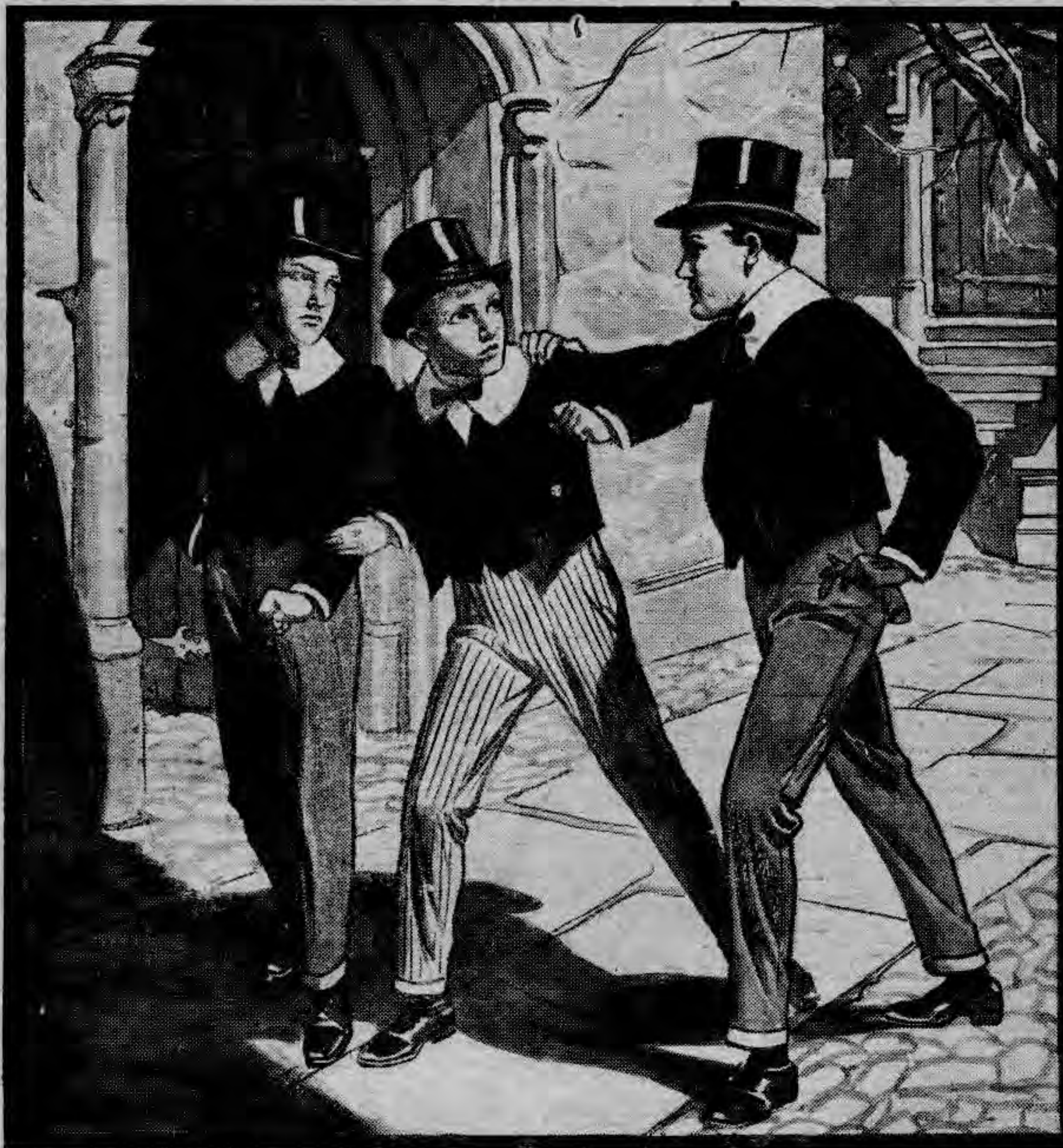


THE WISDOM OF GUSSY!

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



LEVISON MAJOR DISAPPROVES!

(A Dramatic Scene in the Grand, Long, Complete School Story in this Issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — — — —
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EVERY MONDAY | EVERY FRIDAY | EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday :

"A PAL IN PERIL!"

By Martin Clifford.

The introduction of an Italian junior to St. Jim's was hailed by many readers with real pleasure, and some of these have been disappointed that Mr. Clifford has let us hear so little about Giacomo Contarini since then. These readers are sure St. Jim's juniors call him, plays a prominent part. So will to enjoy next week's fine story, in which "Jackymo," as the another section of our faithful army of supporters—those, to wit, who prefer, above all else, yarns of the feud between School House and New House. And so, I really believe, will all the rest, for this is a top-hole story! Read about Tom Merry's play and Figgins' rival drama; about Fatty Wynn in the enemies' camp, and what he heard there; of the friendly attempt at kidnapping, and the hostile attempt; of the great "rag" in which School House scored so heavily over New House—read all about these, I say, and then write and let me know what you think of

"A PAL IN PERIL!"

OUR NOTICES.

I am not going in for a long chat this week. I want to get the notices still outstanding cleared off, and it is not easy to arrange for space elsewhere than on this page. As regards the notices under new rules, you will find the necessary coupon on the last page of the cover. Please note that notices not written on this form—unless they come from soldiers, sailors, or Colonial readers—will be rejected. So will notices without stamps. So will those of a class which the rules don't allow.

THE STORYETTES COMPETITION.

Don't send along any more storyettes. This competition is discontinued. In a short time I hope to announce something to replace it.

THE "MAGNET" STORY.

This week's "Magnet" yarn is particularly good value, and none of you should miss it. Bob Cherry is a favourite with all who have ever read about him, and the genial Bob plays the leading part in the splendid story which Mr. Frank Richards has entitled

"THE DESERTER!"

OUR NOTICES.

Football.

Matches Wanted by :

GLENVALE F.C. (16).—R. T. Hart, 140, Commercial Rd., Kirkdale, Liverpool.
 ALBION F.C. (16)—6-mile r.—R. Loosley, 132, Drayton Park, Highbury, N.
 GROSVENOR ATHLETIC F.C. (16)—6-mile r.—H. B. Finall, 11, Tachbrook St., Westminster, S.W.
 BONNINGTON BIBLE-CLASS F.C. (16)—6-mile r.—P. Anderson, 2, Burns Buildings, Newhaven Rd., Leith.
 JUNCTION ROW F.C. (18)—5-mile r.—G. W. Hood, 2, Sedgelych, Fence Houses, co. Durham.
 ST. GEORGE'S JUNIORS F.C.—F. Hewlett, 40, Great Rd., Brentford.
 TWICKENHAM WEDNESDAY F.C.—4-mile r.—T. Barnes, 14, Bell Lane, Twickenham.
 BECKINGHAM JUNIORS A.F.C. (14-18)—20-mile r.—W. Wilkinson, Trent Bank, Gainsborough.
 52ND BOYS' BRIGADE F.C. (14-17)—within town boundary;

Boys' Brigade or Scout teams preferred.—R. McMillan, 55, Vernon St., Belfast.

HUNTER'S BAR ATHLETIC F.C. (16)—6-mile r.—A. Gardner, 15, Roach Rd., Sheffield.

GLADSTONE VILLA F.C. (14)—5-mile r.—W. Maughan, 26, Napier St., Shieldfield, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

CLIFTONVILLE UNITED F.C.—R. E. Davan, 7, Nailour St., Caledonian Rd., N.

A Shirebrook Team (15-17)—10-mile r.—W. H. Northern, 139, Warsop Vale, Shirebrook.

WILLEDEN JUNIORS F.C. (14½)—4-mile r.—G. Toms, 12, Villiers Rd., Willesden, N.W.

LONDON IRISH ROVERS F.C. (14-15)—4-mile r.—H. A. Delaney, 60, Linton Rd., Barking.

HAMILTON ATHLETIC F.C. (12)—2-mile r.—D. Simons, 27, Hamilton Avenue, Chapeltown, Leeds.

EXCELSIOR F.C. (16)—5-mile r.—C. E. Faulkner, 3, Worcester St., Westminster, S.W.

CHAPEL ROYAL JUNIORS F.C. (13-14½)—4-mile r.—C. Smith, 23, Devonshire Place, Brighton.

GLENLEA F.C. (Barhead) (15)—9-mile r.—R. Nicol, Drimley, Nitshell, near Glasgow.

CLARENCE UNITED F.C. (15½)—5-mile r.—E. Griffiths, 45, Tyas Rd., Canning Town, E.

RED ROVERS F.C.—4-mile r.—L. Hargreaves, 12, Galway St., Beeston Rd., Leeds.

C.C.W.A.C. (16)—private ground.—A. J. Strickland, 19, Eagle Wharf Rd., Hoxton, N.

TYNESIDE ATHLETIC F.C. (13-15)—10-mile r.—Henry Donnelly, 68, Close, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

CLIFDEN ATHLETIC F.C. (10-13)—Brighton district.—A. Peock, 225, Preston Drive, Brighton.

SELSDON F.C. (2nd team) (16½)—8-mile r.—A. J. Mobshy, 41, Tanfield Rd., South Croydon.

SOUTHFIELDS F.C. (18)—7-mile r.—A. E. Thompson, 248, Merton Rd., Southfields, Wandsworth, S.W.

BURDETT ROVERS F.C. (16½)—3-mile r.—B. Finchley, 6, Maidmin St., Burdett Rd., Bow, E.

STANHOPE ROVERS F.C. (14-15)—4-mile r.—J. Watmore Land, 18, Stone St., West End, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

WHITEFIELD UNITED F.C. (15-16½)—5-mile r.—C. Weatherley, 5, Queen's Rd., St. John's Wood, N.W.

CUDWORTH WEST END F.C. (16-17)—4-mile r.—E. Williams, Ehlaleigh, Barnsley Rd., Cudworth, near Barnsley.

HUNTER'S BAR F.C. (13-14)—3-mile r.—C. B. Easterbrook, 54, Penrhyn Rd., Sheffield.

BROMPTON ATHLETIC F.C. (16½)—5-mile r.—T. Payne, 63, Auselm Rd., Fulham, S.W.

6TH LIVERPOOL BOYS' BRIGADE F.C. (15½)—R. W. Jones, 14, Blessington Rd., Anfield, Liverpool.

WESTOE A.F.C. (14-15)—R. Jowett, 90, Hartington Terr., South Shields.

JOHN BULL F.C. (12½)—1½-mile r.—A. R. Main, 15, Baltic St., Aberdeen.

STOKE NEWINGTON COMMON F.C. (13)—2-mile r.—H. Raderman, 5, Northwold Rd., Stoke Newington, N.

HENRY BERRY'S JUNIORS F.C. (15½-16)—6-mile r.—G. Fazzard, 19, Rylstone Terr., Hunslet, Leeds.

ALSTON ROVERS F.C. (15)—8-mile r.—R. Adams, 18, Grango Rd., South Harrow.

A Gateshead Team (14-15)—C. Moore, 120, Rectory Rd., Gateshead-on-Tyne.

ABBAY THURSDAY F.C. (16-19)—20-mile r.—A. E. Green, 6, Victoria St., Spalding.

A Brimsdown Team—5-mile r.—W. Morlane, 4, Mayfield Rd., Brimsdown.

GRIMESTHORPE U.M.F.C. (14½)—6-mile r.—W. Mitchell, 19, Hunsley St., Grimesthorpe, Sheffield.

Your Editor

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Complete Stories
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THE WISDOM OF GUSSY!

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



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked into the study. There was a haze in the room—Levison was stooping over the fire, stirring together in the embers a heap of cigarettes, a pack of cards, and other paraphernalia of a like kind.
(See Chapter 12.)

CHAPTER 1.

Services Not Required.

"**A**RE we goin' to have a bwake?"
"Rats! No."
"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
"War-time economy, my son," explained Tom Merry. "Brakes cost money."
"Yaaa, I suppose they do," assented Arthur Augustus

D'Arcy thoughtfully. "But if we don't have a bwake this aftahnoon, deah boy, how are we goin' to get ovaah to Abbotsford?"

"Bike it."

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter with biking it, fathead?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Lowthah! I weally do

Next Wednesday:

"A PAL IN PERIL!" AND "FOES OF FORTUNE!"

not like the idea of bikin' ovah to Abbotsford for a football-match."

Tom Merry laughed.

"If you think you'll be too fagged for the match, Gussy, I'll take Julian in your place, if you like."

"Pway don't be an ass, deah boy! I am not likely to get fagged by a bike wide. But I wathah think we shall get mudday."

"Awful!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Yass, wathah! Upon the whole, Tom Mewwy, pewwaps we had better have a bwake, and economise on somethin' else."

"How-wow!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"There are other ways of getting over to Abbotsford," remarked Lowther.

"What way do you suggest, Lowthah?"

"Well, you could walk it, you know—"

"Wats!"

"Or crawl on your hands and knees, if you liked that better."

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah, and I weally wish you would not make wotten jokes on a sewious subject. I am thinkin' of my twousahs," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

To the surprise of the swell of St. Jim's, this statement only elicited a chuckle from the Terrible Three. Apparently the awful importance of trousers was quite lost upon their thoughtless minds.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"I suppose you couldn't go in kilts?" suggested Monty Lowther, in a reflective sort of way.

"You uttah ass—"

"Or in the costume of a South Sea Islander?"

"If you are goin' to make wibald jokes, Lowthah, I wefuse to discuss the mattah any furthah! I will bike it, and I thwow upon Tom Mewwy the whole wesponsibility if my twousahs are wuined."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll try to stagger along under it," grinned Tom Merry. "It's about time we were getting off, too. Hallo!"

Levison of the Fourth came out of the School House, and joined the group of juniors who were chatting near the steps. There was a certain hesitation in Levison's manner; but as he evidently wanted to speak, Tom paused to hear what he had to say.

"You're playing Abbotsford this afternoon?" said Levison. Tom Merry nodded.

"I hear that Figgins is standing out—crooked, or something."

"Yes—gammy ankle," said Tom.

"Then you'll want a new forward. Care to play me?"

Tom Merry knitted his brows. His answer was short and sharp.

"No."

"Why not?" asked Levison calmly.

"I think you must know most of the reasons," said Tom Merry drily. "No need to go over them all again."

"You offered me a place in the junior eleven a couple of weeks ago," said Levison. "I wasn't able to play then—"

"No; you went out on the randan instead!" said Monty, with a sniff of contempt. "Smoking and boozing with Racke & Co., you unsavoury bounder!"

"That was really due to a misunderstanding," said Levison, unmoved. "I've been sticking to footer practice—"

"You've given it a miss for a good fortnight," said Manners.

"I've taken it up again."

"Dropping practice and taking it up again isn't the way to qualify for matches," said Tom Merry. "I don't think you're in form for the match. Anyway, I'm not going to play you. When I thought you were turning decent, I was quite willing to meet you half-way, and give you every chance, and you know it. But you were spoofing all the time. It isn't my business to preach to you, and I'm not going to do it, but spokers and gamblers are not wanted in the junior eleven. They don't make good footballers."

"But—"

"Look here, Levison, if you want me to speak plainly, I'll do it. Your last rotten game was rather too thick. You've

added drinking to your other accomplishments, and we found you under the influence of liquor. You can't expect any decent fellow to have anything to do with you after that. And the less you have to say to me the better I shall be pleased. You're unsavoury!"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"That was a slip," he said. "You know I don't drink. I'm not fool enough for that, whether I'm rotter enough or not! As for smoking, I'm really giving it up. And—and as for the rest, that doesn't matter."

"It does, in my opinion."

"You mean you won't play me, anyway?"

"No, I won't!"

"Stwaight fwom the shouldah, bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I must say I quite appwove, Tom Mewwy."

"After which, there remains nothing to be said!" observed Monty Lowther.

"Weally, you ass—"

"And, as a matter of fact, Figgy's place is already filled," added Tom Merry. "Kerr is playing instead of Figgins."

"Is Kerr as good a forward as I am?" asked Levison.

"Better," said Tom.

And he turned away and went into the house, to get ready for the journey to Abbotsford, followed by his chums.

Levison remained standing where he was, with a dark look on his face.

