooke. "They'd wait and watch, like Sister Anne, and wouldn't see anybody coming. Ha, ha, ha!"

"They'd wire to Wharton," said Levison thoughtfully. "But it's a good distance from here, and a telegram and waiting for the answer would take a long time, and, anyway, it would be too late for the Greyfriars team to come over. I think it would work."

"Of course, I'm going to have nothing to do with it," said Crooke, rising. "I've simply given you a tip."

"I understand," said Levison, with a sneer, "you want to dish them, and you want me to take all the risk. I don't care. I'm in for it, and I'm going to chance it. You can keep out of it if you like."

Levison walked away to the School House, his eyes glinting. It was a desperate chance, and it meant trouble—serious trouble—for him when his act was discovered. But he did not hesitate. He had involved himself in a fix by his duplicity, and further and darker duplicity was required to extricate him. Crooke looked after him with a chuckle. His cunning suggestion would have the effect of thoroughly "dishing" the junior eleven, and that without any risk to himself, which exactly suited Crooke's peculiar nature.

CHAPTER 8.

Lumley-Lumley Chips In.

LUMLEY-LUMLEY and Mellish and Blenkinsop, who shared Levison's study with him, were at tea when the cad of the Fourth came in. Levison was anxious to get to work on his precious letter to Greyfriars, and he scowled as he saw that the three juniors were in the study. There was no time to waste, he knew. Levison's gift of imitating hands was great, but he required a little practice before he wrote the letter. That peculiar gift of his, which was likely some day to bring him into serious trouble, had been used before to play tricks on his schoolfellows. With a copy of Tom Merry's handwriting, and an hour's practice, Levison had no doubt of being able to produce a letter that would completely deceive Harry Wharton when he received it at Greyfriars School on the following morning. But he could scarcely venture to begin his task anywhere but in his own study, and there it was necessary for him to be alone.

"Wherefore that worried look, my son?" asked Lumley-Lumley cheerfully. "Squat down and have some tea."

Levison drew a chair to the tea-table. He tried to chat as usual with the juniors, but with that grim worry on his mind, it was not easy. Lumley-Lumley was a keen fellow, and it was easy for him to see that his study-mate had something on his mind. Lumley-Lumley shared Herries' opinion concerning the "croaking" of D'Arcy and Manners, and he suspected that Levison was thinking out some new scheme.

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of the same sort, to make another vacancy in the junior team.

After tea Mellish and Blenkinsop left the study, but Lumley-Lumley remained. He took out a sheaf of impot paper and a copy of Virgil. Levison regarded him irritably.

"Lines?" he asked.

"I guess so," said Lumley-Lumley. "I've had fifty from Latham, and I don't want to be kept in to-morrow afternoon. I'm going to do them now."

"Shall I help you?"

Lumley-Lumley stared. It was the first time Levison had ever offered to help anybody.

"I guess not, thanks. Latham might spot your fist."

"I'd make my writing like yours."

Lumley-Lumley shook his head.

"The less you do of that the better," he said drily. "You remember the trouble you got into over imitating Brooke's handwriting once before. I'd rather you didn't practise my fist if you don't mind. You're not safe."

Levison gritted his teeth, and swung out of the study. Lumley-Lumley settled down to do his lines.

Levison moved quietly along the passage. From the passage window he could see Tom Merry & Co. on the cricket-ground. Cricket practice did not appeal to Levison now; he no longer had any purpose to serve by it. Since his last chance of getting into the junior eleven had vanished, he did not intend to waste any more time on cricket. But, satisfied that the Terrible-Three were not in their study, he made his way there, and entered, closing the door after him.

He looked quickly round the study.

For his purpose he wanted a specimen of Tom Merry's handwriting, and it was not difficult to obtain one. On the table lay a couple of sheets written by Tom Merry; part of a leading article for "Tom Merry's Weekly." Levison quietly took the sheets, and slipped them under his jacket and left the study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy met him as he came downstairs.

"Goin' down to the cricket, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus affably.

"No!"

"Not chuckin' it already?"

"Hang the cricket! What's the good of practice, when a fellow hasn't a chance of getting into the team?" growled Levison.

"But it is good for you, deah boy—"

"Oh, rot!" Levison was quite the old Levison again. He walked on, leaving Arthur Augustus surprised and indignant.

As Lumley-Lumley was in the study, Levison could not carry out his precious task there. He strolled out into the quad to wait till Lumley-Lumley came out. Half an hour later Lumley-Lumley left the School House, going over to the tuckshop with Reilly, and Levison hastened up to the study.

He locked the door and set about his task.

With the sheet in Tom Merry's handwriting before him, he covered page after page of impot paper with writing, in closer and closer imitation. After half an hour's practice he was satisfied with the result. Then he began on the letter.

"Dear Wharton,—I am sorry to tell you—"

Levison had got thus far when the handle of the door turned, and there was an exclamation outside.

"What the dickens— Here, open this door!"

Levison gritted his teeth. It was Lumley-Lumley's voice.

"Who's in there?" shouted Lumley-Lumley. "I want my bat. What do you mean by locking me out? Who's there?"

Levison hurriedly crammed the written sheets into the table-drawer and closed it. There was no other place of concealment at hand. On a hot day there was naturally no fire in the study, neither would there have been time to burn the sheets he had covered with writing for practice. He could not keep Lumley-Lumley out of the study. The junior was already hammering angrily at the door. He had run in hastily for his bat, and he was annoyed.

"Let me in, you silly ass!" he shouted.

Levison ran to the door and opened it. Lumley-Lumley strode into the study with a flushed face.

"What little game are you playing?" he demanded. "What have you locked the door for? Been at your rotten smoking again—what?"

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"Yes," muttered Levison.

It was Lumley-Lumley's most natural conclusion, as Levison generally locked the door when he wanted to indulge in a cigarette. But Lumley-Lumley, as soon as he had spoken, noticed that there was no smell of tobacco in the study.

Levison would have been glad to leave him in the belief that he had been smoking, to explain the locked door—but as it was, he had made the other junior suspicious instead of satisfying him. For it was an evident falsehood.

"Rot!" said Lumley-Lumley at once. "You haven't been smoking. I should smell the tobacco."

"I—I mean—I was just going to—" muttered Levison.

Lumley-Lumley looked at him very hard. Levison could not quite control his agitation, and Lumley-Lumley was suspicious and distrustful.

"I guess I don't believe you!" he cried bluntly. "You're up to some trick. Have you been larking with any of my things?"

"No," growled Levison. "If you've come for your bat, take it and go, and don't bother."

"I guess you'd better mind your p's and q's," said Lumley-Lumley sharply. "Most of the fellows know what to think of your tricks, on D'Arcy and Manners. If you're planning something more of that kind, you'll find yourself in hot water."

"Mind your own business, confound you!"

Lumley-Lumley picked up his bat, and then put his hand on the table-drawer to open it.

Levison's face went white, and he leaped forward to step him.

Lumley-Lumley simply jumped in surprise as the other grasped him by the arm, and pulled his hand back from the knob of the drawer.

"What's the matter with you?" he exclaimed.

"Let that drawer alone! What do you want there?"

Lumley-Lumley stared at him blankly.

"I want my cricket-ball," he said. "You know I keep it there. Why shouldn't I go to the drawer if I like? I suppose you haven't appropriated it as your special property?"

"I'll get it for you," said Levison, with livid lips.

"Why can't I get it for myself, I'd like to know."

"I tell you I'll get it."

Lumley-Lumley looked at him fixedly.

"What's in that drawer that you don't want me to see?" he demanded.

"N-n-nothing!"

"Don't tell whoppers," said Lumley-Lumley crisply. "I suspected already that you had some rotten game on. I don't know what it is you were doing, but you shoved something in that drawer before you unlocked the door. What was it?"

"Nothing!"

"If it was nothing, there's no harm in my seeing it, then," said Lumley-Lumley, advancing towards the table again.

Levison jumped in his way, standing with his back to the drawer, and clenching his fists convulsively, his eyes blazing with rage and desperation.

"Stand back! Stand back, I tell you! Hang you, stand back!"

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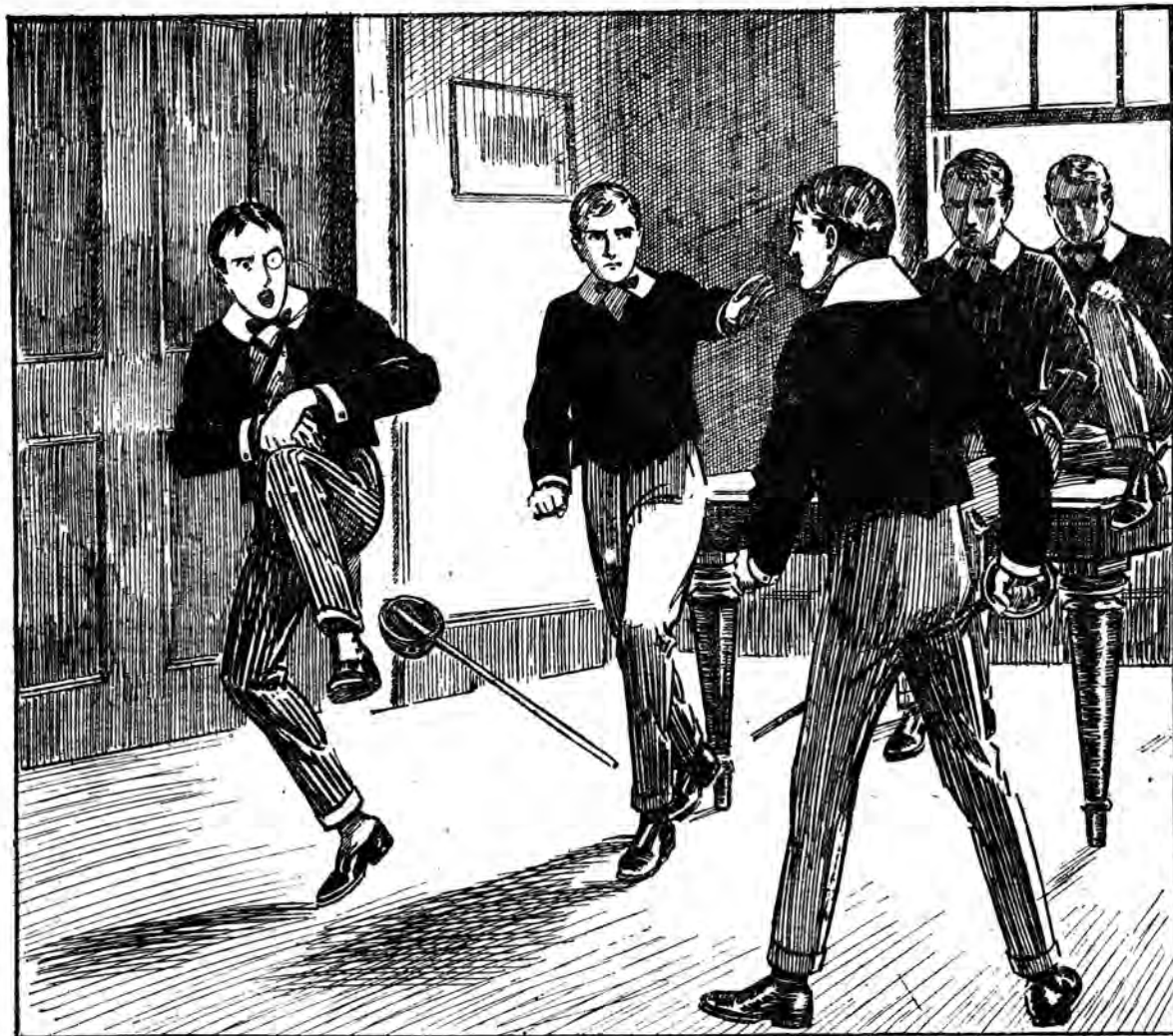
CHAPTER 9.

Foiled!

LUMLEY-LUMLEY paused. Levison's attitude astounded him, and convinced him more clearly than ever that he had surprised the cad of the Fourth in the midst of something that would not bear the light.

Levison was not a fighting man, as a rule, and he was no match at fisticuffs for his study-mate, and at any other time he would have thought twice about tackling Lumley-Lumley. But now he was evidently prepared to fight rather than allow the junior to open the table-drawer in which the cricket-ball reposed, and also whatever it was that Levison had hidden there prior to the other's entrance into the study.

Lumley-Lumley let his bat slide from under his arm and pushed back his cuffs. He was not in the least disposed to be bullied by a fellow like Levison. And, convinced that he had chanced upon some new piece of treachery, he intended to know what it was. He had not forgotten the occasion when Levison had caused trouble for Brooke by imitating his handwriting, and had only been exposed by



Levison's foil whipped through the air, and Arthur Augustus staggered back, with a yell of pain. He dropped his foil, and clasped his right wrist with his left hand. "Ow! Bai Jove!" he gasped. "Gweat Scott!" (See Chapter 5.)

chance. That Levison had been writing he could see—the pen was still in the inkpot, there was a stain of ink on the junior's finger. And the sheets of impot paper which Lumley-Lumley had left on the table after finishing his lines were gone. It was not difficult for the keen junior to divine that Levison had been writing upon them, and that he had locked the study door to prevent discovery of what he was doing, and that he had concealed the sheets in the table-drawer when he had to let his study-mate in. And Lumley-Lumley was grimly determined to know what it meant.

