

TOM MERRY'S BRAG!

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



FOR HIS SIDE'S SAKE!

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A Magnificent,
New, Long,
Complete School
Story of
Tom Merry
and Co.
at St. Jim's.

TOM MERRY'S BRAG!

By
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Clifford

CHAPTER 1. Swank!

"TOMMY, you look worried!"
"What's the matter?"
Lowther and Manners asked those questions together, as Tom Merry came into his study in the School House.

Lowther was busy with his comic column for the "Weekly." Manners was cutting films. But they forgot the comic column and the films as they saw Tom Merry's usually sunny face. Tom was not looking sunny now—far from it!

He sat down with a plump.
"I've done it now!" he said.
"You silly ass, you have!" roared Manners. "You're sitting on a roll of films!"

"Bother your films!"
Manners jumped up in great excitement. The photographer of St. Jim's could stand anything but damage to his films or his camera.

"You howling chump!" roared Manners. "Gerroff!"
"Hold on, Manners! There's something the matter with Tommy!" said Monty Lowther.

"There'll be something serious the matter with him if he don't get off my films!" shrieked Manners.

Tom Merry snorted.
He rose, picked up the somewhat crushed films, and pitched them at Manners. The roll caught Manners on the nose, and curled round his ears.

"There, you ass!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Oh, you dummy——"
"Shurrup!" said Lowther. "Can't you see Tom's worried?"

"Br-r-r-r!" came from Manners.
He had been prepared to be sympathetic. But the damage to his films banished other considerations. Manners looked a good deal like a Hun as he smoothed them out.

"Of all the silly chumps——" he growled.

"Oh, bother your silly films, and bother you!"

"Look here——"
"Fathead!"

"Why, you——you——"

"Peace, my infants, peace!" interjected Monty Lowther soothingly. "Now, Thomas, my bonnie boy, get it off your chest. What's the matter? Railton been down on you?"

"No, ass!"

"Ahem! Lines from Lathom?"

"Blow Lathom!"

"Been lending Baggy Trimble any money?"

"Bless Baggy!"

"Bad news from your uncle at the Front?" asked Lowther, becoming serious.

"Not so bad as that."

"Oh, good! So, whatever it is, it might be worse," said Lowther cheerfully. "Is your dear old guardian, Mr. Priscilla Fawcett, coming to visit you?"

Tom Merry glared.

"Not so bad as that?" asked Lowther.

"Look here, you silly jabberwock——"

"Shush! Don't slang your Uncle Montague when he's being sympathetic.

Have you fallen in love with Levison's sister?"

"You silly ass!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ah! Now you're talking more like your old self!" said Lowther approvingly. "Suppose you tell us what's the matter? I've run through all the misfortunes I can think of."

"I've done it!" said Tom Merry.

"You've done that which you ought not to have done, or you've left undone that which you ought to have done——which?" asked Lowther.

"Oh, don't be a chump!"

"They're not spoiled," said Manners, referring to the films. "They might have been, though. Of all the idiots——"

"Sorry!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Well, you ought to be sorry for sitting on a chap's films——"

"I don't mean that. I mean, I'm sorry they're not spoiled."

"Why, you howling ass——"

Manners glared at Tom Merry, Hunnish again. But the Hunnish expression disappeared as he saw how really troubled the captain of the Shell looked.

"Never mind the films," said Manners, quite heroically. "What's the matter, Tommy, old son? Chuck it out!"

"I've done it, I tell you!"

"Yes, you've told us that. Suppose you give us a slight inkling as to what you've done?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"I've been in the New House——"

"Yes; I thought you'd go over to see Figgins," said Lowther. "Why don't you keep on the respectable side of the quadrangle when your Uncle Monty's not with you?"

"Ass!"

"Ahem! Well, what's happened in the New House? Did Figgins & Co. pitch you out on your neck? We shall jolly soon do the same, if you don't explain!"

Tom Merry drove his hands deep into his pockets.

"I've done it!" he said. "We were jawing footer. Those New House worms beat us in two matches running, owing to circumstances——"

"Goals, I thought!" remarked Lowther. "Circumstances don't count in a footer match."

"Owing to circumstances!" roared Tom Merry. "One time, Talbot was crooked, and Levison was away at Greyfriars, and Herries was off his form in goal. 'Nother time I got a damaged ankle, and had to limp through the match, and Kangaroo was seedy, and——"

"And, to cut it short, we were licked both times!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, chaps have lost footer matches, and still survived."

"D'Arcy and Blake were away the second time," persisted Tom Merry. "Our team wasn't up to full strength either time. But, of course, the New House crowd no end."

"The crowdfulness was terrific!" as that inky chap at Greyfriars would remark. "What does it matter?"

"Well, I suppose it doesn't matter. But——but——"

"But you got excited in arguing with Figgins?" grinned Manners.

"Well, yes!"

"And there was a row?" asked Low-

ther, mystified. "Never mind; this study thrives on rows. We couldn't live without 'em!"

"Worse than that!"

"Well, give it a name."

"I—I—I—I was rather waxy, you know," confessed Tom, "what with Figgins saying the School House was played out, and Kerr offering to come over and coach us at footer, and Fatty Wynn offering to buy us some marbles for a Christmas present——"

"Cheeky ass!" said Lowther warmly.

"And——and I said we'd play 'em every day and beat them——"

"So we will!"

"But——but——but I said——"

"Well, what in the name of the merry old Kaiser did you say?"

"I was waxy, you know. I—I said we'd play 'em and beat 'em, with Baggy Trimble in goal——"

"Wha-a-at!"

"And Grundy in the half-back line——"

"Ye gods!"

"And——and so I've done it!" said Tom Merry lugubriously. "You can bet the bounders jumped at it. They took it for swank——"

"So it was, you ass!"

"I—I suppose it was!" confessed Tom Merry. "I was wild, you know. They took it for swank, and pinned me down to it. Of course, I couldn't draw back then. So——so it's arranged!"

"Arranged! My hat! A House match, with Trimble in goal and Grundy at half!" said Manners faintly.

"Yes."

"Oh, you ass!"

"Oh, you chump!"

"I told you I'd done it!" said Tom Merry.

"You have, and no mistake! Fancy you swanking in your old age!" said Monty Lowther severely.

"I didn't mean to swank, really. I was rather wild, and I suppose I didn't really mean it," confessed Tom Merry.

"But they pinned me down, the beasts. Then I stuck to it. You should have heard those New House beasts chortling as I came away. Simply killing themselves!"

"Yes, I should fancy they'd chortle a bit!" said Manners. "You've booked a licking for the House, you frabjous ass! If they beat us, we shall be laughed to death! And they're bound to beat us, with Grundy and Trimble playing for us—the biggest duffers at footer in the whole school!"

"That's why I said it, of course."

"Of course!" said Lowther. "Well, you'd better go and tell Figgins you were only swanking, and that it's off!"

"No fear! School House can't climb down to New House!"

"Well, I suppose not! But School House is going to get a record licking from New House, and no end of chortling into the bargain!"

"Well, I've done it!"

"Yes, you have done it," agreed Monty Lowther, "and now we're going to do something, to show our appreciation. Collar the silly ass!"

"Look here—— Oh, my hat!"

Tom Merry struggled in the grasp of

his chums. But he struggled in vain. Manners had even forgotten his films in his wrath. The captain of the Shell smote the study carpet with a mighty smite.

Bump!

"Yaroooh!"

Bump!

"Yooop! Leggo!"

Tom Merry sat on the carpet and gasped. And as he gasped, his chums told him what they thought of him. Never had such an eloquent flow of language been heard in No. 10 in the Shell passage.

CHAPTER 2.

Plain English!

"WATS!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke emphatically.

Blake and Herries and Digby grunted, with a grunt expressive of total disbelief.

"It's true!" said Dick Julian. "I had it from Figgins—honour bright!"

"But it can't be true!" growled Blake.

"Imposs, deah boy!"

"Even Tom Merry couldn't be such an ass as that!" said Herries argumentatively. "Of course, he's an ass. He actually found fault with my goal-keeping the other day. He's an ass, right enough! But not such an ass as to play Trimble and Grundy in a House match! Draw it mild!"

"Figgins was pulling your leg!" said Dig.

"It's a fact, I tell you! There's going to be an extra House match, and Trimble and Grundy are playing."

"Wats!"

"I say, have you heard the news?"

Kangaroo of the Shell came up to the group in the junior Common-room.

"What news? Brussels taken yet?" asked Blake.

"Brussels! Blow Brussels! Tom Merry's going to play Trimble and Grundy in a House match!"

"Bai Jove! It begins to look—"

"You fellows heard?" chortled Racke of the Shell, coming in. "Trimble—ha, ha—in the School House Eleven! And Grundy! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wubbish!"

"Fact!" roared Aubrey Racke. "I'm going to put some tin on the New House for that match! Any takers? Five to one—in quids, if you like!"

"Pway do not pwopose any wascally bettin' in my pwesence, Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner.

"Oh, rats! Now's a chance for you fellows to back up your house!" grinned Racke. "Who'll take five to one against the School House? Quids!"

"Oh, don't yell your war-profits at us!" snapped Blake. "It can't be true, and if it is, we'll scalp Tom Merry. We shall want a new junior House captain. One from the Fourth would be best. The Shell isn't much good, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps it would be a good idea for me to put up," remarked Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "What is wanted is a wippin' footballah, and a fellow of some tact and judgment—"

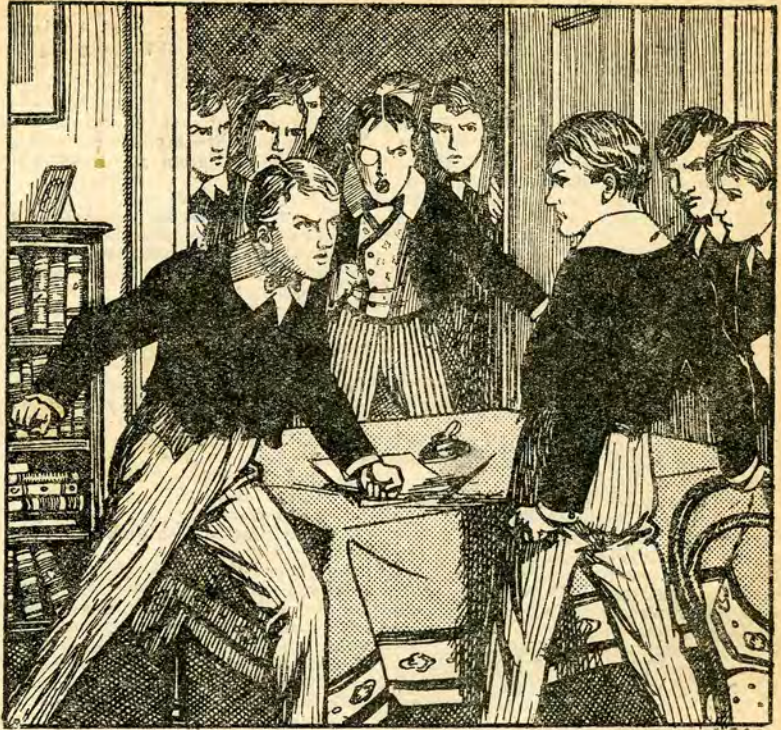
"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, Julian!"

"I say, Tom Merry's gone off his rocker," said Crooke of the Shell, coming in. "What do you fellows think of Trimble in a House match—and Grundy?"

"Begins to look as if it's true!" said Blake, in wonder. "Why, we'll lynch Tom Merry, if there's anything in it!"

"True enough!" said Crooke. "Tom Merry seems to have been swanking over in the New House, and Figgins called his bluff."



Blake Demands an Explanation.

(See Chapter 2.)

"Figgins did what, Cwooke?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Took him at his word," said Crooke. "And that's our captain!" sneered Racke.

"No chance for a chap like me in the House team! Now, I put it to you fellows—do I play worse football than Trimble or Grundy?"

"You couldn't!" said Herries, for once in agreement with the cad of the Shell.

"Oh, rot!" growled Blake. "You don't play footer, Racke! Grundy tries to play, at any rate, though he never gets there. If Tom played you in a House match, we'd duck him in the fountain."

"What about me?" demanded Crooke. "I've asked for a place in the team—I'm a footballer! I was laughed at!"

"Well, it was funny—you asking for a place in the team. You'll admit that!" said Julian.

"I suppose I can play better than Grundy!" sneered Crooke.

"It can't be true!" exclaimed Blake. "Tom Merry wouldn't be idiot enough to spoil the House record in this way. After two lickings lately, too. Hallo, Levison! Have you heard anything about this?"

Levison of the Fourth came in with Cardew and Clive. Cardew was grinning, but the other two looked serious.

"Oh, you've heard?" said Levison. "What the merry dickens does it mean? Trimble and Grundy can't play footer!"

"Then it's true!"

"Oh, yes, it's true! Grundy, you know! Even Wilkins and Gunn nearly fainted when they heard. They've gone to tell Grundy."

Jack Blake looked round grimly.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows!" he said. "It seems to be true. This is where we go and talk to Tom Merry like Dutch uncles!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He must be off his rocker," said Hammond. "Why, there's me waiting for a chance in a House match! Trimble! Grundy! By gum!"

"Come on!" said Blake. "If it's arranged, it will jolly soon be disarranged. It not, Tom Merry will get a bit disarranged. Come on!"

The excited juniors started for the Shell passage, to interview the junior captain of the School House.

It was not surprising that they were excited.

House matches were keenly contested at St. Jim's. Only utter outsiders like Racke and Crooke had no regard for the House record.

It was a feather in any fellow's cap to be selected for a House match. There was always a long waiting-list. It was only second in distinction to playing for the School junior team.

The news that Tom Merry was giving places in the House team to the two most hopeless duffers in the School House was surprising—almost unnerving.

Grundy of the Shell was a fellow whose football would have made a Hun cackle, as Blake expressed it. Grundy was keen enough; he was all right on that point. Nobody could call him a slacker. But he had a perfect genius for blundering, and getting in the way of other players. To play Grundy in a match against any team more dangerous than the Second Form was to ask for a licking.

And Trimble! Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, was a hopeless slacker, fat and unwieldy, lazy and obtuse, conceited and clumsy—too slack even to want to play in a House match if he had the chance!

The crowd of juniors—increasing in numbers by the way—arrived at Tom Merry's study. There was the sound of a warm and excited argument going on within. Evidently Manners and Lowther shared the general opinion of the School House.

Jack Blake jammed his boot against the door, and hurled it open. He was not in a mood to stand on ceremony. The juniors swarmed into the study, and the warm argument proceeding among the

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Terrible. These stopped. Tom Merry looked round with much less than his usual good-humour.

"What the dickens do you fellows want?" he demanded.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We want an explanation!" roared Blake, thumping on the table, with a thump that made the inkpot dance. "Are you playing Trimble and Grundy in a House match?"

"Yes."

"Then it's true!"

"Quite!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And what's the reason, you howling, burbling jabberwock?" demanded Blake.

"Rats!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Rats!"

"Is that all you've got to say?"

"Yes; that's about all."

Blake glared at the captain of the Shell. Tom Merry was flushed, but he spoke quite coolly.