The black sheep of St. Jim's had met with a sharp rebuff, and certainly it was no more than he had deserved.

Perhaps Tom Merry was a little hard upon him without intending it.

Levison had certainly made an effort at reform, and such a character was not to be changed in a day. His backslidings were numerous enough, and his last outbreak had filled with utter disgust every fellow who knew of it. For a St. Jim's fellow—a junior, too—to fall under the influence of liquor was unheard of—incredible, unimaginable, in fact. But even to that depth of degradation the black sheep of the Fourth had descended once. After that, he could not expect a fellow like Tom Merry to have anything to do with him. The mere sight of him gave the captain of the Shell a feeling of distaste and repugnance.

Yet Levison, in his own way, was striving after better things; even in his hardened breast there was deep shame for the depth he had fallen to, and in that way, at least, he was never likely to sin again.

He had taken up football again with renewed keenness, and he had shown considerable form at the game; but, naturally, it was a long time before he could expect his last delinquency to be either forgiven or forgotten.

"Are you going, Ernie?"

It was his minor's voice that interrupted Levison's moody reflections. Frank Levison of the Third joined him with a bright face.

The Fourth-Former shook his head.

"They don't want me in the eleven," he said.

Frank's face fell.

"I suppose it couldn't be expected," he said, after a pause.

"I suppose not," assented Levison grimly. "I could play a good game for the side, too. And—and I want St. Jim's to win—"

"Of course! We all do!" said Frank.

Levison laughed.

"I mean, I've got special reasons for wanting a win this afternoon."

His minor looked at him quickly, a troubled expression coming over his face.

"You haven't been betting on the match, Ernie?" he said, in a low voice.

Levison made an impatient gesture.

"Racke thinks Abbotsford will win," he said. "I've taken him on. Don't make a long face, kid. It's only a quid on the match."

"I—I wish you wouldn't—" muttered Frank.

"How would you like a spin over to Abbotsford, kid, to see the match?"

"With you, Ernie?" asked the fag, his face brightening again. "I'd like it no end!"

"Then we'll go over with the crowd," said Levison cheerily. "There ought to be somebody on the ground to yell for St. Jim's. I don't think anybody's going with the team, only Julian as a reserve. Get your bike out."

Frank's face was quite cheerful again as he made his way to the bike-shed. So long as his major was with him, anyway, he was safe from the company of Racke and Crooke and Clampe and the other young rascals with whom he was pally. Levison, with all his faults, was still, in the fag's eyes, the big brother whom he had always loved and admired, though what Frank saw in Levison to cause either affection or admiration was a puzzle to everybody else.

Write to the Editor of

ANSWERS

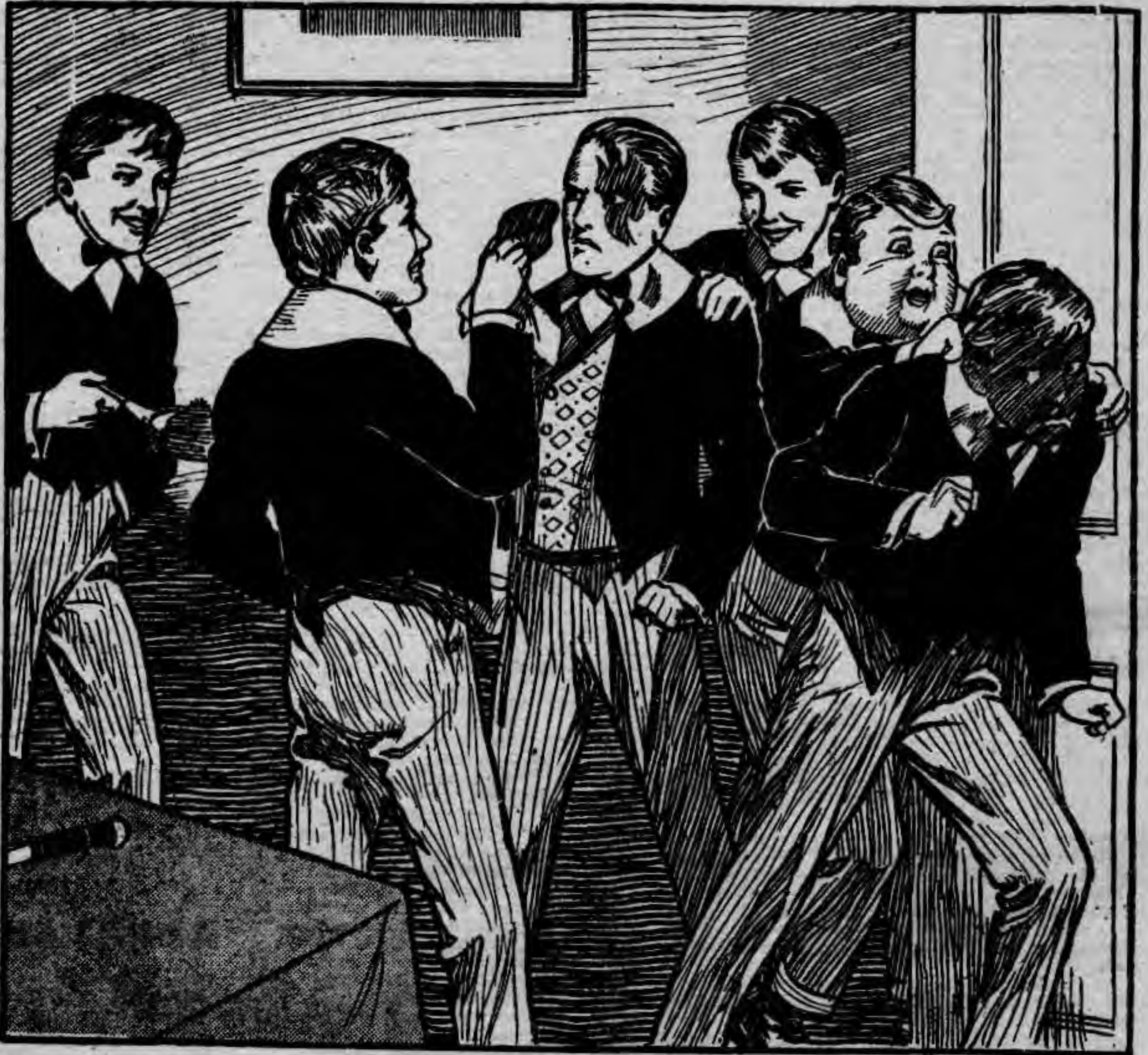
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Kerr shovelled some soot from the chimney. Figgins took Clampe's handkerchief and dipped it in the soot, and proceeded to anoint the faces of the bold, bad blades. (See Chapter 11.)

CHAPTER 2.

Blake Has Bad Luck!

"**F**EARFULLY mudday, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus made that remark as the footballers wheeled their machines out at the school gates.

There was no doubt that roads were muddy, and that the ride to Abbotsford, especially the short cuts through the lanes, would not be a pleasant promenade. But Tom Merry & Co. did not mind. Their regard for their trousers was not quite so keen as that of the swell of St. Jim's.

The eleven were in cheery spirits. Fatty Wynn; Herries, Reilly; Redfern, Noble, Lowther; Talbot, Kerr, Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy formed the team. Julian of the Fourth was going with them, hoping that he might be wanted.

Figgins, whose damaged ankle prevented him from playing, limped down to the gates to see the footballers off. Digby and Dane, and Noble, and Glyn, and Owen, and Lawrence, and Manners, and a dozen other fellows gave them a parting cheer. But nobody seemed keen on biking over with them to watch the game. They were content to leave that muddy ride to the footballers, and to hear all about it when the heroes returned. So there was considerable surprise when Levison and his minor wheeled their machines out and joined the dozen juniors in the road.

"Hallo! You coming over?" exclaimed Julian.

"Why not?" said Levison.

"It's a jolly long ride!"

"For a slacker like me, you mean?" *glared* Levison.

"Yes, if you like," said Julian, laughing. "That's what was in my mind."

"You see, I'm specially keen to see D'Arcy scoring goals—"

"Bai Jove! You are vewy flattewin', Levison——"

"For Abbotsford," added Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!"

"I expect you'll crack up before we're half-way there!" said Jack Blake.

"Two to one I beat you to Abbotsford, if you like," said Levison.

"I'll give you two to one in thick ears, if you like!" said Blake, with a snort of contempt, and he jumped on his machine and pedalled off.

The footballers, riding two and two, went pedalling down the road, and Levison and his minor brought up the rear.

"Levison!" roared Manners from the gate.

Levison looked round.

"You can pick up an ambulance in Wayland, if you get that far!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison scowled, and rode on.

There were few fellows in the party who expected Levison to keep the pace as far as Abbotsford. But, as a matter of fact, Levison was wiry and hardy, and he was quite capable

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "A PAL IN PERIL!" A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

of doing the ride at good speed. In spite of his many backslidings, his reform had made a difference to him. Less smoking had made his wind sounder, and healthy open-air exercise had made him much more fit than of old.

Levison kept level, apparently without an effort. But by the time the cyclists had passed Wayland Levison minor was beginning to slack down. The little fag was not equal to the pace of the Fourth Form and Shell fellows.

Levison's brows contracted as he slowed down to keep pace with his minor. His pride had been aroused, and he wanted very much to get in at Abbotsford School ahead of the footballers. But he could not leave his minor on the road.

"Can't you keep up, Franky?" he asked curtly.

Frank panted.

"I—I can't! Don't wait for me!"

"Oh, rot!" said Levison; and he slackened down.

The footballers drew ahead, and vanished round a bend in the road.

Jack Blake looked back about ten minutes later, and grinned. The road was clear behind. Levison of the Fourth was not in sight.

"Crooked already?" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Perhaps he's slowed down for his minor," suggested Talbot of the Shell.

Blake sniffed.

"Perhaps he has, and perhaps he was glad of the excuse," he said.

"Yaas; I hardly think Levison is equal to the pace, deah boys," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Some of you fellows are wathah hard put to it to keep up with me."

Blake gave a snort.

"Keep up with you!" he ejaculated.

"Yaas, deah boy."

"You ass! I could walk away from you on one wheel!" roared Blake.

"I wegard that statement as asinine, Blake. You could not walk on a wheel at all," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Pway don't push ahead, Blake. You will overtire yourself, and be no good for the football."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I'll jolly well show you!" growled Blake.

And Jack Blake, determined to take the lofty Arthur Augustus down a peg, pushed ahead and put on speed.

The party were only a mile from Abbotsford at this point, and they turned into a lane that cut off half the distance.

The lane was narrow and reeking with mud, wet from late rains, and the surface was cut up by heavy cart-wheels.

It was a most unfortunate spot for Jack Blake to have selected for the purpose of taking the noble Gussy down a peg.

Half a dozen of the juniors were ahead of him, and Blake had to draw in to the side to pass them—into deep ruts and reeking mud.

"Pway be careful, deah boy!" called out Arthur Augustus. "You will go oval at that wate. Bai Jove!"

Blake was over.

Julian, who was close to him, had skidded in a rut, and if Blake hadn't been just at his elbow, Julian could have wobbled and righted. But, as it was, he crashed fairly into Blake.

There was a terrific clatter as both went into the hedge.

Arthur Augustus jammed on his brake just in time to avoid crashing into the fallen machines from behind.

"Gweat Scott!" he ejaculated.

"Silly asses!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

The juniors rode clear, and jumped down to render assistance to the fallen ones. The bikes—sadly damaged—were picked up. Blake and Julian lay gasping in the mud.

Tom Merry caught hold of Blake, to raise him to his feet. The Fourth-Former gave a sudden yelp of pain.

"Yow!"

"Hurt?" asked Tom anxiously.

Blake suppressed a groan.

"Yow! I got the pedal, I think, right on my dashed ankle! Oh, dear!"

Blake stood on one leg, leaning on Tom. Julian rose without assistance, but his face was pale.

"You hurt, too, deah boy?"

"My knee!" muttered Julian, compressing his lips to keep back an exclamation of pain.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Crooked, by gum!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry's face was worried as the juniors examined their injuries. As a matter of fact, both of them had had a lucky escape, for the damage might have been much more serious.

But it was serious enough, from the football point of view.

There was a big bruise forming on Blake's ankle, and Julian's knee was getting blue. Neither of them could ride again; and as for football, that was out of the question. The two unfortunate juniors looked at one another with feelings too deep for words.

Tom Merry almost tore his hair.

Julian, the reserve man, was crooked. Blake, a member of the eleven, was crooked, and there was no one to take his place.

"Well, of all the rotten luck!" said Tom, in dismay.

"All Gussy's fault!" said Blake savagely. "All through that ass gassing—"

"Weally, Blake, I wegard that wemark as uncalled for! I was goin' to say that it was all thwough you showin' off, but I won't!"

"Fathead!"

"I wegard you as a fathead, Blake. Now you are cwooked, and we shall be a man short. Howevah, I shall be there!" added Arthur Augustus consolingly.

"Man short!" growled Tom Merry. "Against a team like Abbotsford! We may as well ask for a licking!"

"Can't be helped," said Kangaroo. "We'll all pile in like thunder. Gussy had better hand out some of those goals he's been promising us."

"Wely upon me, deah boy!"

"The game's up!" growled Blake. "I can't go on. I've got to get back somehow, on one leg, and wheel that wreck. Ow!"

"Better pick up a trap somewhere," said Tom. "You can't walk far, either of you. We shall have to take our chance with the match."

He looked at his watch.

"We're due at Abbotsford now," he added. "No good thinking of wiring for somebody. We shall be late for the match before we could get to the telegraph-office. We've got to chance it. Can't be helped!"

"If I may make a suggestion—" began Talbot.

"Go ahead!" said Tom at once.

"What about Levison?"

Tom Merry started. He had forgotten all about Levison of the Fourth.

"By gum!" he exclaimed. "I forgot him. Levison will be there."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You'd better play Levison," said Blake, suppressing a groan. "No good giving the match away."

Tom Merry's face clouded.

Levison had offered to play in the match, and he had been refused with some exceedingly plain speaking. What sort of reception was the cad of the Fourth likely to give to a request to play after all? It was not pleasant to have to make such a request, considering the way Tom had spoken to Levison. Tom felt it his duty to put his pride in his pocket for the sake of the match. After all, Levison was a St. Jim's chap, rotter as he was, and could be called upon to play for the school if wanted. But—Tom felt exceedingly uncomfortable at the thought of Levison's derisive grin.

But there was nothing else to be done. Tom Merry looked back along the muddy lane. There was no sign of the Levisons.

"They'll be following the main road," said Talbot.

"Yes; I suppose so."

"We shall find them at Abbotsford before us, most likely, after this delay. Better get on, or the Abbotsford chaps will think we're never coming."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Can you fellows get off without help?" he asked.

Blake grinned faintly.

"You can't spare anybody to look after us, if we couldn't. But we're all right. We can potter along to the main road, and get a lift to Wayland, anyway, and get home from there."

"Right as rain!" said Julian.

"All serene, then."

The footballers remounted, and rode on, leaving Blake and Julian to make their way home. They rode into Abbotsford ten minutes later. And as they arrived at Abbotsford School they found two cyclists dismounting there at the gates—Levison and his minor.

Levison looked at them with a grin as they came up. He had followed the main road—a considerably longer route—but he was there first. Frank was gasping a little, but Levison of the Fourth looked fresh enough.

"So you've got in?" jeered Levison.

"Weally, Levison—"

"Hallo! Where are Blake and Julian?"

"Crooked—a spill on the road," said Tom curtly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what are you cackling at?" demanded Tom savagely.

"Ha, ha! It's lucky for Blake he didn't take my bet, after all. Crooked, by gum!" And Levison roared again.

Tom Merry compressed his lips, and went in at the gates with his team. Levison, still chuckling, followed them in with his minor.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison Plays Up.

THE Abbotsford fellows were punting a ball about on the football ground when Tom Merry & Co. arrived. It was already past the time for the kick-off, and the St. Jim's fellows had to change. Yorke, the Abbotsford skipper, took them to their dressing-room.

Levison did not go with them. He had come there to look on. Tom had not yet spoken to him about playing for St. Jim's.