Levison eyed him savagely. Lumley-Lumley's preparations for combat did not make him stir from the position he had taken up. Evidently he had resolved to resist any attempt to open the drawer.

"Will you get away from that table, Levison?" asked Lumley-Lumley quietly.

"No, I won't."

"I guess I shall have to shift you, then."

"Mind your own business," said Levison, between his teeth. "If you want your rotten cricket-ball, I'll hand it to you. What do you want more than that?"

"I guess I want to see what you've written there," said Lumley-Lumley deliberately, "and I guess I'm going to see it too."

"It—it's a private letter."

"In whose handwriting?" asked Lumley-Lumley unpleasantly.

"Mine, hang you!"

"And why did you bung it out of sight before I came in?"

"I—I—I—"

The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was heard from the passage:

"Are you comin', Lumley, deah boy?"

"You can come here," called back Lumley-Lumley. "You can come and see fair play, if you like. Levison's on the war-path, and so am I!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus's eyeglass glimmered in at the doorway. He gazed in astonishment at the two juniors.

"Not scwappin', surely?" he asked. "Pway don't waste time scwappin' deah boy. Weally, you might go easy with Levison now he is twyin' to turn ovah a new leaf!"

"He wants to spy into a private letter of mine!" hissed Levison.

"Oh, wats!"

"The rotter's at his old game," said Lumley-Lumley.

"He's playing a rotten trick! Imitating somebody's fist! I know it as well as if I'd seen him at it. Are you going to get aside, Levison?"

"No, confound you!"

"Then I guess you're going to be shifted!"

And, without wasting words, Lumley-Lumley advanced to the attack, with his hands up, and his eyes gleaming. Levison did not budge. With unaccustomed pluck he stood up to the warlike junior, and hit out savagely. Lumley-Lumley gasped as he received a hard set of knuckles upon his nose, but he did not stop. He grasped the cad of the Fourth, and they closed in a desperate struggle. But Lumley-Lumley was the stronger of the two, and he whirled his opponent away from the table, and hurled him with a crash into a corner of the study.

Levison rolled over with a howl, and Lumley-Lumley grasped the knob of the drawer, and dragged it bodily out of the table.

Sheets of impot paper were scattered over the floor as the drawer fell.

Lumley-Lumley gave a shout:

"Look at that!"

"Bai Jove!"

Levison staggered painfully to his feet. Lumley-Lumley had caught up half a dozen sheets—two of them in Tom Merry's handwriting, containing the article for the "Weekly"—the others in imitation of his hand.

"Now, what do you say to this, you rotter?" he shouted. "You've been practising Tom Merry's fist! Can you deny it now?"

Levison panted.

"It—it was only a joke! I—I was going to write over again that article for the 'Weekly,' and alter it a bit. I—I thought Tom Merry might send it down to the printer's without reading it over again, and—and so—"

"Weally, Levison, it is more than a joke to imitate another fellow's handwriting!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Don't argue with the cad," said Lumley-Lumley. "He's only telling lies. It wasn't a jape on the 'Weekly' he was thinking of."

"It was!" howled Levison. "You can see Tom Merry's article there, and—"

"And what price this?" demanded Lumley-Lumley, reading aloud from another sheet: "'Dear Wharton, I am sorry to tell you—'"

Levison uttered a gasping cry, and sprang towards him, snatching at the sheet upon which he had commenced the rough draft of the intended letter to Wharton.

Lumley-Lumley promptly put his hand behind him.

"No, you don't!" he said grimly.

"Give it to me!" shrieked Levison.

"I'm going to give it to Tom Merry. It's in his handwriting, so it ought to belong to him!" said Lumley-Lumley sardonically.

"You hound! Hand it over, or—"

"Oh what?" said Lumley-Lumley coolly, thrusting the paper into his pocket. "Or you'll take it—what? Come on, then, and take it!"

Levison stood palpitating with rage and terror. But he did not come on. He knew that he could not get the tell-tale paper away from his study-mate.

"Oh, you rotter—you rotter!" he muttered, his fingers working convulsively. "I—I—"

"You can explain this to Tom Merry," said Lumley-Lumley. "You were forging his fist for a letter to Greyfriars. You can explain it to him!"

And Lumley-Lumley strode from the study. Arthur Augustus followed him, utterly astounded and shocked. Levison groaned when he was left alone. "The best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley," we are told, and certainly Levison's precious scheme of a letter to Greyfriars postponing the match, had "gang agley" with a vengeance. And when Tom Merry demanded an explanation, what was he to say?

Lumley-Lumley proceeded directly to the cricket-ground with the paper. Tom Merry was standing outside the pavilion, watching his comrades at practice, when Lumley-Lumley tapped him on the arm.

"Look at that!" said the Fourth-Former briefly.

Tom Merry stared at the paper.

"'Dear Wharton, I am sorry to tell you—'" he read out, in his own handwriting. "What the deuce does this mean, Lumley? Is it a joke?"

"Something more than a joke, I guess. Levison wrote that after he'd covered half a dozen sheets of impot paper with imitations of your writing—for practice, I guess. He was going to write to Wharton at Greyfriars in your hand."

Tom Merry's brow darkened.

"The utter cad! So he's at his old tricks again!"

"I guess so."

"But—but what could he have intended to write to Greyfriars in my name?" said Tom, in perplexity. "Is it a joke?"

Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"Levison is ratty about not playing in the match to-morrow," he said. "He seems to have some strong reason for wanting to play, though I don't know what it is!"

"I know what it is," said Tom, frowning. "But then—"

"And he was writing to Wharton in your handwriting and name," said Lumley-Lumley. "It has something to do with to-morrow's match, of course. My advice to you is to write to Wharton yourself, and tell him not to take any notice of any letter that may come. He knows Levison, as the rotter used to be at Greyfriars, and he'll understand."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought.

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"He was going to make out that I was sorry to have to tell Wharton something," he said, glancing at the sheet again. "What could it have been? He couldn't have been rotter enough to want to make Wharton think I wanted to postpone the match, for the sake of serving us a rotten turn?"

"I guess I can't see what else he could be forging your fist in a letter to Wharton for. He must have had a motive."

"I'll speak to him," said Tom abruptly.

He hurried to the House, and up to Levison's study. Levison turned from the grate as he came in. He had been burning papers. He rose to his feet with a flushed face and a savage gleam in his eyes. Tom Merry held up the sheet.

"What does this mean, Levison?" he asked quietly.

Levison forced a smile.

"Only a joke! Nothing but that!"

"What were you going to write to Wharton at Greyfriars in my name, you cad?" demanded Tom sternly.

"I—I wasn't going to post the letter—"

"Don't tell lies!" exclaimed Tom savagely. "You were going to play me some dirty trick. What was it?"

"Find out!" said Levison sullenly.

He had cudgelled his brains on the subject, but he had been unable to think of any plausible explanation. He was at his wits' end for a lie that would serve his turn.

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"If I took this paper to the Housemaster, it would be enough to get you sacked from the school," he said.

"So you're going to sneak?" sneered Levison.

"No," said Tom; "I'm not going to sneak." He thrust the paper into his pocket. "But I'm going to give you a hiding for forging my handwriting, you cad! Put up your paws!"

When Tom Merry left the study five minutes later there were signs of conflict in his flushed face; but Levison lay on the floor, groaning, with the "claret" streaming from his nose, and a dark circle forming round one eye. When Uncle Bulkeley arrived on the morrow Levison would not be able to display his prowess as a cricketer, but he would have a first-class black eye to display—there was no doubt about that. The cad of the Fourth threw himself into his armchair, panting and groaning, in a state of utter dejection. His scheme had failed. He could not carry it out now. Tom Merry had gone to his study. A quarter of an hour later Levison, from his window, saw the captain of the Shell go to the post-box in the school wall with a letter in his hand. It was easy enough for Levison to guess to whom the letter had been written.

Harry Wharton, at Greyfriars, would be placed upon his guard. A forged letter in Tom Merry's hand would not deceive him now. That scheme for keeping the Greyfriars team away from St. Jim's on the morrow had failed utterly! What was to be done now? Levison was clever, and he was cunning, but as he sat with aching head thinking the problem out, he had to confess that he could not see what was to be done.

CHAPTER 10.

The Day of the Match.

TOM MERRY & CO. rose cheerily at the clang of the rising-bell on the following morning.

It was a whole holiday for the members of the junior eleven, and the selected cricketers, therefore, had a double reason for congratulating themselves.

It was a clear, sunny morning, giving promise of a warm, bright day. Among the School House fellows there was only one dark face to be seen. It was Levison's. Levison came down in the morning with a black eye that attracted general attention, and Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, frowned when he observed it. Levison and Tom Merry received fifty lines each for fighting. But the lines did not trouble Levison very much, neither did he concern himself greatly about his discoloured eye. He had other and more weighty matters on his mind.

For Levison had not given up hope yet. His defeat had made him only the more bitterly determined to carry out his purpose.

When the Fourth-Formers went into their Form-room for morning lessons it was noted at once that Levison was not among them.

Lumley-Lumley looked round sharply as the juniors went to their desks.

"Levison's not here," he said abruptly.

"Bai Jove, he isn't!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking round the Form-room. "Tom Mewey has asked leave for three of the wesserves—old Hewwies, Clifton Dane, and Lawrence. But Levison isn't one of them."

"I guess he's got leave, as he's staying out," said Lumley-Lumley, knitting his brows. "I wonder what the rotter is

up to now? After what happened yesterday, Tom Merry won't have anything to do with him."

"Wathah not!"

"He's up to something," decided Lumley-Lumley. "I don't see how he can have got leave, as he's not in the team. Where is your precious pal, Mellish?"

"Blessed if I know," said Mellish.

"There's something up," said Lumley-Lumley: "I guess I'm going to ask Lathom."

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, came into the Form-room as he spoke. Lumley-Lumley was in a very suspicious mood. The absence of Levison meant, to his mind, some new scheme on the part of the cad of the Fourth.

"If you please, sir," said Lumley-Lumley, coming to the point at once, "Levison isn't here. I—ahem!—I hope he isn't ill, sir."

Mr. Lathom looked benevolently at Lumley-Lumley over his glasses.

"Not at all," he said. "I have given Levison leave this morning, as his uncle is coming down by an early train."

"Oh!" murmured Lumley-Lumley. It was the first he had heard of Levison's uncle, and he was puzzled and uneasy.

Yet, even to Lumley-Lumley's keen mind, it did not seem possible that Levison, with all his cunning and determination, could intervene now in the matter of the Greyfriars match. The Greyfriars team would reach St. Jim's about eleven in the morning, and already they must have left Greyfriars.

But after first lesson, Lumley-Lumley made an excuse to get out of the Form-room, and hurried down to Little Side.

Tom Merry & Co. were there, and were just then engaged in newly rolling the pitch. They regarded Lumley-Lumley in surprise.

"Hallo! What are you doing away from your lessons?" asked Monty Lowther. "Lathom hasn't given you leave to come and cheer, I suppose?"

"I guess not. Have you seen anything of Levison?"

"Levison?" said Tom Merry. "Isn't he with the Fourth?"

"No. It seems that he's got an uncle who's coming down here to-day, and he's got leave to go and meet him," said Lumley-Lumley.

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's right enough. I know about his uncle coming."

"Oh, then it wasn't simply an excuse to get off," said Lumley-Lumley.

"No; he told me the other day that his uncle—Mr. Bulkeley, I think the name is—was coming down to-day to see the match."

"Then I suppose it's all square. I had an idea that he was up to something again, and I came down to tell you to keep your eyes open," said Lumley-Lumley. "I guess he was going to write to Wharton to postpone the match in your name. If the Greyfriars party don't appear to time, you can bet your boots on it that Levison hasn't gone to meet any blessed uncle, but is playing some sort of a gum-game to keep the team away."

And Lumley-Lumley returned to the Fourth Form-room.

Tom Merry knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"Looks to me as if Lumley's a bit too keen this time," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "What could Levison do?"

"I don't know. But I wish we could have our eyes on him," said Tom Merry frankly. "I don't like this. I know Levison had a good reason for wanting to play in the match, and if he couldn't play in it he had an equally good reason for wanting to get it postponed by hook or by crook. Still, I don't see what he can do. After my letter to Wharton last night, he won't believe a word Levison says to him, if Levison goes to meet them."

But Tom Merry could not help feeling uneasy, and his uneasiness increased as the time drew near for the arrival of the Greyfriars team.

