

THE CHAMPION OF THE SHELL!

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



CHESS UNDER DIFFICULTIES!

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A MAGNIFICENT, NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY
OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

THE CHAMPION OF THE SHELL!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

To Run or Not to Run!

"NOW, then, Masters?"
Tom Merry and Monty Leather looked into Study No. 11 in the Shell.

They were in overalls, and looked remarkably fit. Masters was in his blue, and was seated at the study table, with his eyes fixed upon a chess-board, and a deep wrinkle in his brow.

His chair swayed him indignantly. "Why haven't you changed?" demanded Leather warmly.

"We're ready, sir!" said Tom Merry. Masters of the Shell did not even look up.

"The wrinkle in his brow deepened a little, that was all."

Randomly his thoughts were far away.

There were half a dozen pieces and pawns on the chess-board, and Masters was apparently worrying out an end-game.

Perhaps he had his piece in a fix. If so, Monty Leather got three out of the difficulty, for he caught the board by the corner, and turned it over under Masters' horrified eyes.

Pieces and pawns rolled on the table, and Masters jumped to his feet with a yell that would have done credit to a wild lion.

"Oh! Ah! You silly and You—"

"Waiting for you," said Leather calmly.

"You—yes—yes—"

Words failed Masters. He whipped round the table and made a furious rush at his chess, and got his head into chimney.

"Here, I say— Yarnish! Legs!" roared Leather.

"Punch, punch, punch!"

"Yarnish! Drag-moff!" shrieked Leather.

Tom Merry dragged Masters by the shoulders and pushed him backward by main force.

Leather staggered against the door, coughing.

"Oh! Oh, friends! You said better!" he howled. "Wherever you go to! Have you gone off your dot?"

"Leave me get at him!" yelled Masters.

"Order!"

"Let him come on!" howled Leather.

"I'll mop him up! TB—TB—"

Tom Merry pushed Leather back with one hand, holding Masters with the other.

"Order, order! No rage in the family circle!" he said soothingly.

"Look what he did!" gasped Masters. "A mad lion wouldn't have done that. I was working out the end-game and—"

"Now the end-game!" roared Leather.

"You silly chump!"

"You clumsy dunces!"

"You—yarnish!"

"You—yarnish!"

"Oh, dry up the pair of you!" or-

dered Tom Merry. "Look here, Masters, this isn't a time for chess problems. We're waiting for you."

"It wasn't a chess problem, sir!" snapped Masters. "I was working out the end-game. I had a dodge to spring on the Fourth in the chess contest. Oh, that barbarous Hun—that savage Varnish—that unspeakable Goth—"

"Enough!"

"The Kaiser himself couldn't have done a thing like that!" gasped Masters. "Even the Kaiser isn't capable of upsetting a board when a chap's working out an end-game."

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at, you dunces!"

"Never mind the end-game now," said Tom, suppressing his merriment.

"We're in training for the merry Marathon, you know. We've got to keep in form. Get into your clothes, and come out."

"How the Marathons?" said Masters crossly.

"What?"

"How the Marathons! I don't think I shall run in it, after all."

"You won't run in the Form Marathons!" exclaimed Monty Leather. "Are you joking? Of course you'll run. All the Fourth and the Shell are running in it. What do you mean?"

"Oh, run!"

"Why, even Backs and Crooks are going to run!" exclaimed Leather excitedly.

"Old Grandy has promised to shock them all they can't crawl if they don't run. Why, even Crooks's running, even Trumble! You failed, what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say," answered Masters dogmatically. "It depends on me to win the chess competition for the Shell. Training for the Marathons upsets my form for chess. Can't run the two things together!"

"Now, look here, Masters—" began Tom Merry.

"Back!"

"Push! You're a good man to run for the Shell, and you may bag the points for the Form. You've got to run."

"Oh, how some sense!" said Masters crossly. "There's better runners than I in the Shell—yes, Crabtree, and Talbot and Kargum, and even Grandy—even Leather!"

"Even me, eh?" shrieked Leather.

"Yes, an, even you. You haven't any brains, but you've got good legs. That's the end you developed at!" growled Masters.

"Why, you see—"

"Look at the points," said Masters.

"First man in the race gets twenty points, and second man home bags ten. That's how you've fixed it up with leaders of the Fifth, isn't it?"

"That's it," said Tom.

"Well, I can't get in both feet and second, can I?"

"Possibly not."

"Well, then, now look at the chess."

"—"

"Blow the chess!" growled Leather. Monty Leather was not a chess enthusiast.