It went against the grain to speak. Yet it seemed that there was nothing else to be done. It was absurd to think of playing Abbotsford a man short while there was a St. Jim's fellow standing idle on the ground.

"I suppose you're goin' to speak to Levison, Tom Mewwy?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at last.

"I suppose I've got to," growled Tom reluctantly.

"He will play a good game," said Talbot.

"It isn't pleasant to ask him, after the way I jumped on him when he offered to play," confessed Tom. "And he isn't an agreeable fellow to eat humble pie to."

"Yaas; it's an awkward posish, deah boy. But that's one of the pleasuhs of a footah captain. You can't considah your own feelin's, you know."

"I suppose I can't," grunted Tom. "One of you ask him to come in here, and I'll get it over. Blessed worry there isn't any other St. Jim's chap here! If only Manners or Olive had come—"

"Can't be helped," said Herries. "After all, he'll be glad to play."

"Sure, you can't do anything but ask him, Tommy darling," said Reilly, "and the sooner the quicker, bedad!"

"Hallo! Here he is!"

Levison looked in. There was a peculiar grin on his face.

"Playing a man short?" he asked.

"Well, we are a man short," said Tom.

"Like me to play?"

"I was going to ask you."

"I'm your man," said Levison cheerily and without any sign of the derision Tom had fully expected. "Lucky I was here—what?"

Tom Merry's face cleared.

"Yes, very lucky," he said. "We've brought Blake's things, and I dare say you can make them do."

"Any old thing!" said Levison.

He proceeded to change in great spirits. He seemed to have forgotten completely the curt way the football captain had refused his services earlier in the afternoon, and Tom felt a little repentant. After all, the fellow had his good points, he reflected.

"It's decent of you to back us up, Levison," he felt constrained to say.

"I'm jolly glad of the chance. And I'm much obliged to Blake for getting crooked," said Levison.

He looked at Tom, and grinned.

"Bless you! I don't mind the way you pitched in at me this afternoon. Hard words break no bones! I did get squiffy that time, though I never meant to. I didn't know how strong the beastly stuff was. Every chap here has a right to preach at me if he likes, and I don't mind."

"Weally, Levison—"

"Well, when you're ready," said Tom.

"I'm ready."

The footballers came out. Among the Abbotsford fellows gathered round the ground Frank Levison was to be seen, his face very cheery. He was proud to see his brother in the ranks of the St. Jim's footballers. Levison looked very fit and quite capable of upholding the St. Jim's colours.

Levison lined up with the team in Blake's place at inside left. The kick-off fell to Tom Merry, and the ball rolled.

Abbotsford were in great form, and Tom Merry, who had lost two of his best forwards, was a little anxious. Kerr was a good player—Kerr was good at most things—but he was not quite up to the form of the great Figgins. And how Levison would turn out in Blake's place was a problem.

But on that score Tom Merry's doubts were soon relieved.

Levison lacked Blake's staying powers, but his pace was good, and he was as quick as lightning to see a chance and to make the most of it. The St. Jim's forwards favoured a method of short passing, and were accustomed to work together like clockwork—their skipper kept them well up to

the mark in that. Levison dropped into their way as if he had practised with the team on every occasion for weeks past. He was adaptable. He knew what was wanted, and he did it. And before the game had been in progress a quarter of an hour Abbotsford were keeping a very special eye on the St. Jim's left wing.

The first goal came to Tom Merry from a centre by Levison, who fairly took the ball away from the foot of an Abbotsford half and sent it in to his captain at the exact moment.

"That was ripping, Levison!" Tom said, as they walked back to the centre of the field. "Keep it up!"

Levison nodded and smiled. The colour was in his cheeks now, and his eyes were bright. He did not look much like the slacker who was accustomed to mooch about idly with Racke & Co., to smoke cigarettes behind the woodshed, and pore over sporting papers in his study. Among the Abbotsford crowd, Levison minor was yelling "Goal! Hurray!" with great energy. Levison minor looked on that goal as his major's, as, indeed, it partly was.

Yorke and his men strove hard to equalise, but they did not succeed in the first half. When the whistle went for the interval, St. Jim's were still one up.

The match had been hard and fast, so far, and some of the players were showing the effects of it. Levison was breathing very hard.

He was much more fit than of old; but his habits did not conduce to staying-power, and the play was telling upon him.

"Feel wathah wocky, deah boy?" Arthur Augustus asked sympathetically.

"Rats!" growled Levison. "Don't be a duffor!"

"I asked you a civil question, Levison."

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

"Tom Mewwy, will you ask Yorke if he minds makin' the interval a little longah—"

"What on earth for?" demanded Tom.

"While I give Levison a feahful thwashin'!"

"Oh, take him to a lunatic asylum, somebody!" said Levison.

"Weally, you uttah wottah—"

"Dry up, Gussy, for goodness' sake!" urged Monty Lowther. "This is a footer-match, you know—not a jawbone solo!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah!"

"My dear chap, you are at liberty to regard me in any character you choose to assume."

Before the true inwardness of this humorous remark dawned upon Arthur Augustus, the call came for resumption of play, and the St. Jim's team went back into the field.

Tom Merry glanced at Levison rather anxiously several times in the second half. Levison was playing up splendidly; but there was no doubt that he had bellows to mend. The flush had died out of his face, and his lips were compressed, showing the effort he was making to keep going. But determination triumphed over physical failing, and Levison played up grimly. In every attack he was well to the fore, and he did not lose his pace.

Abbotsford did not succeed in getting through till half-way through the second half of the game. Then Fatty Wynn, in goal, was beaten at last by a shot from Yorke. Abbotsford had equalised.

The game went on ding-dong from that, till close upon time. It looked like a draw. Yorke and his men made a supreme effort, and there was a hot attack on the visitors' goal, but Fatty Wynn was more than equal to the test this time. Reilly cleared at last, and Kangaroo sent the ball up the field. Then the forwards had the chance they were waiting for. The whole line got away in great style, passing the ball like clockwork and beating the defence hollow, with a rush that brought them right up to the Abbotsford citadel.

There was a sharp struggle before the goal. The ball went in twice, only to be fisted out by the goalie, and then right back drove it away to the touch-line. Arthur Augustus was on it in a flash, trapping it almost on the line, and sending it in to his inside left. The back was rushing down on Levison as he captured the ball. Tom Merry had been shouldered over, and was not there to take a pass, and there was not a second to lose. Levison back-heeled the ball to Arthur Augustus, and went down the next moment with the back sprawling over him. The way was clear for D'Arcy, and he rushed in and drove home the ball before the goalie knew it was coming.

Levison sat up dazedly as the back rolled off him. He was completely winded. But the ball was in the net.

Arthur Augustus turned gracefully.

"Wathah good, what?" he said calmly.

Tom Merry clapped him on the shoulder.

"Jolly good, Gussy! Levison's a brick!"

"Levison! I was weferrin' to my goal, you ass!"

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Tom laughed, and hurried to Levison to help him. Inside left stood unsteadily upon his pins.

"Jolly good!" said Tom. "Not hurt, I hope?"

"No!" gasped Levison. "Only a bit shaken. There goes the whistle!"

The game was over, with St. Jim's two to one. Levison was glad of it. He hadn't a trot left in him, and he was gasping as the players walked off the field. He looked rather white in the dressing-room as he changed.

"Over-done it a bit," said Talbot.

"Yes," said Levison, with a faint grin. "Being out of condition, you know. If I'd known I was going to play, I'd have been a bit more careful the last week or two."

"Let it be a lesson to you, deah boy!" advised Arthur Augustus.

"Bow-wow!" said Levison ungratefully.

"Weally, you know—"

"Levison's done jolly well," said Tom. "He had a hand in both the goals. Jolly lucky he was here!"

And the team agreed that it was jolly lucky that Levison had been there, and when the footballers came out for the ride home Levison had the unusual and rather pleasant feeling that he was one of them; and he had to admit that he had enjoyed his afternoon a good deal more than if he had joined the sportive party who were smoking and playing banker in Racke's study at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 4. Gussy's Idea!

"I 'VE been thinkin'."

Arthur Augustus made that statement in No. 6 Study, where Tom Merry & Co. were gathered to a high—and rather late—tea, after the return from Abbotsford.

Jack Blake had tea ready when they came in, with the assistance of Digby. Blake was still limping, but he had been cheered up considerably by the news that Abbotsford had been beaten on their own ground.

"Thinking!" repeated Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, Lowthah."

The humorist of the Shell took out his pocket book, and a pencil, and made a note. Arthur Augustus regarded that proceeding with some perplexity.

"May I inquiah what you are up to, Lowthah?" he asked.

"Certainly! I'm making a note of it."

"Of what, deah boy?"

"That you've been thinking," said Lowther cheerfully.

"It's the second time this term."

"You uttah ass!" shouted Arthur Augustus, as the tea-party chuckled. "I wegard you as a howlin' duffah, Lowthah!"

"Thanks!"

"And a burblin' jackass!"

"Anything else?"

"Yaas, a feahfully impertinent cwass idiot!"

"Is Gussy always as nice as this to visitors?" asked Lowther, looking with polite inquiry at Blake and Herries and Dig.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I forgot that you were undah our woof, Lowthah. I take back those wemarks. But pway undahstand that if you were not a guest in this study, I should wegard you as a burblin' idiot. Howevah, to wesume, I have been thinkin'—"

"The same think, or another?" asked Lowther, opening his pocket-book again.

"I wefuse to take any notice of your wotten jokes, Lowthah! I have been thinkin' about Levison, deah boys."

"Pass the jam," said Manners.

"Blow the jam! Aftah the wipin' way Levison played up to-day, I wathah think that the boundah ought to be let down lightly. Of course, he acted like a disgustin' black-guard; I am wathah afwaid that he is a disgustin' black-guard, and there is no gettin' away fwom it. But there must be some good in a chap who plays up as he did this aftahnoon, and I am goin' to pwopose—"

"You are going to propose?" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"Yaas!"

"Then you're doing quite right to ask us about it. To whom are you going to propose?"

"You uttah ass!"

"If it's the girl in the bunshop, I forbid the banns, as the young lady is engaged to a soldier—"

"Lowthah, you howwid wottah—"

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"If it's Mrs. Mimms—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I approve of your choice," went on Lowther, while Arthur Augustus looked at him as if he would eat him. "Mrs. Mimms is a nice widow, and a very good house-dame. But the question arises about the disparity of age—"

"Lowthah, if you do not leave off perpetwatin' wotten jokes, I shall wequest you to leave this studay!"

"Well, I'm going to leave it. Did you think I was going to take it away with me?"

"Bai Jove! That is about the tenth time you have made that wotten joke, Lowthah. I wecommend you to wead 'Chuckles,' and get some new ones. I am goin' to pwopose, deah boys, that we give Levison a chance. He has the makin's of a good footballer in him, and on sevewal occasions he had shown twaces of decency. He looks aftah his minah vevy carefully, and I have noticed that, while he goes about with wottahs like Cwooke and Wacke himself, he is vevy careful to keep his minah away fwom such wottahs. That shows a twace of good in the fellow, I considah."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners. "Pass the toast."

"Suppose, then, that we take the boundah up, and tweat him wathah well, and give him a chance," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally believe that he has twied to weform his wotten ways, but it's wathah a big job for a chap like Levison to gwow decent all at once—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But with pwopah encouwagement, pewwaps the good in him will come to the top," said Arthur Augustus. "As a pweliminawy step, I am thinkin' of askin' him in heah to tea. It would be a gwaceful wecognition of the way he played up this aftahnoon. If no gentleman pwesent has any objection—"

"Ob, good!" said Lowther. "He will stand us smokes all round after tea. Ask him in, by all means!"

"Ahem!"

"Got any cards in the study?" asked Manners.

"Bai Jove! What do you want cards for, Mannahs?"

"Well, Levison will want a game of banker."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, Levison will understand that his wascally pwoccedin's will not be tolewated in this study. I have a theowy that if you tweat a chap as a decent chap, he is vevy likely to play up, you know. What do you think, Talbot? You have more sense than these kids."

Talbot laughed.

"I think it's a very good idea," he said.

"Then, if nobody objects—"

"Oh, go ahead!" said Blake. "There's a rasher left, and some sardines. Tell Levison to buck up, or there won't be any jam, though."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus, full of his new benevolent idea, quitted Study No. 6, and proceeded in search of Ernest Levison. He left his chums grinning. Only Talbot of the Shell seemed to take D'Arcy's new idea at all seriously.

Levison was not in his study. Lumley-Lumley and Trimble and Mellish were at work there.

"Do you chaps know where Levison is?" asked Arthur Augustus, as he glanced in at the door.

"Try Racke's study," grinned Mellish.

"Bai Jove! Is he with Wacke?"

"I guess so," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Thank you, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus went on to the Shell passage, somewhat slowly. He did not like visiting Racke's quarters. Aubrey Racke, the heir of the fat war-profits of Messrs. Racke and Hacke, was not a fellow Arthur Augustus could pull with.

However, he arrived at the study, and tapped at the door. It was locked.

"Who's there?" called Racke from within.

"It is I, deah boy."

"What do you want?"

"I want to speak to Levison."

"No pwefects about?" called out Levison's voice.

"Pwefects! No."

"Right-ho!"

The door was unlocked, and Arthur Augustus entered.

The reason why Levison had inquired whether there were any pwefects about was obvious enough. There was a blue haze of smoke in the study, and there were cards on the table. Crooke was shuffling the cards, and Racke was lighting a cigarette. Levison had one between his lips as he opened the door.

Arthur Augustus coughed. The atmosphere of the study was not agreeable to his healthy lungs.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"Come in," said Racke, with a grin to his friends. "You're

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Levison back-heeled the ball to Arthur Augustus, and went down the next moment with the back sprawling over him. (See Chapter 3.)

just in time to take a hand. You play banker, I suppose?"

"I have played bankah for nuts, Wacke."

Racke roared. Racke had never played banker for nuts.

"I wegard these pwoceedin's as disgustin'," said Arthur Augustus scornfully. "If Kildaro or Dawwel came along—"

"Shut the door, Levison!"

"Pway do not close the door, Levison! This atmosphere is wathah thick," Levison grinned, and closed the door. "I am not goin' to wemain."

"Won't you have a smoke?" asked Crooke.

"I wepudiate the suggestion with feahful contempt, Cwooke! I came heah to speak to you, Levison."

"Well, go ahead," yawned Levison. "You're interrupting the game, you know."

"I am sowwy to see you playin' for money, Levison."

"Better make it nuts!" yelled Racke. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, I will not pass any wemark upon it, exceptin' that it is wotten, disgwaceful, unmanly, and despicable!"

"Ha, ha! Is that all?"

"I came to ask you to tea, Levison. We have wathah a spwead in No. 6."

Levison stared.

"Me!" he ejaculated.

"Yaas, deah boy."

"My dear chap, I should contaminate the holy precincts of Study No. 6. I should leave a stain upon the angelic youths who congregate there," said Levison. "And I couldn't play banker there, you know. Thanks all the same!"

"Weally, Levison—"

"But as you're here, there's something you can do for us," said Levison. "Will you umpire for us?"

"In what way?" asked Arthur Augustus, regarding Levison somewhat suspiciously.

"About a bet I had with Racke."

"You uttah wottah!"

"You see, I backed St. Jim's for the Abbotsford match, and Racke backed Abbotsford!"

"You feahful wottah, did you have a bet on the match?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in great disgust.

"Only a quid. Racke thinks the bet ought to be called off, because I played in the match. I don't."

"Certainly," said Racke. "I depended on D'Arcy mucking up the game for St. Jim's. You seem to have stopped him. So it wasn't a fair deal."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Crooke, greatly delighted at the expression that came over the face of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove!"

"Now, what's your decision, D'Arcy?" asked Levison.

"I wefuse to umpiah in such a matter," exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I wegard you as a set of wottahs. If Tom Mewwy had known you were bettin' on the match, Levison, he would wathah have lost the game than played you. I am sowwy I came here, and I will shake the dust of this studay fwom my feet at once!"

And Arthur Augustus did so, closing the door behind him with a bang. He left the black sheep of the School House roaring with laughter.

D'Arcy's colour was a little heightened when he came back.