Tom was in a bad position. He could not advance any argument in defence of playing the two duffers in a House match. But he was bound to do it, or else climb down to the New House—which was unthinkable. Naturally, his reply did not placate the indignant School House juniors.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I suggest a whip wound to buy a stwait-jacket for Tom Mewwy."

"Rats!" chimed in Monty Lowther. "Tommy's footer captain, isn't he? Don't you criticise your skipper, you young ass!"

"Like your cheek, I think!" said Manners hotly.

Tom Merry simply blinked at his chums. These remarks were very unlike those they had been making to him a few minutes before.

But it was a case of backing-up the study, and Manners and Lowther played up loyally. Tom had, unfortunately, put himself in the wrong; but it was not a time for his chums to desert him.

"You kids clear off," continued Lowther. "I'm surprised at you! You can't talk to a footer captain like this!"

"Pure cheek!" said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, you ass—"

"I call upon Tom Merry to resign!" shouted Herries.

"Hear, hear!"

"Resign, you ass!"

"Give the job to somebody who can do it!" howled Crooke.

"Resign! Resign!" vociferated Racke, with great relish.

It was pure joy to the two shady black sheep of the House, to find a big majority against Tom Merry. For once, they were at one with the decent fellows. They meant to make the most of it.

Tom Merry bit his lip.

"You want me to resign?" he asked quietly.

"Yaas, wathah! Undah the cires, I wegard that as the pwopah capah."

"Yes, of course," said Blake. "I never said a word about his losing matches. Accidents will happen. But when you go out deliberately to book lickings for the House, it's time you travelled!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Resign!"

"Well, I won't resign!" said Tom. "I've challenged Figgins & Co. to a House match, with Grundy and Trimble in our team. I don't say it was a judicious thing to do—"

"My hat! I should say not!"

"But I've done it! Dash it all, you fellows are always gassing that School House is cock-house of St. Jim's! Well, if we're cock-house, we can beat the New House playing two men short. That's what it amounts to! We're going to try!"

"It's worse than that! Grundy can't play, and he won't let anybody else play!" hooted Digby.

"So you mean to say you're playing the goat like this from sheer swank?" exclaimed Blake.

Tom Merry coloured.

"Oh, rats! 'Nuff said! Any chap who isn't satisfied can raise the matter in committee, and if I'm asked to resign in a proper way I'll resign fast enough. That's all!"

"You'll get the boot!" sneered Racke. Tom Merry gave Racke a look of contempt.

"You needn't chip in!" he exclaimed. "You don't care twopence for House matches, excepting to lay your rotten bets on the result!"

"Yaas, wathah! You dwy up, Wacke!"

"Well, I think you're a howling idiot, Tom Merry!" said Blake.

"Same to you!"

"And a burbling chump!" roared Blake.

"Anything else?"

"Why, you—you—you—"

"Pway do not let your angwy passions wise, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy has made a mistake. He has been swankin', and the New House have pinned him down. That's how it is. We are bound to see him through. Instead of waggin' Tom Mewwy, let's pile in at footah pwactice, and get into toppin' form for beatin' the New House."

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—" said Lowther.

"Weally Lowthah—"

Blake snorted.

"I suppose we should be bound to play the match, even if that silly ass did resign, or else be chortled to death by the New House," he said. "We've got to see it through. The howling duffer has undertaken to play them with two silly idiots in the team. Let him do it. If he wins the match for the House, all serene. If he loses it, he will be asked to resign, and make room for a skipper who doesn't play the giddy ox with House matches!"

Tom Merry frowned.

"If the match is lost, I shall resign without waiting to be asked," he said. "Now give me a rest!"

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

"Duffer!"

And, with those parting compliments, Blake & Co. retired, and the door was closed with a slam.

Left alone, the Terrible Three looked at one another.

"Well, you're in for it now, Tommy!" remarked Manners.

"Can't be helped! After all, we're cock-house, and we ought to be able to beat the New House with two passengers aboard. I shall make up a jolly good team, excepting those two."

"You didn't mean that about resigning—"

"I did!" said Tom quietly. "The fact is, I've played the giddy ox, and I don't mind owning up to it. If I pull the match out of the fire, well and good; if I don't, the School House can look for a new junior skipper. New, I'd better go over the eleven."

And Tom Merry, with a pencil and paper and a deeply-wrinkled brow, conned over his list of players, and became oblivious of everything else.

CHAPTER 3.

Good News for Grundy!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY of the Shell was in his study when Wilkins and Gunn came in grinning. Grundy wore a frown.

He fixed his eyes on his study-mates with a bitter expression. Grundy was not often bitter; but there were times when a fellow got fed-up, and this was one of the times.

"I call it rotten!" said Grundy. "So all the fellows are saying," remarked Gunn.

"Oh, are they?" said Grundy, in surprise. "Well, I'm glad they're coming round to the sensible view. It's a bit too thick for a fellow of my abilities to be constantly overlooked. Not only kept out of the footer—and you chaps know how I play footer—"

"We does!" murmured Wilkins—"we does!"

"Not only that—though that's bad enough. But when a chap hints anything about taking the lead in the St. Jim's Parliament, he's sat on! Sat on!" said Grundy wrathfully. "Well, there's a chap who's not going to be sat on. Unless I'm elected Premier in the St. Jim's Parliament, I shall put my foot down."

"Never mind the merry school parliament now," said Wilkins. "I can see you haven't heard the news. I thought by what you said that you had."

"Eh? What news?" said Grundy morosely. "If it's anything about the elections—"

"Bother the elections! It's about the footer!"

"Tom Merry decided to play me in the next House match?" asked Grundy, with sarcasm.

"Yes."

"Wha-a-at?"

Grundy jumped up.

"That's it!" said Wilkins.

"My only hat! You mean to say that Merry has decided to do the right thing at last!" exclaimed Grundy.

"I don't know about the right thing; but he's decided to do that. I expect the chaps will lynch him."

Grundy's frown vanished as if by magic. The St. Jim's Parliament was dismissed from his mind. He was to play in the House match! Now, at last, he was going to have a chance of showing St. Jim's, and the world generally, what was what at footer.

"Well, I must say this is a surprise!" he said. "Tom Merry isn't, on the whole, a bad skipper!"

"I never thought so till now," remarked Gunn.

"He's kept me waiting for this, but he's decided to do the sensible thing at last," said Grundy, unheeding that remark. "A chap can go easy with a chap who does a chap justice at last. He was bound to do it, really, after losing two House matches. He felt, I suppose, that he couldn't spare me. Well, I must say I'm glad he can see it at last, though it's taken him a long time."

Wilkins and Gunn looked curiously at their chum. Evidently Grundy hadn't the faintest suspicion as to the true inwardness of the case.

"I shall overlook the past, and let bygones be bygones," said Grundy magnanimously. "I'm not a fellow to bear malice. After all, Merry's doing this in time to save the House record. What are you cackling at, Gunn?"

"W-w-was—I cackling?" murmured Gunn.

"By gad, we'll beat the New House this time!" said Grundy, rubbing his hands. "We'll wipe out those two defeats. I may say I shall wipe them out!"

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It all depends on how the team back me up!"

"Back you up!" stuttered Wilkins.

"Yes. I suppose it's no good asking Tom Merry to leave the captaincy in my hands; he's a bit too conceited for that. But I shall give him some advice about the rest of the team. You ought to be played, Wilkins!"

"Thanks!"

"What about me?" demanded Gunn.

Grundy shook his head.

"N.G.!" he said decidedly. "I'm sorry to say it, Gunny, but I couldn't recommend Merry to put you in. You're all right at books, but you ain't much at footer. You don't mind my saying it, do you?"

"Not at all!" gasped Gunn. "I might mind if you knew anything about footer. As you don't, I don't mind. Not at all!"

"Don't be a silly ass, Billy Gunn! The fact that I'm in the House eleven shows what my footer's like, I suppose."

Grundy was already feeling like a full-blown House player.

"It's a sort of joke," said Gunn. "Tom Merry was swanking that he could play the New House with you in the team—like undertaking to lick a chap with one hand tied behind your back, you know!"

Grundy gave Gunn one look, and then pushed back his cuffs.

"Come on!" he said.

"Eh?"

"I'm sorry to have to punch you, Gunn, but if you ask for it——"

"Look here, you ass—— Oh, my hat!"

William Gunn dodged out of the study as Grundy rushed at him. He was not prepared to face George Alfred's four-point-seven punch.

"Come back!" roared Grundy.

But William Gunn's footsteps died away in the distance.

Grundy turned to Wilkins.

"Bit thick, a chap's own pal being jealous of his football form!" he said. "I should hardly have expected it of old Gunn. What are you grinning at?"

"Nothing!" gasped Wilkins. "I—I say, Tom Merry's going to play Trimble in the same match!"

"What utter rot! Trimble can't play footer!"

Wilkins opened his lips, but closed them again. He was about to remark that, in that respect, Grundy was in the same boat with Trimble. But George Alfred was between him and the door, so that remark remained unuttered.

"I shall certainly object to that!" said Grundy. "I can't have House matches chucked away by an utter ass being played in the team."

"You're going to decline?"

"Eh? I'm speaking of Trimble!"

"Oh! My mistake!"

"If you're going to be funny, George Wilkins——" began Grundy darkly.

"Not at all!" murmured Wilkins. "It's a serious matter for the School House!"

"Yes; I agree with you there. Trimble certainly can't be played. I shall point that out very firmly to Tom Merry. Hallo! What do you fellows want?"

Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in.

"We've come to make a suggestion to you!" grunted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm open to suggestions!" said Grundy loftily. "I'm afraid I can't discuss the Parliament bizny now, though. I'm rather busy about footer. I dare say you know I'm in the House team now?"

"That's it! I suppose you want the School House to win?"

"Of course!"

"You'd like to help?"

"I'm going to."

"Well, then, could you make it convenient to walk down to the river——"

"To the river, ejaculated Grundy, in astonishment.

"Yes; and jump in——"

"Jump in!"

"That's it."

"You frabjous ass! How would that help the School House to win a House match?"

"Why, you'd be drowned, you see, and then Tom Merry couldn't play you. See?"

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

The two Fourth-Former's went on their way, leaving Grundy staring. Wilkins burst into a chortle.

"Stop that silly cackling, Wilkins!" roared Grundy. "There's nothing to laugh at in the cheek of those Fourth-Form fags! Shut up!"

"You're not going to do it?" asked Wilkins humorously.

"I know what I'm going to do!" exclaimed the exasperated Grundy. "I'm going to give a cackling duffer a thick ear!"

Wilkins dodged out of the study.

"Cheeky ass!" growled Grundy, and he tramped away to Tom Merry's study.

He found the Terrible Three there, and bestowed a genial nod upon Tom Merry as the latter looked up from his footer list with a worried brow.

"I hear you're playing me in the next House match, Merry?"

"That's right!"

"I congratulate you!"

"Well, I'm glad somebody's pleased!" said Tom, with a sigh. "You're the only fellow in the House who doesn't want to scalp me, Grundy!"

Grundy snorted.

"Don't take any notice of silly, carping idiots!" he advised. "Do the right thing, and stick to it! But I hear you're playing Trimble. That won't do!"

"Won't it?"

"No. I hardly think I could consent to Trimble playing in my eleven."

"Your eleven?"

"Well, the eleven I'm a member of, anyway," amended Grundy. "You can see it won't do! Trimble can't play!"

"Well, you can't either!"

"Don't be a funny ass, Tom Merry! I warn you that I don't care about playing in the same team with a fat cuckoo like Trimble of the Fourth."

Tom Merry looked hopeful.

"You decline to play?" he asked eagerly.

If Grundy declined to play, the captain of the Shell was naturally absolved from his undertaking to play him. He couldn't make a fellow play against his will.

But there was no such easy escape for the hapless footer captain.

"I don't say that," said Grundy. "No, I don't say that—certainly not! If a fat idiot like Trimble is in the team, you'll need all the good players you can get—and leaving me out would mean defeat. I doubt if I shall be able to pull the game out of the fire, though, with Trimble in the team."

"Do you mind if I put that in the 'Weekly,' Grundy?" asked Monty Lowther, taking up a pencil. "I want a paragraph more to fill up my comic column."

"I didn't come here to listen to your silly gags, Lowther!" roared Grundy. "You dry up! Now, then, Tom Merry! About Trimble? Where are you going to play Trimble?"

"In goal."

"Oh, my hat! And you call yourself a footer captain?" said Grundy. Where are you going to play me?"

"Where you'll do least damage."

"Look here, Tom Merry, I'll tell you what!" said Grundy. "You can't captain a team for toffee; you'll admit that yourself. Playing Trimble, by gum! I'll

tell you what! Leave it to me! You want to win, of course. Well, leave it to me, and I'll give you a place in the eleven if possible. I—— Yaroooh! Oh, crumbs!"

Tom Merry was fed up. He rushed at Grundy, and Manners and Lowther rushed at him, too, and the flow of George Alfred's eloquence was suddenly cut short. He roared as he was lifted through the doorway and bumped in the passage.

"Now, cut off!" said Tom Merry.

Grundy sat on the floor and gasped. Then he rose up in his wrath and charged into the study. Three pairs of hands seized him, and he was tossed out again. He landed in the passage with a terrific bump. Gore looked out of the next study to ask if it was an air-raid. Tom Merry slammed the door of No. 10, and Grundy, on second thoughts, did not open it again.

CHAPTER 4.

The Importance of Baggy!

"TRIMBLE!"

Baggy Trimble grinned.

Trimble of the Fourth had heard all about it. He knew that Tom Merry had landed himself in a difficulty owing to that unfortunate football argument in Figgins' study. Tom Merry was pledged to play Trimble, and the crafty Baggy intended to take full advantage of the fact.

Baggy did not rise as Tom came into his study. He just glanced round carelessly, looking as patronising as he could.

"I'm afraid I can't be interrupted just now, Merry!" he remarked.

"What?"

"Look in another time, will you?"

"You fat idiot!" roared the captain of the Shell.

"There's the door, Merry!"

Tom Merry came in, and fixed upon the fat Fourth-Former a glare that a basilisk or a Hun might have envied.

"You silly, fat chump!" he said, in measured tones.

"I don't want any of your cheek, Merry! I've said that I'm rather busy just now. Run away and play!"

"You're going to play in a House match on Wednesday."

"Next Wednesday?" said Baggy reflectively. "I'll see about it, Merry. I'd like to oblige you, but I may have another engagement."

Tom Merry almost choked. There were good footballers in the House who would have given a term's pocket-money to play for the team. Baggy Trimble played footer worse than any fag in the Third. And this was how he received the high honour!

"Don't you understand?" gasped Tom. "You're wanted to play for your House!"

"Oh, yes, I understand! I've been kept out of the footer a long time," said Trimble. "I don't have much time for practice, having so many engagements, but I'd have been willing to play for the House before. Some fellows were afraid of being put in the shade by a really ripping forward! I quite understand! But I'm not hung up on a nail to be taken down just when wanted. I may be able to play on Wednesday. I may not. I'll let you know later."

"You're going to keep goal," said Tom.

Trimble shook his head.

"If I play, centre-forward's my place," he said. "I'm best there."

"You're best nowhere!" said Tom.

"You're rotten anywhere!"