"Look at the chess!" repeated Masters. "In the last round, myself against one of the Fourth, I bag twelve points and—"

"If you beat all six!"

"I shall beat all six."

"Blow it! He that bloweth his own trumpet!"

"Foolish! I shall beat all six if I'm in form. Then in the second round, beat two games out of three, I bag another twelve—"

"If you win two out of three against the best man in the Fourth."

"I shall win the first two, and the third won't be needed."

"Oh, comrades!"

"That's twenty-four points in all in the Form contest, bagged entirely by me," said Masters. "No good risking all that for running in the Marathons. Lots of fellows to win that for the Shell."

Masters' cheeks blushed at him.

The great Form contest at St. Jim's was going strong stronger than ever. The competitors were keener and keener every day.

Both Forms had had good and bad luck, and it was pretty clear that at the finish it would be a close thing.

The number of points awarded to the winner of the Marathons race would count heavily. So would the points in the chess contest. Masters was generally relied on in the Shell to win the chess business for his Form, though Kerr of the Fourth was a dark horse.

Masters was a modest fellow, Scotch and Masters were as far as the Pole, master. He never bragged, but it seemed to his chess that he was coming perilously near to it now.

"So the chess is a dead cert before it begins!" ejaculated Monty Leather at last.

"Oh, yes," said Masters calmly.

"Then we may as well ask the Fourth to give us the points without troubling to play the game. Then you'll be able to run in the Marathons," said Monty Leather sarcastically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Masters. "That's how it stands. I'm not bragging, you see! I know what I can do. You say, it won't do to let anything else interfere with the chess. Somebody else can win the Marathons for the Shell. Better the Marathons, anyway!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"You're wrong, Masters. To play good chess, you want to keep fit and keep a clear head, and you want actual chess exercises for that. Running in the Marathons will make you win at chess. Mugging over it induces will make you lose. So come along."

"Look here, leather—"

"Get a move on!"

"I'll go!"

"Take his other arm, Leather!"

"You silly goose!" snarled Masters, as his chess grasped him by the arms, and

propelled him towards the door. "I tell you I want to work out that end-game."

"This way!"

Manover, struggling, was propelled into the passage, and his grinning chums roared him along. There was no doubt in his chums' minds that Manover was the victim of self-deception. He wanted to work out chess problems, and so he had persuaded himself that he had better remain deluded and do it.

Tom Merry and Lotherer felt that they were bound to save him from himself, as it were. And then did.

The Terrible Three came along the passage with a rush.

It was sheer black that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth dropped out of Study No. 6 as the three passed the doorway of that famous apartment on their way to the stairs.

"Crash!"
"Vamoose!" roared Arthur Augustus, as he went spinning. "Whatevah—
Yamoose! Great Scott— Oh, wotday! I bump!"

Arthur Augustus rolled on the cold, unsympathetic linoleum. The Terrible Three staggered, but they kept on—Manover pulling one way, and Tom Merry and Lotherer the other. Tom and Lotherer won, and Manover was dragged on over the prostrate shell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up shakily as the three Shell fellows disappeared down the staircase.

"Gwogoch!" he gasped. "Oh, wotday! Where's my dulled organ? Oh, his jaws!"

"What the merry dickens!" Blake and Horrie and Digby stared out of Study No. 5. "Was that an earthquake or an air-cush?"

"Gwogoch!"
"What are you doing on the floor?" demanded Blake.

"Gwogoch! I am sittin' down! I regard that as a wilderness question, Blake!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Three hammers washed into me. I really do not know why. Gwogoch! Can't you give a fellow a hand up, instead of standin' there grinnin' like three idiotic gawwlers?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Blake & Co. gave their noble chum a hand up—Blake taking hold of one ear, Horrie of another, and Digby clutching his hair. Arthur Augustus rose to his feet quite suddenly, and even then, to judge by his remarks, he was not quite satisfied.

CHAPTER 2.

Blake's Little Game.

"ROTTERS!" growled Baggie Trimble.

Trimble of the Fourth ran an vicious and wonderful eye upon three juniors who were just disappearing through a gap in the hedge—a leafless yard or so from the gate of St. Jim's.

The three were Blake, Crooks, and Skops of the Shell.

Trimble was a terrible follower of that happy band of black sheep. Aubrey Blake generally tolerated him in a contemptuous way.

Trimble had had the honour of sharing in some of the secret feuds of the hall at the war-prefecture, Messrs. Blake and Blake. But, alas for Baggie! Those secret feuds were a thing of the past!