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into Study No. 6. Tom Merry & Co. gave him inquiring looks.

"Well, is Levison coming?" asked Blake. "Shall I put the kettle on again?"

"Levison is not comin', Blake."

"Then I'll have the other rasher," said Blake cheerfully.

And the tea-party in Study No. 6 heard no more of Arthur Augustus' noble idea for helping to reform the black sheep of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 5.

Arthur Augustus Thinks It Out.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, the next day, might have been observed to be wearing a thoughtful expression.

His suggestion in Study No. 6 had furnished his chums with considerable food for merriment. Perhaps it was that circumstance which caused Arthur Augustus to stick to the idea. He could be, as he had often confided to Blake and Herries and Digby, as firm as a rock. And his chums had agreed that he could be as obstinate as a mule.

Whether it was due to the firmness of a rock, or to the obstinacy of a mule, Arthur Augustus had not given up his idea. He admitted that it was uphill work to help Levison on the path of reform. But he explained that a determined fellow ought only to be spurred on by difficulties, and not deterred by them in the least. He pointed out that Levison, in spite of many little slips, was much less of a rotter this term than he had been last. And his regard for his minor, his care to keep Frank away from evil associations, showed that there was a leaven of good working in his complex character. With a fellow of tact and judgment to help, that leaven of good might be used to good effect, in D'Arcy's opinion. And Arthur Augustus particularly prided himself upon being a fellow of tact and judgment.

Having thought the matter over, Arthur Augustus proceeded to tackle Levison, in what he fondly regarded as a tactful and well-judged manner. He joined him when the Fourth Form came out of the class-room for lessons. His manner was gracious, and he assumed a very affable smile for the occasion.

"You got on wathah bettah than usual in class this aftahnoon, deah boy," he remarked.

Levison grunted.

"You have been doin' your pwep, and Lathom was not waxy with you, as usual. I am glad to see that you are payin' more attention to your work, Levison."

"I don't see that it's any business of yours," said Levison, with a stare. Have you been made a monitor, by any chance?"

"Ahem! No. The fact is, Levison, I have been thinkin' about you."

"You might have found something worse to think about," agreed Levison. "But what have you been doing it with?"

"Eh! With my bwain, I suppose!"

"Oh! You've got one?" asked Levison, with an air of polite interest.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard. But, with an effort, he continued to look affable. He was not feeling quite so affable.

"The fact is, Levison," he said, in as cordial a tone as he could command. "I wathah think the fellow are wathah hard on you in wegardin' you as an uttably wotten skunk."

This tactful speech ought to have brought a smile of pleasure to Levison's face. But it didn't. He scowled.

"It is twue," resumed Arthur Augustus, unmindful of the scowl, "that you are wathah a disgustin' blackguard in many ways, Levison. I am suah you will admit that yourself."

"You silly idiot!" howled Levison.

"Bai Jove! Pway do not be offended, Levison! You seem to misundahstand me. I am speakin' to you for your own good, you know."

"You dummy!"

"Ahem! What I was goin' to wemark is, that, in spite of your bein' such a wascally wottah—Where are you goin', Levison?"

Levison did not reply. He walked away.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "The boundah seems to misappwehend me!"

He hurried after Levison into the quadrangle.

"Pway don't wun away, Levison!"

"Oh, sheer off, you ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, you wottah—ahem!—I—I mean—I was goin' to say, Levison—"

"For goodness' sake, ring off!"

"Ahem! I was goin' to say that I wecognise that you are

not so uttah a wascal as is genewally supposed—Yawwooh!"

To Arthur Augustus' astonishment and indignation, Levison gave him a sudden violent shove on the chest, which caused him to sit down in the quadrangle.

There was a splash as D'Arcy sat down. He had unfortunately landed in a puddle left by recent rain. Levison walked away.

"Gwooh!" howled Arthur Augustus.

He reposed gracefully in the puddle for about a second, and then leaped up like a jack-in-the-box. Mud was streaming down his elegant trousers.

"Oh, cwikey! The awful wottah! Gwooh!"

"Hallo! Mud collecting?" asked Tom Merry, coming up.

"Bai Jove! Look at my twousahs, Tom Mewwy!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry looked at them, and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to laugh at, you fathead!"

"Ha, ha! There is!" yelled Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus strode away wrathfully. He disappeared into the School House to change his trousers, leaving Tom Merry yelling. When that important operation was performed, Arthur Augustus looked for Levison—no longer with friendly intentions.

"Where is that uttah wastah?" he exclaimed. "Blake, have you seen Levison?"

"Oh, blow Levison!" said Blake.

"I want to find the uttah wottah."

"Haven't you finished reforming him yet?" asked Blake.

"I wefuse to weform him! I weally believe he is uttably incapable of weform. I was speakin' to him in a fwiendly mannah, when the uttah beast pushed me ovah into a puddle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"I uttably fail to see anythin' to laugh at, Blake! I do not wegard the mattah as comic in the least."

"I do!" gasped Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard your mewwiment as unfeelin'! Where is that wottah? I am goin' to give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus bestowed a withering look upon his hilarious chum, and dashed away in search of Levison of the Fourth.

He sighted him at last. Levison was in the window-seat at the end of the Form-room passage, with his minor beside him. He had a Latin grammar open on his knees, and was apparently explaining some knotty point to the fag.

Arthur Augustus paused.

The sight of Levison engaged in that brotherly occupation disarmed him. Levison did not look up, and Arthur Augustus walked away without the aid of the Fourth having become aware of his hostile intentions at all.

"Well, have you slaughtered him?" asked Blake, as he met his noble chum in the quadrangle a few minutes later.

"I am not goin' to thwash him aftah all, Blake. Upon the whole, as the wottah misundahstood my wemarks, I shall ovahlook his wotten impertinence. And—and I have thought of a new ideah—"

"Go and bury it!"

"Weally, Blake, it is a toppin' ideah—"

"Go and tell Tom Merry," suggested Blake. "If he won't hear it, confide it to Lowther; and if he isn't taking any, whisper it to Manners."

"Weally, you know—"

"And if Manners jibs, look for Julian. He's a good-tempered chap, and will stand almost anything."

And with that advice Blake limped off hurriedly, leaving Arthur Augustus with his great new ideah uncommunicated.

"The ass!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I shall wefuse to tell him my ideah now! I say, Talbot!"

Talbot stopped.

"I have a new ideah, Talbot, deah boy—"

"Go it!" said Talbot cheerfully. "A new scheme for supplying Sunday toppers to the prisoners in Germany?"

"Nothin' of the sort, you ass! It's about Levison. Pew-waps you have noticed that he is wathah less of a wottah than he used to be."

"Eh?"

"As a fellow of tact and judgment, Talbot, I have come to the conclusion that there is some good in that wastah," said Arthur Augustus impressively.

"I have always thought so," said Talbot, with a smile.

"I have twied to weform him, but he is wathah an ungwateful beast. I twied once befoah to help him in turnin' ovah a new leaf, and he was an ungwateful beast then. But I have thought of a wippin' ideah for helpin' on the good work without appearin' personally in the mattah at all."

"Then it ought to be a success," said Talbot gravely.

Arthur Augustus looked at the handsome Shell fellow rather suspiciously. But Talbot was quite grave.

"Ahem! You may have observed, dear boy, that Levison is wathah attached to his minah—a wathah decent little chap."

"Yes."

"Although he is a smoky wottah himself, he keeps Frank away from Wacke and Cwooke and Piggott, and that set. I heah that he thwashed Wacke once for twyin' to get the kid to take up wotten ways."

"Good for him!" said Talbot.

"Yaas, wathah! Well, suppose Fwank took up wotten ways like his majah—that would be wathah a shock to Levison—what!"

"A very unpleasant shock, I think," said Talbot. "But it's not likely to happen."

"But that's the ideah, dear boy."

"Eh?" ejaculated Talbot, in astonishment.

"Don't you think it's a wippin' ideah?" demanded Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Well, hardly," said Talbot, staring at him.

"Don't you think that it might bwing Levison back to the wight woad?"

"Very possibly. But what about Frank?"

"You do not appeah to compwehend, Talbot. Howevah, I will explain at full length—"

"Are you coming, Talbot?" shouted Tom Merry.

"Coming!"

"Talbot, dear boy—"

But Talbot was gone.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, addressing space. "There isn't much encouwagement heah foah a chap with wippin' ideahs. Howevah, I shall cawwy it out. I weally wegard it myself as a corkah!"

And Arthur Augustus' kind face beamed with satisfaction as he thought over that ripping idea, which he justly regarded as a corker.

CHAPTER 6.

Awfully Deep.

"**C**HEER-HO, kid!" said Wally of the Third, slapping Levison minor on the back with a slap that made him yell.

It was a few days after the Abbotsford match—Saturday afternoon, to be precise. As Saturday afternoon was a half-holiday, everything in the garden was lovely, from Wally D'Arcy's point of view, and he did not see why Frank Levison should be looking down in the mouth. Hence his vigorous greeting.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Wally.

"Eh? Nothing! Don't bust a chap's backbone!" grunted Levison minor.

"Bless your backbone!" said Wally. "You're looking like a bear with a sore head, or a Hun with war-bread for dinner. What's biting you?"

"Nothing, fathead!"

"Grundy been cuffing you?" asked Wally, with a warlike look. "It's about time we ragged Grundy again."

"Oh, no."

"Well, cheer up! I suppose it's your blessed major!" growled Wally. "Blow your major! Look here, Manners minor has had a remittance, and we're going down to the bunshop in Rylcombe. Come along!"

"I—I think I'd rather not this afternoon," stammered Frank.

"Want to mooch about on your own?" demanded Wally sarcastically. "Oh, don't be an ass! Reggie told me to ask you."

"I—I'd rather not."

"Well, you're a silly duffer!" said Wally, and, with that frank expression of opinion, he hurried off to join Manners minor, and Hobbs, and Joe Frayne, who were waiting for him at the gates with very visible signs of impatience.

Frank Levison drove his hands deep into his pockets, and mooched along under the leafless elms by himself.

He was in a downcast mood that afternoon.

He could not help it. Wally had been quite right in guessing that the fag was thinking of his major. Frank was thinking about his brother, and his thoughts were gloomy. He had seen Levison leave the school with Racke and Cwooke, and he knew that they were bound for Wayland—and what Racke called a "good time."

He was despondent. Only lately Levison of the Fourth had been fairly bowled out by the Housemaster, and had escaped the sack very narrowly. Mr. Railton was watchful of Levison, giving him unusual attention, and if the black sheep of the Fourth was caught tripping again there was not likely to be much mercy for him. Levison's luck was wonderful, but it could not always hold out.

But that was not what was worrying Frank. It was the knowledge that his major was on the downward path, and that his efforts at reform—efforts genuine enough so far as they went—always seemed to end the same way. At Abbotsford Levison had played up splendidly, and his minor had been proud of him; yet the same evening Frank knew how he had been engaged in Racke's study. And now! It was the rottenness of it all, more than the risk, that troubled Frank. Levison had so much good in him, and his abilities, when he chose to make the best of them, were of no common order. He could have made his mark in the school; he could have been a credit to St. Jim's; he could have been all that the fag had believed him to be before he came to the school and discovered what he was. But the strange kink in his character had to have full play.

Levison had striven at first to keep the shady side of his life secret from his minor. When Frank had learned of it, as he was bound to do, Levison had made an honest attempt at reform. But it had ended thus!

Now that his minor knew everything, Levison seemed to attach less importance to the matter; and Frank, deeply as he felt it, seldom or never ventured on a word of remonstrance. But it made him miserable to think of what Levison was, and what he might have been had he chosen.

Tom Merry & Co. were playing footer on Little Side, and on Big Side there was a senior House match—Kildare's team against Monteith's. But Frank did not feel inclined to watch the footballers. He was feeling lonely now that Wally & Co. had gone, yet he was not sorry that he had not joined them. He was mooching under the elms, when a kind voice fell upon his ears.

"All on your own, dear boy?"

It was Arthur Augustus of the Fourth. Frank gave him a faint smile. He liked Arthur Augustus, as everybody did.

"Yes, just now," he said.

"I've got some chestnuts in my studay," said D'Arcy. "I heah that you are a wippin' hand at bakin' chestnuts. Will you help me?"

"If you like," said Frank. "I thought you were playing footer."

"I have wesigned in Julian's favah this aftahnoon," said Arthur Augustus. "It is only a Form match, you know. Come on, dear boy!"

Frank followed the swell of St. Jim's to study No. 5. He was tired of his own society and his gloomy thoughts, and he was glad to help D'Arcy bake the chestnuts, and dispose of them internally.

"The fact is, I want to have a little chat with you," said Arthur Augustus, when the chestnuts were duly baked.

"Yes," said Frank, wondering a little. It was a puzzle what the swell of the Fourth could want to chat with a fag of the Third about.

"About your majah," added Arthur Augustus.

The fag's face clouded.

"Your majah is a wippin' chap in some ways—"

Frank brightened up again wonderfully. He had not quite expected to hear a remark of that sort.

"And an awful wottah in othah ways—"

Frank rose to his feet.

"Sit down, dear boy. You haven't finished the chestnuts."

"I—I'd rather go," said Frank, "if you're going to speak about my brother—"

"Bai Jove! It's weally wemarkable how fellows mis-appwehend me," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway sit down. Sushly you do not think that I am goin' to wun down your majah to you, dear boy? I should wegard that as bad form."

Frank sat down again.

"I was goin' to wemark," went on Arthur Augustus, with a touch of dignity, "that I take wathah an intwest in your majah. If he were an uttah wottah like Wacke or Cwooke, I should wefuse to wecognise his existence. But upon weflection I have decided that he is nothin' of the sort."

"Indeed he isn't, D'Arcy!" said the fag eagerly. "He's a splendid chap! You can't guess how kind he has been to me since I came! I should get into lots of rows with Selby if Ernie didn't help me with my lessons."

"Yaas, I have noticed that, and othah things," said D'Arcy, with a nod, "and I weally believe that if Levison had a stwong motive, he would thwow up his wotten ways, and give Wacke and Cwooke and their set the cold shouldah. And I have been thinkin' it out, dear boy, and I have thought of a way."

"Oh!" said Frank, more puzzled than before.

"F'winstance, your majah is vewy particulah not to let you get into his own ways," said D'Arcy. "I have observed that. He thwashed Wacke for twyin' to teach you to smoke, or somethin', and he has wowed with Cwooke about it. It would be wathah a shock for him if you took up smokin' and bettin' and playin' the wottah genewally."

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Frank laughed.

"I'm not likely to give Ernie a shock like that," he said.

"That's the ideah!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Don't you see? Seein' you takin' up his wotten ways, Levison would think wathah sewiously about the mattah. He would wealise that he was settin' you a vewy bad example, and he could not be surprised if you followed it. I wathah think that he would turn the mattah over in his mind, and decide to set you a good example instead," said Arthur Augustus sagely.

Frank stared.

"Now, if Levison felt that it was up to him to keep you stwaight by bein' a stwaight chap himself, I think he would do it," said D'Arcy. "I weally think so. He is weally not a vicious beast, like Wacke—only a weckless ass, you know. It would come home to him if he found you on the same twack, and it might cure him for good."

"My hat!" said Frank, in astonishment.

"So my ideah is that you should play a little game," said Arthur Augustus, beaming. "Let Levison see you dwop a cigawette somewhah—"

"Oh!"

"And ask him to lend you a pack of cards—"

"Oh!" said Frank again.

"And wequest him to give you an intwoduction to the wottahs—I mean the sportin' fellahs—at the Gween Man. Of course, he won't do it, so there's no dangah. But it will make him think—what?"

And Arthur Augustus grinned with satisfaction.

Frank stared at him, quite flabbergasted at Arthur Augustus' deeply-laid scheme. He would never have suspected the swell of St. Jim's of evolving such a plot out of his own unaided brain. A grin broke over the fag's face. Surprising as the idea was, Frank was quite quick enough to see what its result was likely to be.

"It would be wathah spoofin'," said Arthur Augustus. "But it is quite wight to spoof a fellow for his own good. You may wely on me for that. And, moreovah, it may save your majah from gettin' sacked. He came awf'ly neah it last week."