He remembered very clearly all that Levison had told him, the deception practised on Mr. Bulkeley, and he understood well enough the motive of that letter to Wharton which had been begun but not finished. If Mr. Bulkeley saw the Greyfriars match, and saw that his nephew was not in the eleven, he would know that he had been deceived. The only way Levison could save his face was by getting the match put off if he could contrive it. Tom Merry had thought the matter out, and he was quite certain now that that had been the object of the intended letter to Wharton.

Could the cad of the Fourth have some other card up his sleeve? Knowing the fellow's cunning nature as he did, Tom could not help feeling uneasy. His eyes were constantly upon the clock in the tower.

Eleven struck.

But Harry Wharton & Co. had not arrived.

Some of the cricketers went down to the gates to look down the road. They had arranged for a brake to be at Rylcombe Station to meet the Greyfriars cricketers, and it was time that the brake arrived at St. Jim's.

But there was no sign of it on the road.

"Something's up!" said Blake.

"And Levison's in it!" growled Tom Merry, clenching his hands. "But what can he have done? My hat! If the team don't come after all—"

The faces of the cricketers were very grim.

CHAPTER 11.

Tricked!

"LUXFORD!"

A dozen cheery juniors, with cricket-bags galore, turned out of the train as it stopped in Luxford Station.

They were Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, en route for St. Jim's.

A very fit and cheery-looking set of fellows they were. As they came out of the train, a junior who was standing on the platform came towards them. There was a general exclamation of surprise from the Greyfriars juniors.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Levison!"

Levison grinned in his most amiable manner.

"Hallo!" he said. "How do you do, Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent? So you're here, too, Smithy? And you, Browney? Same old crowd!"

"You've come all this way to meet us?" asked Bob Cherry. "Awfully polite of you, I must say. Any of the chaps with you?"

"No. I've come alone," said Levison. "I haven't forgotten that I used to be a Greyfriars chap, you know, though I dare say you've forgotten me there."

"You're not so easily forgotten, Levison," said Wharton drily. "You left a reputation behind you, you know."

Levison flushed, and his glance was very unpleasant as it dwelt for a moment upon the handsome face of the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Oh, let bygones be bygones, Harry," said Bob Cherry uneasily. "All friends to-day."

"The friendfulness is terrific!" said a dusky junior who rejoiced in the name of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and whose English was as remarkable as his complexion. "We are all glad to see the esteemed and ludicrous Levison."

"The fact is, I've brought you a message," said Levison.

"From St. Jim's?"

"Yes."

"Hand it out," said Harry Wharton, with a curious smile.

"We've got a quarter of an hour to wait for the train, and there's time to hear your giddy message."

"Dash it all, you might be civil to the chap, when he's come all this way to meet us!" Bob Cherry murmured in Wharton's ear.

The Greyfriars junior skipper shrugged his shoulders.

"Wait till you've heard his precious message," he said.

"Get it out, Levison, old man."

"It's from Tom Merry," said Levison. "It's a note."

"Oh, a note!" said Wharton, with the same curious smile.

"Yes. I offered to bring it over, as I wanted to meet you chaps," said Levison, fumbling in his pocket. "I think it's about the line being up between here and Wayland. The later express goes through Bunchester, you know, and you get to St. Jim's a quarter of an hour later than you arranged. Tom Merry only heard about the railway being up this morning, so it was too late to wire."

"Railway up!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Yes; there's been an accident over-night. But you'll get there all right by the Bunchester Express," said Levison.

"Oh, good! Jolly lucky you met us, then."

"Where's the note?" asked Wharton.

"Here it is."

Wharton opened the envelope, and the Greyfriars cricketers crowded round to read the letter, written in Tom Merry's boyish hand.

"Dear Wharton,—Levison will give you this note at Luxford. I've just heard that the line is up between Luxford and Wayland, so you had better take the Bunchester Express at ten o'clock. Otherwise, you will be hung up, and won't get here in time. From Bunchester you can get on to Wayland, and the brake will be there to wait for you.—Always yours,
"TOM MERRY."

"Lucky we got that in time," said Bob Cherry.

"Awfully lucky!" said Wharton.

"Ten o'clock!" went on Bob. "That's a quarter of an hour later than the train we were going to catch. Time for a little refreshment in the buffet, my sons."

"Hear, hear!" said the cricketers.

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "Now that Levison's given us this note I'd like to compare it with a letter I received from Tom Merry this morning."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY—**"THE FIGHTING PREFECT!"** A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! I didn't know you'd heard from Merry this morning."

"I wasn't going to say anything about it—letting bygones by bygones, as you seem to think it a good idea, Bob. But now I think you'd better see it; and I think you'll agree that we'd better let the Bunchester express alone, if there is any Bunchester express at ten o'clock—which I doubt."

"Why, what—"

Levison gritted his teeth as Wharton drew a letter from his pocket and read it aloud to the astonished cricketers:

"Dear Wharton,—Perhaps you remember a fellow named Levison, who used to be at your school, and was sacked, I think, for something rotten or other. I think you know he is at St. Jim's now. He was spotted to-day writing a letter to you in an imitation of my writing, most likely with some idea of mucking up our match to-morrow. I am writing this to warn you that if you hear anything from Levison not to take any notice of it; and if you receive any letter postponing the match, or anything of the kind, it won't be genuine, never mind whose handwriting it is in. Of course, there's no need to talk about this; but as Levison used to belong to your school you probably understand why I am putting you on your guard. The rotter has been scheming to muck up the match. I wish you had kept him at Greyfriars."

"Yours sincerely,
"Tom Merry."

"My hat!"

"By Jove!"

"Well, that takes the cake!"

"What have you got to say to that, Levison?"

"Did Tom Merry give you that eye for imitating his fist, you rotter?"

"The eyefulness of the esteemed Levison is terrific, and his rottenfulness is also great," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I suggest that the bumpfulness is the proper caper."

Levison backed away.

"Well," said Harry Wharton, "you see, we know what to expect, Levison. That note you have just brought me wasn't written by Tom Merry at all. After what he says in this letter, he certainly wouldn't use you as a messenger. It's pretty plain that you haven't changed your ways since you were kicked out of Greyfriars. It's to be hoped that it won't be long before you are kicked out of St. Jim's, too."

Levison gritted his teeth. He knew that Tom Merry had written to Wharton, and he had feared that Wharton would be too much on his guard to be taken in by his trick. But it had been a chance, and he had tried it.

It had failed.

"We'll jolly soon learn whether the line is up!" remarked Vernon-Smith. "They'll know at this station. Here's a porter."

Vernon-Smith called to the porter:

"Is the line up between here and Wayland?"

"No, sir."

"The train leaves as usual for Wayland Junction?"

"Yes, sir—nine-fifty."

"Is there an express for Bunchester at ten o'clock?"

The man shook his head.

"The express for Bunchester has left, sir. There's another this afternoon."

"Thanks!"

The Greyfriars cricketers looked grimly at Levison. After Tom Merry's letter they had hardly known what to think of the note brought by Levison, but the information from the porter cleared it up clearly enough.

"If we had believed this rotter we should have lost our train, and the next is a wait of two hours," said Wharton. "We should have found there wasn't any Bunchester express after it was too late to catch our own train! Got any more messages, Levison?"

Levison clenched his hands.

The cricketers crowded round him, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh suggested again that the "bumpfulness," as he called it, was the proper caper.

But Wharton shook his head.

"Let the rotter alone!" he said. "He's had a good long journey for his trouble, anyway, and he hasn't taken us in. Clear off, you cad!"

Levison slunk away down the platform.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated one of the cricketers—a sturdy, sunburnt lad. "So that rotter used to be at Greyfriars! Rather a good thing for Greyfriars he cleared, I should say!"

"Yes, rather, Squiff!"

"Better get to our platform," said Vernon-Smith. The junior whom the others addressed as Squiff looked

curiously after Levison. He was a new fellow at Greyfriars, and had not known Levison before.

"Rather a good idea to give him another eye to match the one he's got already!" growled Squiff.

Levison heard the junior's remark, and swung suddenly round.

"Perhaps you could do it?" he exclaimed.

Squiff laughed.

"Yes, I think I could do it!" he said. "Wait a minute, you chaps—"

"You come on!" said Bob Cherry, grasping his arm. "The train's in, and it leaves in two or three minutes. No time for scrapping, we've got to get to the other platform."

"Oh, all right!"

"Funk!" sneered Levison.

Squiff turned crimson.

"Why, you rotter—" he exclaimed.

"Funk!"

Squiff jerked his arm away from Bob Cherry and ran towards Levison. Levison faced him, his eyes glittering. He was no match for the sturdy Australian junior, and he knew it, but he had a purpose to serve. Unheeding the heavy knuckles that came upon his face, he closed with Squiff and dragged him down on the platform.

"Stop it, Squiff!" shouted Harry Wharton. "There's no time to lose!"

"I'm coming!"

Squiff tore himself loose from Levison's clutch and jumped up. The cricketers were already streaming away down the platform. There was, as Wharton said, no time to lose. It went sorely against the grain with Squiff to run away from the fellow who had called him a funk, but he made up his mind to it. But as he started to run after the others Levison clutched at his ankle and caught it, and brought Squiff with a crash to the platform.

"Oh! Ow!"

Levison held on savagely, and Squiff was struggling with him again in a moment. Some of the cricketers ran on, and Harry Wharton and several others turned back. Wharton and Bob Cherry caught hold of Levison and dragged him by main force away from Squiff. Porters and passengers were gathering round in some excitement at the disturbance.

"Buck up!" gasped Bob Cherry. "There's not a second to lose now. This rotter is trying to make us lose the train."

"Let go, you cad!" shouted Squiff, as Levison grasped him again.

He hit out hard, and Levison rolled on the platform. The cricketers tore away at a run; and Levison sat up, gasping for breath and aching from his tussle. But there was a grin of malevolent triumph on his face; for as he sat up the loud shriek of a whistle rang through the station.

It was the whistle of the departing express.

Harry Wharton and Bob and Squiff reached the departure platform as the train steamed out of the station.

The other cricketers were already there, but they had not boarded the train to depart without their captain. Two or three who had entered a carriage jumped out again as they saw that Wharton was left behind. So the whole crowd were gathered on the platform with their bags when the three late comers arrived.

"Gone!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Lost the train, by gum!"

"Oh, you ass, Squiff—"

"It wasn't Squiff's fault," said Bob. "Levison planned that. He happened to fasten on Squiff; but he'd have picked a row with one of us—anyone would have done! He only wanted to make us lose the train."

"And we let him do it!" groaned Wharton. "Two hours to wait for the next!"

"Oh, it's rotten!"

"The rottenfulness is terrific!"

"Let's find Levison, and give him a thundering good hiding!" suggested Vernon-Smith.

And as there was nothing else to be done the juniors returned to the other platform to seek Levison and take vengeance upon him for the scurvy trick he had played them. But Levison was not to be found. He had already cleared off, and the Greyfriars cricketers were disappointed.

CHAPTER 12.

Something Like a Scheme!

LEVISON grinned as he walked out of Luxford Station, wheeling a bicycle. He had brought his bike with him to Luxford—his plans were already laid. If his forged letter failed to cause the Greyfriars party to lose their train, he had resolved upon the desperate resource of picking a quarrel with them, and thus delaying them at the

last moment, and he had succeeded only too well. He mounted his machine and rode swiftly away, while the disappointed and enraged cricketers were seeking him in the station.

Levison had "posted" himself thoroughly by a long study of time-tables. The Greyfriars party were stranded at Luxford for two hours to come. But Levison knew that at Melthorpe, fifteen miles distant, he could catch a train for Wayland if he lost no time. There was no means for Harry Wharton & Co. to get there in time, neither did they know anything about the local trains; and that was why Levison had brought his machine with him. He pedalled away down the road at a scorching speed. Slacker as he was, he could exert himself when he chose. And he chose now. He fairly flew along the green lanes, leaving a cloud of dust in his wake.

Harry Wharton & Co. would undoubtedly inquire after other means of reaching Wayland, now that they had lost the express; but it would take them too long to get a conveyance to Melthorpe, when they learned of the train there Levison, who was not losing a second, was not quite sure of catching it, and he scorched for all he was worth.

He was flushed crimson with exertion, and panting for breath, when he dashed up to Melthorpe Station, and jumped off his machine.

He had three minutes for the train.

In three minutes more, his machine was in the luggage-van, and Levison was breathing hard, leaning back on a cushioned seat as the train ran out and rushed away towards Wayland Junction.

"Done it!" he muttered. "Just done it! Dash it all, I deserve to have some luck. I'm taking trouble enough!"

He was fatigued by that hard ride, but less fatigued than he would have been a couple of weeks before. For his steady cricket practice, bad as his motive had been for taking it up, had done him good, and he was in a much more fit condition than usual.

For a quarter of an hour he rested without troubling his head to think, while the train sped on through the green and sunny countryside.

But Levison's active brain was never idle for long.

As he sat in the carriage, he reviewed in his mind what he had done, and what he had yet to do.