"If you think that, you'd better leave me out," sneered Baggy. "I'm not asking for a place in the team. These junior matches are hardly up to my form, anyway!"

"Oh, my hat! You're going to keep goal on Wednesday, Trimble; and you're going to do your best. You're going to put in every possible minute between now and Wednesday at practice, and get into some kind of form."

"I'm jolly well not!" said Trimble emphatically. "I don't care for footer practice. Rather a bore!"

"And you're coming down now to begin!" said Tom.

"Sorry! Another engagement!"

"Of course, if you decline to play, you'll be within your rights," said Tom Merry, with a faint hope. But that hope, as in the case of Grundy, was to be dashed to the ground. Trimble did not intend to be got rid of. He understood the expression on Tom's face, and he grinned sarcastically.

"I don't decline," he said promptly. "I feel that I ought to play for the House, if only to show the fellows that I ought not to have been passed over so long."

"I'll give you the choice," said Tom. "I've undertaken to play the New House with you in goal. If you refuse to keep goal, it falls through, and I can explain to Figgins. Yes or no? Sharp!"

"Yes," said Trimble, at once. When it was put like that Trimble decided not to have another engagement on Wednesday. He had suddenly become a person of importance, and he was not going to lose his importance.

"That's settled, then," said Tom. "You keep goal! So long as we keep up a good defence, you mayn't do much harm there. But you're going to be as good as possible. Come down to practice."

"Can't!"

"Why not?"

"I don't care for it just now. I may stroll down presently!"

Tom Merry choked back his wrath. The fat boulder of the Fourth ought to have been quite overcome by the unexpected distinction. But it was only too clear that Baggy meant to make himself as objectionable as possible. Most of the fellows regarded the fat Fourth-Former with more or less good-humoured scorn, and this was an opportunity for the slacker of the Fourth to get his own back.

He rolled back in his chair, and crossed his fat little legs, and smiled at Tom Merry with great self-satisfaction. He was master of the situation to a certain extent. Unless he was licked into some sort of shape, he would be quite useless in goal; and Baggy intended to be approached with humble persuasion.

"Will you come?" demanded the captain of the Shell, at last.

"Not now!"

Tom looked at him. He came very near seizing the fatuous Baggy and mopping the study carpet with him. He controlled himself, however, and left the study, slamming the door after him.

Baggy Trimble gave a fat chuckle. It was the first time he had been able to set down the junior captain, and he enjoyed it.

His study-mate, Mellish, came in, grinning. He had heard it all from outside.

"Good for you, Baggy!" he said. "Give 'em plain talk! Don't you let them bully you!"

"I don't intend to!" chuckled Trimble. "If they want me, they can be civil. I shall suit myself. Of course, I'm a better man than any they've got in the team. I don't need all the practice those chaps need!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway, I'm not going out this afternoon. Too jolly cold!"

And Trimble settled down comfortably THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 513.

in the arm-chair, with his feet on the fender.

Tom Merry joined Manners and Lowther, who were waiting for him on the stairs.

"Where's the porpoise?" asked Lowther.

"He won't come down to practice!" "Phew!"

"It's a rotten position," said Tom, with a grunt. "Of course, any real member of the team would be kicked out if he refused to turn up for practice. I can't kick Trimble out, owing to circumstances."

"But we can persuade him to come down to practice," said Lowther.

"How?"

"You take one of his ears, and I'll take the other!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, it will do the fat brute more good than slacking about indoors on a fine, frosty day," he said. "He's accepted the place, and he ought to practice. Come and lend me a hand!"

"You bet!"

Tom Merry turned back, and his chums followed him. The Terrible Three were not disposed to stand on much ceremony with Trimble.

Baggy looked round, and grinned, as they came in. He waved a fat hand at them.

"Don't bother now," he said. "I haven't any time to attend to you!"

"Our time is rather valuable, too!" remarked Lowther. "We won't waste any of it in talking! Kim on!"

He grasped one of Trimble's fat ears, and there was a terrific howl from Baggy.

"Yaroooo! Yah! Yoop! Leggo!" "Take the other, Tom!"

Tom Merry took the other.

"Now, your ears are coming along with us," said Monty Lowther pleasantly. "If you stay indoors, Baggy, there will be a painful parting! Come on, Tom!"

Still grasping Baggy's fat ears, the chums of the Shell started for the door. Needless to say, Baggy Trimble went with them. His ears had to go, and Trimble accompanied his ears.

With a succession of furious howls, Trimble rolled out of the study between Lowther and Tom Merry. Manners came behind, kindly helping Trimble along with his boot.

"Will you leggo?" shrieked Trimble. "I'm not coming—Yaroooo! Stop kicking me, Manners, you rotter! Yah! Leggo! I'll yell for a prefect! Yooop!"

"Kim on!"

Trimble was marched downstairs. His howls rang along the staircase and the passages, and drew attention on all sides.

"Bai Jove! Whatevah are you doin' with Twimble?" exclaimed D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the peculiar procession.

"Taking him down to practice!"

"Yaroooo! I won't go! Ow, ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kildare!" roared Baggy, as the captain of St. Jim's came along the passage.

"I say! Prefect! Prefect!"

"What's this, thundering row?" exclaimed Kildare.

"Only taking Baggy to footer practice, Kildare!"

"I don't want to go!" yelled Baggy. "I'm being bullied! Make 'em let me go, Kildare!"

"I'll make you wriggle, if you don't stop that row!" said Kildare. "Why don't you want to go down to practice?"

"It's—it's c-c-cold—"

"You'll get warm. And if you let out one more howl I'll warm you before you go," said the Sixth-Former. "Now, shut up, and cut off!"

There was no help for Trimble. Kildare had no sympathy with slackers. Baggy rolled disconsolately out, and the

Terrible Three marched him down to the football-ground. There he was planted between the goal-posts. And quite a crowd of fellows gathered round, to see how Trimble would keep goal.

CHAPTER 5.

Keeping Goal!

BAGGY TRIMBLE gasped for breath, with a crimson face, as he stood in the goal. He hadn't any choice about standing there. But Baggy remembered the old proverb—a horse could be taken to the water, but could not be made to drink.

Baggy was in goal, but how he would shine as goal-keeper was quite another question.

"Now," said Tom Merry. "Stand up! You're not a sack of coke!"

"Grooogh!"

"Stop that puffing and blowing, you grampus!"

"Groogh! I'm winded! Yow!"

"I'm going to pitch the ball in, and you're going to stop it!" said Tom.

"Now, pull yourself together, Baggy, and do your best! Remember, you're going to play for your House!"

"Yow! Bother the House! Groogh!"

"Look out in goal!"

"Yah! Yow!"

A somewhat muddy footer was thrown down; practice had been going on already. Tom kicked the leather in. It was the simplest and easiest shot for the new goal-keeper to save.

Trimble did not make a movement. The ball passed within a foot of him, and landed.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That will be wippin'—in a House match!"

There was a chortle from a crowd of New House fellows. Figgins & Co. had been on the ground when Tom Merry arrived with his new recruit, and they were looking on with great enjoyment.

Figgins regarded Tom Merry's rash undertaking in the light of a huge joke. The School House junior skipper, in that argument in Figg's study, had spoken hastily and wrathfully. Figgins & Co. regarded it as School House swank, and they held Tom Merry to his word. How he would get out of the fix he had landed himself in was an interesting problem to Figgins & Co.

"My hat!" said Fatty Wynn, the great goal-keeper of the New House. "My hat! That's how the School House keeps goal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck that ball out, Trimble!"

shouted Tom Merry.

"Grooogh!"

Tom strode into the goal and picked up the ball, and smote Baggy Trimble on the head with it, amid a yell of laughter from the onlookers. There was another kind of yell from Baggy. Tom dropped the ball in the penalty area.

"Now, look out, Baggy—"

"Groogh! I'm all muddy! I—I—I—"

"Look out, will you?"

"No, I won't! Yah!"

Tom kicked the ball in. He was determined that Trimble should stop it, and he kicked it directly at Baggy's fat face. Baggy was determined not to stop it, and he supposed that the leather would pass him, as before. It didn't! It plumped right on Baggy's nose, and there was a fiendish howl from Baggy as he went heels over head.

"Gurrrrrrrh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's School House goal-keeping!" yelled Redfern. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble sat up, spluttering.

"Yah! Groogh! Rotter! Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get up, you fat chump!" shouted

Tom Merry, in exasperation. "Chuck that ball out! If I come in to you, I'll scalp you!"

"Bai Jove! I weally think we shall have a wathah wemarkable display in the House match next Wednesday, deah boys!"

"We shall!" gasped Blake.

"Get up, Trimble!"

"I—I can't get up!" spluttered Trimble. "I'm winded! I—I—Groogh!"

"Help him, Kangy!"

Kangaroo of the Shell went into goal to help Trimble. He lifted the fat junior by one ear. Trimble was very quickly on his feet.

"Stick there for a bit, Kangy, will you? Kick him every time he doesn't stop the ball!" exclaimed Tom Merry in great exasperation.

This was worse than Tom had expected even of Trimble. He knew that Baggy was a clumsy slacker, but to have obstinacy added to clumsiness was a little too much. The Australian junior threw out the ball, and posted himself in goal to help Baggy in his work. Baggy eyed him savagely. Kangaroo took a good size in football boots.

"Play up!" said Harry Noble grimly. "I'm going to help you, Baggy! Every time you don't stop the footer, you'll think you're a footer yourself, from what you'll get!"

"Look here, you beast—"

"Look out in goal!"

Tom Merry kicked the leather in once more. Baggy made a clumsy dab at it, and missed. The next moment Kangaroo's boot came into contact with his fat person, and Trimble's yell could be heard all over the playing-fields.

"Same every time, dear boy!" smiled Noble.

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Figgins, wiping his eyes. "This is what they call footer! And they call their mouldy old House cock-house!"

"Rats!" growled Blake. "Baggy's not much worse than Clampe and Chowle of your House, anyway!"

"We don't play Clampe and Chowle in House matches," grinned Figgins.

"Hallo! There they go again!" chuckled Kerr.

Baggy Trimble made a desperate effort to stop the ball this time. He had had enough of Kangaroo's football boots. He stopped it, and tipped it outside, and there was an ironical cheer.

"Well saved!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good for you!" said Tom Merry. "Keep that up!"

"I—I can't!" stammered Baggy. "I'm tired! I'm worn out! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Look out, Trimble! It's coming!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Baggy.

The ball whizzed in, and Baggy slashed at it desperately, and his fat fist missed it by about a yard. Kangaroo rushed at him, to fulfil his part of the contract, and Trimble, with a howl, dodged out of the goal and fled.

"Come back, you fat villain!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leg it, Trimble!"

Five or six juniors rushed after the fat Fourth-Former. But fear lent Baggy wings, and he fairly flew. Hunters and hunted disappeared in the direction of the School House, amid howls of merriment.

"Oh, cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Oh, gweat Scott! I weally have a vewy sevealh pain in my wibs!"

"Oh, Tommy!" murmured Manners.

"Now you're through with that circus, perhaps you'll let a fellow get some practice," said Grundy of the Shell sarcastically.

"Oh, don't you practise, now, Grundy!" exclaimed Figgins beseechingly.

"Eh? Why not?"

"You'll make us break something if we laugh any more now!"

"You cheeky New House ass—"

"Come away, you chaps!" said Figgins. "School House footer gives me a pain in the ribs!"

Figgins & Co. departed, chortling. Grundy gave a snort of contempt, and proceeded to exhibit his wonderful powers as a footballer. Tom Merry felt inclined to weep as he watched him. When the School House fellows went in, Tom was looking the reverse of cheerful.

"What a prospect!" he groaned, as Talbot of the Shell joined him.

Talbot smiled.

"It's rather hard lines, Tom. But the rest of us are going to play up like internationals, so we may pull it off on Wednesday. We mustn't let the New House fellows get anywhere near goal, that's all!"

"It's a bit thick, Figgins holding Tommy down to his brag," remarked Blake. "He might let him off."

"Brag!" repeated Tom. "I wasn't bragging, you ass!"

"What were you doing, then?"

"Oh, rats!"

And Tom Merry went in to tea in no happy mood.

CHAPTER 6.

Racke & Co. Catch It!

TOM MERRY wore an unusually thoughtful expression the next day.

The House match weighed on his mind.

Never had the captain of the Shell been placed in so unfortunate a position. He could have kicked himself for his imprudence.

It was really absurd to have become so exasperated by the chipping he had received in Figgy's study. It had caused him to make that reckless challenge, which Figgins had jumped to accept. Tom Merry was really the last fellow in the world to be guilty of swank. But to declare that he could beat the New House at footer with two passengers in his team certainly was perilously near swanking. He had spoken in haste and wrath. But the words had been uttered, and they had to be made good.

Doubtless Figgins & Co. expected the School House junior skipper to climb down. But that he would not do. What he had said, he had said. And the rest of the School House quite upheld that. Climbing down was impossible. The match had to be played upon those unequal terms. They hoped that somehow it might prove a win. That, indeed, would be a tremendous triumph. But there was little prospect of a win, and the School House footballers continued to tell Tom Merry, in the plainest of plain English, what they thought of him, till the unhappy football captain was sick of the subject.

Apart from Grundy and Trimble, Tom Merry had made up a first-class junior House team. The front line was excellent—Tom himself, Talbot, Blake, D'Arcy, and Ernest Levison. Grundy was at centre-half, unfortunately; Kangaroo, who usually played centre, was put on the right, and Wilkins on the left. Herries, not being wanted in goal, was at back, with Clifton Dane, the Canadian. The weakest spot of all was Baggy Trimble in goal. But Tom Merry hoped to keep on attacking, and leave very little for Baggy to do between the posts.

Grundy—if Grundy could be persuaded to keep quiet—mightn't be so very bad. But Grundy was difficult to persuade. Grundy knew the terms upon which he

was put in the team, but that only made him snort with contempt. He was determined to show St. Jim's that he ought to be played on his merits. Grundy flattered himself that he was a first-rate half. But he was by no means contented to play half, and half alone.

That wouldn't have been like Grundy. Grundy felt the whole weight of the game upon his broad shoulders, like Atlas supporting the globe.

Grundy felt it is duty to lend the forwards a hand—all the forwards. Merely feeding the forwards was not at all Grundy's conception of his duty. He was there to win the match, and he was persuaded that if he didn't kick goals for his House nobody would. He was prepared to lead desperate charges, to dribble the ball right down the field on his own, regardless of mere forwards, and if he was interfered with, to shove anybody and everybody off the ball. At other times, he would kindly assist the goalkeeper in his duties, and he was prepared to give tips about the game to the referee.

Grundy had heaps of energy, and he was ready to spend it all in the game, playing everybody's game as well as his own. And Grundy had a fixed conviction that the ball ought constantly to be in his possession. He wasn't a selfish player—he despised a selfish player—but, for the sake of the game and the side generally, he felt that it was better for him to have possession of the ball, and keep it.

A player like Grundy might well have made any footer captain despair. Grundy was calculated to turn any skipper's hair grey in the course of a single match. And he was impervious to argument. Argument and remonstrance only elicited a superior smile from George Alfred. Grundy was one of the fellows who knew it all!

Still, Grundy was very big and strong and heavy, and, under favourable circumstances, might be almost as dangerous to the opposing side as to his own.