Frank shivered a little. He knew how near it his major had come; he knew how near Levison was to it now, for that matter.

"You see, he can't wun on for evah without gettin' clean bowled-out in the long wun," explained D'Arcy. "Wailton has an awf'ly sharp eye on him now, and next time he comes down on him, it will be the finish for your majah."

"I—I know!" muttered Frank.

"And that would be wathah a pity, for Levison could weally be a cwedit to the school if he liked."

Those kind words banished any lingering doubts Frank might have had. He gave a nod of assent.

"I'll try!" he said.

"That's wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with great satisfaction. "Wely upon it that I'm givin' you good advice. I am a fellow of gweat tact and judgment, you know. Now, wiah into the chestnuts!"

And Levison wired into the chestnuts with a good will.

CHAPTER 7.

Levison Minor's Little Game.

"LEVISON!"

"Adsum!"

"Levison minor!"

No answer.

"Levison minor!" repeated Mr. Lathom, who was taking the roll-call.

Mr. Lathom blinked over his glasses, and marked Levison minor down as absent. He went on with the list till he came to the P's.

"Parker!"

"Adsum!"

"Pegg!"

"Adsum!"

"Piggott!"

Silence.

"Dear me" said Mr. Lathom. And Piggott of the Third was marked absent from calling-over, as well as Frank Levison.

Levison of the Fourth knitted his brows. It was not particularly unusual for a fag to be late for call-over on a half-holiday, but Frank was generally very punctual. His

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absence and Piggott's absence together made Levison knit his brows. It looked as if they were out in company; and Piggott of the Third was not a fellow Levison wanted his minor to know. Piggott, though only a fag in the Third, was a member of the honourable society who followed Racke's noble example, and he was a pretty thorough little rascal.

When the Hall cleared, Levison went to the door and looked out into the quadrangle. It was about ten minutes later that Frank Levison and Piggott came in, and they came in together.

"You're late, Franky," said Levison.

"Am I?" said Frank carelessly.

"Yes; roll-call's taken."

"That means lines, I suppose," said Frank. "Couldn't get back, could we, Piggy?"

"Imposs," said Piggott. "I don't mind the lines. Blow the lines!"

"Where have you been?"

"Oh, down to Rylcombe!"

"Don't ask questions," grinned Piggott.

And the two fags went in to report themselves.

Levison stared after them.

He had warned his minor against Piggott more than once, and Frank had seemed to heed his warnings. Now he had gone out with the shady little rascal, stayed late for call-over, and declined to tell his major where he had been. It was a shock for Levison. Where had Frank been, then, in company with that vicious little waster?

Levison had been enjoying himself that afternoon, in his own fashion, with Racke and Crooke and Clampe. He had supposed that his minor was with Wally & Co., as usual. The possibility that Frank's occupation might have been on the same lines as his own came to him as a shock.

Surely it was not possible. Frank had never shown the slightest sign of vice—not in any shape or form. He had never liked Piggott's company. Levison resolved to have a very plain talk with his minor that evening. His own example was not exactly the one he wanted Frank to follow.

As a rule Frank was only too pleased when Levison bestowed his company upon him; but that evening, for once, he was not on call. Levison looked for him up and down the House, but did not find him. His brow was dark when he returned to his own study. Frank was avoiding him, evidently for the reason that he did not want to be questioned. Why?

Later in the evening Levison looked into the Third Form-room, and found his minor there with the fags. He beckoned to him, and Frank came out.

"Anything wanted?" asked the fag.

"Yes, you young sweep!" growled Levison. "Come here!"

"Wally's calling me."

"Confound Wally!" said Levison savagely. "Come with me!"

"Oh, all right!"

There was a change in Frank's manner towards his major which Levison did not fail to note. He drew the fag to the window-seat at the end of the passage.

"Now, I want you to tell me where you went with Piggott," he said.

"Only down to Rylcombe."

"Why weren't you with your friends?"

Frank did not answer.

"What have you taken up with that smoky little beast for?" asked Levison. "You don't like Piggott."

"Oh, he's all right, in his way!"

"His way isn't your way, I suppose? You know the little beast smokes, though he's only thirteen?"

"Well, you smoke, and you're only fifteen."

Levison started.

"I! What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, you're older than Piggott," said Frank. "If it's wrong, you're more to blame than he is, ain't you?"

Levison stared at his minor without replying. This was quite a new tone for Frank to take with him.

"So you're making excuses for the little brute?" he asked at length.

Frank looked obstinate.

"Perhaps you have taken up his ways?" said Levison savagely.

"Perhaps you were sneaking into

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Arthur Augustus jammed on his brake just in time to avoid crashing into the fallen machine from behind. "Gwreat Scott!" he ejaculated. (See Chapter 2.)

some corner, smoking with him, when I couldn't find you this evening."

"Perhaps," said Frank coolly.

"You admit it?" shouted Levison.

No answer.

"I want to know where you went in Rylcombe," said Levison, between his teeth.

"I don't think you ought to ask," said Frank. "I haven't asked you where you've been, have I?"

"Where did you go?"

"We went to see a chap Piggott knows," said Frank sullenly.

"What for?"

"Well, you see——"

"Out with it, you young rascal!"

"Well, Piggy wanted some smokes," said Frank. "Of course, the tobacconist wouldn't have served him. So we—I mean he—got the other fellow to go and get them. He's older, you see."

Levison looked at him, aghast.

"Don't you know that that's breaking the law?" he exclaimed.

"Is it really?"

"Yes, it is."

"I believe lots of fellows do it. Why, you do!" said Frank.

"Never mind what I do," growled Levison, taken aback.

"You haven't come to St. Jim's to do as I do."

"Why not?"

Levison found it difficult to answer that question, and he did not attempt to do so. He was utterly disconcerted.

"So you went with Piggott to get smokes?" he asked.

"Yes."

"After the way I've warned you against that little beast, too!"

"He's no worse than Crooke or Mellish. He's not nearly so bad as Racke. You go about with them. Why shouldn't I know Piggott?"

"You cheeky little rotter!" exclaimed Levison. "Blessed if I ever thought you'd turn out like this! Look here, it's going to stop at once!"

Frank made no answer, but he looked obstinate.
 "Did Piggott give you any of the smokes?" asked Levison.
 "Yes; two."
 "Give them to me!"
 "What for?"

"Because I tell you!" growled Levison. "Because I'll give you a hiding if you don't! Hand them over at once!"

Frank, with a show of reluctance, extracted two cigarettes from his pocket and handed them to his major. Levison twisted them to pieces in his fingers.

"Anything else?" said the fag. "Wally's waiting for me."

"You can go to Wally, and be hanged!" snapped Levison. He rose from the window-seat and walked away.

Frank grinned as he went back into the Form-room. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's excellent scheme was evidently working well.

CHAPTER 8.

Levison Minor's Sunday Walk.

"COMING, Levison?"

Racke of the Shell asked that question the following morning—Sunday—after the morning service in the old chapel.

Sunday walks were an institution at St. Jim's, and Racke & Co. generally went out together. They would stroll away from St. Jim's looking very innocent and mild; but their innocence and mildness did not last after they were out of sight of the school. They generally slipped away by bypaths to the Feathers, an inn up the river, where they spent their leisure hours in their own fashion.

Levison of the Fourth was generally one of the party. The click of billiard-balls on a Sunday morning was a sound not unknown to his ears.

But on this especial morning Levison hesitated.

Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy had just come out, arrayed in shining toppers. D'Arcy had stopped to speak to Levison minor, within hearing of his major.

"Comin' for a twot with us, kid?" asked Arthur Augustus kindly.

Frank shook his head.

"Thanks, I'm going with Piggott," he said.

"All sewene!"

Arthur Augustus and his friends sauntered on. Levison's brow had darkened as he heard.

"Are you coming?" repeated Racke.

"No!" grunted Levison.

"Please yourself. What about that hundred up, though?"

"Hang the hundred up!"

"You're in a nice, cheery temper this morning!" sneered Racke. "Are you afraid you'll lose one of the quids you got out of me yesterday?"

"Confound you, an' your quids, too!"

Racke laughed, and walked away to join Crooke and Clampe. Levison was left on the steps of the School House, looking very morose.

Wally and Joe Frayne and Jameson of the Third came along, and hailed Levison minor, who was evidently waiting for someone.

"Get a move on, young Levison! Come along!"

"Not coming," called back Frank.

"Go and eat coke then!" said Wally politely. And the fags walked away without their usual companion.

Levison major compressed his lips, and went over to his minor. Frank looked at him in a guarded way.

"Why haven't you gone out with D'Arcy minor?" asked Levison.

"I'm going with Piggott."

"What do you want to go with Piggott for?"

"He's going to show me some rat-catching," said Frank.

"He knows a man on a farm who keeps dogs. He says it's great fun."

"You little beast!" said Levison, in angry surprise. "Is that the sort of amusement you've got for Sunday morning?"

"Not worse than playing billiards at the Feathers, is it?" asked Frank. "I'll come to the Feathers, if you like."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You can teach me to play billiards, if you like. I'd like to learn," said the fag. "Piggott will come, too. He plays. Piggott told me the man at the Feathers lets you have the billiard-room to yourselves on Sunday morning."

Levison was at a loss for words.

Piggott came out of the School House, and joined Frank. Frank nodded to his major, and moved away with Piggott. Levison started after them.

"Frank!"

"Hallo!"

"You're not going out with Piggott!"

"Look here, let your minor alone!" said Piggott angrily. "What's it got to do with you where he goes, Levison major?"

"You cut off!" growled Levison. "If I catch you speaking to my minor again, I'll give you a hiding, you little waster!"

"Well, I like that! I'm not the only waster here, anyway!" grinned Piggott. "What were you up to yesterday afternoon?"

"Mind your own business, you slimy little cad!"

"Well, you mind yours. Come on, Frank!"

"Look here, Ernie, I'm going with Piggott," said Frank. "I'm not stopping you from going with Racke."

"You're not going with Piggott!"

"You've no right to interfere with me. I haven't interfered with you."

"I'm going to do it, whether I've got a right or not. Cut off, Piggott!"

"Rats!"

Levison clenched his hand and raised it. The black sheep of the Third looked at him with cool impudence.

"Better not!" he said. "You touch me once, you bullying cad, and I'll tell Kildare something about where you were yesterday; see if I don't!"

Levison's hand dropped to his side.

"Come on, Frank!" said Piggott victoriously. "We shall be late for the ratting if we don't buck up. Got your money with you?"

"Yes, rather!"

"You follow my tip, and you'll make something," said Piggott. "There'll be a dozen fellows there, and a lot of betting. Come on!"

Levison caught his minor by the shoulder as he was starting with the cheerful Piggott. Frank resisted.

"Look here, Frank, I—I want you to come with me this morning," said Levison, at a loss how to deal with the situation.

"Wouldn't some other time do?"

"No, it wouldn't."

"Frank's coming with me!" said Piggott angrily. "None of your humbug, Levison major! Why can't you get along to the Feathers, as usual?"

"Will you come with me, Frank?"

Frank hesitated.

"Look here, you've got to come!" said Levison. And he put his arm through his minor's, and led him away.

Piggott scowled after them. Piggott's company was not much sought after in the Third, and he had been glad to pal on with Levison minor. He was deprived of his companion now.

The two brothers walked out of the gates together. Frank's face was cheery enough; he did not seem to miss his excursion with Piggott very much, after all. But his major's brows were knitted darkly.

"I suppose you'd rather be with Piggott all the time?" growled Levison, after a long silence.

"Well, Piggy said it would be fun at Griggs' farm."

"You always wanted Sunday walks with me, when I had somewhere else to go."

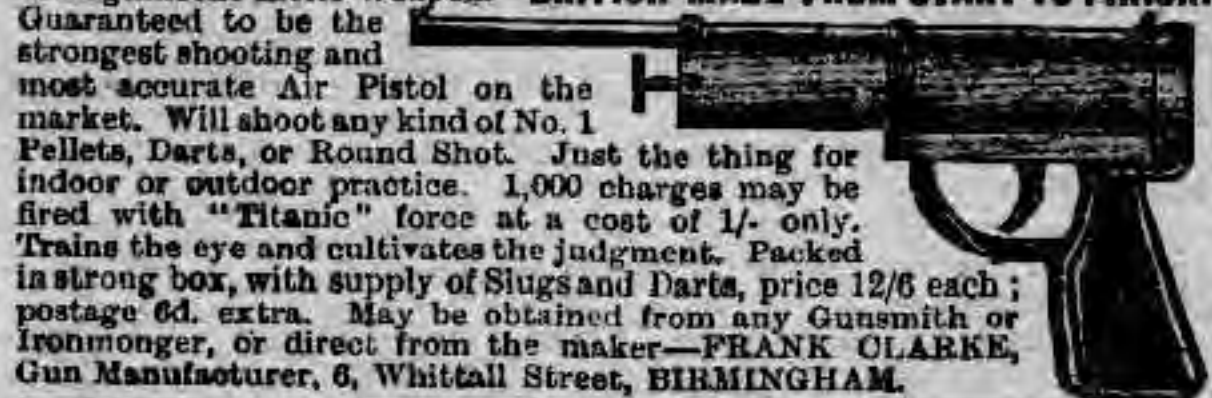
"Well, I'm not stopping you going somewhere else," said Frank. "You told me I wasn't to interfere with what you did. You're making me interfere now."

Levison compressed his lips.

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The new departure on his minor's part astonished him, and filled him with uneasiness. He ought not to have been surprised at it, as he realised very well. His own example was quite enough to bring about such a change in the long run, but it was dismaying to see such a change coming.

What was it going to lead to? The thought of Frank joining the circle of black sheep, of his taking up Piggott's ways, of his joining in the shady amusements of Racke & Co., made Levison feel sick with disgust. Levison had always prided himself upon being a hard case; but the prospect of his minor becoming a hard case, too, was dismaying. There was not much that was admirable in being a hard case, after all, when he came to think of it. Yet, if Frank learned to tolerate his own shady ways without comment, it was only natural that sooner or later the fag would take up the same ways himself.

Levison of the Fourth had very serious food for thought during that Sunday morning walk, and he was not a cheerful companion. He was silent almost all the time, and his brow was dark. Frank did not seem to mind.

When they came back, they met Arthur Augustus and his friends at the gates. The swell of St. Jim's turned his eye-glass upon them.

"Had a nice walk, Franky?" he asked.

"Topping!" said Frank cheerily.

"That's wight. Nethin' w'ong, I hope, Levison?"

"No!" growled Levison.

"You are lookin' wathah down in the mouth, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with a chuckle.

"Oh, rats!"

Levison strode away.

Arthur Augustus lingered behind with Levison minor.

"I wathah think it's workin', kid," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"I—I don't half like it," faltered the fag. "Ernie seems to be taking it to heart. It worries him."

"That wowwy is vewy good for him, deah boy. He doesn't seem to have gone out blaggin' with Wacke and Cwooke this mornin'."

"No," said Frank, grinning. "He took me out instead."

"You have done him a good turn, deah boy. I advise you to keep it up. You can wely on my tact and judgment, you know."

And Levison minor, though a little troubled in mind, resolved to take Arthur Augustus' sage advice, and keep it up.

CHAPTER 9.

At the Cross-roads.

TOM MERRY dropped in at Levison's study a day or two later, in the evening. Levison was working at his prep, having left it late, owing to certain occupations in Crooke's study. His study-mates had long ago finished and gone down. Levison was grinding sullenly at his work when the captain of the Shell came in.

"I'll look in later if you're busy," said Tom.

"Oh, I'll take a rest!" said Levison, rising. "Hang prep! What is it? Want a new man in the eleven for the Greyfriars match?"

"Not exactly."

"You might do worse," said Levison. "I'd like to play against the Greyfriars team. I used to be at Greyfriars, you know, and I'd like to see Wharton's face when he found me in the eleven."

"I'm afraid I can't give you another chap's place in the eleven, for the pleasure of seeing Wharton's face," said Tom, laughing. "It isn't footer this time. I was going to speak to you about your minor."

Levison's face clouded over at once.

"Well, what has my minor been doing?" he snapped.