He had stranded the Greyfriars party at Luxford for two hours—they would be two hours late in getting to Wayland—and when they arrived there, they would have half an hour to wait for a train to Rylcombe.

That meant that the match was, at least, delayed until the afternoon.

Even if he did not fully succeed in his object, he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had, to a great extent, "mucked up" the match from which he was excluded—and that was a very great satisfaction to the cad of the Fourth.

But he was not finished yet.

Fast as the train was, it was too slow for Levison's impatience, and he chafed as it stopped at station after station on the way to Wayland Junction.

But at last it ran into Wayland Junction.

Levison jumped from the carriage.

A man in "loud" check clothes, with a bowler hat set rakishly on the side of his head, was smoking a big **bloek** cigar on the platform.

He came at once to meet Levison as he alighted from the train.

"I've been waiting for you, Master Levison."

It was Lasker, the billiard-sharper.

"All serene! Let's get into the waiting-room!" Levison did not wish to be seen in public with a gentleman of Mr. Lasker's reputation. Lasker followed him into a deserted waiting-room.

The rascal looked curiously at the St. Jim's junior. His intense dislike for Tom Merry, against whom he had a bitter old score, made Mr. Lasker more than willing to help the cad of the Fourth in his schemes against the junior captain of St. Jim's.

"Wot's the little game now, Master Levison?" he asked.

"I want you to help me," said Levison. "I've explained to you what I'm trying to do. If the Greyfriars team don't get that match at St. Jim's to-day, it's a good thing for me. If you help me out, and it's a success, it's a good thing for you, too, Lasker; and, anyway, it will be a dot in the eye for Tom Merry."

Lasker's eyes gleamed.

"I'm your man," he said. "Anything you like, so long as there ain't too much risk, and no expenses."

"I'm standing the expenses," said Levison. "I've had a good tip from my uncle, and I'm in funds for once. If I work this all right, it means a good deal for me—very likely a handsome allowance from my uncle. He's rich. I've succeeded all right so far. The Greyfriars fellows are stranded at Luxford, they have a two hours' wait before them. They can't arrive here till about half-past twelve."

"You made them lose the train?"

"Yes."

"Well done," said Mr. Lasker. "I don't quite see 'ow you could 'ave done it, but well done! You are a deep 'un, Master Levison!"

"I hope I'm a match for Tom Merry, anyway," said Levison. "Now it depends on you, Lasker. The St. Jim's fellows know you well enough, but the Greyfriars chaps have never seen you. They won't know you from Adam."

"You want me—"

"I want you to have a brake here ready to meet them when they arrive."

Mr. Lasker whistled.

"A brake!" he repeated.

"Yes. You can drive a brake, I suppose?"

"Of course. But—"

"Don't you see? Wharton will wire from Luxford that he's lost the train, of course. When he gets here, he has half an hour to wait for a local to Rylcombe. Well, it will seem quite natural to him that Tom Merry should send a brake over to meet him, instead of leaving it to meet him at Rylcombe, as previously arranged. You'll be on the platform waiting for them—you'll know them, of course—a dozen cricketing fellows, one of them a Hindu."

"Oh, I'll know them all right!" said Lasker, with a nod.

"But—"

"You go up to them, and tell them Tom Merry sent you here with a brake for them. They couldn't possibly have a suspicion that it's not all right!"

"I don't see 'ow they could," agreed Mr. Lasker.

"Well, they don't know this part of the country. You bung them into the brake, and drive them away. Instead of going to St. Jim's, you take them off into the country. If they ask any questions, you're taking a short cut—see?"

"My eye!" ejaculated Mr. Lasker. "You're a deep 'un, I must say again!"

Levison smiled. He was very pleased himself with the scheme. It would cost him some money, and Levison did not like parting with money; but there was a certain amount of satisfaction to him in using his uncle's generous remittance for the purpose of fooling the old gentleman. Levison was that kind of fellow. The more crooked a path was, the more Levison was inclined to follow it.

"You may get them miles and miles away from the place before they smell a rat, and really make you stop," he said. "To them you'll be simply a brake driver—no reason why they should suspect you. By the time they really get suspicious, you'll have them landed on the other side of the moor, miles from any station, and you can get the horses loose from the brake."

"What!"

"Make out that one of the geegees has gone lame, or something, and stop and get the traces loose, and clear off with the horses, and leave them stranded on the moor. Then they'll have to walk—unless they feel inclined to pull the brake along." Levison chuckled. "And they won't even know which direction to walk in. I don't care if they drop into St. Jim's about evening, tired out and done in—it will be too late for the match—and my uncle will be gone. He leaves by the five o'clock train, as he has got to get back to London this evening. See?"

Mr. Lasker rubbed his hands.

"Master Levison, I must say as I admire you," he said.

"You've got brains, you 'ave! About gettin' the 'orses away from the brake, and leavin' 'em to walk—why, that's a tip-top idea, and as easy as winking, too—though I'd never 'ave thought of it myself. Jest fancy their faces when I clear off with the 'orses!"

Levison laughed.

"Plenty of time to get a brake here ready," he went on. "More than an hour yet before Wharton gets to this station. I don't see how it can fail, if you do your part."

"I'll do my part right enough," said Mr. Lasker. "As for the expenses—"

"I'm footing the bill, of course," said Levison, with rather a wry face. "I know the brake will cost money. Still, you can get it cheaper than I could. And if it turns out all right, there's a quid for you at the finish."

"I'm your man!" said Mr. Lasker, more heartily than before.

"I rely on you," said Levison. "I've got to get off to meet my uncle at Rylcombe—he's coming down in time to lunch at St. Jim's. Of course, it wouldn't do for me to be around here when Wharton arrives. The rotter thinks I'm hung up at Luxford, the same as he is. As for you, he'll take you for the man that Hooker's have sent with the brake. No reason why he should have the slightest suspicion of you."

"None at all!" agreed Mr. Lasker.

For ten minutes more the two rascals, the schoolboy and the sharper, discussed the details of the precious scheme, and

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then they parted, in time for Levison to get a local train for Rylcombe.

The expression of the cad of the Fourth was very satisfied as he sat down in the train. If all went well, the Greyfriars match was "off."

If all did not go well, he had had his trouble for his pains; but he had done his best. It was the last throw of the dice, as it were, and he had to trust now to fortune.

CHAPTER 13.

Kerr Gives Advice.

"TELEGRAM for you, Master Merry!"

The lad from the post-office stopped at the school gates, where Tom Merry & Co. were waiting and watching anxiously for the arrival of the Greyfriars party.

It was past the time when Harry Wharton & Co. should have reached St. Jim's, and the anxiety of the cricketers was growing very keen.

What Levison might have done, they could not guess; but they could not help feeling that the delay in the arrival of the team was due to some cunning manœuvre of the cad of the Fourth.

They promised Levison all sorts of things in the near future, but that, as Blake dolefully remarked, would be a very poor satisfaction, if the last big match of the season was mucked up.

A special whole holiday was granted for the Greyfriars match, and if it did not take place, the opportunity was lost; the junior cricketers would not get another holiday for a whole-day match.

Tom Merry took the telegram eagerly and opened it. He guessed that it was from the delayed cricketers.

He was right. The message was dated from Luxford, and it ran:

"Lost train. Arrive two hours late. Not our fault."

"Luxford!" said Tom Merry. "They've lost the connection at Luxford. Blessed if I see how they can have done it! There's a quarter of an hour for changing trains there."

"Wharton says it's not his fault," said Lowther. "You can see what that means. Levison has been there."

"But how—"

"He has tricked them somehow into losing the train."

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

"It must be that, I suppose. But Wharton ought to have been on his guard. I wrote to warn him about Levison. And, besides, he knew the fellow well enough when he was at Greyfriars. Still, it can't be helped. They've lost the train, and they'll be two hours late, which means that we shan't be able to start before lunch. It won't be a whole-day match, after all."

"It's rotten luck!"

"I suppose it must be Levison's work, or Wharton wouldn't put it like that," said Tom Merry musingly. "Oh, the rotter!"

"We'll slaughter him afterwards!"

"That won't help us now," said Figgins lugubriously.

"No, hang it, it won't!"

"Anybody got a time-table?" grunted Tom.

Kerr had a time-table, and the junior skipper consulted it eagerly.

"They'll get to Wayland at twelve-forty," he said. "If they catch a local train at once for Rylcombe—"

"They won't," said Kerr. "The next local train after that is past one o'clock."

"Then they won't be here even in time for lunch. We shall have to send word down to Rylcombe. The brake's waiting there," said Tom Merry.

Kerr looked very reflective.

"Suppose they lose the local train, too?" he suggested.

"Dash it all, they can't do that, with half an hour to wait for it!" said Blake.

"You never know, considering that Levison is on the warpath, and we can't get at him to stop him," said the Scottish junior. "He may have some fresh scheme in his head. My idea is that we'd better take the Greyfriars' party under our wing when they get to Wayland, and not leave anything to chance."

"We can't go over there at that time," said Fatty Wynn, with a shake of the head.

"Why not?" demanded Kerr.

"Because we shall be having our dinner here."

Kerr sniffed.

"I suppose wild horses wouldn't drag you away from your dinner, Fatty! But you needn't go; no need for the whole crowd to go. But I think some of us had better be there, to see that there ain't no more accidents."

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"Well, there's something in that," agreed Tom Merry. "We might get some practice while we're waiting for them. But there's something in what Kerr says. I don't see what Levison could possibly do."

"You didn't see before, but he's made them lose their train at Luxford," said Kerr in his incisive way.

"Well, that's so."

"If you fellows don't want to come, I'll run over to Wayland," said Kerr. "It's a good way from here, but it's worth taking the trouble, in case Levison has anything more up his sleeve."

"Kerr's quite right," said Figgins, who had unbounded faith in the sagacity of his Scottish chum. "You can depend on it Kerr's right. Kerr's a match for Levison every time."

"Why not get the brake away from Rylcombe, and take it over to Wayland, and meet them there?" went on Kerr, thinking it out. "As they have to wait half an hour for the local train, it won't take any longer to come here by brake—not much longer, anyway. And if we could get them into the brake we shall feel sure of them, anyway."

Tom Merry nodded.

"It's a jolly good idea!" he exclaimed. "Kerr's right. One of us can cut down to Rylcombe on a bike and fetch the brake here, and we'll go over to Wayland in it and meet Wharton there. We have to wait dinner for them, anyway; that's only civil."

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "Fatty was of opinion that civility could be carried to absurd excesses."

"Oh, you needn't wait!" said Tom, laughing. "They're going to lunch in the School House. That's arranged already."

"Then I think it's a good idea," said Fatty Wynn, relieved.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern fetched his bike out, and pedalled away to Rylcombe for the brake. Tom Merry & Co. returned to the cricket-ground in a decidedly exasperated frame of mind. They had to wait now, and the special leave for the whole-day match was wasted. Their feelings towards Levison were not amiable.

They put in some practice at the nets while they were waiting for Redfern to return. The brake, which had attended in vain at Rylcombe Station for the Greyfriars' party, came rolling up at last, with Redfern and his bike inside.

When the brake started for Wayland, Tom Merry and Lowther and Blake and Kangaroo and Figgins and Kerr went in it. It did not seem at all likely that Levison could have any further trick to play on the Greyfriars' party when they reached Wayland. But the juniors were willing to leave nothing to chance.

The brake disappeared, and the rest of the cricketers went back to the pitch to while away the time till dinner.

"Hallo, there's Levison!" said Redfern, glancing towards the school gates about half an hour later.

Levison had just come in, wheeling his bike. He was not alone. An old gentleman, with a bronzed face and white moustache, was walking by his side. It was easy to guess that this was Levison's uncle, Mr. Bulkeley.

"The rotter had really gone to meet his uncle, after all!" remarked Digby.

"But he's been to Luxford all the same, somehow or other," said Herries.

"I suppose we can't bump him now," remarked Redfern regretfully. "We shall have to leave it till after his relation's gone, I suppose."

That was evidently the case. Levison did not even glance towards the cricketers. He went into the School House with Mr. Bulkeley, and disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER 14.

The Last Card.

"PLENTY of time!" said Tom Merry.

The big brake stopped outside Wayland Junction Station. The station clock marked a quarter-past twelve.

The half-dozen St. Jim's juniors descended from the brake. Wharton's train was not due for another fifteen minutes, so there was plenty of time.

"Better too early than too late," said Kerr sagaciously. "I don't believe Levison's done with us yet."

"I don't see what he could do."

"We can never see what he could do till he's done it."

"Well, that's true enough. Anyway, we've checkmated him this time, if he had any rotten scheme up his sleeve. We bag the Greyfriars' chaps the minute they step out of the train."

"There's another brake waiting here," Kerr remarked,

nodding towards a large brake with two horses that was drawn up outside the station entrance. "Looks as if there's another party arriving, as well as ours."

The juniors glanced carelessly at the other brake, little dreaming what it was there for. A boy was holding the horses, but the driver was not to be seen.

"Who says ginger-pop?" said Figgins.