Tom Merry & Co. had cleared out Blake's man, who had lived in Rylands and helped his master to obtain surreptitious supplies of food in defiance of the ration. Since then the noble Aubrey had been on short commons—compunctively speaking. And when he was able to indulge in a gorge only his



Helping Baggie Up!
(See Chapter 1.)

very special chums were permitted to share, and Trimble was not one of them.

"Heave Baggie's wrath!"
"Rotters!" murmured Trimble. "Food-bags! Cash! Unpatriotic boasts! Fancy giving a pal like me the go-by! Yah!"

Blake & Co. were seeking for a shepherd's hat across the field, deserted now. They could have only one object in seeking such assistance—a secret lead, to be followed by cigarettes. And Baggie Trimble was left out in the cold—and he was the hottest and hungriest fellow at St. Jim's! No wonder he roared wrath!

There was a patter of footsteps on the road, and Trimble looked round. The Terrible Three came swinging along. Manover had submitted to the inevitable, and he was looking quite cheerful now. The fresh, keen air was good, and Manover had to admit that it did him good, too, after sticking in the study for a couple of hours over chess.

Talbot and Kangaroo, Wilkie and Glen and Davis, Green and Thompson and French, and several more Shell fellows had joined the Terrible Three for the practice run. Nearly all the Shell were very keen on the Marathon—one of the biggest events in the celebrated Form routine which was making so much stir in the old school.

The juniors came swinging by in a cheery bunch.

"I say, Tom Merry—" called out Baggie.

"Can't stop now!" answered Tom.

"But I say—"

But Tom was gone. Baggie Trimble caught hold of Talbot's arm as he passed, and hung on. The rest forged ahead, and Talbot of the Shell had to stop. He looked impatient, good natured as he was.

"Let go, Trimble, please!"

"I say, Talbot, it's important!" gasped Trimble. "Those food-bags—"

"Oh, bother!"

"Blake's got some more grub from somewhere—"

"Hang Blake!"

"They're going to feed. I think they ought to be stopped. You call the other chaps, and—"

"Bliss!"

Talbot shook Trimble off, and put on a quail to comfort his comrades. Baggie Trimble blinked after him wrathfully.

"Rotters!" he growled. "Nobody's patriotic at St. Jim's, grumping me!"

"Yah!"

Certainly the canners of the Shell were not likely to give up their special as better about what Blake & Co. might be doing just then.

Trimble stared across the field. The three shakers had disappeared into the shepherd's hat, and Trimble could guess how they were engaged. His mouth watered at the thought of it. The fat junior was greatly minded to march off to St. Jim's and unroll a packet to the boys.

But even Trimble stopped at smoking to that extent. Moreover, there would have been painful consequences from Blake & Co. afterwards. But to leave the precious trio in the enjoyment of their lawless spread was too much. As Baggie was not invited to the festive board, he made it a point to feel shocked at their appetitive selfishness.

"Rotters!" murmured Trimble. "I've a good mind to give them away! They'd look jolly if Redton or Kidney looked in on them! He gave a fat chuckle. "My hat! I'll jolly well startle them! I can imitate old Linton's voice, and he's their Form-master! He give 'em a start!"

Baggie Trimble squeaked through the hedge, and headed for the shepherd's hat. He approached it from the rear, in order not to be spotted by the precious trio within.

There was a murmur of voices in the

The Gem Library—No. 22.

but as Raggy approached the back of the little building on tiptoe.

Raggy backed close to the timber wall. There were many rifts and cracks in the dilapidated building, and, putting his eye to a crack in a board, Raggy had a good view of the interior.

Racks, Crooke, and Scrope were seated there on an old bench and a box, and on the bench, among them, were several open tin and a box of biscuits, and other necessities. Somehow, Rack's wealth had enabled him to obtain that supply, which was very far in excess of the regulations. It was probable that the cup of the Shell had been hoarding the tin of meat in some snug place ever since the ration had come in. Now the three were eating with keen appetite, each one consuming more than he was entitled to in a fortnight. This was better than the average tea in the school—from Rack's & Co.'s peculiar point of view.

"I say, this is tip-top," Crooke was remarking. "Have you got anything else put away, as well as this little lot, Rack?"

"Don't ask questions, and I'll tell you as best I can!" answered Arthur Rack gravely. "You must have bought up a lot of stuff in time," remarked Scrope. "I wish my father was making war-profits! I'd do the same!"

"If you don't keep a civil tongue, Scrope, you won't see any more of the grub, anyhow!" growled Rack.

"My dear chap, I envy you, that's all!" said Scrope slyly. "I suppose everybody would envy war-profits if he could. Those who can't, pretend to make out that it's wrong—what!"