"It isn't exactly my business," said Tom, colouring a little; "but Franky is such a good little chap, I don't like to see the way he's going. I don't pass any opinion of your own ways, Levison. It's nothing to do with me. I've always understood that you didn't want your minor to go the same way. It would be rather a shame, for he was a thoroughly decent kid when he came here."

"Until he came under my corrupting daily influence, you mean?" sneered Levison.

"Well, to be quite candid, your example can't have done him any good," said Tom directly.

"I didn't expect it to."

"I believe you used to keep an eye on him," said Tom.

"If he were my minor, I should interfere fast enough."

Levison made a restless movement.

"Well, what's he been doing?"

"Perhaps you haven't noticed," said Tom quietly. "I thought I'd speak to you about it, after thinking it over. He has taken up with Racke and Crooke; and from your own experience, you know the kind of fellows they are, and how much good they're likely to do a little duffer of the Third. Kids are imitative, you know. There's that little wretch

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Piggott, who took Cutts of the Fifth for a model—you know what it's done for him. You wouldn't like your minor to learn what Racke could teach him, I suppose?"

"I—I don't see how I can stop it," muttered Levison.

"Well, Frank always does what you tell him—lots of fellows have noticed that!"

Levison smiled bitterly.

"He used to," he said. "He doesn't now. I've tried to break it off between him and Piggott, but it makes no difference. He doesn't do as I tell him."

"Oh!" said Tom.

Tom Merry was nonplussed. He had taken an interest in Levison minor, and he was not pleased to see the cheery little fellow going the same way as his major. He knew that it would not please Levison, either, and he supposed that Levison, wrapped up in his own selfish interests, had observed nothing. It was a discovery to him that Levison knew it, and was powerless.

"I'd stop it if I could," said Levison moodily. "I can't understand Frank lately—he's got quite out of hand. I could lick him, of course, but I'm pretty sure that would only make matters worse."

"It wouldn't be likely to do much good, certainly."

"If you've got any advice to give me, I'm willing to hear it," said Levison. "It's been on my mind for some time."

Tom was silent.

He could have given advice, certainly, but it would not have been palatable, and Levison was not likely to follow it.

"You can't?" said Levison.

"Well, I could, if you want it. I'd advise you to go a bit straighter yourself, and set the kid a good example. What's the good of telling him not to do things that you do yourself?"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I know you won't follow my advice," said Tom; "but it's the best I can think of. So-long!"

The captain of the Shell quitted the study.

Levison did not resume his work.

He moved restlessly to and fro, a prey to troublesome thoughts. The good that was in him prevented him from saying, like Cain, of old, "Am I my brother's keeper?" He knew that he was responsible.

If Frank had been a young rascal with vicious tendencies, like Piggott, Levison might have shrugged his shoulders and washed his hands of the matter.

But it was not so. The boy had come fresh from home, without knowledge or suspicion of the seamy side of life at a public school. He had been thrown into his new life with an innocent and unstained heart, with only his brother for guide and helper.

And what help and guidance had Levison given him? He had tried, certainly, so far as words went, to keep the lad in the right path. He had tried to keep him away from bad associates. But those bad associates were his own friends. All the things he had warned Frank against he had done himself. Of what use were words in the presence of such an example?

There was no occasion for surprise in Frank's conduct. The surprising thing was that he had not followed his brother's example earlier.

And there was only one way in which Levison could save him from the path he had himself trodden, and that was by acting upon Tom Merry's advice, and going straight himself. And even that might be too late!

And Levison was not prepared to do it. Every effort at reform—and he had made efforts—had been followed by an outbreak of his old nature, and he had given up the uphill fight in cynical recklessness. Could he throw it all over, for his minor's sake, as he had striven once to do? What was there, after all, in the shady side of his life that was so attractive? There was risk, excitement; but he was not so happy, and he knew it, as a fellow like Tom Merry.

Unhealthy excitement was always followed by depression; every indulgence had to be paid for in physical unfitness. The game was not worth the candle. He knew it, and yet he went on in the old way.

Even now his head was heavy from the smoke and the excitement of gaming in Racke's study. His work, which should have come easily enough, was a dull and heavy grind to him. He knew that he would construe badly in the morning, and that meant sharp words and lines from Mr. Lathom.

The game was not worth the candle!

Mellish looked into the study, interrupting his gloomy reflections.

"Bed-time. Done your prep?"

"No!" growled Levison.

"You're have to dodge Lathom in the morning, then," grinned Mellish. "I did mine before I went to Racke's little party. It's more sensible."

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"Oh, rats!"

"I say, your minor's coming on!" grinned Mellish. "The little beggar's coming to Racke's party to-morrow, Racke says."

"What rot!"

"It's a fact! Rather a change from what he was when he came here. You're improving him!" chuckled Mellish. "You remember what a pasty, little snivelling prig he was—"

Mellish left his remark unfinished and quitted the study. Levison was looking dangerous.

Mellish chortled as he went down the passage. The unreasonable attitude Levison had taken up—that his own friends were not good enough for his minor—had, naturally, had an exasperating effect upon the blades of the School House. The progress of Levison minor was distinctly gratifying to those sportive young gentlemen, and they were ready to give him every encouragement. Levison's anger and dismay only amused them.

Levison was not in an enviable mood when he went up to the dormitory with the Fourth. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy noted the grim look on his face, and smiled sweetly. There was no doubt that Arthur Augustus' little scheme was working.

CHAPTER 10.

Figgins Puts His Foot Down!

THUMP!

Figgins of the Fourth brought down his fist upon the study table with a terrific concussion.

Kerr jumped. Kerr was doing algebra, and that sudden thump on the table made his exercise look more algebraic than ever. Fatty Wynn, who was toasting cheese, turned a ruddy face round from the fire.

"You thundering ass—" howled Kerr.

"What the merry dickens—" said Wynn.

Thump!

For the second time George Figgins smote the table.

"It's going to stop!" he announced emphatically.

"You howling burler!" roared Kerr. "Look at my exercise!"

"Bless you exercise!"

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Fatty Wynn. "The cheese will be done in a minute or two, Figgy."

"Blow the cheese!"

Kerr looked mournfully at his paper.

"It's rotten!" snorted Figgins.

"Mucking up a chap's work, do you mean? I agree with you."

"Never mind your work now!" said Figgins. "You must think of something better than algebra and toasted cheese, you fatheads, at a time like this!"

"A time like what?" asked Fatty Wynn, in astonishment. "Can't think of anything better than toasted cheese at supper-time. I don't know about algebra."

"What about the honour of the House?" asked Figgins.

"The what of the which?"

"I'm not standing it any longer!"

"What aren't you standing?" howled Kerr. "The honour of the House, or the algebra, or the toasted cheese? Have you gone potty?"

"It's sickening!" said Figgins. "This is where we're going to put our foot down. We're top dogs in this House—"

"We are—we is!" agreed Kerr. "Reddy doesn't say so, but we are! But what are you burling about?"

"I've seen 'em coming in," growled Figgins—"sneaking in, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, in case a prefect noticed them!"

"Who?" yelled Kerr.

"Those School House rotters!" snorted Figgins. "And I tell you I'm fed-up, and it's got to stop! I hear that Railton, over the way, has been growing sharp lately, and keeping an eye on the gang—Levison, and Crooke, and Racke, and the rest. So they've taken to visiting Clampe, over here, and carrying on their games in his study. And I'm not going to stand it. The New House isn't a refuge for wasters and slackers and smoky rotters!"

"Oh, I see! It isn't our bizney, is it?"

"I've decided that it is. Suppose old Ratty gets after them; he's a good bit sharper than Railton. Nice bizney for this House! Besides, the New House is cock House of the school. I suppose you admit that?"

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr and Wynn together.

"Well, then, it's time we chipped in. Clampe is a rotter, a regular waster—no better than those School House rotters! We can't help that. There's black sheep in every flock, and the House isn't proud of him. I've held his head under the tap myself for smoking. We're not going to allow Clampe to

bring those cads over here and carry on the game they daren't carry on in their own House. It's not good enough!"

"Well, it is rather rotten!" agreed Kerr. "But what—"

"We're going to put our foot down," said Figgins. "We're going to make it clear to Racke & Co. that if they want to play banker and smoke and talk gee-gees, they can do it in their own House, not in the New House. Like their blessed cheek to bring their mouldy rot over here, I think!"

"Well, that's right enough!"

Figgins rose to his feet.

"Well, if you agree with me, let's chip in, and give those School House cads a warning."

"What sort of warning?"

"Well, it's no good talking to them. I've talked to them already, and they've only sniggered. My idea is to wade into Clampe's study, and make an example of the whole gang."

"Well, there's time before supper," remarked Fatty Wynn, with a glance at the clock. "We're not going to be late for supper, Figgy."

"There's a new kid in the party, too," said Figgins. "You've noticed Levison minor? He wasn't a bit like his major when he came, and now he's thick with those rotters; and I've seen him go into Clampe's study. He was decent enough, and those worms are making him a rotter like themselves. It's up to somebody to chip in and stop it."

"I don't quite see how we can stop it, Figgy."

"We can stop it on this side, anyway."

"That's so."

"Come on, then! We'll call Reddy, in case they cut up rusty."

"I rather fancy they will, if we interrupt their little game," grinned Kerr.

"Let 'em!" said Figgins, with a warlike look.

He led the way from the study, and Kerr and Fatty Wynn followed, the latter with a lingering glance at the odorous cheese.

Figgins' indignation was natural enough. It was not at all agreeable to Figgy for Racke & Co. to transfer their rascality to the New House now that it was growing risky in their own quarters. If they chose to be blackguards, Figgy couldn't prevent that, but he could prevent them from exercising their blackguardism in the New House, and he was going to do it.

Figgy had chafed under it for some time, and his patience had given out now. Clampe's guests were going to know what he thought of them.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were at prep in their study when Figgins & Co. looked in.

"Come on!" said Figgins.

"Whither, O chief?" asked Redfern.

"Clampe's study."

"Thanks! I'll stay where I am!" said Redfern drily.

"You won't catch me among that gang!"

"Fathead!"

"Same to you, and many of them!" said Redfern affably. "Shut the door after you, will you?"

"You silly ass!" roared Figgins. "I'm not asking you to join the smoky party. We're going to raid them and clear them out!"

"Oh!" Redfern jumped up with alacrity. "I tumble! I'm your man! It's about time the chopper came down, I think."

"Oh, we'll come!" said Lawrence. "Better not make a row, though; we don't want Ratty up."

"Ratty's gone out."

"Oh, good! Lead on, Macduff!"

Figgins led on, and Redfern & Co. followed with Kerr and Wynn. They went down the Shell passage to Clampe's study. In that apartment a buzz of voices could be heard. Clampe's little party had gathered there. Through the door the newcomers could hear the sardonic, unpleasant voice of Aubrey Racke.

"Levison wouldn't come. He didn't like his minor being with us—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So I told him to go and eat coke. Why shouldn't his minor have his fling if he wanted to?"

"Why not?" said Clampe. "Levison minor's quite welcome here, and his major can sulk on his own as long as he likes."

"What's the game?" This was Mellish's voice. "Nap or banker?"

"Hark at 'em!" growled Figgins, in utter disgust. "Might fancy it was a pub tap-room, instead of a study at St. Jim's. The silly dummies! Anybody might have come along and heard that!"

Figgins rapped sharply on the door, which was locked.

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There was a startled exclamation in the study, and a sound of a quickly-closed drawer. Something was being put out of sight.

"Who's there?" called out Clampe.

"I'm here!"

"Oh, it's only Figgins!" Clampe's voice had a tone of relief. He had feared that it might be Monteith, or Baker, or another prefect. "What do you want, Figgins?"

"I want to come in!"

"Can't be done at present. Busy!"

"Would you rather I busted the door open?" asked Figgins pleasantly. "I give you one minute to open it before I get a hammer!"

"Look here, you cheeky ass——"

"Oh, shut up! That minute's going!"

There was a buzz of whispering in the room, and then the door was unlocked and opened. Clampe of the Shell knew that George Figgins was a fellow of his word.

Figgins & Co. strode into the study with determined looks, eyed very grimly by Clampe and his festive party.

CHAPTER 11. Drastic Measures.

F IGGINS looked grimly round the study.

Racke and Crooke, Mellish and Levison minor were there, along with Clampe of the New House. There was no sign of cards or smokes. Figgins remembered the hastily-closed drawer.

"Well, what do you want, now you've come in?" demanded Clampe savagely.

"Just a few words with you, to begin with," said Figgins. "These School House rotters are going straight back to their own House!"

"What?"

"You heard what I said."

"What the dickens' business is it of yours what visitors I have in my study?" exclaimed Clampe furiously.

"We know what they've come for, you see," said Redfern.

"We've come over for a little talk with Clampe," said Mellish, looking rather alarmed. He did not like the look of the New House fellows.

"Yes, and the rest," said Figgins. "You've taken to playing your rotten games in this House because your own Housemaster has his eye on you. We know!"

"We don't ask you to join in our little games!" sneered Racke. "Can't you mind your own business?"

"We're making this our business. It's got to stop!"

"You're going to interfere in my study?" ejaculated Clampe, hardly able to believe his ears.

"Exactly!"

"You cheeky idiot!"

Figgins pushed back his cuffs, and advanced upon Clampe, who promptly backed away round the table.

"Would you mind saying that again?" asked Figgins, with elaborate politeness.

"Look here! Get out of my study!"

"After we've done what we've come to do," said Figgins. "You can put up a fight if you like, man to man. The others will see fair play."

"Depend on us!" grinned Kerr.

"I—I don't want to fight you!"

"We didn't come over here for a scrap!" growled Crooke. "We came for a friendly talk with Clampe. Let us alone, confound you!"

"Pull open that drawer, Fatty!"

"Let it alone!" yelled Clampe.

Fatty Wynn grinned, and jerked out the table drawer. A pack of cards and a box of cigarettes were disclosed. Figgins took them out.

"That's my property!" said Clampe between his teeth.

"Well, there goes your property!"

Figgins jammed the cards and the cigarettes in the fire, and stamped them well in with his boot. Clampe eyed him hunnishly, but did not venture to interfere. The Shell fellow was bigger and heavier than Figgins of the Fourth, but he would as soon have faced a wild bull as Figgy's hard knuckles.

"Now, those cads are going!" said Figgins.

"Do you think I can't have some School House chaps over to see me if I like?" hissed Clampe.

"Certainly you can. Tom Merry, or Lowther, or Blake, or Kangaroo, or any chap you want to see. But you're not going to turn a New House study into a gambling-den, like Racke's study in the School House. We're going to see to that!"

"I—I think we may as well get off," murmured Mellish.

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"You're going to! But you're going to have a lesson before you clear as a warning not to come again."

"Look here——"

"Line up there!" said Figgins, as Racke & Co. made a strategic movement towards the door.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence lined up in the doorway, grinning. Racke & Co. halted. They did not care to attempt to force a passage.

Figgins opened the study cupboard, and took therefrom a fives bat.

"Clampe first!" he said.

"Let go!" roared Clampe, struggling fiercely, as Kerr and Fatty Wynn laid hold of him.

"You can make it a fight if you like, Clampe."

"I'm not going to fight you, you beast!"

"Over with him, then!"

Clampe was pitched face downward on the table. Then Figgins got to work with the fives bat. He gave Clampe six of the best, amid wild howls and wriggings from the unfortunate blade.

Racke & Co. looked on sullenly. Their turn was coming, and they knew it. Frank Levison's expression was very peculiar.

It is an old saying that one is judged by the company one keeps; and Frank had been found in bad company. Figgins & Co. judged him like the rest. The fag did not speak.

"Racke next!" said Figgins.

"Come on, Racke!"

"If you touch me——" began Racke, between his teeth.

The Co. touched him before he could finish. Racke, resisting fiercely, was flung on the table, and the fives bat went to work again.

Racke was gasping when he was tossed aside, and his face was worse than Hunnish. Crooke came next—unresisting. Then Mellish had his share of the fives bat, with an accompaniment of howls.

"As for you, you young rascal," said Figgins, glaring at Levison minor, "I advise you to keep clear of these rotters in future. If I were your major, I'd see that you keep clear of them, too, or else not leave a whole bone in you. I hope this lesson will do you good. Over with him!"