And the juniors, who were dry after the drive in the hot summer sun, said "Ginger-pop!" with one voice. They left the brake outside the station, drawn up behind the one that was already there, and crossed the road to the confectioner's opposite the station, where the cheery ginger-pop was soon flowing.

They had not observed a man, with a bowler-hat set rakishly on his head, who was lounging in the station vestibule, and who drew back quickly out of sight when they had come into view.

It was Mr. Lasker.

That gentleman's face fell considerably at the sight of the juniors from St. Jim's. He watched them covertly till they disappeared into the confectioner's.

"My eye!" murmured Mr. Lasker. "My eye, this puts the lid on!"

Mr. Lasker was at a loss.

The plan concerted with Levison had seemed to promise certain success, but it was knocked "sky-high" by the unexpected arrival of Tom Merry & Co. with a brake.

When Wharton arrived he would find Tom Merry waiting for him, and in Tom Merry's presence it was evidently impossible for Mr. Lasker to carry out the programme of presenting himself as a brake-driver despatched from St. Jim's to meet the party.

Mr. Lasker clenched his teeth hard on his cigar.

His first thought was that it was all "U P," as he would have expressed it. But he was keen to carry out the scheme, and keen to earn the "quid" which was to be the reward of success. He thought it over savagely. There was a chance yet—a very slim chance—but Mr. Lasker resolved to try it.

He stepped out of the station and spoke to the boy who was minding the horses. The lad led the brake round the station to the other entrance.

Then Mr. Lasker entered into a whispered conversation with a roughly-dressed loafer who was chewing a straw outside, evidently an acquaintance of the billiard-sharper. A half-crown was passed from Mr. Lasker's hand to the loafer's dirty palm, and the man crossed the road, and proceeded to "loaf" outside the door of the confectioner's shop.

The train was nearly due now. It was already signalled. And Mr. Lasker waited on tenterhooks.

He knew that it was "touch and go."

Tom Merry probably intended to come into the station to greet the Greyfriars' party as soon as they stepped from the train. Mr. Lasker's "pal" was to pick a row with them in the street, and delay them there as long as possible.

In the interval Mr. Lasker hoped to get hold of the Greyfriars party, get them out of the station by the other exit, and into his brake, and away before the St. Jim's fellows "tumbled" to what was going on.

Mr. Lasker was acting with considerable astuteness; but he knew that the chances of success and failure were about evenly balanced. It was, in fact, a desperate chance, but there was nothing else to be done.

The train came rushing in at last.

Tom Merry had not appeared, but from the street Mr. Lasker could hear a sound of excited voices, which showed that a "row" was in progress.

The juniors, in fact, left the confectioner's a few minutes before the train came in, and as they came out the loafer lurched into Tom Merry, according to Mr. Lasker's instructions.

Tom Merry drew away from the man; but the rough turned upon him with a torrent of lurid language, and planted himself in his path.

"Get aside," said Tom angrily. "You ran into me! Clear off!"

"You want all the blooming street, I s'pose?" roared the rough. "You want the 'ole of the pavement—eh? Fur two pins I'd mop up the ground with yer, I would!"

"Look here, I don't want a row with you!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Let me pass!"

The rough spit upon his hands, and squared up to him.

Tom Merry drew back, setting his lips. He did not want a "scrap" with the ruffian in the street, and he wanted to be in the station to meet the Greyfriars party.

"Oh, kick the drunken fool out of the way!" exclaimed Figgins.

The rough turned upon Figgins.

"You jest try it, my pippin!" he said. "Kim on!"

And he thrust a dirty fist into Figgins's indignant face.

That was too much for George Figgins. He hit out, and the rough staggered away with a yell.

But he was rushing upon Figgins again in a moment, and he grasped the junior and dragged him to the ground.

The other juniors gathered round excitedly, striving to drag the ruffian off Figgins, and a crowd collected at once.

Meanwhile, the train had come in.

From the train, as it stopped in the station, descended a dozen schoolboys, with their cricket-bags, and Mr. Lasker fairly ran to meet them.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked up and down the platform. They had not expected to be met there, but they knew that they had to get to another platform for the local train to Rylcombe. Mr. Lasker came up, touching his hat.

"Gentlemen from Greyfriars?" he asked.

"Yes," said Wharton, looking at him.

"Brake's outside, sir."

"Brake from St. Jim's?" asked Wharton.

"Yes, sir. Master Merry sent the brake 'ere. Waited for you at Rylcombe this morning, sir, and then Master Merry told me to come over 'ere. There's 'arf an hour to wait for the local."

"Oh, good!" said Wharton. "Come on, you fellows! Tom Merry's sent a brake to meet us here!"

"Good egg!" said Bob Cherry.

"The goodness is terrific!" said the dusky junior.

"Not that way, sir," said Mr. Lasker hurriedly, as the cricketers were starting along the platform. "The brake's at the other entrance. 'Ave to pass round by the local platform. Took the brake round there because they're unloading a dray jest outside the main entrance!"

"Oh, all right!" said Wharton.

There was no reason why the Greyfriars fellows should be suspicious of the horsey-looking man. They followed Mr. Lasker without a misgiving. Mr. Lasker led the way to the footbridge over the line, and they reached the "local" platform. Mr. Lasker was on pins and needles, so to speak, all the time. At any moment the St. Jim's juniors might come on the scene.

But his rascally associate was doing his work well. Tom Merry & Co. were delayed just long enough.

From the local platform Mr. Lasker led his flock out by the other exit from the station, where they gave up their tickets.

In the side street the brake was waiting.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Sounds like a row!" said Bob Cherry, as a buzz of excited voices came round the corner from the main entrance of the station.

"Only them draymen," said Mr. Lasker. "They're a rough lot, they are, them draymen! 'Ere's the brake, young gentlemen!"

Harry Wharton & Co. deposited their bags in the brakes, and climbed into it. Mr. Lasker jumped on, and took up the reins. He was almost trembling with excitement now. So far, his little scheme had worked with perfect success. A couple of minutes more, and he would be too far away for Tom Merry to "spot" what had been done.

Meanwhile, the "scrap" outside the main entrance of the station had come to an end. A policeman had arrived on the scene, and the rough was "moved on" with a very ungentle hand.

Figgins, in a very dusty state, crossed the road with his comrades, and the St. Jim's juniors hurried into the station and to the arrival platform.

The train was there, but there was no sign of the Greyfriars party.

Tom Merry & Co. stared at the empty train blankly.

"They haven't come!" gasped Tom.

"But they must have come!" exclaimed Kerr. "Here, my man!" He shouted to a porter. "Have you seen a party of fellows arrive—a cricket party with bags?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where have they gone?"

"They went over the footbridge to the local platform, sir."

"Oh, that's all right!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Of course, they didn't know anything about a brake being here, and they've gone over for the local! They were mighty quick about it, I must say. Come on!"

The juniors went at a run over the footbridge, and reached the local platform. They expected to find the cricketers there, but the platform was bare.

"Where the dickens—"

"What the deuce—"

Kerr ran to the exit.

"Anybody passed out here?" he asked the ticket-collector breathlessly. "We're looking for a party—about a dozen chaps with cricket-bags!"

"Yes, sir; they've just gone out!"

"Gone out!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What on earth

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have they gone out for? They had to wait here for the train!"

"They've taken the brake, sir."

"The—the brake?"

"Yes, sir," said the man. "It was waiting outside. The driver, I think, was with them—a man with a whip under his arm, anyway. They—"

The juniors did not wait to hear more. They knew it was not their own brake that had been taken, for that was still outside the main entrance. They knew immediately that it was a trick of some sort.

"Levison again!" yelled Figgins.

Kerr gritted his teeth.

"It's another trick! That's why that loafer picked a row with us—to delay us! Oh, come on!"

They rushed out into the side street.

At the end of the street a brake was in sight, dashing away. It was crowded with the Greyfriars cricketers. Tom Merry sprang into the road and shouted. He saw some of the Greyfriars fellows glance round, and then the brake turned a corner and vanished.

"Dished!" yelled Blake furiously.

"After them!"

"Hold on!" gasped Tom. "No good running! The brake—the brake!"

They dashed round the station in hot haste. Tom Merry muttered a few words of hasty explanation to his driver, the juniors piled into the brake, and the big vehicle was set in motion.

It swept round the station, and proceeded at a gallop on the track of the brake in which the Greyfriars fellows had been ravished away.

It had been quick, but it had taken some time. Tom Merry & Co. were now five minutes behind Mr. Lasker. Mr. Lasker had that brief start in which to make his escape with his passengers—if they let him!

CHAPTER 15.

Foiled at the Finish.

MR. LASKER drove his pair of horses down the street at a really reckless speed.

He had heard the wild shout that Tom Merry sent after the brake, and he knew that his trick had been spotted.

He set his teeth and drove hard, keeping to the side streets.

But Harry Wharton & Co. were suspicious now. They had caught the merest glimpse of Tom Merry as he shouted. Mr. Lasker having promptly turned a corner. They had not recognised him in that brief moment and at the distance, but they had seen that he was a schoolboy in cricketing flannels.

And the haste with which Mr. Lasker was driving was a suspicious circumstance, too.

"Hold on, driver!" said Harry Wharton, touching the man on the shoulder. "There's a fellow behind calling after us; he wants something!"

"I didn't 'ear him, sir," said Mr. Lasker, driving on. "Master Merry told me to get to the school as fast as possible, sir."

"But this isn't the way to St. Jim's," said Vernon-Smith. "I've been here before. This is not the way!"

"I'm takin' a short cut, sir."

"Anyway, don't drive so fast," said Harry Wharton. "We don't want to kill anybody. Slacken down!"

Mr. Lasker did not slacken down. Harry Wharton's grip closed more tightly upon his shoulder.

"Go slower!" he said. "Do you hear? You'll run over somebody soon. I say, I don't like the look of this, you fellows!"

"And I don't, either!" said Bob Cherry. "After all, we've no proof that this man is from St. Jim's at all. And after the trick Levison played us at Luxford—"

"Stop him!" said Nugent.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes another brake!" shouted Bob.

Mr. Lasker was driving furiously down a long, quiet street that led into the country lanes outside the town, and at the end of the street, behind, a brake had come into sight, also driving furiously, and with half a dozen juniors in it waving their hands.

Mr. Lasker turned a corner quickly.

But Harry Wharton & Co. had recognised their pursuers now.

"Tom Merry!" Wharton gasped. "It's Tom Merry himself who's after us!"

"I saw Blake, too."

"This chap is playing it low down on us," said Squiff.

"It's another trick of that precious rotter Levison."

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"Make him stop!"

"We'll jolly soon do that," said Harry Wharton. "Do you hear, driver? Stop, or we'll yank you over into the brake. Stop at once!"

Mr. Lasker set his teeth, and drove on. The brake was rushing at a great speed now, and the last street was left behind, and a long green lane lay before them. The Greyfriars fellows looked back; behind them came the St. Jim's brake in full pursuit.

Tom Merry & Co. were waving their caps, and the Greyfriars fellows waved back. It was only too clear now, past the shadow of a doubt, that they were being taken away from St. Jim's, instead of to the school.

Mr. Lasker perhaps counted upon the risk of stopping him forcibly while the brake was in full career, but he had to deal with fellows who were quite equal to the occasion.

Harry Wharton and Squiff grasped him, and the reins were wrenched out of his hands. Bob Cherry took the reins, and Wharton and Squiff dragged Mr. Lasker over backwards among a crowd of legs. The unfortunate Lasker collapsed under the feet of the cricketers, sprawling in the brake. Bob Cherry pulled the horses in. He could not stop them at once, but he made them slacken, and the brake slowed down.

"Ow!" gasped Mr. Lasker. "Gerroff! Ow! Grooh!"

Clatter, clatter, clatter, came on behind.

The pursuing brake was gaining fast now, and Harry Wharton & Co. could hear the shouts of the pursuing juniors.

"Stop!"

"You're being fooled!"

"Wait for us!"

"All serene!" shouted back Squiff. "We're stopping."

Bob Cherry drew the steaming horses to a halt at last. The St. Jim's brake came thundering on behind, and slowed down and stopped. Tom Merry sprang out.

"Thank goodness we've caught you!" he panted.

"Hurrah!"

"Ow! Lemme gerrup!" groaned Mr. Lasker, who was pinned down under half a dozen of the Greyfriars juniors.

The juniors dragged him bodily out of the brake. There was a general exclamation from the St. Jim's fellows as they recognised him.

"Lasker!"

"So you know the man?" said Wharton.

"Yes; a rotten cad, and a friend of Levison's. Levison must have put him up to this," Tom Merry exclaimed. "My hat! It was nearly a success, too. I suppose it was Levison made you lose the train at Luxford? He was there?"

"Yes; it was Levison."

"He was there—rather," said Bob Cherry. "And then he fixed this up for us here—"

"Oh, the rotter!"