He was not, at all events, a lazy slacker like Trimble. And he was not malicious. Trimble was. Trimble was breathing wrath over his enforced exertions, and it was an open secret that when the celebrated House match came off, Trimble didn't mean to stop the ball, even if he could. On the occasion of the match, of course, it was not feasible to post a fellow in goal to kick Trimble into doing his duty.

Neither did Trimble think it necessary to keep fit. In cold weather he would hang about the fire, instead of getting warm by healthy exercise out of doors. That had to stop now. If Trimble was going to play he was going to be as fit as possible. Tom Merry was determined on that. After lessons that day Tom Merry called to him in the Form-room passage.

"Want you after tea, Trimble?"

Trimble gave him a glare.

"It's raining!" he howled. "I suppose we can't play footer in the rain?"

"We're going out for a trot."

"I'm not!" said Trimble.

"You are!" said his captain. "It will bring your fat down. I'll call for you in half an hour."

When Tom Merry called at Trimble's study, he found the door locked. He hammered furiously on the door, but there was no reply from within. A crowd of grinning juniors gathered round.

"Will you come out, you fat beast?" Tom Merry shouted through the keyhole.

No reply.

"Bai Jove! You seem to be havin' difficulties with your weewuits, Tom Mewwy!" chortled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Oh, rats! Come out, Trimble!"
 "Perhaps he isn't there!" grinned Lowther.

"The door's locked."
 "There's a little party in Racke's study," remarked Lowther. "Suppose we give Racke a look in!"

Tom Merry nodded, and strode along the Shell passage. Racke's door was locked, too, and Racke's voice could be heard within:

"Your deal, Chowle!"
 Tom Merry thumped angrily on the door.

"Hallo!" called out Crooke.
 "Is Trimble here?" shouted Tom Merry.

"Find out!"
 "Open the door!"
 "Bow-wow!"

Tom Merry's eyes blazed. His difficulties were great enough, without the malicious interference of Racke & Co. to make them greater. He could guess that Trimble was in the study, and had locked his own door as a blind.

"Lowther, get me your hammer, will you?" said Tom. "I'm going to smash in the lock!"

"Certainly, my infant!"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Racke, who heard the words from within. "I'll open the door, hang you! Any prefects about?"

"No, you smoky cad!"
 The door was opened.

There was quite a crowd in Racke's study—Racke and Crooke and Clampe and Chowle, of the New House, and Mellish and Trimble. There was a thick atmosphere of cigarette-smoke. Baggy Trimble had a cigarette between his lips—Baggy was quite a gay dog when he could beg, borrow, or steal smokes. He gave Tom Merry a defiant look, as the captain of the Shell strode in.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, in disgust. "Of all the wascals—"

"Come out, Trimble!"

"I won't!" howled Trimble.

Tom gave Aubrey Racke a savage look.

"You're encouraging that fat fool to smoke, Racke, to make him even rotter for the footer!" he exclaimed.

Racke yawned.

"You—you set of silly, smoky, dingy, sneaking blackguards!" snapped Tom. "You want a prefect to drop in and see this!"

"Going to sneak?" sneered Chowle of the Fourth.

"I'm going to stop this!" said Tom. "You can play the fool as much as you like, for all I care—within limits. But you've got a member of my team here, and you're going to have a lesson. You two New House cads, get out!"

"We'll go when we please!" growled Clampe.

"You'll go now!"

"Rats!"

"Don't go, you fellows!" said Racke.

"We don't intend to!" said Chowle warmly. "Who's Tom Merry, I'd like to know!"

"Are you going?" asked Tom quietly.

"No!" said Clampe and Chowle together.

Tom signed to his chums, and Manners and Lowther came in at once. Clampe and Chowle were collared, and pitched headlong into the passage. Then they decided to go. Racke & Co. did not come to their assistance. They were rather apprehensive of themselves.

"Get out of this study, Trimble!" snapped Tom Merry.

"Look here—Yaroooh! All right, I'm going, ain't I?" howled Trimble. And he went.

"Now mop up the study," said Tom. "It's time these rotters had a lesson!"

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"You cheeky hound!" shouted Racke.

"If you dare—Yah! Oh!"

Racke and Crooke and Mellish had the time of their lives for the next few minutes. It seemed to them as if an earthquake had landed in the study as the Terrible Three got to work.

When they were finished, Racke & Co. were strown on the floor, with cigarettes jammed into their mouths in handfuls, and with aches all over their weedy, unfit persons. Then the Terrible Three left the study. Tom Merry dropped his hand on Trimble's shoulder.

"Are you coming?" he asked grimly.

Baggy Trimble quaked.

"Yes! Yes, rather! I—I want to come! I—I've been looking forward to a walk with you, Merry. I—I have really!"

And Baggy Trimble had to walk, whether he had been looking forward to it, not. He covered five miles before the Terrible Three allowed him to limp into the School House again, and then Baggy collapsed into the armchair in his study, and did nothing for an hour but gasp and groan. But he was all the better for it.



CHAPTER 7.

The Trial Match!

"HOW'S your cheery old team getting on?"

George Figgins asked that question on Saturday afternoon. Figgins smiled genially as he asked. The difficulties Tom Merry was encountering were really a subject for sympathy; but the New House fellows howled over them as if they were the joke of the season.

"First-rate!" said Tom. "We're going to beat you on Wednesday!"

"With Grundy and Trimble?"

"Yes!" growled Tom.

"You're not inclined to climb down yet, and take it back?" smiled Figgins.

"Of course, we'll let you off, if you admit it was only swank!"

"The School House never climbs down!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"We leave that to the old casual ward you call a House!"

Figgins grinned.

"Well, it will be as good as a climb-down, when we walk over you on Wednesday!" he remarked cheerfully.

"Rats!"

The Terrible Three walked on, leaving Figgins chuckling.

There was no fixture that afternoon, and Tom Merry had arranged a practice match between two junior School House sides. He was anxious to see exactly what would happen with Grundy and Trimble in the team.

The other eleven was a pretty good one, made up of the House reserves. It was captained by Sidney Clive, the South African, who played centre-half. Dick Julian, Hammond, Kerruish, Reilly, Digby, Bernard Glyn, Cardew, Gore,

Manners, and Lowther made up Clive's team. Manners and Lowther were not in the House team on this occasion.

The scratch eleven fully expected to win. They were nothing near the form of Tom Merry & Co., taken as a whole, but Tom Merry's team was handicapped by Grundy and Trimble. That made all the difference.

Figgins & Co. came to watch. So did a good many other fellows. Indeed, even some seniors of the Fifth stopped to look on. Grundy's fame was great as a footballer of an original variety, and fun was expected.

Baggy Trimble looked as if he would burst out of his footer garb. The food regulations had made no difference whatever to Baggy's circumference. But he was not looking happy.

Baggy liked the distinction of playing for his House; it was to be a subject of endless swank in future. But he did not like the exertion involved. The steady practice he had been put through lately had exasperated him.

Racke had been talking to Baggy, too. And it was understood that Baggy was to be present at a spread in Racke's study after the match if he did not succeed in saving a single shot.

In those circumstances it was not probable that Baggy Trimble would shine as a goal-keeper.

But Grundy was looking very business-like.

Grundy knew how his inclusion in the team was regarded by the other fellows. But his performances in the trial match were going to silence all detractors—at least, that was Grundy's intention.

The goals he was going to take would mark him out as a fellow who could not be spared from any team. True, it was not considered, as a rule, a half-back's special business to shine as a goal-getter. But Grundy had his own manners and customs on the football-field.

It was not much use talking to Grundy. But Tom Merry tried it.

"I want you to keep your place, Grundy," he said. "Don't get in the way of the other chaps. And don't hang on to the ball. Feed the forwards. You understand! And don't try any of your brilliant charging bizney!"

Grundy stared at him.

"Do you want to win this trial match, or do you want to be beaten by a scratch team?" he inquired.

"To win, of course, fathead!"

"Then you'd better let me alone!"

"There can't be two skippers in a football team, Grundy!"

"To be quite frank, Merry, I think you ought to leave the job to me," said Grundy candidly. "If you stick to the place, you'll be doing it against my judgment!"

"Your—your what?"

"My judgment!" said Grundy firmly.

"I give you my opinion for what it's worth!"

Grundy's manner intimated that he considered it was worth a great deal.

"I suppose," remarked Blake thoughtfully, "that it wouldn't do to lynch Grundy on the cross-bar, would it?"

"Bai Jove! It might win the match for us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I suppose it's no good talking to you, Grundy!" gasped Tom Merry. "If you don't keep in your place, we'll scrag you, that's all!"

"A good footballer's place is where he's wanted!" said Grundy firmly. "If I see you fumbling the ball, Merry—"

"Me—fumbling?"

"You—fumbling!" said Grundy calmly.

"If I see you fumbling the ball, I'm bound, from a proper regard for the side, to help you out. In such a case, I shall certainly chip in, and do my best. You

can rely on me to interfere at any point where I see bad play!"

"Oh, Jemima!" murmured Wilkins.

"To tell the candid truth, I'm not satisfied with this team!" went on Grundy. "Look at the way D'Arcy passes—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Levison, too! I don't think much of Levison's style—"

"Perhaps I'd better resign!" said Levison sarcastically.

"That would really be the best, Levison. Noble, too, is pretty clumsy at half! I shall have to do most of his work, as well as my own!"

Kangaroo gave Grundy the look of a basilisk.

"Let me catch you getting in my way!" he said. "There'll be a dead lunatic lying about soon afterwards!"

"As for Herries, you know what a muff he is!"

"Am I?" roared Herries.

"Yes. I'm sorry to say so, Herries, but the truth is the truth, you know! My judgment is that you ought not to be played for the House!"

Herries did not reply. He couldn't. He seemed on the verge of apoplexy.

"Talbot isn't bad," went on Grundy, in his role of cheerful critic.

"Thanks!" said Talbot, laughing.

"Not at all!" said Grundy kindly.

"Honour where honour is due, you know! You're not bad, and with a little coaching from me, you'd be really good!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That's enough!" gasped Tom Merry. "Shut up, Grundy, for goodness' sake! I only hope you won't drive us into massacring you during the match. You ready, Clive?"

"Quite!" grinned Clive.

Clive won the toss, and gave the House eleven the wind to kick off against. Grundy tapped Tom Merry on the arm from behind.

"Leave the kick-off to me, Merry, please!"

"What?"

"Leave it to me! You see—"

"Get back, you fool!"

"Oh!"

Figgins winked at his chums as the ball rolled and the trial match started. Figgins remarked that that match was likely to prove a trial in more than one sense to the School House junior skipper, and the Co. grinned and agreed.

And certainly George Alfred Grundy had reason to plume himself upon the attention he was getting. For the shouts were all for Grundy. Almost every eye was fixed on the burly George Alfred. The fellows were wondering what he would do. And Grundy smiled with satisfaction as they roared what he took for encouragement and applause.

"Go it, Grundy!"

"On the ball, Grundy!"

"Give Grundy a chance!"

"That shows what the fellows think!" Grundy found time to remark to Wilkins. Wilkins agreed.

CHAPTER 8.

The Order of the Boot!

TOM MERRY had thought the matter out. Handicapped by Grundy at half, and Trimble in goal, the School House game was to attack, and keep on attacking. The front line, at all events, was excellent. If the team with two passengers succeeded in knocking out Clive's eleven, it would be a good omen for the New House match on Wednesday.

The House players had it all their way at the start. In the first ten minutes they were swarming in Clive's half, and attacking goal hotly. Gore, in goal, was unusually good, however, and he defended well. But the attack persisted,



Trimble is Wanted.

(See Chapter 4.)

and would doubtless have materialised but for some assistance it received from George Alfred Grundy.

Grundy was not the fellow to hang back while an attack was being fumbled, as he regarded it. If the forwards couldn't beat Gore, he could—or he thought he could. A terrific rush from his centre-half sent Tom Merry spinning away from the ball as he was about to kick for goal. That attack in the rear was, naturally, quite unlooked-for, and it took the junior skipper by surprise.

Tom Merry was hurled off, barging into Levison, and Grundy took possession of the ball, and kicked.

Naturally, it was a miskick, and instead of landing in the net, the ball dropped at Sidney Clive's feet, and the Africander sailed away merrily with it.

Grundy, quite ignorant where the ball had gone, stared into goal, as if expecting to see it reposing in the net.

The next instant he was collared by his indignant captain, spun round, and sent whirling.

It was not a usual proceeding on the part of the footer captain. But it was not surprising, under the circumstances, that Tom Merry was a little excited.

Grundy crashed to the ground, and gasped there, while the House players rushed after the ball.

But Clive & Co. were making the most of the opportunity so kindly afforded them by the great George Alfred.

Clive, Lowther, and Cardew—who was showing unexpected form as a forward—kept the ball among them in a rush up the field. Cardew, usually looked upon as a slacker, was full of energy now.

They brought the ball through, and Kangaroo and Wilkins had no chance. Centre-half was sprawling in front of the opposite goal.

Clive kicked the leather in, and it whizzed past Baggy Trimble, and landed. There was a roar of laughter from the crowd.

"Goal! Ha ha ha!"

Figgins wiped his eyes.

"That's football!" he wept. "That's what they call footer in the School House. They call themselves cock-house of St. Jim's. And they call that footer!"

"Good old Grundy!" roared Kerr.

"Go it, Grundy!"

"Did you ever!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, my only hat! And that's the team they're going to play against—US!"

Tom Merry's face was a study.

He had hoped for the best, in spite of his two passengers; but it was the worst—the very worst—that was happening.

Trimble, with a sickly grin, shoved out the ball. Kangaroo dropped back into goal to speak to Trimble.

"You didn't try to stop that ball, Trimble," said the Australian junior quietly.

"I—I didn't see—"

"You didn't try!"

"Look here, who's keeping goal?" demanded Trimble loftily. "You keep your place, Noble! I don't want any lessons from you!"

"You're going to get one, all the same," said Kangaroo. "You didn't try, Trimble! You can't help being a fool, but you can help being a rogue. Next time the ball comes in, you're going to do all that a fool can do—see? I'll help you—like this, Trimble!"

"Yaroooh!" roared the fat goalkeeper, as Kangaroo collared him, and bumped his head against a goalpost.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the crowd.

"That's School House footer!" said Figgins, weeping. "That's the way they keep goal! Oh dear! My ribs!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yaroooh! Help! Murder! Yah! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble clutched his damaged head, and yelled, as Kangaroo released him.

"That's for a start!" said the Australian junior grimly. "You'll stop the

next ball, Trimble, or I shall use my boots on you next time!"

"Yow-ow-ow-yow!"

"Line up!"

Kangaroo went back to his place, leaving Baggy Trimble rubbing his head, and glaring like a wild Hun. His little game had been nipped in the bud. Not all the spreads in Aubrey Racke's study would have induced him to go through a second experience of that kind. Trimble meant to do his best as goalkeeper now—for what that was worth.

Grundy strode up to Tom Merry, his face aflame with wrath. Grundy was not the kind of fellow to be handled like Trimble.

"You slung me over!" he roared.

"Get into your place, you fool!" Tom Merry was too angry to be polite. "If you don't keep your place after this, I'll kick you off the field!"