Levison minor was laid on the table. But Figgy was light on the fag, giving him only two. Frank took the punishment without a word. It came hard on him in the circumstances, for inwardly he was fully in agreement with Figgins. But he had to suffer for the company he was keeping. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's awfully deep scheme had its drawbacks in some ways, it seemed.

"Is that all?" grinned Redfern. Figgins was breathing rather deeply after his exercise with the fives bat.

"Not quite. Get some soot out, Kerr!"

"Any old thing!" grinned Kerr.

He shovelled some soot from the chimney. Figgins took Clampe's handkerchief, and dipped it in the soot, and proceeded to anoint the faces of the bold, bad blades. Racke clenched his hands fiercely, but he did nothing more; and in a few minutes Clampe and his visitors were transformed into very good imitations of Christy minstrels.

"Now kick 'em out!" said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can't go back like this, you fool!" yelled Crooke.

"I rather think you can," said Figgins. "I jolly well know you're going to, any way. Kick 'em till they clear, you fellows!"

"What-ho!"

Redfern & Co. drew aside at the doorway. The unhappy sportsmen of the School House passed out rather gingerly, knowing what to expect. They got what they expected. There was a wild rush down the passage to escape, and Redfern & Co. put in a good number of kicks before the fugitives escaped down the stairs.

They came back grinning.

"Gone!" said Redfern. "Pity we can't send Clampe after them."

"I think Clampe's had a lesson," said Figgins, glaring at the Shell fellow. "You'd better understand, Clampe, that this is only a taste of what you'll get if there's any more of this."

"Grooogh!" mumbled Clampe, savagely spitting out soot.

And the reformers of the New House went their way, quite satisfied that they deserved well of their House and of their country generally.

"I fancy that'll be the end of it," said Figgins, as he sat down to his prep in his study. "But if there's any more, we'll give them a second dose."

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

And Clampe of the Shell, as he furiously scrubbed his sooty face in a bath-room, was, in fact, making up his mind that

he would think twice, if not three times, before he asked Racke & Co. over to the New House again for a little game.

CHAPTER 12.

Arthur Augustus is Quite Satisfied!

"**H**A, ha, ha!" Julian of the Fourth came into the Common-room in the School House in an explosive state of merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared.

"Bai Jove! What's the joke, deah boy?"

"Hallo! Wherefore the cackle?" asked Monty Lowther.

Julian chortled joyfully.

"Come and look at 'em! Racke & Co.! Come and look at 'em. Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what's happened?" asked Tom Merry.

"They've been looking for trouble in the New House, and finding it!" grinned Julian. "The whole merry gang—Racke and Crooke and Mellish and Levison minor—"

"My minor?" exclaimed Levison, jumping up.

"Ha, ha! Yes—the whole merry family. They've come back sooted—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're in the Shell dorm cleaning up," chuckled Julian. "They came sneaking in on tiptoe, afraid of being spotted. They look pictures!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush of the juniors to the Shell dormitory to see Racke & Co.

Those disconsolate youths were seeking to clean off the soot. They had their jackets and collars off, and were scrubbing away with furious faces.

The juniors crowded into the dormitory, yelling with laughter at the sight. Racke & Co. did not feel very merry. Only Frank Levison was taking it good-humouredly.

"How on earth did you get like that?" asked Tom Merry, laughing.

Racke snarled.

"Figgins and his gang, of course. They came on us in Clampe's study—a gang of them. We hadn't a chance."

"Bai Jove! I wathah think I can guess what they did it for, then," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I know vewy well what you went to Clampe's studay in the New House for, you wottahs!"

"We went for a talk," said Mellish.

"Wats!"

"So you were there, Frank?" said Levison, eyeing his minor grimly.

Frank nodded cheerfully.

"What did you go for, Levison minor?" asked Kangaroo of the Shell.

"To play banker!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Banker!"

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated the Cornstalk in astonishment. "You precious young rascal, you don't mind owning it!"

"Not a bit!"

"Always make a clean breast of it, deah boy!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Levison, old scout, I feah that your minah is on the mewwy downward path—what? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's nothing to chortle about, Gussy!" remarked Jack Blake.

"I wegard it as vewy funnay, Blake. Aftah all, it was only to be expected of Levison minah, considewin' what his majah is like."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Levison.

"Weally, Levison—"

"Clear out of here, you howling dummies!" snarled Crooke.

"It's rotten enough without a set of cackling geese!"

"I wefuse to be called a cacklin' geese—I mean goose—Cwooke. I considah that you have got what you have been askin' for!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

"Well, I must say it serves you jolly well right!" said Tom Merry. "By Jove! We might do worse than follow Figgy's example and raid Racke's study one of these evenings."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as a good ideah."

"Lucky you weren't with them, Levison," remarked Lumley-Lumley. "How on earth did you happen not to be present when there was anything shady going on?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd of juniors went away chuckling, leaving the unfortunate blades to finish the cleaning process. Only Levison waited for his minor.

Frank looked at him rather oddly as he left the dormitory, and Levison joined him with lowering brows.

"Lucky you wern't with us, Ernie," ventured the fag. "You'd have been put through it just the same. Racke says you wouldn't come because I was there. Why?"

Levison set his teeth.

"You precious young rotter!" he said.

Frank gave him a look of surprise.

"Why, what have I done?" he exclaimed.

"Done!" said Levison savagely. "You know what you've done. This affair will be the talk of the School soon. Your name will be mixed up with those cads. Every fellow in the Lower School will know that you're one of them!"

"Well, what does that matter? You're one of them yourself, aren't you?"

"I—I—"

"What have I done that you wouldn't do?" asked Frank.

"You know you've done wrong."

"But I've heard you say that a fellow must have some excitement, and a short life and a merry one, and the rest," said Frank. "I'm only doing as you do."

"I suppose it's no good talking to you!" said Levison savagely. "I've a jolly good mind to throw you over altogether, and let you go to the dogs your own way!"

"Your own way, you mean!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"You can't say I took up with Racke and his set for a long time. I stood out of that kind of thing until quite lately," said Frank. "But you've told me not to preach to you, more than once. Well, what's good enough for you is good enough for me, I suppose?"

Levison bit his lip hard.

So far as argument went, he hadn't a leg to stand upon, and he realised it. What was the use of telling his minor one thing and at the same time doing the exact opposite himself? Precept was not much use without example. If a fellow needed some excitement, if he was bound to play the goat at times for the sake of variety, the same applied to Frank as well as to himself.

Yet the thought of Frank following in his own footsteps, of becoming a vicious, cheeky little rascal like Piggott, of joining in Racke's shady practices, and in the end getting kicked out of the school—for it was very likely to come to that—filled Levison with dismay and apprehension.

"I'll tell you what," said Frank, with a chuckle, "let's make a break to-night, and you can introduce me to your friends at the Green Man."

"The—the Green Man!" said Levison faintly.

"Yes; Banks and Lodgey and old Joliffe, you know. I saw Lodgey the other day in Rylcombe."

"Did he speak to you?" exclaimed Levison fiercely.

"Yes; he was very friendly. He asked me if I were your brother. He thought I was, from the likeness, and he told me he'd be pleased to see me any time I could come in."

"The hound!" muttered Levison, clenching his hands.

"He seemed very friendly," said Frank calmly. "What are you calling him names for, your own friend?"

"Did you say you'd go and see him?" snapped Levison.

"I said I'd ask you to take me the next time you came to the Green Man," said Frank cheerfully. "What about making a break after lights out to-night, Ernie?"

Levison major stared at the fag aghast.

Was this his minor who was speaking, or a second edition of Piggott of the Third? Anger and dismay and disgust mingled in Levison's breast. Certainly Frank seemed to have made great progress since he had taken up with Racke & Co.

"Well?" said Frank, with a grin.

"Hold your tongue!" snapped Levison.

And he drove his hands deep into his pockets and strode away.

Frank looked after him with a curious expression on his face. Then he went down slowly to the Third Form-room.

He found some excitement there. The fags had the story by this time, and Levison minor was surrounded at once by Wally & Co., who wanted an explanation.

"You shady rotter!" said D'Arcy minor, in measured tones. "Going to play banker with those cads—what?"

"No, I wasn't."

"Why, you said so."

"I said I went there to play banker; but I wasn't going to play, all the same," said Frank. "Don't be an ass!"

"Then what were you doing with that gang?" demanded Frayne.

Levison minor did not reply.

"I've been expecting this," said Wally, looking round. "Sooner or later Levison minor was sure to take after his major. Lucky for him he's got some pals to stop him. We're not going to let you be a rotter like your brother, young Levison. Collar him!"

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "A PAL IN PERIL!" A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Look here—" began Frank, in alarm.

"Collar him!"

Levison minor was promptly collared. He could not very well explain to his chums in the Third, and Wally & Co., considering that Frank was getting into bad ways, felt that it was up to them to put a prompt stop to it. They did not want any more bold blades in the Third. Piggott was quite enough in that line. Levison minor was accordingly bumped thrice on the floor, and then given the frog's-march round the Form-room, as a warning of what he might expect if he did not mend his ways.

When his friends had finished, Levison minor was in a very breathless and dishevelled state. Jameson suggested anointing him with cinders, and Frank bolted from the Form-room in haste.

He ran into Arthur Augustus in the passage.

"Bai Jove! You look wathah untiday," said Arthur Augustus. "What's the mattah?"

"I've been ragged!" gasped Frank.

"Bai Jove! What for?"

"Because they think—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" I see, it is wathah a misunderstandin'. Nevah mind, deah boy, the little scheme is workin' first-rate."

Levison minor grunted. The little scheme was doubtless working first-rate in some ways, but in others it had very decided drawbacks.

"Keep it up, deah boy," went on Arthur Augustus. "It's workin'. I have just seen your majah, and he is lookin' fwightfully down in the mouth."

Frank felt a pang of remorse.

"Is he?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah! He has just had a wow with Racke, too, and punched his nose in the Common-room," grinned Arthur Augustus. "He has kicked Mellish out of his study, too. Ha, ha! It's workin', deah boy. He looks awfly wotten now."

"Oh!" said Frank.

"Bai Jove! Wheah are you goin', Levison minah?"

Frank did not reply. He was hurrying away. Leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the Form-room passage, somewhat ruffled, the fag hurried upstairs to the Fourth Form quarters.

He tapped at his brother's door, and opened it.

Ernest Levison was alone in the study.

He was seated in the armchair, his hands driven deep into his pockets, his brows contracted, his whole look one of dejection and deep trouble.

Frank's heart smote him.

"Ernie!" he exclaimed, coming into the study.

Levison started, and looked up. To his amazement, Frank saw that his eyelashes were wet. Levison of the Fourth, the black sheep of St. Jim's, the hard case, had tears in his eyes.

"Ernie!"

Frank ran towards his brother.

"Well?" muttered Levison.

"Ernie! I—I'm sorry! I didn't mean—"

"Oh, don't jaw!" growled Levison. "You've made me the miserablest rotter in the school, and you can be satisfied with that. It's my fault, I know that. I never thought it would come to this. I've asked for it, and now I've got it!"

"Ernie! I—"

"I suppose it's no good talking to you?" said Levison bitterly. "It's a bit too late for that. It's no good telling you that, if you'll chuck up Racke & Co., I'll do the same, and we'll start fresh together. No good asking you that."

But as he spoke, his eyes fixed eagerly upon the fag. Levison had made his resolution—if it was any use. But was it too late?

Frank's eyes filled with tears.

"Do you mean that, Ernie?"

"Yes; if it's any good."

"I—I've got something to tell you," muttered Frank, crimsoning. "I—I'm sorry now that I did it, Ernie; but—but I thought it was—was a good idea. I—I've been spoofing you, old chap!"

Levison stared at him.

"Spoofing me?" he exclaimed. "You couldn't spoof me, you little ass!"

"But I have!" said Frank. "It's all rot—it's all spoof. I—I haven't really taken up with Racke. I—I haven't taken up smoking and betting, and that sort of thing. I—I was only spoofing, just to—to—to—"

Levison stared at him blankly.

"You've been taking me in?" he exclaimed.

Frank hung his head.

There was silence in the study for a full minute. Levison was staring blankly at his minor, hardly able to understand at first all that it meant. But he understood at last. A load seemed to be lifted from his heart.

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NOW ON SALE.

"IN HOT WATER!"

"You've taken me in," he repeated. "You've taken me in! You young sweep! And—and what did you do it for?"

"I'm sorry, Ernie," said Frank remorsefully. "I—I didn't know it would hurt you so much."

"You wanted to give me a lesson, I suppose," said Levison. "By gad, you've given me one, you cheeky little waster!"

"You're—you're not waxy, Ernie?" said Frank timidly. "I—I won't do it again!"

Levison burst into a laugh.

"You won't need to do it again," he said. "Blessed if I should ever have thought anybody could take me in—you least of all! I'm jolly glad it's no worse than that." Levison drew a deep breath. "No, I'm not waxy, and I meant what I said, too, we'll make a fresh start together, Frank, and—and we'll see what comes of it. Is it a go?"

"Done!" said Frank brightly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked into the study a few minutes later. There was a haze in the room. Levison was stooping over the fire, stirring together in the embers a heap of cigarettes, a pack of cards, several racing papers, a bridge-marker, a betting-book, and other paraphernalia of a like kind. Frank Levison looked on with a very bright face.

Arthur Augustus did not speak. He withdrew silently, and walked away with a very thoughtful face to Study No. 6. He found Tom Merry & Co. there discussing baked chestnuts.

"Just in time," said Blake. "Nearly all gone, fathead!"

"Wherefore that beaming smile, O Gustavus?" inquired Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus smiled expansively.

"I think I have remarked to you fellows several times that I am wathah a chap of tact and judgment," he observed.

"About a hundred times," agreed Blake.

"Nearer a thousand," said Tom Merry.

"More like a million," said Manners.

"Wats! Aftah what has happened, deah boys, I twust you will admit that I had gwounds for my statement."

"Why, what has happened?" asked Talbot.

"Upon the whole, I think I had bettah not confide the mattah to you youngstahs, as Levison might not like it. But I twust that aftah this—"

"After what?" shrieked Blake.

"Never mind what, Blake. Aftah this, I twust you fellows will have the sense to place a propah weliance upon a fellow's tact and judgment. I will have some of those chestnuts, Blake."

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"A PAL IN PERIL!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

NOTICES.

Back Numbers Wanted, etc.

By H. Hindley, 3, Thelwall View, Knutsford Rd., Grappenhall, near Warrington—"Foes of the Fourth," "Sportsmen All," "Race to the Tuckshop," "A Son of Scotland," and "For the Old School's Sake."

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A Splendid Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. in THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Price 1d.

A NEW ADVENTURE SERIAL.

START TO-DAY!

**The First Chapters.**

CARTON ROSS, a lonely and friendless youth, sole heir to a great fortune, though unaware of it, is hunted by a party of outlaws led by DIRK RALWIN. He is befriended by HARVEY MILBURNE and his daughter LORNA, who lose their home and are separated in an attempt to defend him from his pursuers.

Ross is captured by the brigands, but, with Lorna's help, recovers his wallet—containing papers which prove his identity—and escapes. Later they fall in with RODDY GARRIN, an Englishman, and his companion AH CHING, a Chinaman. The outlaws continue the chase, together with HUXTON FENNER, a Yankee, who had previously been a companion of Garrin and Ah Ching, but had deserted them.

They are all captured and taken aboard a Mexican cruiser, from which they escape, the cruiser afterwards being blown up during a mutiny aboard her. Eventually Lorna is captured, and taken to Dirk Ralwin, at Quito, a settlement on the banks of the Amazon, and is confronted with her father, who is in chains, and thin and pale from the privations he has suffered. Ross, who is on the balcony outside the room in which the scene takes place, hears the outlaw chief threaten to kill Harvey Milburne unless Lorna tells him where her friends are in hiding. He shows himself through the window, and Dirk Ralwin screams out an offer of ten thousand dollars to the man who captures him. But Ross escapes, and returns to Garrin and Ah Ching, who are hidden in a hollow covered by foliage, close to the river. He tells them what has happened, and Ah Ching proposes a plan for obtaining the ten thousand dollars. Just as they have completed the arrangements a sound is heard outside. It is CAPTAIN ESHMAN of the cruiser which had been blown up.