"There's a ditch handy," said Squiff, with a grin; "and this blighter ought to have a lesson about playing rotten tricks on nice innocent kids—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Leggo!" groaned Mr. Lasker. "It—it was only a joke, sir. Master Levison is—is such a humorous gent, sir—"

"We'll show him how this humour is appreciated presently," said Tom Merry grimly; "and we'll show you now. We've met a bit differently this time, Lasker. I'm not alone with you on the moor now, and you haven't a stick—"

"That—that was only a joke, sir," said Mr. Lasker apprehensively. "I wasn't goin' to 'urt you, sir. It—it was a little joke."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"It was—it was really, sir—a little joke of Master Levison's—"

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"Of course! What an ass I was not to think of it! Levison put you up to it, so that he could chip in and help me. He was fooling me, the rotter, and I thought— Oh, what an ass I was! Pitch this cad into the ditch!"

"I—I say, young gents, I—I— Ow!"

Splash!

Mr. Lasker disappeared into the ditch, and he crawled out again, drenched to the skin and caked with mud. The juniors, grinning, clambered into the St. Jim's brake, and drove away cheerily for the school. Mr. Lasker stood with mud and water running down him, and a most lugubrious expression upon his streaming face.

"Oh, my eye!" he murmured. "It's all U P now—quite U P. Well, I done my best, and Master Levison will 'ave to fork out that quid, or I'll know the reason why. Ow! I do feel bad! Ow!"

And Mr. Lasker, after a quarter of an hour spent in scraping off mud, drove the brake away in a very bad humour.

But Tom Merry & Co. did not share Mr. Lasker's despondency. They drove off to St. Jim's in high spirits. The match had been delayed—that could not be helped. But it

was, fortunately, only delayed. They had narrowly escaped missing it altogether. But for Kerr's canny foresight, they would not have come to Wayland to meet Wharton; and if they had not been on the scene there, Mr. Lasker's plan would have gone without a hitch. As it was, it had been an extremely close shave. But, as Bob Cherry cheerily remarked, a miss was as good as a mile, and the match was coming off after all; and if they didn't have time for two innings, they had time for one, so everything in the garden was lovely. Levison had played his last card, and he had lost.

And in their relief at the defeat of their unscrupulous enemy, the juniors were almost ready to forgive him for the trouble he had caused, and they were in high spirits as they bowled along to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 16.

Unmasked!

LEVISON jumped.

His face went suddenly pale, and his eyes seemed almost to start from his head.

He had just come out of the School House with his uncle. Mr. Bulkeley had lunched with the Head, and Levison, after dinner, joined him, to take him for a walk round the school.

Levison had already explained to Mr. Bulkeley that the Greyfriars match for that day was, unfortunately, "off," the Greyfriars team having failed to keep their engagement. Therefore, he would not have an opportunity of displaying his prowess as a member of the junior eleven before the avuncular eyes.

And Mr. Bulkeley had said that, owing to other engagements, he would not be able to come to St. Jim's on the day of the House match in the following week, so Levison's cup of satisfaction was full. For after his rascally conduct that day, it was extremely unlikely that he would be allowed to play in the House match.

As there was to be no match that day, and as Mr. Bulkeley could not come down to see the House match next week, Levison felt secure.

True, it was in the power of Tom Merry to betray him if he chose. A word from Tom Merry would have enlightened Mr. Bulkeley as to the real facts of the case.

But Levison knew that Tom would never utter that word. Angry and indignant as Tom Merry might be, he would never play the sneak, much as Levison deserved to be given away. That was not to be feared—there was no danger in that quarter.

Mr. Bulkeley was not suspicious. Crooke of the Shell had "played up" well in aid of his chum, remarking to Levison, in his uncle's presence, how hard it was that the match was off, and adding further, for the old gentleman's benefit, that great things had been expected of Levison in the Greyfriars match.

Everything was going well, from Levison's point of view, till he stepped out of the School House with Mr. Bulkeley.

For at that moment there came a clatter from the direction of the school gates, and a brake rolled in.

And in the brake were Tom Merry & Co. and a crowd of Greyfriars juniors.

Mr. Bulkeley glanced towards them.

Levison stood rooted to the steps.

His face changed from white almost to green. This was the end of it; his scheming had come to this. Lasker had failed him, somehow. It did not matter much how—he had failed. "The best-laid schemes of mice and men—"

The brake stopped outside the School House, and the cricketers swarmed out of it. At the sight of Levison, there were dark looks among the Greyfriars juniors, but the presence of Mr. Bulkeley restrained an open ebullition of their feelings. Mr. Bulkeley was looking astounded. From the cricket-pitch, Redfern and Digby and Herries and the rest came racing across to greet the new arrivals.

"Hurrah!"

"Here you are, at last!"

"Bai Jove! You're awfully late, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, coming out of the School House. "But heah you are, anyway. Almost given you up, bai Jove!"

"All's well that ends well," said Harry Wharton cheer-

fully. "We've been delayed, and jolly nearly prevented from getting here at all. But it's all right, and there's going to be a match."

"Yaas, wathah! I'm sowwy I'm not playin', owin' to being cwooked—"

"Then we can count on a dead-cert for our side!" said Bob Cherry solemnly. "This is where Greyfriars gets a walk-over."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Excuse me, young gentlemen," said Mr. Bulkeley courteously. "May I ask if this is the Greyfriars junior team?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Then the match is not postponed?"

"Not at all."

Mr. Bulkeley fixed a very curious look upon his nephew.

"I understood—" he began.

"I—I was mistaken, it seems," muttered Levison, with dry lips. "You—you see, they were so late in coming, I—I concluded—"

"But the match will be played, after all?"

"I—I—I suppose so."

"Very good!" said Mr. Bulkeley. "Then I shall be able to see you in the match. That was my chief reason for coming down to-day, really, and I am very glad."

Levison did not speak. The juniors who did not know his miserable secret looked amazed and wondering. Tom Merry did not utter a word. It was not his business to betray the wretched plotter. When Mr. Bulkeley saw the match—as he certainly would now—he would see soon enough that Levison was not in the eleven. But, as it happened, Mr. Bulkeley did not have to wait till then for the information. Bob Cherry, who had heard his remark with astonishment, turned at once to Tom Merry.

"You are playing Levison?" he exclaimed, in indignant amazement.

"Playing Levison!" echoed Wharton. "Surely Levison isn't in your eleven, Merry?"

Tom Merry did not reply. Levison deserved little consideration at his hands assuredly; but the misery and desperation in the wretched junior's face touched him. But it was not necessary for Tom Merry to reply.

"Levison in the team!" hooted Figgins. "No jolly fear!"

"Not likely!" shouted Herries.

"Bai Jove, what an idea!"

Mr. Bulkeley knitted his brows.

"I seem to be under a misapprehension," he said, in a low, even voice. "I understood that my nephew was a member of the junior eleven."

"Bai Jove! What a weally extwaordinary impwession for you to have, sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in surprise. "Howevah could you have got that impwession, sir?"

"A fact! That impression because my nephew stated it to me as a fact!" said Mr. Bulkeley grimly.

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

"Who is the captain of the junior eleven here?"

"I am, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly.

"Thank you. Is my nephew a member of your team?"

"N-no, sir."

"Has he ever been a member of the junior eleven here?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"I understand," said Mr. Bulkeley quietly.

"Come in to dinner, you chaps," said Jack Blake awkwardly.

And the cricketers crowded into the School House, leaving the wretched Levison alone with his uncle.

Levison's eyes were on the ground. His face was white.

"Well," said Mr. Bulkeley, in a grinding voice, "it seems that you have deceived me?"

Levison made no answer.

"Why did you lie to me?"

"I—I—I meant to get into the eleven," muttered Levison. "They won't let me in, because—because there's a prejudice against me. And—and—"

"If some of the things I have heard of you are true, there is ample reason for the prejudice against you, I think. You told me a deliberate untruth, and I, believing it, modified the opinion I had formed of you. I admit you are very clever—very clever indeed. You have neglected lessons somewhat, owing to the calls on your time as a member of the eleven, and it turns out that you have never been a member of the eleven. However, now that my eyes are opened, I shall not be deceived by you again." Mr. Bulkeley looked at his watch. "Under the circumstances, I shall not stay to see the match. There is an earlier train—"

"Uncle—"

Mr. Bulkeley turned away without replying.

And Levison, driving his hands deep into his pockets, tramped away, a prey to utter bitterness and despair.

(Continued on page 111. of cover.)

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—NEXT WEDNESDAY— "THE FIGHTING PREFECT!" —A Magnificent New Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Something Good for Every "gemite" will be found in this week's number of

"CHUCKLES."

NOW ON SALE.

OUR GRAND NEW WAR SERIAL.



READ THIS FIRST.

Paul Satorys, the rightful heir to the throne of Istan, lives quietly in England as a private gentleman until he hears that his place in Istan has been usurped by an adventurer named Jem Stanton, who is the exact double of Satorys. Worse than this, Stanton has decoyed Grace Lang, Satorys' fiancée, out to Istan with him. Grace, however, discovers the deception and escapes from the usurper. She falls into the hands of a tribe of natives, who make her their queen, and call her Nada. Satorys himself is subsequently captured by the natives and brought before the queen, who, however, he does not recognise owing to her veil. Nada offers to help him, and Paul leads her native troops against Istan. He is defeated, however, but saves himself by donning the uniform of an Istan officer, and mixing with the Istan Army. With his faithful followers, Peter Mardyke and Anton, he enters the city, and gets into conversation with an Istan officer.

"Germany has declared war on England, and our king is going to help the Germans," said the officer.

"What! Fight England?" gasps Satorys.

(Now go on with the story.)

Satorys' Resolve.

"Decidedly we do. Our king, it seems, has no cause to love England. He is working for her downfall. He has been negotiating with Germany for long past. Germany expects our help. She will have it!"

Satorys said nothing. He was thinking hard. He was an officer in the army which in a few short weeks would be entering the country which for so long had been as his own. To attempt to get back his rights now would be useless, he knew well; but there were plans forming in his mind. He was inwardly resolving that the army of Istan should never be led against England.

But how was he to attain his object?

"It is a clever move on the part of his Majesty," said the officer, as he folded the paper, and slipped it into his pocket. "There was talk of this before, you must know. I heard about it at the Royal Club before I started on this expedition. The king is soured—soured by the failure of his marriage, though between you and me that was a mistake. People said nasty things about that. I did not see the princess, but report has it that she was very lovely, and you know how the public is. There is a report that she killed herself to escape. Well, anyhow, the king has no more cause to fear his rival. If it was the pretender, he is out of the way, either shot down or drowned; it comes to the same thing in the end. Your health, sir!"

Satorys returned the compliment. He glanced round him. Peter was making himself very comfortable in his corner, and Anton seemed likewise disposed.

"This fresh expedition may make the king easy in his mind, though I should say it is a mistake for him to go in person. We have heard too much of the disastrous results of a king who is no soldier placing himself at the head of

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A Bid for a Throne.

A Thrilling War Story.

By CLIVE R. FENN.

his armies, and our king is no more a fighter than a mouse. At the club some of the older officers declared him to be a coward. He trembles at the least thing—a poor creature, who seems to have entirely lost his nerve, supposing he ever had any. But there it is. He is going to put his spoke in, and I suppose he will pick up some of the spoil. You saw the British Fleet had suffered a reverse, and that there were all the signs of a break-up. What beats me is the folly of the men at the head over there in London. They have been asking for trouble for many years past, weakening the army out of sheer childishness, forgetting that in the last resort all depends upon the bayonets. But, there, I am not an Englishman. If I were, I should be ashamed of my country, and that's all there is to it!"

Satorys rose and left the café, after saying good-night to his friend, whom he was to meet on the morrow on board the train which was lying in the terminal station—a long train of corridor carriages, with baggage waggons in the rear, a train which required three engines to haul it across the half of a continent, up gradients which looked impossible to those accustomed to the flat country.

At the little hotel where Satorys had managed to get a room, though every lodging in the little town was full to overflowing, he took counsel of his friends.

"We must go to Istan," he said, "and wait events. The regiment of which I am an officer is earmarked to sail on this mad expedition. I go with it!"

England Invaded.

"Well, sir," said Peter, "I hope you are pleased with things."

It was long after. The Istan forces had had an uninterrupted voyage, and swept up the Channel, saluted by the warships of Germany, which covered the disembarkation of the troops.

Satorys had almost ceased to think of detection, but, as the expeditionary corps advanced through the country, he did consider the possibility of asserting his rights and turning the force of which he was a member to the advantage of England.

There was nothing to be done as yet, he knew that much. The land was desolate.

"I am sick of it, sir!" said Peter, at the end of the second day, as he stood by Satorys' side at the door of the little inn, where a number of the men were billeted. "I am sick of this stiff and starchy uniform, sick of seeing the soldiers with their bright turnip cutters, and the swanky Germans everywhere, insulting the poor English countryfolk as they are. Wish I was back at sea—anywhere but here—for, although we haven't been asked to fight as yet, there is no knowing how soon the orders will come, and when they do, sir, detection or no detection, I give you my Alfred David that I shall turn round and strike a blow for the dear old land."