"What?"

"Line up, dummy!"

"Why, you—you—you—"

"Now, then," said Smith major of the Fifth, the referee, "Line up!"

Wilkins dragged Grundy away. The great Grundy was boiling with wrath, and on the point of committing assault and battery upon his skipper.

"Did you ever see anything like it, Wilkins?" gasped Grundy. "He slung me over!"

"You silly chump!" was Wilkins' reply. "You spoiled a certain goal by barging like a rhinoceros, you howling dummy!"

"What! I was saving the situation!"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Look here, Wilkins—"

The whistle went, and Grundy's eloquence was cut off. But the great man of the Shell was by no means subdued. According to Grundy, he had been slung over, and thereby lost a certain success for his side. If there was anything more like that, Grundy meant to put his foot down.

The peculiar display on the side of the House eleven encouraged the scratch team. Clive and his men played up well from the restart. They got through, but the House backs defended well, and the forwards got the ball again, and went up the field, passing in great style.

There was a tussle before goal, and into that tussle came Grundy, charging like an infuriated elephant. Levison was sent whirling, Arthur Augustus spun round, Blake was floored, and Tom Merry was charged away. Grundy had got the ball again for a second. It required only one second for Manners to take it from his foot and send it up the field. There was a rush after it, and an attack on the House goal; but this time Trimble was on the alert. He knew what to expect if he wasn't. He fisted out the ball, and the backs cleared. The referee's whistle rang out sharply. It was time, for three of the School House forwards had fastened on Grundy like wolves, and seemed to be massacring him, to judge by Grundy's wild yells.

The spectators rocked with laughter.

"Get off the field, Grundy!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"What!" gasped Grundy, struggling frantically with his assailants. "I won't! You're mucking up the game! You won't even let me save it! I—Yaroooh!"

"Kick him off!"

Struggling in the grasp of many hands, and bumping on the ground at every step, George Alfred Grundy was borne off the field, and hurled over the ropes. There was a howl from the packed crowd there as he landed among them.

The trial match proceeded without any further assistance from Grundy. In THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 513.

the circumstances two half-backs were better than three. Tom Merry was bound to let Grundy lose him Wednesday's match; but there was no reason for letting him lose this one, and Grundy's magnificent play was finished for that occasion.

Not that Grundy intended to take his exclusion quietly. He gained his feet, and was about to charge back into the field, when half a dozen School House fellows in the crowd seized him, and rushed him away. Grundy was frog-marched to the House, and pitched in headlong. And by the time he had sorted himself out, the great Grundy was not feeling inclined for any more scrapping.

Without Grundy's aid, Tom Merry pulled his team together, and proceeded to beat the scratch eleven. Baggy Trimble, in goal, played up unexpectedly well. His head was still aching from the lesson Kangaroo had given him in goal-keeping. He let the ball through only once more, which was really creditable for Trimble. The trial match finished with the House three to two.

CHAPTER 9.

Gussy to the Rescue!

"I'VE got an ideah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that announcement in Study No. 6 in the School House at tea after the trial match.

If the swell of St. Jim's expected the announcement to be received with respectful and impressed attention, he was disappointed. Blake and Herries and Digby, and the Terrible Three, who were guests in No. 6, did not even seem to hear the announcement at all.

"It's rotten!" Tom Merry said ismally. "I know I've played the giddy ox, and you needn't tell me so again, Blake. You've told me twenty times—or is it thirty? Nearer fifty, perhaps. I'm going to resign the captaincy if we're beaten on Wednesday, so you needn't rub it in."

"Well, we won't hold you to that," said Jack Blake generously. "I dare say you can't help being a silly idiot, if you come to that."

"I wepeat, you fellows—"

"I shall hold to it, though," said Tom Merry. "We shall lose the match, that's a cert. We might scramble along with Trimble in goal, by arranging to thrash him every time the ball goes in. But Grundy—"

Tom Merry groaned by way of conclusion. The bare idea of Grundy as a member of the House team made him feel like groaning.

"I was wemarkin', you fellows—"

"There's only one hope," said Blake. "There may be an air raid, and a bomb may drop on Grundy. Short of that, we're booked for a licking on Wednesday."

"If you uttah asses will listen to me—" roared Arthur Augustus, quite forgetting the repose that should stamp the caste of Vere de Vere, in his indignation.

"You've got an ideah?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go and tell it to Grundy, then!"

"Weally, Lowthah, what would be the use of explainin' my ideah to Gwunday?"

"It would serve him right."

"You uttah ass—"

"Good!" said Blake. "Grundy deserves it, and we don't! Run and give Grundy a look in, Gussy."

"Pay him a long visit!" said Herries heartily.

Arthur Augustus' eyeglass glittered with indignant wrath at his study-mates. It often happened that Arthur Augustus

was, like the prophets of old, unhonoured in his own country.

"I insist upon you uttah asses payin' attention," he said. "I wemark your wemarks with scorn. I have an ideah for makin' up for Tom Mewwy's feahful blundahs!"

"Ass!" said Tom politely.

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Tom Mewwy, especially by an uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "You have landed the House team—the juniah House team—into an extremely awkward posish. It is up to this study to get the House out of that awkward posish."

"Something in that!" agreed Blake, with a nod.

"Bow-wow!" remarked Manners.

"I wemark that as a wiculous ejaculation, Mannahs! But to wesume. If Gwunday plays for the House on Wednesday, we shall be beaten. But he is bound to play, owin' to Tom Mewwy's fat-headed challenge to Figgins—"

"Cut it short!" remarked Tom.

"Wats! I have an ideah for neutwalisin' the dweadful effects of playin' Gwunday in the House team."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "Go it! Do you mean you are going to sing one of your tenor solos to him, so that he will have to go to a funeral instead of a football match?"

"Wats! If we play the New House a man short, we may get through all wight. But we are bound to play Gwunday, owin' to Tom Mewwy's—"

"Get to the point, for goodness' sake!"

"I am gettin' to the point as fast as I can, Tom Mewwy, considewin' that I am bein' intewwupted by asinine wemarks. My ideah is to play Gwunday tied up!"

"What?"

"We are bound to have Gwunday in the team. But we are not bound to allow him to wush about wuinin' the game. My ideah is to tie his hands behind his back—"

"What?"

"And fasten a wope wound his silly legs—"

"Gweat pip!"

"And then he won't be at all dangewous, you see!" explained Arthur Augustus, evidently much taken with his brilliant idea. "We play him—accordin' to agweement. It was not specified in the agweement that he should be untied—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Of course, when he's woped up he won't be able to play, but he wouldn't be able to play in any case, as he can't play footah. He will be a membah of the team, howevah, and that is all the New House has a wight to expect. We will leave him loose enough to walk about, but no loose enough to wun about. He will have to keep off the ball. A footah captain has a wight to tie the hands of a playah if he likes, if the playah agwees—there is nothin' watevah in the wules of the Football Association to forbid it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar in Study No. 6.

Arthur Augustus' way out of the great difficulty took the juniors by storm. The swell of St. Jim's beamed upon the tea-party.

"You see, deah boys, it's a wippin' ideah. In case of doubt, you know, you can always wely on a fellow of tact and judgment, as I have wemarked several times in this study!"

"By the Kaiser's whiskers!" exclaimed Blake. "It's the idea of the century! It's a corker! Nothing against it, that I can see. We shall be playing a man short if Grundy's not allowed to do any damage, and we can beat the New House a man short!"

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows.

"Wouldn't it be a bit like wriggling out of it?" he asked doubtfully. "The agreement was to play Grundy—"

"Well, you'll be playing him, if he's in the team—"

"Yes, but—"

"Now, look here, Tommy," said Blake, "you've done enough damage! It's bad enough to play a man short in a House match. Gussy's idea is a corker! It will keep that dangerous maniac from doing any damage. I vote for Gussy's idea!"

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Digby. Manners and Lowther looked doubtful. They intended to abide by Tom Merry's decision.

The captain of the Shell wore a worried look.

The tying up of George Alfred Grundy would introduce an element of the comic which would be out of place in a House match. But Tom would not have minded that much. The bottling-up of the great Grundy might mean a victory instead of a defeat. But Gussy's scheme, brilliant as it was, seemed a little like getting round the agreement to play the duffer of the Shell. Playing a man was not merely letting him walk on the field without sharing in the game.

Tom shook his head at last.

"I trust, Tom Mewwy, that you do not intend to refuse to adopt my wippin' idea?" asked Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner.

"Can't be helped," said Tom. "I undertook to play Grundy, and the New House chaps would say I was crawling round it. Otherwise, I'd jump at the scheme."

"I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy!"

"Thanks!"

"And I think you're a howling idiot!" said Blake.

"Go it!"

Arthur Augustus frowned majestically. He was very pleased with his great scheme, and it had not occurred to him, at first, that it would be like getting round the terms of the challenge.

But on reflection the great Gussy realised the point, and he interrupted the somewhat personal remarks Blake & Co. were making.

"Pewwaps you are wight, Tom Mewwy," he said mildly. "I wegard it as a wippin' scheme, but pewwaps it would not be quite the thing, considewin' that you undahtook to play Gwunday—like a silly ass! I withdwaw my suggestion!"

"Hear, hear!" said Tom.

"Howevah, I have anothah suggestion to make. Let us awwange to keep an eye on Gwunday, and woll him ovah ewvery time he gets neah the ball. That will not be bweakin' the wules. We are entitled to keep a howlin' idiot off the ball, and pwevent him fwom wuinin' the game. You did not undahtake exactly to let Gwunday lose the match. I pwesume?"

Tom Merry brightened up.

"That's better!" he admitted. "Of course, we're entitled to keep Grundy from throwing the game away with his fool tricks, if we can. We'll pass the word round to charge Grundy whenever he gets going."

"Good egg!" said Blake, mollified. Blake had been rather roughly handled by the great Grundy in the trial match, and the suggestion jumped exactly with his ideas.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So long as Grundy plays centre-half, let him!" continued Tom. "When he begins playing the ox, we jump on him. I undertook to play Grundy as centre-half, not as giddy ox!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Right enough!" said Herries. "We'll charge him! Let him shove into me, that's all! I'll give him shoving!"

And so it was settled.

After tea Tom Merry confided the plan to the rest of the School House junior eleven, and the players concurred with wonderful unanimity.

Everybody, in fact, seemed keen to keep Grundy in his place.

From which it did not appear that George Alfred was likely to have a very enjoyable experience when he played for his House.

CHAPTER 10.

Good Old Figgins!

TOM MERRY was feeling a little anxious when Wednesday came round.

It turned out a fine, cold, clear day, first-rate for football, and in other circumstances Tom would have looked forward to the afternoon's match with great keenness and pleasure. But there was little pleasure in the prospect of the match as matters stood.

Trimble was certainly improving in goal. Drastic measures had been used with Trimble. He had a great dislike to having his head knocked against a goal-post. For that reason he bucked up amazingly. Clumsiness and fatuity could not be helped, but slacking was visited with condign punishment, and Trimble was already learning not to slack. And Racke's offer to stand him a stunning feed if he let the ball through every time was sadly declined by Baggy. The most stunning of feeds could not have consoled him for the handling he would have received if he had been detected slacking in the House match. The penalties promised to Baggy if he did not do his best were simply terrifying. And it was certain that Baggy would do his best, such as it was.

As for Grundy, threats were useless. Threats would only have made him more obstinate. The fellows had given up talking to him. Actions were wanted with Grundy, not words. And if he stepped over the line in the match, he was going to have actions, hot and strong.

So Tom Merry hoped for the best, but he was not happy. He felt bound to resign the junior captaincy if the match was lost. That price he had to pay for having been betrayed, in a moment of excitement, into unjustifiable swank. He did not want to resign, and most of the fellows, on reflection, did not want him to, either. But it was settled. If his reckless challenge to Figgins & Co. lost his House a match, he felt that he had no choice in the matter.

So Tom had plenty to think of that morning, and Mr. Linton found him a little absent-minded in the Shell Form-room in consequence.

There were lines for Tom Merry that morning, but it could not be helped, and Tom did not mind very much. Lines were little in comparison with the dismal prospects of the afternoon.

The School House footballers were early on the ground, Baggy Trimble being routed out, grumbling, from a corner by a fire.

Fellows began to gather on the ground from far and near. Grundy's performances in the trial match had been cut short by his being kicked off the field, but they had been very entertaining, as far as they went. Grundy was the great attraction in the present match. Owing to Tom Merry's reckless undertaking, Grundy couldn't be kicked off the field this time; he was bound to play the game through. Many of the fellows—especially New House fellows—looked forward to an enjoyable afternoon watching Grundy.

Fortunately, the rest of the team were in tip-top form.

The School House fellows punted the ball about while they were waiting for

the New House team. Kick-off was fixed for half-past two. Grundy stood looking on at the punting, talking to Wilkins—confiding to his chum the great things he was going to do in that match. Grundy was still dreaming of goals.

Wilkins said nothing. He was in agreement with the rest to put the stopper on Grundy when he went in for goal-getting, but he did not feel inclined to inform George Alfred of the fact.

"Time the New House were here," remarked Wilkins at last, interrupting the flow of Grundy's eloquence. "Why, they're not changed yet—that fat bouncer's in Etons!"

Wilkins stared at Fatty Wynn of the New House, who had strolled down to the ground, with his plump person attired as usual. Tom Merry spotted him, and came over to him.

"Why haven't you changed, Wynn?" he exclaimed. "Are you going to keep us waiting?"

Fatty Wynn smiled.

"They'll be along in a minute," he said. "Figgins is routing out one of the team from a smoking-party in Clampe's study."

"Oh!" said Tom. "Well, isn't it time you changed?"

"I'm not keeping goal this afternoon."

Tom brightened. If the New House were leaving out their champion goal-keeper the School House chances were considerably increased.

"Crooked?" he asked, with as much sympathy as he could possibly feel under the circumstances.

"Not a bit."

"What are you standing out for, then?"

"Taking a rest, you know," said Fatty Wynn affably. "Figgins's got another goalie for this match."

"Hallo, Lawrence! You not playing either?" exclaimed Tom Merry, as Edgar Lawrence of the Fourth joined Fatty Wynn by the ropes.

Lawrence smiled, and shook his head.

"No. Figgins's got another half this afternoon instead of me."

"Oh, good! I—I mean—"

"Hallo! Here they come!" said Fatty Wynn.

The New House footballers appeared.

Tom Merry looked them over curiously. To his astonishment he saw Clampe of the Shell and Chowle of the Fourth in their ranks.

The two slackers were looking morose.

Tom stared at them blankly.

Why Figgins should be playing those two hopeless duffers in a House match was a deep and baffling mystery. He was under no compulsion to play two passengers as Tom Merry was.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, in astonishment. "Suahly Figgay is not ass enough to play those two howlin' fumlabs?"

"All the better for us if he does!" said Blake, in wonder. "But what on earth is the little game?"

Talbot laughed. He thought he could guess what the little game was.

"Figgins is a sportsman," he remarked.

"I fancy he was only pulling Tommy's leg in accepting his challenge, and he's playing two duffers to level things up and make it a fair game."

"Bai Jove! If that is the case I wegard it as weally wippin' of old Figgins!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Good man!" said Levison.