(Now read on.)

Ah Ching's Venture.

"Signors—brave signors!" Captain Eshman piped, in a ridiculous falsetto. "Spare me, and I will be your friend for ever! With me to protect you, then you need have no fear of Dirk Ralwin. He is my enemy as much as he is yours, for he has brought ruin upon me, signors, and I will never rest until I have had my revenge!"

"Cut it short!" said Garrin, with a short laugh of contemptuous amusement. "We know that you and Ralwin are thick as thieves, else why did you prevent us from going aboard that steamer? No, lies won't serve your turn now, so be quiet and behave yourself until we've decided what is to be done to you."

Instead of acting on this advice, Eshman, with disconcerting suddenness, sprang to his feet with a bellow of mingled fear and rage. Striking out with his fist, he felled Ah Ching to the ground and made a dart for the open.

But before he had gone three yards he was seized by Ross and Roddy Garrin and violently overthrown. Struggling and kicking like a madman, he was dragged back.

"There's a cunning serpent for you!" said Garrin wrathfully. "Sit on his chest, Ah Ching, while Ross and I rope him up. And you'd better gag him, too. He squeals worse than a stuck pig!"

In a few minutes Captain Eshman, most effectively gagged and trussed like a fowl ready to be cooked, was lying powerless at the foot of a great tree, at whose canopy of leaves he glared in impotent wrath and gloom.

"The question now," said Garrin, "is what is to be done with him? We must make some use of the fellow."

Carton Ross reflected silently for a moment or two over the problem. Then he looked up and smiled.

"I've hit it!" he said. "We'll keep Captain Eshman a prisoner here until we've released Lorna and her father. He is bound to know where their place of imprisonment is, and, with such other information as he must be forced to give us, we ought to succeed in liberating them."

Ah Ching looked alarmed.

"My likee do one thing at a time," he said. "What about those dollars? My wantee catch them before you start on something else."

Carton Ross gave a hearty laugh.

"That's all serene, Ah Ching," he said. "You shall fool Dirk Ralwin first, and take his money—or try to—before we attempt to free Lorna and her father. I'll promise you that much."

This point settled, the comrades turned their attention to their prisoner. Sullen and intractable, Captain Eshman maintained an obstinate silence, when questioned, that was excessively exasperating.

Ah Ching coolly proposed the use of various forms of torture which he affirmed would at once have the effect of making the Mexican naval officer divulge all he knew concerning Lorna Milburne's place of captivity.

"It won't do, my son," objected Roddy Garrin. "We're not living in the twelfth century, remember. But have patience. The gentleman will speak before the day is over."

The pangs of hunger and thirst becoming acute, Captain Eshman at last signified his readiness to give the comrades the information they desired to have. From what he told them, they learned that Lorna Milburne and her father had been imprisoned in the lower part of the Customs House, and he described the place of their captivity with such exactitude that his listeners were confident of being able to find it without any difficulty.

"You are sure that what you've told us is the truth?" inquired Carton Ross. "Because, if it isn't, you'll regret to your last day that you lied to us. And to make sure that you will be punished, in that case, you will remain here until we return from the attempt to liberate our friends."

"Signor," declared Captain Eshman, with great dignity, "I would scorn to tell a lie. You can trust me."

Roddy Garrin grinned mischievously.

"I do believe the old brick is speaking the truth for once," he whispered to Ross. "At any rate, we must take his word for it. When shall we make the venture?"

"To-night, if possible," Ross answered, "after Ah Ching has come back with the dollars."

Roddy Garrin turned up the whites of his eyes and groaned.

"If Ah Ching does get back, with or without the money," he declared, "I shall be charmingly surprised."

Ah Ching smiled.

"You trust this chile," he said, "to come back with the money all serene. Me make no mistake about it, Mista Garrin, as you shall see."

Directly dusk had fallen, Ah Ching set out from the hollow on his daring enterprise.

Ah Ching Claims His Reward.

Outside the Customs House, which was in darkness except where a light shone here and there from some open window, Ah Ching paused and looked round to familiarise himself with the immediate locality.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "A PAL IN PERIL!" A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Fortune had favoured him so far. He had made the journey from the riverside without let or hindrance. Those whom he had passed had bestowed no more than a careless glance at him. To them he was but an ordinary Chinaman, and there were several Chinese living in the settlement.

Now the crucial moment was at hand. Most men would have felt a nervous excitement at such a time, but Ah Ching did not even experience a quickening of his heart-beat, for he was a born fatalist.

What was to be was to be. He was prepared for failure as well as for success. Either would find him as cool and composed as the other.

All the same, Ah Ching meant to have those ten thousand dollars and fool Dirk Ralwin and the outlaws.

Making his way to the front of the building, Ah Ching beheld a Mexican guard, with a bayonet fixed to his rifle, standing on duty at the entrance. Never hesitating, he walked up to the man, smiled affably, and passed on into the interior before the other had time or inclination to question him.

A flight of steps leading to the upper part of the house confronted him. Remembering the information Carton Ross had given him, he ascended them to a landing from which a large room, whose door was wide open, branched off. In this room, seated at a table beneath a green-shaded electric light, was Dirk Ralwin.

Entering the room, Ah Ching stepped forward to the table, and as Ralwin glanced up at him, bowed again and again with true Oriental genuflection.

"Sapristi!" exclaimed the bandit chief, with a stare at the other of angry astonishment. "How did you get here?"

"My wantee see you on velly particular business," said Ah Ching, ignoring the direct question, "so my come straight here. It has to do with Carton Ross."

Dirk Ralwin gave a quick start of suddenly awakened interest.

"Ah!" he said. "So you are the Chinaman who was with Ross when the cruiser took him on board?"

"That is so," Ah Ching replied. "And we makee run away from that cruiser just before she was blown up. There was me, Carton Ross, Mista Garrin, and the little lady, Lorna Milburne. We found our way to a hut where a Spanish man lived, and stayed there the night. Next day we move on, all but the little lady, and she stop with the Spanish man. Savee?"

Ralwin's eyes gleamed with delight and eager anticipation. "I understand you," he said, with a smile that for him was affability itself, "and your information is of the utmost value. But where is Carton Ross now? That is what I wish to know. Can you tell me?"

Ah Ching, with a glance at his questioner of infinite cunning, nodded his head.

"My can tellee you where he is," he answered. "What is more, I have come to lead your men to him."

Dirk Ralwin struck the table before him with his clenched fist.

"Magnificent!" he cried. "You're the very man I've been looking for, my friend!"

"Mista Carton no suspect me," Ah Ching continued. "He think me his velly good friend. But my love money more than anything else in the world, and for the reward my hand him over to you."

Ralwin looked hard at the blandly-smiling face before him.

"Reward!" he said. "What reward?"

"The reward of ten thousand dollars," answered the other. "My have heard in Quito that you offered it to the man who captured Mista Carton. That made me come to you. Suppose you no offer it, my stop away. You pay me that reward, and Mista Carton is your prisoner."

"Very well," said Ralwin, after a short reflection. "You shall have the money when Carton Ross is captured and in my power."

The promise was easily made, he told himself, but he would never carry it out. Once Ross was his prisoner he could laugh at this yellow-faced simpleton, and refuse to pay him a penny. But the little Chinaman was anything but the simpleton Dirk Ralwin chose to imagine him to be.

"No can do," said Ah Ching, shaking his head. "My wantee money now. Then my lead your men to Carton Ross. Suppose you no pay me, the thing is off!"

Rapping out a savage curse, Dirk Ralwin leaned over the table and glared fiercely into the other's face.

"You dog!" he exclaimed. "Do you dare to doubt my word?"

"My no tellee you that I doubt it," Ah Ching answered, with calm assurance. "Allee same, my wantee money now. You savee?"

Restraining the wrath that possessed him with a visible effort of will, Ralwin went to an iron safe in a corner of the room, opened it, and took out notes and gold to the value of

ten thousand dollars. As he did so a hard, malicious smile showed in his face as he reflected that his visitor would gain the reward but to lose it.

"There you are!" he said, depositing the money on the table before Ah Ching. "There are your ten thousand dollars!"

Ah Ching's Return—Parted for Ever.

Having counted the notes and gold, and found that they amounted to the ten thousand dollars named as the reward, Ah Ching swept the money into a canvas bag, which he attached to a belt worn beneath the capacious folds of his gown.

"Now, you get your men ready," he said to Ralwin, "and my lead them where they want to go to."

The outlaw chief rang a little silver bell, and in response to the summons Aylman Aylman entered the room.

"This Chinaman," said Dirk Ralwin to his subordinate, "has come over to our side. The reward of ten thousand dollars that I offered for the capture of Carton Ross is the bait that has brought him here. He will guide you and as many men as you think fit to take for the purpose to the place where Ross is hiding. Go immediately that your men are ready."

Aylman looked sharply at Ah Ching.

"Is the fellow to be trusted?" he asked. "These Chinese are a slippery lot. I never did trust them."

"That will make you keep a closer eye on this one than if you did, then," said Ralwin, with a significant smile. "See to it that he has no chance to play you false. At the least sign of treachery on his part, shoot him dead! But I do not fancy that he will risk losing his life as well as his money."

"What is to be done with him when Ross has been taken prisoner?"

"He must be brought back here," answered Ralwin, with a sardonic laugh, "to give me a receipt for the ten thousand dollars."

To this remark Ah Ching made no reply. The mind of the other was like an open book to him. He knew that Dirk Ralwin never intended him to have the reward, even if he betrayed Carton Ross, and that knowledge filled the little Chinaman with a bitter scorn and contempt that he had hard work to control.

Leaving the Customs House, he was taken to the guard-room, and kept there until Aylman and his party were ready to depart. The patrol force consisted of a dozen men, two of whom were specially detailed to look after Ah Ching. His wrists were crossed and bound together by a long rope, the loose ends of which were knotted to the sword-belts of his guards.

"My no look for this!" said Ah Ching to himself, as he marched away at the head of the little procession. "It seems too much like being in prison. Allee same, my have got the money safe."

The thought of the money in the canvas bag, hidden under his gown, cheered him up again. How he was to escape from those around him, now that he was unable to move a step without them, he had not the remotest notion, but he did not worry over the perplexing problem, feeling sure that he would be able to solve it at the right moment.

Being a stranger to the neighbourhood, Ah Ching did not have much choice in the matter of selecting a definite line of route. All roads were alike to him, except the one leading to the riverside refuge of his comrades, and that he carefully avoided by going in a totally opposite direction.

While openly suspicious of him, the outlaws were compelled to trust their guide. The forest region beyond Quito was almost as unfamiliar to them as to him. Except for an occasional track made by travellers, the whole country was a pathless wilderness, where Nature had reigned unchecked for countless ages.

Into the vast labyrinth of tropical growth Ah Ching led the men who were both his companions and his foes. The track he followed was a narrow one. Soon it became impossible for him and his two guards to walk abreast. Ah Ching smiled with secret delight. He saw a solution of the problem that had perplexed him at first.

"No can do," he said, coming to a halt. "You must let me go in front."

The savage prod of a rifle-butt in the back urged him forward. His guards started protesting vigorously against being driven into the thorny bushes lining each side of the track. They struggled on some little distance farther, squeezing Ah Ching in between them until he could scarcely breathe, and then at last they stopped dead, unable to move another yard.

Fuming with impatience, Aylman freed the little Chinaman, and sent him on in advance of the rest. But he walked

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

THE SECRET OF HAIR-BEAUTY

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FOES OF FORTUNE!

(Continued from page 20.)

close behind his guide, menacing him with a revolver, whose cold steel barrel pressed wickedly into the nape of Ah Ching's neck.

"Go careful!" said Aylman grimly. "I'm at your heels, my yellow friend, ready to drill holes through you! How much farther are you going to take us?"

"Not velly far," Ah Ching answered. "You keep smiling, and my bring you through allee right."

"Take care you do!" growled Aylman.

The track went endlessly on. Here and there it was bright, with the moonlight shining down through gaps in the trees, but elsewhere it was dark and gloomy, with the night shadows that the fire-flies, darting in every direction, failed to disperse.

As time passed, Ah Ching began to feel more and more uneasy. Though he was released from the forced companionship of the two guards, his wrists were still fettered, and the pressure of Aylman's revolver against the back of his neck warned him of the fatal consequences that would follow the slightest attempt to escape.

That there was reason for his uneasiness soon became apparent. As the patrol reached a sharp turn in the path, Aylman ordered the men to halt. Then he turned sharply to Ah Ching, with a dark scowl on his face.

"See here!" he exclaimed fiercely. "It's my belief that you're fooling us. This track leads nowhere. You know it."

Ah Ching shook his head.

"What for you think that?" he asked. "My lead you where you have to go. No can help how long the way is."

The words and the bland, smiling face of the other exasperated Aylman to fury. Uttering a curse, he raised his clenched fist, and struck a blow that sent Ah Ching reeling back against the trunk of a near tree with a loud crash that set the branches overhead shaking.

"That will teach you not to bandy words with me," said Aylman viciously. "Now get up, and—"

The incomplete sentence ended in a fearsome yell of rage and pain as a great, cumbersome object landed on his head and shoulders from above, hurling him to the ground.

It was an enormous tree sloth. Startled by the sudden noise and the shaking of the branches, it had rolled from its

resting place, and fallen on the outlaw standing below, as neatly as if Aylman were some new kind of tree yearning to receive it.

The bandits darted forward to the assistance of their discomfited leader, but they did not succeed in killing the tree-sloth, which scuttled away into the undergrowth before a shot could be fired at it.

Neither was Ah Ching slow in effecting his escape when such a splendid opportunity was afforded him. While the sloth was giving its attention to the outlaw, the little Chinaman sprang over a bush, and was out of sight in a moment.

His wrists being bound, he was very awkwardly situated at such a time, and in so peculiar a set of circumstances, but Ah Ching forgot his disadvantages in his joy at having regained his freedom. Threading his way back to the spot where he had first entered the forest at the head of the outlaws, Ah Ching set out beddly for the hiding-place of his comrades.

He heard the men whom he had been able to leave behind him so neatly searching for him, and once passed so near to the party that he could have touched some of them by stretching out his arm.

"Tee-hee!" Ah Ching chuckled to himself. "Suppose they look this side all night and all to-morrow they no can find me. My have given them the slip, and my know it!"

His comrades, who had been anxiously expecting him, gave Ah Ching a rousing welcome upon his arrival back in their midst. His first request was that he should be freed from the rope securing his arms together, and when this desire had been complied with, he waved his arms about like the sails of a windmill in the exuberance of his delight.

"Yes," said Roddy Garrin; "you have every reason for thinking yourself lucky. It's a wonder you're here at all, and if I were you, I should treasure these bits of rope they used to bind you up with as precious mementoes of a really remarkable occasion."

Ah Ching smiled, and gave a gesture of contemptuous scorn.

"My no wanted such little piecer things!" he exclaimed. "My have got something much better to remember my escape by."

"Eh?" queried Garrin, a note of curious interest in his voice. "What is it?"

"You makee guess," said Ah Ching grandly. "My no can tell you."

(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Wednesday's issue of THE "GEM" LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance.)

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PAY HEED TO THESE RULES.

1.—In future, the only notices which will be accepted free of charge are those from soldier, sailor, and colonial readers.

2.—All notices must be written—one word in each space—on the form below, and if more than 24 words are needed, another form must be obtained. But we will accept one form from the GEM and one from the "Magnet," or the forms from back numbers may be used.

3.—The charge is 3d. for any notice not exceeding 24 words. If exceeding 24 words, 6d. The fee must be paid by penny stamps pinned—not stuck—in the space provided.

4.—The Editor reserves to himself the right to refuse any notice sent in, and he will not accept in any case notices of articles to be

sold or for exchange, or requests for correspondence with readers of the opposite sex.

5.—Insertion at any specific date will not be guaranteed, and no notice can be expected to appear in less than five weeks from its receipt, while it may have to be held back much longer. Nor will the Editor undertake to insert any notice in the exact form received. Space is precious, and readers should do their utmost to keep notices as short as possible. The argument that more than 3d. has been paid will not be heeded.

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