Satorys clapped his hand on the sailor's shoulder.

"We will do it together, Peter, old son!" he said, trying to speak cheerily, though it was difficult, for the plight of the Old Country was something which brought a lump to the throat, and made the heart sad.

"You don't mind me talking, sir?"

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE, is the principal character in one of "CHUCKLES," 44

Satorys shook his head.

"It is a bit of a relief. Remember that little toddler we saw by that cottage just outside Portsmouth, clinging to its mother's dress, and the poor woman was weeping. It is these Germans who made her weep, it is these Germans who have soaked the land with blood, made more widows than there are leaves on those trees there, brought the dear old land to ruin and death. They say these Germans understand the art of war, and we are to help them! Well, I am not for one, sir, and so I tell you. We are being ordered here and there by the Germans who fancy themselves the masters of the world, but I have been hearing things, sir, and the old land isn't dead yet, for there is a fresh army being got together up in the North."

The sailor stopped speaking, as there was a whirring rush in the sky, and a fleet of aeroplanes was seen sweeping across. "And this Stanton, who calls himself king! I reckon he is really King of the Hellenes, which should be another name for Old Nick. Well, I suppose things will mend some time. Live and let live is my motto, as the blackbeetle said to the cook; but I want to be fighting for the Old Country on board a ship, and dressed as I used to be. Any old clothes would do!"

"If we get out of this, Peter, I will give you a wardrobe," said Satorys.

"Don't do that, sir, for mercy's sake!" said the sailor. "I am never long in one place, and what would I be wanting with a wardrobe? I couldn't be carrying the big mahogany thing round the world on my shoulders! There, sir; maybe it is all right enough, but England ought to have woke up a long time ago. It is a bit late in the day for the fleet which seems to have been sent south on a false errand to come back, and as for the army from India, which they say is on the way, what I want to know is, can it get here? There's plenty of German cruisers waiting for it on the high seas."

"But we are here, Peter!" said Satorys softly.

"We are that, sir! But what's the good of that, seeing as how we are under the orders of a nasty, swanking liar, a pudding-faced thief! I often feel I would rather just be tramping through the country ready to stick something into every German I saw than pretending to belong to this army which is here to help the Emperor of Germany, bad luck to him! Bad luck to everything German, from a cousin to a sausage. Ah! They ought to have given the job of looking after things to Charlie Beresford and Kitchener long ago!" Satorys was silent.

"Are you going to take it lying down, sir? Isn't there anything to be done? Is the old land going down for ever? Are we going to see the place taken over altogether by these Germans—this scum pulling down the Throne, swanking down Whitehall, eating the roast beef of Old England?"

"There is something to be done," said Satorys, as he tapped his riding-boot with his sword. "There is something to be done, and I am waiting to do it, but the time has not yet come!"

And to the intense chagrin of the three friends, the time did not come during the march northwards to London, which was now in the occupation of the Germans. Satorys felt the effort would be in vain if he attempted to turn the Istan Army from its purpose now. Stanton went forward at the head of his strong force, being received as a conqueror by his German allies, though, so far, the Istan Army had not had to strike a single blow.

The Germans, the hordes of the German Kaiser, had swooped to a purpose, and on all sides the country was a desert, the retreating British Army having laid waste those places where the enemy could have found supplies.

The whole of the south was in the hands of the enemy, and Satorys knew that he might declare himself, but that if he did, it would be to be shot with his two companions.

It was the fourth day after their landing. The Istan Army was in touch with the German troops encircling London, and Satorys, who had found himself in favour with the false king, was present at a council of war. He was in full possession of the facts now, knew that Germany had been long meditating the stroke, and had found England unprepared.

Satorys emerged from the council, his brain on fire, and hastened to his tent, to find Peter and Anton waiting for him.

"I am going," he said. "There is one thing that we can do—give warning, if we can reach the British headquarters in time. There is to be a coup, and the final effort of the British Government to hurl back the invader is to be crushed. The British are, as I have just learned, at Evesham. The wires are cut, no news can get through, but I can, and will!"

"Well said, sir!" cried the sailor. "When do we start?"

"I go alone! One man can get through, two, three never would!"

"How ignorant you are, sir!" said Peter

"I go with you!" said Anton stolidly.

Satorys was forced to yield. Satorys had stepped to the door of the tent. He was followed by his two companions, and they started—started that night of pitchy darkness, when the brooding of autumn were over all.

The camp was about ten miles from the Metropolis, the city where German rule prevailed. The pretty riverside villages were destroyed. The bulk of the people had fled to the west, taking what goods they could manage to carry with them.

As the three men glided forward, a challenge rang out in the night air, a challenge in German, and it was Satorys who replied.

"Istan!" he cried.

There was the command to halt. A German sentry advanced and peered into his face, muttering something about "the English," for the voice of Satorys had told, and the latter saw his chance of getting away, of giving the warning and throwing in his lot with the British Force in the north, fading away.

"You are English!" cried the German, bringing his rifle to his shoulder.

Satorys saw the man was alone, though a hundred paces away there were to be seen a group of the man's comrades. With a bound he was on to the sentry, driving him back, the rifle went off, and as the sentry collapsed under the blow between the eyes given by Satorys, the three started running for life and liberty on into the night.

It was perhaps mad; but it was the time for madness then, and, as shots rang out, Satorys heard the hoarse panting of the sailor and the muttered words of Anton.

More shots, and then silence. Satorys drew up.

"Which way?" he murmured.

Peter shook his head. Anton knew very little of the country. It was in the mind of Satorys to get off the main track, to find horses, a motor, anything, and make a dash to the north-west. It was the only way to serve England, to carry the warning of what was being prepared for the utter annihilation of the British Army, which had been reformed in haste, and was, according to report, marching south. Satorys knew the riverside district well; knew that Twickenham was a couple of miles away to the right, and he led the way into the shelter of some wrecked houses which afforded shelter for the time.

"Love us all, sir, but you've got it!"

Satorys had faltered, but as Peter caught at his arm, he made a supreme effort. One of the shots had found a billet in his shoulder.

Peter was supporting him, holding a flask to his lips, and Anton hurriedly opened his tunic and roughly bound the wound.

"Take a drop of this, sir," said the sailor. "Not much in it, I know, but yours is empty, and so is this here village, all but for a motor-car at the door of the inn there. Come on!"

"Right!" said Satorys, mastering his weakness.

The three glided out of the darkness of the devastated street of Twickenham, and peered in at the door of the inn. It was the inn which stands at the corner of a little alleyway leading down to the river.

"Quick!" whispered Satorys. "We must have that car!"

There was a man in charge, and inside the lighted bar were seen the figures of a group of German officers. Peter pushed Satorys aside, and threw himself on the uniformed chauffeur.

A gurgling cry! The man sank to the ground, the sailor's hands at his throat.

Satorys was at the door of the car. It needed not Peter's warning shout, nor Anton's swift action in starting the engine, to show those inside the inn parlour that something was amiss.

"For your life, sir!" roared Peter.

The sailor had sprung on the hood of the car, which was moving away, with Satorys gripping the steering-wheel. There was a yell from the inn, and in a second the deserted street was alive with armed men. They saw the motor racing down the road. Shots rang out, and Satorys bent double over the wheel, the sailor crawled to his side, and Anton threw himself flat behind.

They were safe!

The shots cracked behind them, but now the distance was too great. The car bumped and jolted over a road which had been cut to pieces by artillery. The open country was upon them, and Satorys drove—drove faster and faster—till the car swung and swayed.

They stopped at Staines, where a frightened innkeeper was made to give them petrol at the revolver-point. They were on once more, not stopping now till the dawn.

"We'd better take our bearings now, sir," said Peter. "We are in strange seas, and must go piano. As for me, I prefer a fiddle; but that is neither here nor there, though it

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makes one think of the swing-boats and the girls dancing in the good old times."

It was Satorys' firm intention to get to the British headquarters, and so frustrate the demoniacal plot of the German Staff.

"Yes, we are all right now," said Peter. "I recognise that little hill there on our port bow."

For the moment Satorys was glad to leave the direction to the sailor. Anton was wounded, though he made light of his injury; and Peter drove till Satorys told him to rest.

So on!

Satorys knew that if the British advanced south, as was intended, they would march into the death-trap which had been prepared. He made a rough chart of the country as he advanced, with Peter looking at him strangely. He knew the British sailor before—knew him for what he really is—brave as a lion, modest, trusting, patient, faithful unto death. But it was not until that drive north, with numberless attempts to stop them, despite the friendly help of frightened villagers, that Satorys realised the hero the sailor was—humble, God-fearing, splendid, with those lessons which the sea teaches men.

The car broke down, and had to be left. The three comrades journeyed at night, Satorys animated with one aim only—to let the British commander know the truth as to what was actually happening in the south.

The country was a wilderness. A man who was lying concealed in a cave by the roadside offered them bread which was black with age. Satorys had been through the last campaign, when as a youngster he had served with the French, but never had he seen anything like the condition of England then. Places—little countryside—where there had been laughter and content in long-vanished summer-times, were now black—the houses burned to the ground, the churches ruined, used as stables for the horses of the German troops. A soldier of the King who had fought the good fight lay, with glassy eyes, in the grass by the track; cottages and schoolhouses mere walls now; all dead, all gone away: a fluttering placard concerning some merrymaking hanging forlornly and pathetically on a post, a memory of the times that had gone. Here and there amidst the ruins a fragment of a woman's dress, a child's toy, a broken mirror flashing in the sunlight. The household goods of the countryfolk made good fuel for the invaders!

"We'll get there, sir," said Peter. "Don't you mind! There's a good time coming for all of us some day; and even if the British commander refuses to listen to the warning, at least there will be three more of us to fight for the old flag."

The Battle of Evesham.

General Summers, who commanded under his Majesty King George the newly organised army, whose headquarters were at Faversham, stopped writing a despatch as an orderly advanced.

"There are three men from the south, sir, just come in, and they ask for an interview."

"I will see them," said the commander-in-chief.

A minute later Satorys and his companions were ushered into the tent; and the general listened gravely to what Satorys had to say, but he shook his head in answer to the warning.

"We go on," he said—"death-trap or no!"

The news of the German advance on the Western Midlands was common property. Satorys spoke of the details of the council of war at which he had been present, and his story was listened to with respect. He was granted an audience with the King of England, who was living the same arduous life as his soldiers, and he learned from the lips of the first in the land that there was news that the army from India had escaped the attentions of the German cruisers, and was hourly expected.

But would it be too late? There had been a heroic defence of the south, but the forces of the British Crown had been driven north, and now it was the casting of the die.

The German commander-in-chief had staked all on his preparations to sweep the last organised army of England out of existence, and he was relying on the Istan Army to achieve the crowning triumph of the campaign.

The hostile advance took place upon three lines, and to meet it there was only the hastily provided force, which had had no time to make itself invincible, even though its numbers were being added to every day, thousands of men pouring in,

ready to fight and die for their country—brawny, kilted Scotsmen, sons of the villages of the north and the western shires, as well as townsmen, wiry, of seemingly poor physique, but with grit enough to carry the day if heroism alone could do it.

Satorys received a warm welcome in the army, but his advice was not heeded.

Then had come the result of the shock tactics—the disaster of one night—with a landing of several divisions of the German Army, and the calamity of the British Fleet being in southern waters, the ships in home seas being inadequate for the purpose of stopping the disembarkation of the German troops.

Of all this Satorys heard as he took his place with Peter and Anton in the fighting line of the British force. He heard more of those happenings which had precipitated the frightful crisis—of the circumstance of the British expeditionary force in Belgium, of the traitors in London of German nationality who had done their utmost to handicap the authorities, and of the devoted bravery of the troops in the attempt to prevent the invaders reaching London. The defences of the Thames and the Medway had proved defective, and the miscellaneous force which had been mustered proved insufficient to stem the torrent.

He heard, too, of the horrors of the state of things in London—the effect of the occupation, the starving populace, the mad fight of countless thousands. But, so far, the north was firm; and as Satorys saw the grim determination around him he felt that even yet the country would recover, and hold its own until the armies from India reached its shores.

It was the morning of the third day after he had reached the British camp that the heavy roll of artillery was heard.

"They mean it this time," said Peter, "and no mistake! Look!"

The sailor pointed to the dark masses of German infantry, which was advancing under cover of the firing of their heavy guns.

Just to the north of Evesham is a stretch of hilly ground. A regiment was ordered up to complete the line of defence here, for the enemy was advancing on this point, and the force, in massed formation, was marching in the direction of the hill when the note of danger sounded—an eighteen-pound shell exploding in the midst of the mass of men.

The Germans charged forward, but, meantime, the British gunners were not idle, and the guns belched forth a savage answer to the challenge of the foe, pumping death broadcast into the teeming multitudes of armed men who were sweeping forward, their aim to wipe out of existence the last of the home armies, as they had done those which had met them before.