Tom Merry greeted Figgins as he led his merry men on the field with a stare of blank surprise.

Figgins nodded affably.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Ye-e-es. But—but—"

"But what, my infant?"

"What's the game?" demanded Tom.

"Football!" said Figgins innocently.

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And his followers chortled. "You don't expect us to play cricket, I suppose, at this time of the year?"

"Rats! I mean, why have you left out your goalie and your best half to play two crass asses like Clampe and Chowle?" Figgins chuckled.

"My dear ass, you're playing two silly idiots in the School House team, aren't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, I'm playing two silly idiots, too! One good turn deserves another, you know. I was only pulling your leg," Figgins explained cheerily. "If you held to your swank, I intended to play my idiots to match yours all along!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. "I—I see!"

"Time you did!" grinned Kerr.

Tom Merry drew a deep, deep breath. He understood now, and he could forgive Figgins for pulling his leg over that reckless challenge. Certainly, rotten players as Trimble and Grundy were, they were not much worse than Clampe and Chowle.

"I—I say, Figgy, you are a sportsman!" said Tom. "But—but you're entitled to hold me to my bargain if you like. We don't climb down, you know, and you can play whom you like."

"Bow-wow!" said Figgins. "We shall beat you, anyway. Whether we do or not, I don't want to snatch a win."

"Bai Jove! I regard that as a very pwopah attitude, Figgins, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Figgins bowed almost to the ground in acknowledgment.

"If I had any doubts," he said solemnly, "they are settled now. After that, I feel quite easy in my mind."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Look here, Figgins," growled Clampe sulkily, "I'm not keen on playing in this match, and if that's the way you put it—"

"That's the way I put it," said Figgins calmly.

"Then I don't care to play!"

"My dear ass, you couldn't play if you did care to. But you're going to do your best."

"I suppose I can walk off the field if I like?" sneered Clampe.

"Certainly, if you want a football-boot to help you on again!" assented Figgins. "Quite your own choice."

"I've got another engagement for this afternoon," said Chowle sullenly. "I don't care for footer, anyway."

"You wouldn't!" said Figgins.

"Well, I don't want to play in this match," retorted Chowle. "That's plain, isn't it?"

"Quite. Anything more to say?"

"I'm not playing, that's all!"

"Will you take hold of Chowle's ears, Reddy?" asked Figgins. "Put him over, and bang his napper on the ground!"

"Hold on!" roared Chowle, in dismay.

"I—I say, I'll play if you like, Figgins, of course."

"Oh, all right!" Figgins turned to Tom Merry again. "Ready when you are, dear boy. What do you think of my two recruits?"

"About as good as mine!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Look here, Figgins, if you really mean this—"

"What I have said, I have said!" remarked Figgins solemnly.

"Well"—Tom hesitated—"you're a good sport, Figgy. And—and I take back what I said in your study last week, about being able to beat the New House with Grundy and Trimble in my team. There!"

"The amende honourable!" grinned Kerr.

"All serene!" said Figgins, laughing. "We knew it was only School House swank, of course. Now, then, we're ready!"

The two skippers tossed the coin, and the footballers lined up. Smith major was referee again. Grundy tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Just a word, Merry!"

"Shut up!"

"You see that Figgins is playing Chowle in goal, for some reason!"

"Well?"

"Well, that means that we can score as many goals as we like, with the forwards really well led!" said Grundy eagerly. "Don't you think you'd better take my place, and let me in as centre-forward? As matters stand, it's clearly your duty—for the sake of the side, I mean."

"Get back!" roared Tom Merry.

"Now, look here, Merry—"

Wilkins and Kangaroo dragged Grundy away.

"Wilkins, did you ever see such an obstinate idiot as that fellow Merry?"

Grundy exclaimed, in great exasperation, "When I've pointed out to him, too—"

"You—you chucklehead!" said Wilkins. "You chump! You frabjous jabberwock! You burbling, whiffing dummy!"

"Why, you cheeky ass—" began Grundy wrathfully.

Phoop!

The whistle went, and that very remarkable House match began.

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT.

If you are unable to obtain this publication regularly, please tell any newsdealer to get it from

Messageries HACHETTE et Cie.,
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CHAPTER 11.

Honours Divided!

PLAY up, School House!"

"Go it, New House!"

"Go it, Grundy! Ha, ha!"

All eyes were on the game when it started. Chowle and Trimble, in the opposite goals, stamped about to keep warm. Neither was likely to have much else to do, if the respective teams could help it.

There were loud shouts of encouragement to Grundy, but they all came from New House fellows round the field. Now that a House match was at stake, the School House crowd were not eager to see George Alfred begin his marvellous performances.

But the School House fellows gave Clampe encouraging shouts. They would have been glad to see Leslie Clampe emulating Grundy.

Clampe, however, was not thinking of that. His object was to walk through the match with as little exertion as possible. Clampe did not believe in exerting himself at any game more strenuous than banker or nap.

But Grundy was bursting with energy, as usual. As usual, he was prepared to play the whole game off his own bat, so to speak. The shouts from the spectators spurred him on. He did not discern that all his encouragement came from New House fellows. Their motive for it did not require much guessing, but Grundy did not guess.

He simply felt that he was called upon to play up and win that match for his House, and he meant to do it.

The New House forwards were in their rivals' half, attacking hotly, and Grundy defended valiantly. His defence took the form of charging left-back over, and

falling on right-back the next minute. Exactly what object Grundy expected to serve by these proceedings was a deep mystery, known only to Grundy himself. Figgins, laughing almost too much to kick, brought the ball right up to goal, and sent it in with a shot Baggy Trimble could not have stopped in ten years.

There was a joyful howl from the New House.

"Goal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Baggy Trimble, with an apprehensive glance at Kangaroo. "Noble, you beast, I—I did my best!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't kill the goal-keeper—he's doing his best!" chortled Cardew, in the crowd, and there was a roar.

"Mind you do, you fat villain!" growled Kangaroo. "Chuck that ball out and shut up, you grampus!"

"Look after that dangerous maniac Grundy, Kangy!" said Tom Merry, as the players went back to the centre.

"You bet!" said the Australian grimly. "I'm watching him now!"

School House kicked off, and the New House charged again, but this time they were well stopped. Tom Merry and Talbot and D'Arcy got through with the ball. Now was Grundy's chance. He made a terrific rush after Tom Merry, to hook away the ball and send it romping home. But before Grundy could charge his captain from behind, Kangaroo played up, according to arrangement. He charged Grundy.

Grundy gave a roar and rolled over, and the Australian landed on him—and sat there.

The game surged into the New House half, and Grundy was out of it. His valuable assistance could not be given. He wriggled and roared under the weight of the Cornstalk, but the important thing was to keep Grundy out of mischief, and Kangaroo did it. He settled a little more heavily on Grundy's chest, and stayed there.

There was a roar as Tom Merry kicked for goal. Chowle could not save that shot; in fact, he did not particularly want to. He kept his hands in the pockets of his footer shorts as the leather flew in.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah! Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern dropped back into goal, kicked the ball out, and then kicked Crowle. There was an indignant roar from Chowle.

"Yah! Wharrer you at?"

"That's what I'm at!" said Redfern, landing again with a heavy footer boot.

"Stop the next ball, my son! You can't keep goal with your hands in your pockets—you're not quite up to that, Chowle. Take 'em out, my son, or you'll get another—like that!"

"Yaroooh!"

Chowle kept his hands out of his pockets after that.

The footballers lined up again. Grundy, released by Kangaroo, had made a frontal attack upon the Australian junior, and to his indignation had been collared on all sides and bumped hard. Grundy was in a towering rage when he took his place again. It looked as if he was going to be roughly handled, if he did not let the other fellows throw the match away—as he regarded it. There was no doubt about the rough handling, at all events.

But Grundy was a stickler. As soon as play was resumed Grundy got going again. He succeeded in charging Talbot off the ball, and then he was charged himself. He found himself on his back, and the moment he staggered up he found himself on his face. Then Wilkins—his own familiar friend—sat on him while the game swept away, and did not get up till there was no longer any danger of Grundy chipping in. There was another

goal for the School House. Chowle seemed little better with his hands out of his pockets than with his hands in his pockets. But the score levelled up again when Koumi Rao got a chance at Trimble.

"Two to two!" grinned Fatty Wynn, watching the goal-keepers alternately with great interest. "It will be fifty to fifty at this rate!"

Fatty Wynn's prediction seemed on the way to being realised. Trimble was doing his best, in dire terror of the results if he didn't. But his best was not much use against the goal-kickers of the New House. He saved hardly a shot. It was only a question of getting through for the New House, and Grundy's marvellous play at centre-half made the getting-through a much simpler proposition than was customary.

On the other hand, Chowle was an equally easy victim, and Clampe, in the New House half-back line, was as good as an open gate. Clampe spent most of his time being charged about and gasping for breath. Grundy spent most of his in being charged over and sat on. And the two goal-keepers were constantly occupied in watching the ball pass them into the net.

When the whistle announced the close of first half, the score stood at five for the School House and six for the New House, a score that was sufficiently remarkable for itself.

And there was still a half to play. In the second half, Grundy made one more attempt at brilliance, and he was charged and hustled and bumped and rolled over at such a rate that he simply hadn't any breath or energy left to play with, and he was quite quiet after that. Clampe, by that time, had limped off the field and collapsed.

The game was fast and furious. As football, it was not quite up to House-match level, but it was full of push and go, at all events. And the goals came along merrily.

With five minutes to go, New House stood at ten to the School House nine. The crowd were husky with laughter. In the last few minutes Tom Merry & Co. made a hot attack, and the ball went in—smiting Chowle on the nose, and stretching him on his back in the New House goal.

Then the whistle went.

"Ten to ten!" said Fatty Wynn, almost weeping. "Oh, my hat! What a game!"

"What a game!" muttered Cardew, wiping his eyes. "A game like that on the cinema would bring down the house!"

The footballers came off, gasping a little. The match had ended in a draw, with a remarkable score. Perhaps never before had 10-10 been registered in a game.

"Well, we drew with them!" Baggy

Trimble remarked. "Lucky for you fellows you had me in goal, after all!"

"A draw!" said Grundy bitterly. "A measly draw! If I'd been allowed to play my own game, the New House wouldn't have got ten to ten!"

"Bai Jove! More likely ten thousand to ten, deah boy!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

To which George Alfred Grundy replied only with a scornful snort.

The great match had been played. The School House had not lost, and Tom Merry did not resign. But that unhappy result would certainly have been achieved but for the good sportsmanship of Figgins, and it was agreed that the honours were with Figgy. George Alfred Grundy was somewhat morose after the match. But he came round, and genially assured Tom Merry that he could rely upon him—George Alfred—for the next House match.

To which Tom Merry's reply was the classic phrase:

"I don't think!"

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"JACK BLAKE'S HUN!" by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"JACK BLAKE'S HUN!"

By Martin Clifford.

It is some little time since we had Jack Blake as the chief figure in a story, though the sturdy and outspoken Yorkshire junior can hardly be said to have been pushed into the background. He is a general favourite, I know; and I am sure that the mere title of next week's fine yarn will arouse no end of interest. It is a line yarn—one of the very best, and you are sure to like it.

No, the Hun is not a spy. We have had some good spy yarns; but this is not one of them.

No, Blake is not kind to the Hun. Blake is Yorkshire. Haven't Yorkshiremen sense enough to see that kindness is wasted on Huns? You can't tell a Yorkshireman anything. I know it, for I have tried. Never mind that, though—Yorkshire's all right, and no one has more respect for it than I have.

No, I am not going to tell you what Taggles' old boots have to do with the story. Wait and see!

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

Next Week:

SPECIAL GREAT CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND."

Splendid value for twopence. Read the fine Rookwood yarns—there are two of them, one long and one short. Read the Highcliffe story.

"DE COURCY'S CHUM."

No one who is keen on "The Twins from Tasmania" can afford to miss this, though Flip Derwent is not in it, for Courtenay and the Caterpillar are. Read

"FRANK RICHARDS' CHRISTMAS."

By Martin Clifford.

This is not all. But this is worth

TWOPENCE.

surely? And the whole issue costs no more than that.

A BIT MORE OF "GEM" HISTORY.

If you are getting tired of this, you have only to say so. It's not as easy to write as the ordinary Chat matter, for it means a lot of looking through old volumes; but in some ways it is more interesting.

Towler and Pongo figured prominently in No. 68 (New Series), which was entitled

"Hip-Hip-Hooray!" The next story was "A Son of the Empire," and in it the coming of Kangaroo was recounted. In that which followed the firm of Noble, Dane, and Glyn was formed. The three have been staunch chums ever since. Then the story of a visit to Coventry—not the place where unpopular fellows are sent, but the real town, where they used to make watches and things, and cycles later, and motor-cars; but it is mostly munitions now, I believe. "Played Out!" told of a really great jape on the Gramarians. "Gussy's Guest" brought Bunter of Greyfriars to St. Jim's on a visit. Gussy had to settle up for what W. G. B. had borrowed after he left. In "Skimpole's Discovery" Towser had a wash—not his first or his last, of course, but rather an extra-special wash. Skimmy was mixed up in it—very much mixed-up in it. He had discovered that he could heal by suggestion—something a bit in the Christian Science way. Gore did not take it nicely; Gore had developed spots—paint spots—on the face through causing Towser to need a bath; and Skimmy developed a red and swollen nose through trying to be kind to Gore. "The Terrible Three's Air Cruise" was an exciting balloon-yarn. "The Boy Scouts' Rivals" introduced a patrol—I hope I have the correct word—of Girl Guides. Cousin Ethel was among them, of course. "Jack Blake's Plot" told the story of one of Kerr's impersonations. Then we had Glyn and Skimpole as "The Rival Inventors." "Twelve in Tow" was a motor-cycle yarn. "Tom Merry's Trust" and "The School House Secret" were exciting stories, in which a desperate foreign spy figured. More soon!

NOTICES.

Leagues, Amateur Magazines, etc.

William E. Clarke, 22, Egerton Street, Heaton Park, Manchester, wants readers for amateur magazine. Specimen copy, 2d.

R. Dewey, 53, Quick's Road, Wimbledon, S.W. 19, wants to form correspondence club for readers all over the world. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

County Correspondence Club wants more members—14-17.—R. N. McCormack, 62, Regent Street, Greenock.

British "Magnet" and GEM Club wants more members—papers, etc., exchanged—other attractions.—Hon. sec., 23, Morten Road, Colchester.

A. Dalken, 12, Vickers Street, Bishop Auckland, wants members—14-16—for exchange and correspondence club. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Chas. Gent, Beechwood, Gorebridge, Midlothian, wants readers for Thos. Bray's Journal. Specimen copy, 1d.

Will subscribers to "Magnet" and GEM Social Club please write to Albert Fletcher, 65, Netherfield Lane, Parkgate, Rotherham?

Correspondence Wanted:

By L. C. Barton, 212, Sheffield Road, Wadley Bridge, near Sheffield—with West Indian boy reader, about 16, to exchange picture postcards.

By Miss Dorothy A. Turner, Outram Street, Ripley, Derbyshire—with girl readers at home and abroad, to exchange postcards.