"Well, that's about the size of it!" answered Rack, and he spoke sincerely enough.

That was the opinion Rack had of human nature! Like his father, the profiteer, he judged others by himself.

"We shall start facing a lot, if we're going in for the Marathon," remarked Crooke.

Rack gritted his teeth.

"I've said I won't do it," he said. "You fellows promised me, too, that you wouldn't take part in their rotten Form contest."

"Well, what's a fellow to do?" said Crooke, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Grundy is going to fight every fellow in the Shell who starts me. I'm not taking on Grundy. Too hefty for me. Of course, I shan't run; but I'll start with the rest."

"Same here," said Scrope. "So will you, Rack. What's the good of pretending that you'll stick it out, or fight Grundy? You won't."

Rack seethed angrily. He knew that that was the truth. It was agreed that a fellow was not to be forced into the Form contest if he didn't choose; but Grundy explained that he wasn't forcing anybody. He was simply going to fight every Shell fellow who stood out in the Marathon race. He had a right to do that if he had.

That was enough for Rack & Co. They knew that they had to start with the rest, at least—though it was precious little running they were likely to do. And it was a bitter pill for Rack to swallow—for he had set his face against the great Form contest, affecting to despise the whole thing as beneath his lordly notice, and had loudly announced that he would not take the slightest notice of it.

"You'd have to start, Rack," said Crooke, with a nod.

"I may just as well off from the starting place," said Rack.

The shouts greeted.

"But I'll make 'em carry for it!" said Tom Cox Limerick.—No. 138.

Racks, between his teeth. "I was going to let their rotten competition alone! As they're forcing me into it, I'll make them sorry. I'll see that the Shell loses points."

"You can't!" said Crooke. "Nobody expects you to win the Marathon."

And Scrope chuckled at the idea.

"I'm not talking about the food now! I'm talking about the fool chess!" said Rack severely.

"You're not playin' chess for the Shell."

"Manners is," said Rack. "The first round comes off to-morrow. Manners plays six games at once. After that, in the second round, there's twelve points on a single-handed contest—Manners against his best man in the Fourth, added by two others."

"Someday I can see it!" said Scrope, with a stare. "The Fourth will put in Kerr, with three of the Fourth to play with him. They'll win very likely. Any way, you can't make Manners lose."

"That's all you know," said Rack, with an evil grin.

"How the things—"

Rack felt in his waistcoat pocket, and held up a little point. His companions stared at it.

"What on earth's that?" asked Crooke.

"Medicine."

"Oh!"

"It's half-hall," said Rack calmly. "It's part of a dropping-draught—quite harmless. A dose makes you sleep sound, even if you've got the toothache. Half a dose makes you sleepy and heavy-headed. Suppose Manners took half a dose, a short time before the chess—"

"My hat! He wouldn't!"

"Not if he knew it!" Rack slipped the little bottle back into his pocket.

"He won't know it, you see. I shall watch that."

"Here!"

"My only hat!" said Crooke. "Then—when he comes round to play Kerr, he will be off his head."

"He will be feeling too dull and heavy to play a fool like Trimble, let alone Kerr and his gang of advances," said Rack coolly. "He will be beaten hands down, and the Shell will win twelve points! That's their reward for forcing me to run in the Marathon! I'm rather a dangerous chap to drive into a corner!"

"By gad! If they knew—"

"They won't dare! You fellows can help me to get it through—it will be easy enough. Of course, nobody would suspect anything of the kind. Give me a match."

Rack lighted a cigarette.

Outside the school's hat, Raggy Trimble was breaking head. He did not carry out his intention of giving the boys a scare by violating the rules of Mr. Limerick, the master of the Shell. He retreated from the crack in the wall, his heart palpitating.

Rack's diabolical scheme for rubbing his Form of points in the contest shocked even Trimble a little—though he was not easily shocked. Perhaps he was all the more shocked because Rack had left him out of the secret feast. As he came back out of the large, Trimble grumbled.

"So that's the game?" he murmured. The better! He's going to draw Manners and make him lose—the old! Keep on all his grub to himself!—I mean, use patriotic heart! I rather fancy I'm going to make Rack very hot's checked me—rather!"

And Raggy Trimble rolled away towards the school, chuckling. He felt that he had the little Audrey in the hollow of his hand. True, he could not hope to extract anything from Rack as the price of keeping the secret—for if Rack was informed that Trimble knew, it was certain that he would drop the scheme instantly. But Raggy felt that such a secret ought to be worth some-

thing to him—and he turned it over very carefully in his hot mind. He could save the Shell from an unfair defeat—if he chose! Raggy felt a sense of unusual importance.