"We are going to charge now!" cried Satorys hoarsely.

He and his two friends had been given supernumerary rank; and now, as the British guns roared out defiance once more, the commanders ordered up the flower of the infantry for the charge.

Satorys was among them. He waved aside the words of Anton.

"It is for England!" he cried. "What more can there be? I would die for her!"

Then came the charge. The Germans had wavered, their line broken, the officers fighting to restore alignments, the spirit of iron militarism prevailing even then at that hour of death and horror, with the earth stained with the blood of thousands. From far away on the west, where it had been at first imagined the main attack would come, reinforcements were being hurried up, the King in person leading the van; but it was manifest that the relief would be too late, and that the Germans would break through, throw their divisions northward, and turn the British position, unless the charge of the infantry restored the balance and checked the advance.

There was a shout from one of the officers, and the men cheered, their bayonets laid to hip, the officers waving their swords and racing ahead to meet the enemy, which was charging up the bullet-raked slope of the hill.

It was a moment of the wildest excitement, the men facing certain death as though it were the simplest thing in all the world, hundreds dropping before the deadly fire of the Germans, their places taken by their comrades from behind. They were fighting for England—for its homes, its faith, and hope—fighting for the mothers who wept for sons who lay dead on many a field, fighting for the honour of the old days, fighting for past glories, and for the lustre of the name of Britain which shines so brightly down the corridors of time.

(Another grand instalment of this thrilling story next Wednesday.)

LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!

(Continued from page 21.)

CHAPTER 17.

Well Won!

TOM MERRY & CO. turned out cheerfully for the match in the afternoon.

Delayed as it had been, they were only too glad that it was to be played after all, and that Levison had been foiled at the finish.

As for the wretched cad of the Fourth, they gave him no further thought. Tom Merry knew that his punishment had been severe enough, and most of the fellows, after the scene outside the School House, guessed that Levison had been very hard hit. And so they agreed, when Tom Merry suggested that what Levison had done should be passed over in silence. In his utter failure and downfall, Tom Merry did not want to add to his punishment.

But the cricketers dismissed Levison and all his works from their minds as they came down to the sunny cricket-ground for the great match.

And a great match it was! The play on both sides was great, and even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who watched it from beginning to end through his famous monocle, admitted that the St. Jim's batting was very nearly as good as it would have been if he had been in his place in the eleven. After which there was, of course, no more to be said.

Play was very fast, the bowling on both sides being deadly. St. Jim's batted first, and were all down for 60, and Greyfriars scored 62 for their first innings. But there was ample time to go on, and St. Jim's in their second innings reached the hundred. The afternoon was well on the wane when Harry Wharton & Co. went in for their second innings.

They wanted 99 to win, if there was time to finish, and the Greyfriars fellows were sportsmen all, and they were determined to finish, if possible, win or lose.

Fatty Wynn was bowling his deadliest, and the wickets went down at a good rate, but Wharton and Squiff were piling up the runs. When eight wickets were down for 90 there was a buzz in the crowd gathered round the field.

Nine wanted to win for Greyfriars, and it looked like win! There was half an hour of light left—plenty of time!

Vernon Smith and Tom Brown of Greyfriars Remove were at the wickets now. Three by Tom Brown. Only six wanted now. Three by Vernon-Smith. Now there were only three wanted. Then Vernon-Smith's wicket went, and it was last man in. Peter Todd came in to take Smith's place, and the Greyfriars fellows smiled. Todd of the Remove was good for more than three.

Two to tie, and three to win! Todd swept the ball away, and ran. It was a single, and brought Tom Brown to the batting end. One to tie, and two to win! The excitement was intense. All eyes were upon Fatty Wynn as he delivered the ball once more.

Down it swept, and there was a smack as the gleaming bat met it, and it flew. The batsmen were running—but—

There was a roar!

Tom Merry had made a leap into the air, and there was a light sound as the ball met his ready palm and stayed there.

"Caught!"

"Oh, well caught, sir!"

"How's that?"

"Bai Jove! How's that, you boundahs? How's that, bai Jove! Huwway!"

The St. Jim's crowd thundered cheers. For that catch had taken the last of the Greyfriars wickets, and St. Jim's had won the match by a single run!

The St. Jim's fellows swarmed on the field, and Tom Merry was carried off shoulder-high.

Harry Wharton met him with a cheery congratulation. He was a good loser.

"Well won!" he said. "That was a ripping catch! It was a close thing. But you bag the match! Well done!"

There was a tremendous celebration at St. Jim's after the great match, and when the Greyfriars' team departed, a merry crowd of juniors marched down to the station with them.

Tom Merry & Co. had won the great match, and they rejoiced, and in their intense satisfaction they could afford to forgive Levison.

Levison's last chance had failed him, his schemes had recoiled upon his own head, and all was well that ended well.

THE END.

(Another grand long complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled "The Fighting Prefect," by Martin Clifford. Order in advance. Price One Penny, as usual.)

THIS WEEK'S CHAT.

The Editor's Personal Column.

For Next Wednesday—

"THE FIGHTING PREFECT!"

By Martin Clifford.

In this grand, long, complete story of life at St. Jim's College, Darrel, the popular prefect, and a very handy man with his fists, has to take on a very unenviable task. This is none other than that of defending Mr. Horace Ratcliff the sour, spiteful New Housemaster, who has hardly a friend at St. Jim's, from the attentions of an old St. Jim's boy. The latter is anxious to give Mr. Ratcliff a taste of his own medicine, and St. Jim's agrees by common consent that it is no more than "Ratty" deserves. But Darrel cannot, in duty, allow it, and a tremendous "mill" is the result. The prefect puts up a magnificent fight against a professional pugilist, and Mr. Ratcliff is let off. He behaves with base ingratitude towards the prefect who has saved him, but in the end things turn out right for

"THE FIGHTING PREFECT!"

THE ONLY REMEDY!

A number of reports have been reaching me again lately, to the effect that a good deal of difficulty is being experienced in some places in getting the "Gem" and its companion papers.

In these times of stress, there is an inclination for some of the more timid newsagents to hold smaller stocks of weekly papers, with the result that when the popular papers become sold out—as they quickly do—inferior ones are offered in their places. In this way, there is no doubt attempts have been made to put off "Gem" and "Magnet" readers with other publications of far inferior merit and interest. This state of affairs, however, is one that can easily be remedied by my readers themselves; if they will only order their favourite papers in advance, they will not get "left out"! That is the only way in these times that my chums can be sure of getting the "Gem" and its companion papers regularly. More than ever before, it behoves you all to remember now, and act up to, the oft-repeated maxim:

"ORDER IN ADVANCE!"

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Kathleen Sheldon (London, W.).—Jack Blake has both mother and father.

"Two Seaside Girls" (Bournemouth).—We have many communications from Bournemouth readers.

HEROES OF THE LIFEBOAT.

Achieving the Impossible.

Nor has Gorleston a monopoly in deeds of daring, the like of which are being enacted on many another point of our coast from day to day, though space does not permit of my giving more than two instances.

On March 7th, 1905, the schooner Yarra Yarra, of Skerries, bound from Newport to Wexford with a cargo of coal, after a fierce fight with wind and sea, was driven ashore close by the Rosslare lighthouse near Wexford. A terrific gale blew from the E.S.E., and cataract seas began their work of destruction upon the doomed vessel.

Coastguardsmen and lifeboatmen responded nobly. Efforts were made to get a line on board by means of the rocket apparatus, but the distance proved too great, and the attempt had to be abandoned.

Meanwhile the men were endeavouring to launch the lifeboat. Here again the impossible faced their gallant attempts. Hundreds of willing hands worked that night, the owners of which seemed possessed with supernatural aid; that is why they refused to believe in the impossible. In this first desperate struggle brave hearts proved victors; the boat was launched in the face of an angry, raging sea.

No sooner was she out in the storm than everyone saw that the lifeboat was in as much peril as the ship. Again and again they tried to reach her, and again and again the waves beat them back. A surging mass of water drove the lifeboat past the wreck, and one of the men, catching his chance, threw the lead life-line, and one of the sailors was dragged through the raging surf into the boat, more dead than alive.

The brave Irish gave a yell of triumph, and redoubled their attempts, and one by one each man was taken off the battered ship. What a splendid fight! Heroes every one of them.

THE EDITOR.

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

INDIA-GESTION!

An examination was in progress at a certain school, and the examiner was questioning one of the little mites.

"What are the products of our Indian Empire?" he asked.

The unhappy infant began to reel off a list she had learnt by heart:

"Please, sir, India produces curries and pepper and rice and citron and chillies and chutney and—and—"

"Yes, yes!" said the examiner impatiently. "What comes after all that?"

Instantly another infant's hand shot up.

"Well," said the inspector, "can you tell her what comes next?"

"Please, sir, India-gestion!"—Sent in by F. Nevin, Liverpool.

HEREDITARY.

William had just returned from college dressed in peg-topped trousers, a fancy waistcoat and a tie that spoke for itself. He entered the library where his father sat reading. The old gentleman looked up as his son entered. The longer he looked the more disgusted he was.

"Son," he finally blurted out, "you look like a silly fool!"

Later on the major, who lived next door, came in and greeted him heartily.

"William," he said, with undisguised admiration, "you look exactly as your father looked twenty years ago when he came back from school."

"Yes," replied William, with a smile; "father has just been telling me so!"—Sent in by David Gottlieb, London, E.

DISCOVERED.

Bertie Splosh: "Where is the centre of population around here?"

Garibaldi Simpkins: "Wha' d'ye mean?"

Bertie Splosh: "Where is the population densest?"

Garibaldi Simpkins: "What's that?"

Bertie Splosh: "Oh, never mind! I guess it's thickest right here!"—Sent in by Charles Coleman, Hastings.

A SHARP REPLY.

Jonathan, an American, and Pat, an Irishman, were riding together through a village. On the way they passed a gallows.

"Where would you be," asked the American, "if the gallows had its due?"

"Ridin' alone, I guess!" replied Pat.—Sent in by Bertie Knights, Great Yarmouth.

AN IRISH WEDDING.

A man, meeting an old Irish friend, the possessor of a fearful black eye, and with his arm in a sling, asked him the cause of his misfortune.

"Well," said Pat, "it was at my sister's wedding, t'other day. There was a chap dressed with a bobtailed coat and white waistcoat, and says I, 'And who are you when you are at home?' 'Oh, I'm the best man,' says he. 'Indeed,' says I, 'we will see about that!'—And, begorra, he was!"—Sent in by William H. Ince, Manchester.

HIS REMORSE.

The white-robed nurses quietly busied themselves at the patient's bedside. He was plainly breathing his last.

"Have you anything to say?" asked the doctor who was in attendance.

"Nothing—nothing!" gasped the dying man. "It is only this—this remorse—this terrible blow to my self-respect!"

His breathing was more laboured, and they bent over to catch every word.

"Oh," he wailed, "to think—to think that I have smashed all anti-speed laws against motors, and then to be run over by a donkey-cart!"—Sent in by W. White, New Cross, S.E.

TAKING PRECAUTIONS.

On a very windy day a mother, glancing through her bedroom window, was surprised to see her small daughter, aged two, standing in the very windiest part of the grounds with a piece of string tied tightly round her neck, which she was holding fast in her chubby hands. The mother hurried out and said:

"Why, baby, what are you doing?"

To which the tiny mite replied:

"I've holdin' myself, so the wind won't b'ow I away!"—Sent in by Miss K. Birmingham, Australia.

TOO MANY RESTS.

An Englishman was rowing against an Irishman in a race at a small village regatta. The Englishman was winning so easily that he stopped two or three times, and shouted to Paddy to come along. After the race everybody was chaffing Paddy on the beating he had received from the Englishman, but he simply shrugged his shoulders, and remarked:

"If I had had as many rests as he had, I could have beaten him easily!"—Sent in by V. Trees, Manchester.

GOT HIM!

Mate: "May I ask you what you were before you joined the Navy?"

Captain: "Why, I used to be a commercial traveller, and I travelled in things you have not got—brains!"

Mate: "Well, well, captain, you're the first commercial traveller I've seen without a sample!"—Sent in by S. Fletcher, Birmingham.

A DUST-HEAP.

A school inspector remarkable for his great love of neatness happened to notice that a globe in one of the classrooms was dusty. This annoyed him, and, putting his finger on the globe, he exclaimed:

"There's dust here an' inch thick."

"It's thicker than that, sir," said the teacher.

"What do you mean?" asked the inspector.

"Why, sir," came the answer, "you've got your fingers on the Desert of Sahara!"—Sent in by H. W. Bowles, Norwich.

A (B)RUSH JOB.

O'Rourke: "Phwat's come over you, O'Toole? Yez seem to be painting that house as if you were doing it for a wager."

O'Toole: "Whist! Stan' oot o' the way, an' don't shtop me! O'm shtriving to git through before me paint gives out!"—Sent in by Miss E. Quinland, Twickenham.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender 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 other-wise than on postcards, will be disregarded.