By Harry Broke, 318, Corfield Street, Bethnal Green, E.2—with boy in New Zealand.

By A. Davies, Coronation Villas, Handsworth Avenue, Higham Park, E.4—with boy reader, 11, in Essex.

By Edward Lester, 57, Range Road, Shanghai, China—with readers anywhere.

By A. E. Hancock, 117, Victoria Road, Handsworth, Birmingham—with readers about 14 in Australasia, China, or U.S.A.

Football—Matches Wanted by:

CAMBERWELL RANGERS—14-16—4 mile radius—away matches preferred, or at Clapham Common.—H. Richards, 11, Blucher Road, Chamberwell, S.E.

AINSBURY JUNIORS—14½.—Michael Gannon, 112, Stitt Street, Liverpool.

GRAHAM ATHLETIC—12-14—2 mile radius.—R. Hardesty, 21, Salisbury Road, Dalston, E.8.

BRITTON RANGERS—15-6 mile radius—want also three good players.—F. Lees, 7, Suffolk House, Rushcroft Road, Brixton, S.W.

HERNE BAY JUNIORS—16-18 mile radius.—D. Pottmann, The Studio, William Street, Herne Bay.

Yours Editor



THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA

Our Great New Serial Story.

THE CHIEF CHARACTERS OF THE STORY.

PHILIP DERWENT		} The twins from Tasmania—Philip (Flip) at Highcliffe, Philippa (Flap) at Cliff House.
PHILIPPA DERWENT		
PONSONBY		The leader of the Highcliffe nuts.
GADSBY		One of the nuts, and Flip's enemy.
VAVASOUR		Another of them—an empty-headed swell—hand in glove with Gadsby
MONSON MINOR		Yet another—sulky—disposed to the Gadsby faction.
MERTON		} Two more of the nuts—chums of Flip's—they share No. 6 Study with him.
TUNSTALL		
FRANK COURTENAY		Captain of the Fourth at Highcliffe—a fine fellow.
RUPERT DE COURCY		His chum, known as the Caterpillar.
THE GREYFRIARS FELLOWS		For further information see the "Magnet"
MARJORIE HAZELDENE		} Cliff House girls and friends of Flap.
CLARA TREVLIN		
PHYLLIS HOWELL		
MOLLY GRAY		

Ponsonby insists on being one of a Highcliffe party which is going to tea at Cliff House. Flap lets her brother know that the girls would rather not have Ponsonby as one of their guests, and Gadsby manages that the postscript of her letter, in which she says this, reaches Pon instead of Flip.

(Now read on.)

Fellow-Guests and Rivals.

"DASHED if I can make it out!" Gadsby muttered those words to himself.

It looked as though what Gadsby had intended as a bombshell for Pon had proven the merest dud.

The scheme had looked certain to succeed. Gadsby had not doubted that when Pon found on his mantelshelf the postscript from Flap Derwent's letter, asking Flip to bring someone else to tea instead of Cecil Ponsonby, whom the girls did not like very much, Pon would be simply furious.

He would take it that Flip had put the half-sheet there, in order to choke him off. And that would not be calculated to allay his anger.

But there had been no explosion at all!

He must have seen the thing. Gadsby had made certain of that. When Gaddy and Vavasour had gone in together, some ten minutes after Pon, it had gone, and Pon was looking unamiable. But he said nothing. That he should say nothing to his two study-mates was not wonderful; a snub of that kind is not the sort of thing one passes on.

But he had said nothing to Flip Derwent! And he must have thought that Flip was responsible. Who else could have put the postscript there?

Somebody else had, of course. Gaddy had. But Pon could not guess that.

Now he was going off to Cliff House with Derwent and Merton and Tunstall, apparently in the best of spirits and on the best of terms with all three!

It was enough to make an industrious and persistent plotter like Gaddy groan. And Gaddy felt like groaning, too.

Pon and Tunstall and Merton were all tastily arrayed for the occasion. There was nothing loud about them, of course. They knew better than that. But their ties were works of art, and their waistcoats were dreams, and the creases in their trousers were in the right places to a hairsbreadth, and their silk hats shone resplendent.

"You chaps," said Flip, who was much as usual, and consequently made quite an effective foil for his chums, "don't look a bit as if there was a war on."

"Well, they aren't fightin' at Cliff House, by Jupiter!" returned Merton.

"Oh, no! And I dare say the girls will have their best bibs and tuckers on in your honour. They'll turn up their noses at me—I'm like a brown sparrow among the

humming-birds. I only hope Flap won't rag me for not wearing a topper."

"You're goin' to see your own sister. We're goin' to see other people's. Makes quite a dashed lot of difference, Flippy," said Tunstall.

"I'm goin' to see Miss Primrose," replied Flip, grinning cheerfully. "She ain't half a bad sort, and she asked me, you know. You're the nice, quiet boys I was allowed to bring along."

"Dash it all, you can't say we're loud, Flippy!" said Pon.

"My hat, no! You are IT, dear boy. But you chaps have such silly-fool notions about girls, you know."

"Well, it suits me better to talk to Phyllis Howell or Clara Trevlyn than to be called 'dear child' and 'sweet boy' by the Primrose dragon, by Jupiter!" remarked Merton.

"Does she call you that, Algy? You'd better look out, old sport! She must be spooney on you!" grinned Flip.

"Rot! As if."

"Well, I'll bet she's every bit as spooney on you as any of the girls are!"

"Fathead!"

"Silly lot, ain't they, Flip?" observed Cocky, from under the cloth that covered his cage.

Cocky was going along. It occurred to Flip at this moment that labour is lightened by being shared. He passed the cage to Tunstall, who took it without protest, but very soon transferred it to Merton, who grumbled slightly, but still took it.

Within a couple of hundred yards of Cliff House Merton suggested that it was now Pon's turn to carry the burden.

At another time Pon would have refused point-blank. But this afternoon he was taking rather special pains to be amiable. He knew that all three of his companions were a trifle doubtful as to his welcome more than a trifle, perhaps, as it was likely that all had seen that annoying postscript to Flap's letter. Which of them had taken it to his study he could only guess. But he did not think it was Flip. He thought it more likely to have been either of the others, and would not have been surprised to learn that it had been done without Flip's knowledge.

The nuts' standard of honour was not high, and Tunstall and Merton had always been numbered among the nuts. Possibly neither was aware that he had changed in the last few weeks; and certainly Flip did not know that he had wrought a change in them.

But it was so. Things they might have done without a second thought a term earlier they would not do now. They would not have said so to themselves: "Flippy wouldn't do that." But that was the real reason. Flap had come to these two, who were not past saving, like a breath of pure air to someone slowly but surely being poisoned in a foul atmosphere.

They had escaped Frank Courtenay's influence only to fall under Flip's. Frank might have done more for them. He was stronger in many ways than Philip Derwent. But Flip was their chum.

Gadsby, who knew well enough that Flip was incapable of a mean trick, had yet not given Pon credit for knowing as much. But a rotter generally does know that about a decent fellow. Skinner of Greyfriars might pretend to believe Wharton guilty of meanness or treachery when there seemed ground for suspicion against him; but none knew better than Skinner that Wharton could not be guilty. And Pon's faith in Flip was firm.

Pon took over Cocky, then, without a murmur. But his face flushed and he bit his lip when, just as they reached the gate of Cliff House, they met the Famous Five.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were all very carefully and neatly dressed. But they were not nuts, and they resembled Flip in attire rather than the other three Highcliffians.

"Hallo, you fellows! This is an unexpected pleasure," said Harry Wharton politely.

But of the Highcliffe four only Flip Derwent seemed to consider that it could be styled a pleasure at all. He smiled. Pon frowned. Merton looked disappointed, and Tunstall sulky.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Taking the washing home, Ponsonby?" inquired Bob cheerily.

Pon's scowl in return was anything but cheery. Bob ought to have known better than to address in tones of familiar jocularity the great leader of the nuts. But Bob had never been given to discrimination of persons in such matters. It was even doubtful whether Bob regarded Pon as of any more importance than himself!

"It's only Cocky—my cockatoo, you know," said Flip. "I let these chaps carry him part of the way—as a little treat, and a reward in advance for prospective good behaviour."

"For—er—which?" asked Bob.

"Oh, I forgot you were only in two syllables yet, old scout!" said Flip. "I mean that I'm

hoping they'll behave nicely. Do you get that? I hope you will, too. But, of course, I'm not respon—beg pardon, of course, that one's too long for you. Let's see—

"I know that one, Derwent, because it has 'pon' in it, and I'm so keen on anything that reminds me of Pon. He's so cheerful and pleasant, you know. If I had my way I'd never go out to tea without him!"

Pon scowled again, and Merton and Tunstall felt that they did not at all agree with the irrepressible Bob. They would have preferred coming without Pon, and still more not finding the Greyfriars fellows there as fellow-guests.

"Let's have a look at the bird, Derwent," said Frank Nugent, anxious that there should be no collision between Bob and Ponsonby.

"Kiss me and call me Albert!" said Cocky drowsily.

"Ha, ha, ha! Will he say that, when we get inside?" asked Bob.

"Very likely. It won't make any odds if he does. Unless any of you fellows happen to be named Albert. It might be a bit personal then," replied Flip. "I shouldn't think Miss Primrose would be on, though."

"What scandal are you talking about our revered preceptress?" asked the clear voice of Clara Trevlyn from the gate.

"Preceptress, Cherry," said Flip, "means—"

"Do you know what a thick ear means, Derwent?" snapped Bob.

"I do! I think I should, having had the honour of scrapping with you, old chap!"

"We can't allow any scrapping here," said Phyllis Howell, who had caught that one word.

"And we wouldn't think of it," returned Flip. "We're peacefuller than a—than a giddy girls' school!"

"As we are not giddy," said Marjorie sedately, "we do not know how to measure your peacefulness."

Marjorie and Flip were both there, with two more of their form, Miss Alice Bell and Miss Katie Smith.

They all shook hands with the nine boys. It made quite a ceremony. The nine, with one exception, seemed rather constrained and shy. The Famous Five had often been to tea at Cliff House before, but never with Highcliffians as fellow-guests. They scented a plot to make the lions and the lambs lie down together, and were half inclined to resent it—especially as they did not know whether they were the lambs or the lions.

The one exception was Flip. Perhaps it was because he had a sister there, and thought a good deal more of her than of any the rest.

"Where's Hazel, Harry?" asked Marjorie.

"He—he couldn't come," Harry answered, rather falteringly.

It was not quite true. Hazeldene might have come if he had chosen to make an effort. But Wharton was not going to wound Marjorie by telling her that.

"Wants kicking!" growled Bob.

"Do you?" inquired Flip innocently.

"Shall I oblige?"

"Ass! I mean that chap Hazel."

"I'm not sure that I don't agree. His sister's worth a hundred of him!" said Flip.

"Bob growled again. He liked that, and yet he didn't quite like it. Derwent said it as if he meant it, and his good opinion was worth having. But—there was a "but" that Bob would have found a difficulty in explaining.

However, Derwent did not seem a spoony sort of fellow, thank goodness!

Flip joined them as they walked up the gravel path to the house. Miss Clara was denying with extreme indignation the suggestion that she and the rest had come to the gate to meet their guests.

"Well, I came to meet you, anyway, Flip!" said the girl from Tasmania, slipping an arm through one of her brother's. "I had begun to wonder if you were ever coming. But you haven't brought Cocky—it's too bad!"

"Pon's got him. Didn't you see?" returned Flip.

"Oh!" said Flip.

Bob Cherry was not the most observant of fellows in such small matters, as tones and glances, but he noticed something in the way Flip uttered that exclamation.

In point of fact, Pon had not got Cocky at that moment. Hurree Singh had taken the cage. He did not appear to mind carrying it in. Pon did mind, and felt almost grateful to Inky.

"That bird's a regular knock-out, Miss Derwent!" said Bob. "You see, even Pon's one of his admirers, and there ain't—ain't, I mean—so very much Pon admires. It's beneath his dignity to do it."

Flap and Ponsonby.

"I'm so glad that you two are friendly!" said Flap, in a pleasant, little, soft voice, that Bob thought ever so nice—nicer than anyone's but Marjorie's, perhaps.

"Why shouldn't we be?" said Flap. "These fellows have a nasty, low way of yelling 'Highcliff cads!' when they sight us; but, as far as I can make out, that's only because they don't know any better—not that they really mean to be as rude as they sound."

"But when I saw you the other day, you know—Oh, what am I saying? We agreed that you were not to know!"

Flap breathed hard. She seemed quite taken aback by the slip she had made.

Flip grinned.

"Did you girls really see the fight?" he asked. "Bonza! It must have been rather worth seeing—eh, Cherry?"

But Bob did not feel as Flip did.

"I say, Miss Derwent, did Marjorie see?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, she didn't want to see. She wouldn't look at first. But she couldn't help it, after a bit."

"I wish Marjorie hadn't seen!" said Bob, in a low, troubled tone.

Flip squeezed his sister's arm. That squeeze meant, "Say something nice!" Flip didn't feel in the least inclined to chip Bob. He realised that only deep feeling could have caused that trouble in his voice.

And Flap played up.

"You musn't think Marjorie has any lower opinion of you because of it," she said. "She thinks a lot of you, I know; and we all felt that it wasn't so bad, because you and Flip didn't seem savage. Of course, you hurt each other, and I'm afraid you weren't sorry; but it was all fair play, and when you shook hands we knew it was all right."

"I don't see how Marjorie can think much of me," said Bob dismally. "I'm only a rough, silly ass, without two ideas in my napper, and she's no end clever, besides being the nicest girl in the world!"

"That's just how I feel about her," said Flap brightly. "I'm sure we shall be friends. And I like to like Flip's friends, you know."

She spoke a little wistfully, for she was thinking of Ponsonby. Had Flip read that postscript? She supposed he must have done, and that he had not been able to get out of bringing Pon. But he might have said something, she thought.

But, no. After all, he could hardly say anything before Bob Cherry, who was not Highcliff. And he counted Pon a friend. She wished Bob had been in Pon's place.

Now they reached the wide door, and Miss Primrose was there to welcome the visitors.

Miss Primrose might have her queer little ways, and she certainly did look a back number, as Pon whispered to Merton. But she was a rare good sort. Not many schoolmistresses would have given as hearty a welcome as she did to a small crowd of boys.

The Head of Cliff House was no believer in keeping boys and girls apart. But she would have frowned upon the mixed hockey practices—had she known them. As yet, however, she did not know. That was to come!

She greeted them cordially, but was especially nice to Flip and Harry Wharton.

"And where is Peter Hazeldene?" she asked.

Harry had to say that Hazel could not come, well knowing that he might have come had he made an effort. Harry did not like it; but it could not be helped.

"Oh, and is that the wonderful bird, Philip?" she asked Flip, as Inky put down the cage.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Flip, whipping off the cloth.

"Kiss me, and call me Albert!" said Cocky shrilly, cocking a knowing eye at Miss Primrose.

"Dear me! He is really—Still, it is only a phrase he has picked up, of course," said Miss Primrose, looking down at him in rather a flustered way. Kissing was not, in her opinion, a topic of conversation to be encouraged.

"Cheer up, old girl!" said Cocky.

Even that Miss Primrose took in good part. Flap made a diversion by producing pea-nuts, which was fortunate, for some of those who heard could not have restrained their giggles much longer.

"Hallo, Algy!" said little Molly Gray, putting out a small brown hand to clasp Merton's. "Algy and I are palth—I mean, friendship—at home, Miss Primrose, you know."

"I am very pleased to hear it, Molly," Miss Primrose replied.

"She'll kiss you in a minute, Algy!" whispered Pon.

Merton turned impatiently upon him.

"Oh, keep your dashed remarks to yourself, Pon!" he said hotly, though he took care that his tones should not carry too far. "If you mean the kid, it wouldn't be the first time, and I wouldn't care who saw it! She is a little brick! And if you mean a joke against Miss Primrose—well, my notion is that this isn't the place or the time for it, that's all!"

"Didn't know I was comin' to a dished Band of Hope meetin'!" snarled Pon.

"Well, no one wanted you to come, an' if you don't enjoy it that's no one's fault but your own!"

But Pon had made up his mind that he was going to enjoy himself if possible. He particularly wanted a talk with Flap. He might suspect that she had no special desire for a talk with him; but that made no difference. Cecil Ponsonby had a very high idea of his own good looks and the fascination of his manners; and he was confident that he could talk Flip's sister round.

He waited his chance, and it came!

Half a score or so of the girls, including Molly Gray, were allowed to entertain their guests to tea without supervision. Miss Primrose knew that she could trust them; and, full of high spirits though they were, they never forgot that they were in honour bound to justify her trust.

Pon managed to secure a seat on one side of Flap. Tunstall was on the other, rather to Pon's annoyance. Marjorie, pouring out tea, had Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry as zealous aides. Merton devoted himself to Miss Clara, and kept up a running fire of chaff with her. Flip planted himself by the side of Molly Gray, who solemnly promised to keep him in order.

During tea the talk was pretty general. But when it had been cleared away something took Tunstall across the room to speak to Phyllis Howell, and Pon seized his chance.

"You're not very kind to me, by gad, Miss Derwent!" he said pathetically.

Flap had an uneasy feeling that all through tea she had been turning the light of her countenance upon Tunstall and away from Pon. After all, Cecil Ponsonby was a guest, though an unwelcome one. And he was Flip's chum, though Flap would much have preferred that he should not have been.

But on both scores it was impossible for her to be rude to him.

"Well, I don't suppose you want me to be, do you?" she said.

"Oh, but I do, by gad! An' why shouldn't we be friendly? I'm not an absolutely repulsive chap, Miss Derwent, am I?"

"Of course not," replied Flap. What else could she say? And Ponsonby really was not repulsive in the least—as he seemed then. But some instinct for discriminating between the false and the true had been given to Philippa Derwent. Flip hadn't it.

"You've been rather rough on me, you know," went on Pon.

"I? Oh, but—"

Flap had to stop. All her instincts were for frankness and truth. She could not say that she was not conscious of having been set against the fellow whose smooth voice she hated.

"Yes, by gad! You can't deny it, you see."

"I—oh, really, I don't see what good it will be to either of us to argue about it!" said Flap, quite distressed. She looked over towards Phyllis Howell. Phyllis would have been a tower of strength at a time like this. But she was still talking to Tunstall, and she failed to see Flap's appealing glance.

Pon saw it, though.

"Oh, hang it!" he said. "Don't send out S.O.S. signals for help, y'know, Miss Derwent! I'm not so terrible as all that."

"I—well, then, I did look at Phyllis. But—"

"I'm Flip's chum, y'know. An' you're so like the old chap that I can't help feelin' fond of you—in a perfectly respectful way, you understand."

But his bold eyes were not respectful, and his manner made Flap very uncomfortable, Algy or Fred Tunstall would never have talked like this.

"Yes, I know Flip likes you," said Flap desperately.

"But you'd rather he didn't?"

The girl hesitated. Pon was pressing her cruelly hard.

But frankness seemed best to her.

"I don't think you should have asked me

that," she said. "But, as you have, I can't help owning you are right."

"What's the dashed reason for it?" Pon was getting angry. The red flush on his face showed it.

"I don't really think you're likely to do Flip any good!"

The girl's eyes flashed as she spoke.

"An' you think that he's such a poor, weak rat that I can lead him astray by liftin' my finger, I suppose?" Pon sneered.

"No, I don't! I've lots of faith in Flip. But when he's fond of anyone he is not hard to influence."

"An' he's fond of me, eh? I believe you're right there. Perhaps you'd be surprised if I told you that Flippy hates this Pharisaical attitude you've taken up against me?"

"I'm not a Pharisee! But I dare say Flip doesn't like it."

"He hates it, I tell you! Look here, when you wrote that letter warning him against me—"

"What? Oh!"

If Pon had struck her Flip could hardly have been more cruelly shocked.

That Flip should have shown that letter to Pon! It was treachery—and yet—no! Flip could not be treacherous. But he had been unkind, disloyal!

Flip had not shown the letter to Pon at all. It was through Gadsby that Pon had seen it—just as it was through Gadsby that he had in the P.S. to Flip's note of the day before. At how could the girl guess that?

"If you doubt that I've seen it, I can prove it," said Pon. "I have it in my pocket now. In two halves—Flip slit it across in his rage. And then yesterday—was it quite the fair thing to ask him to bring Drury instead of me? Was that playin' the game, by gad, Miss Derwent?"

"Oh!"

It was all Flip could say. The tears were in her eyes. Pon saw them, and took them as a sign that she was giving way.

"I don't want to do Flip any harm," he said, and the anticipation of triumph made his tone gentler. "I'm not a plaster saint like Wharton an' Courtenay, by gad! But I'm a gentleman, I hope, an' old Flippy's my best chum! I'd cut my right hand off before I'd hurt him on my honour I would, Miss Derwent! An' he's done me good, too, Flip has. He's straight every way. Some of the fellows who make prim mouths an' pose ain't, y'know."

Flip did not like that last sentence. But she was moved. Pon had scored in suggesting that Flip had a good influence over him. And, after all, wasn't that as likely as that he could influence Flip for evil?

Flip was headless in some ways—over-full of self-confidence; but he was not weak.

And Flip did not know how little it amounted to when Cecil Ponsonby invoked his honour. Rupert De Courcy, hearing, would have said that he liked not the security!

"If that—oh, but Flip shouldn't have done it—he shouldn't!"

"I've gone wrong, I see. I oughtn't to have given old Flip away. But it's not so easy to know what to say to a girl. I've never cared a lot about being friendly with one before. But you're different from all the rest, an' you're Flippy's sister—that counts!" "I suppose I mustn't say anything to him about it; but it's hard. Flip and I haven't gone in for having secrets from one another, you know. But it wouldn't be fair to let him know you have said anything. He would be angry with you."

"Ah, so you'll say nothin'—keep it back, though you know it might force a quarrel between us, when a quarrel is just what would suit your book best? By gad, you're a brick, Miss Derwent! Flippy himself could not be more generous, an' he's by long odds the most generous chap I know! I didn't dream girls were ever like that."

Pon had played his hand well. Flip realised with some alarm that something very like a secret understanding had been established between her and him.

"It was a perfectly innocent one; but even so she disliked it."

But while she was still trying to find words to repudiate it without hurting the tender feelings of the sensitive Pon, Phyllis came up—reinforcements too late!

Pon was discreet. Pon mizzled. It was not a sufficiently decisive victory to justify him in an attempt to push it further.

But he counted it a victory for all that.

"You seem to have been getting on with Ponsonby quite well, Flip," said Phyllis.

"Oh, I don't know! Yes, perhaps. I couldn't be rude to him, of course. And he isn't quite so bad as we thought him."

After the Tea-Party.

THE time had come for the guests to depart. Ponsonby had not come near Flip again meanwhile. She was glad of that. But she had seen little of Flip, either. The other girls and the Greyfriars fellows had hindered that, quite without intending to, of course. Flip was pleased to see him so popular; but she had missed him, and no one else could make up for that to her. Altogether Flip had enjoyed the tea-party rather less than anyone else there.

She had not expected that—not even when she had seen Ponsonby with the rest. Flip had been quite his old frank self while he and she and Bob Cherry had talked. It seemed almost impossible that he should be hiding anything from her.

And yet she could not doubt that he had shown Pon her letters!

As a matter of fact, Flip was hiding something, though he had forgotten all about it until he saw her with Pon. There was the game of nap. It did not weigh heavily on his conscience; but he knew that Flip would worry about it no end. Girls were like that; they would set up their very limited wisdom in opposition to that of a fellow who knew quite well how to take care of himself, and was not the least in the world likely to fall a victim to the gambling craze.

But Flip felt a twinge of remorse at keeping a secret from his sister.

He chose an odd way of making up for it. "Have you forgotten Cocky, Flip?" asked Flip, when good-byes were being exchanged.

"Not exactly. I reckoned it was your turn to have him now for a bit, old girl," he said.

"Oh! Are you sure you can spare him, Flip? And what will Algy and Tunstall say? And I must ask Miss Primrose, of course."

"I suppose you must; but you needn't worry about asking Algy and Tun," replied Flip, with a grin.

Miss Primrose gave a ready assent. She was very fond of Flip, and Cocky had conducted himself with great propriety since his first slight outbreak. He had not asked to be called Albert again, and had foreborne from mentioning kissing.

Flip came back with her cheeks aglow. But the colour faded from them, and her eyes grew very wistful as she remembered about Pon and those letters.

But she might not speak to Flip about it. Probably he had meant no harm. She would try to think that. And, anyway, she had as good as promised Ponsonby that nothing should be said.

"Good-bye, old girl!" said Flip, and kissed her before them all, heedless what Miss Primrose or anyone else might think.

But Miss Primrose did not seem to mind. It would have been otherwise if any of the rest—but the rest managed to look as if they would never have dreamed of such a thing.

Pon's parting from Flip was not lacking in impressiveness.

He held her hand longer than was necessary, and looked as if he felt confident that there was quite an understanding between them now.

Outside, he proceeded at once to put up the backs of the others—every one of them, though some were more annoyed than the rest.

"Dashed big privilege bein' a brother, by gad!" he said. "Wish I was one! Why didn't you kiss 'em all round, Flippy?"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Flip.

"Throwin' away chances—eh, what? went on Pon. "What do you chaps think?"

"I think I'll punch your head, Pon—no, I know I shall punch your head—if you don't mazzle yourself!" snapped Bob Cherry, his fists tight clenched in the darkness.

"So do I!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, dash it! What have I done now?" growled Pon, in mock dismay. "Such a pity, when all was peaceful an' calm an' bright, too! I never know how to take you fellows; you make me feel old in vice, ty gad!"

"So you are!" growled Johnny.

"Thanks, Bull! Quite flattered. I assure you! Wharton, you don't speak. How's that, by gad?"

"Because I don't care to discuss the matter with you, Ponsonby!"

"Oh, don't be alarmed! I'm not trespassin' on your preserves! I don't want to, Miss Hazeldene is too angelic for my taste."

"If you sneer at her again, I'll knock you down!" flashed Harry.

"Hanged if I'm going to wait till he does it again!" roared Bob. "Once is enough for me! Put your fists up, you cad!"

"Easy on, Bob!" protested Frank Nugent. "It's too dark to fight, and I don't think myself that it's worth while. We all know what Ponsonby is. Nothing he says can touch Marjorie. She's too far above him for that!"

"Perhaps the nobleman from the East will have a trifle more sympathy with my views?" sneered Pon. "In his country they don't put anythin' an' everythin' that happens to wear a skirt on a dashed pedestal, by gad!"

"If you referentially indicate me under that titlefulness, Ponsonby, I have only fully to say remarkably that it will afford me the honourable pleasurefulness to punch your ludicrous and disgusting head!" said Inky.

"Shut up, Pon!" snapped Merton. "If you are a cad in grain you needn't go out of your way to advertise the fact, by Jupiter!"

"My hat, Algy, you're only making it worse!" growled Flip. "Pon was only joking. It ain't just my sort of joke; but I don't believe he meant any offence to anyone."

"You don't know Ponsonby, Derwent!" said Harry hotly.

"Thanks, Wharton, but I fancy I know him rather better than you do."

"I'm goin' to give you a dashed good hidin', Merton!" gritted Pon, in tones of concentrated venom.

"Oh, crumbs! What's happened to get all you chaps on edge like this I can't make out!" said Flip.

"I'm not so dashed sure you can!" said Merton coolly. "You're welcome to try, though. Good-night, you Greyfriars fellows! You'd better leave us to our little squabbles. No need to draw you into them, y'know."

If Merton could have seen the faces of the Famous Five he would have perceived that all of them were expressions of amazement. They had not expected this from Merton. They knew him for a far more decent fellow than Pon, it was true. But he was one of the nuts; and chivalry was a quality they did not hope for from nuts.

"You can't fight here," said Bob, breaking a momentary silence. His voice sounded uneasy. Bob felt sure that it was his job that Merton was taking on. He also felt pretty sure Merton would be licked. And that seemed a pity—though Bob had never before felt thus at the prospect of any of the nuts getting a hiding.

"Don't you worry, Cherry, old son!" said Flip easily. "They're not going to fight here, or anywhere; I'll see to that."

"Oh, will you?" growled Merton.

"Good-night, you fellows!" said Tunstall, rather pointedly.

There seemed nothing for it but to go, and the Famous Five went.

"You two asses!" snorted Flip, when their good-byes—none of them coupled with the name of Pon—had died away in the darkness.

(To be continued next week.)



NOTICES.

Football—Matches Wanted by:

- CRAIG VIOLET—15-18.—Robt. McIloney, 5, Ravenscraig, by Motherwell, Lanark.
- MOLYNEUX ATHLETIC—14-4 mile radius of Wormwood Scrubs.—E. E. Day, 44, Molyneux Street, Edgware Road, W.
- MILLMARTON—16-17.—W. F. Jennings, 35, Hungerford Road, N. 7.
- SOUTHFIELDS JUNIORS—15.—A. Holloway, 127, Lavenham Road, Southfields, S.W. 18.
- HAMMILL ATHLETIC A.F.C.—16-5 mile radius.—Thomas Bond, 67, Scott Street, Warrington.

Players Wanted by:

- A Sefton Park club.—Apply Ernest Jones, 6, Scholar Street, Sefton Park, Liverpool.

Back Numbers, etc., Wanted.

- By Kenneth Bean, 722, Anlaby Road, Hull.
- "Magnet," No. 472.
- By O. Spence, 11, Lochlea Road, Newlands, Glasgow.
- "Boy without a Name," "School and Sport," "Rivals and Chums," "After Lights Out"; also GEM, Nos. 100-400.
- By H. Lampard, 121, High Street, Stevenage.
- "Boys' Journal," 17-27.
- By Bernard F. Smith, 17, Castle Road, Bradford.—GEM, any numbers 1-480—clean.
- By Miss D. Harrison, 43, Millgate, Newark.
- "D'Arcy Minor's Bolt."
- By Wilfred Wesley, High Street, Warsop, Notts.—Cheap pair of footer boots, size 5, State price.
- By John Byworth, 8, Duff Place, Camberwell, S.E. 5.—"Tom Merry's Minor," "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "Bob Cherry's Backing-Out," and "The Toof."