Raggy Trimble was in the doorway when Tom Manners & Co. came home, rudely and drowsily, from their run. He called in the way of the Terrific Three.

"You chaps had tea?" he asked.

"No, no!" said Tom.

"I'm coming to tea with you," said Raggy.

"Do!" said Manners. "I've got a cricket bat in the study, and you're welcome to the business end of it."

"Look here, Leather."

"Oh, dear of it!" said Manners.

"You'd give something to know some thing that I could tell you, Manners, wouldn't you?"

Manners stared at him.

"What do you mean, if you mean anything?" he demanded.

"I know what I know," answered Trimble, still more mysteriously.

"And that's precious little!" growled Manners. "Go and talk out to somebody else!"

And he pushed Trimble against the wall, and walked on.

Raggy gave an impatient yell.

"Yah! I won't tell you now! Yah!"

That terrible threat left the chums of the Shell quite unmoved. They went on to their study to a late tea, heading Raggy out at all, but as it happened, Raggy Trimble would never have been worth listening to for once—but as that had never been the case before, the Terrific Three naturally did not suspect it.

CHAPTER 3. One Against Six.

"I WATHAN feel that the Fourth will not score this time, dear boys!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a doubtful shake of the head.

Arthur Augustus felt that he had reason to be dubious.

For the occasion had arrived of the first round in the chess contest, which meant a great deal in the Form competition, Fourth versus Shell.

Manners of the Shell was taking on six of the Fourth; to play six games at once, and win them if he could.

The Fourth Form had picked out its champions with care—and had passed over Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

As Raggy remarked, he was not the fellow to put himself forward in any way—and he took it gracefully. But he naturally felt doubtful as to the consequences. True, Raggy was not a chess-player—but he had his sure that, by bringing his powerful brain to bear upon the matter, he would have done credit to the Fourth. The Fourth did not feel so sure, and as the word of St. Jim's was simply a "loser on in Vienna" for their captain.

Manners' task appeared to most of the St. Jim's fellows a terrible one. But Manners seemed confident. Manners was not a conceited fellow, and he gauged his own powers pretty well. Great chess champions would break nothing of playing twice as much as a common player, from table to table and making moves with a careless air, and winning the lot. Manners fixed his limbs at six-to make sure. He was prepared to play the best hand-chess in the Fourth, and he hoped to beat them. It meant twelve points for his Form if he did, and for every game he lost it meant two points for the Fourth; so that if he was beaten all along the line, the Fourth would score a dozen. But that was not of the question.

The champions of the Fourth were three from the New House, and three from the School House. The fastest wrote

Kerr, Koorai Rao, and Redfern. The latter were Julian, Levison, and Rayburn.

Ready No. 6, for some, were out of an important event—they did not claim to share in broken games. Gump, certainly, was willing to represent them in the chess contest; but Blake and Howie and Blythe had replied, with great unanimity, "Nuts!" to the suggestion. The selection of the six had been made very carefully, and every man of them the best chess player that could be found in the Form. Of the six, two were really good men. Kerr and Koorai Rao, the Indians. Kerr, certainly, was extremely good.

Tom Merry & Co., and the juniors generally, were not quite so keen on the chess game as an outdoor event. But a great crowd turned up, in the junior common-room in the School House, to watch the struggle. One against six was interesting, even in a game none of the fellows did not understand.

Manners cut in with Tom and Monty Lowther, looking very fit and quick. As a matter of fact, the training for the Marston had done Manners good. He was fitter than he would have been if he had stayed indoors mugging over chess. Blake and Crooke and their pals were in the arena, and Blake gave Manners a sarcastic grin as he came in.

Blake had a real pickle for Manners when the second chess round came off. Harry Trivette caught his look, and cried; he knew what it meant. But Manners was keeping the secret as far as he could.

Two chess-tables were set out, and two boards were laid on the big mahogany table, to accommodate the six games.

Manners sat on a corner of the big table, and put his hands in his pockets. It was barely possible that there was just the slightest trace of smug in Manners just then. To say is human. Kerr and Redfern and Koorai Rao, Rayburn, and Julian and Levison, sat at their boards, ready to begin.

Round them gathered the juniors, keen to watch, selecting which star champion they preferred to follow.

Blake was interested in the Form contest for once. Unless Manners proved the victor in the first round, Blake's chance for dishing him in the second and more important round would fall to pieces. For that reason Blake for once was desirous of seeing a champion of the Form successful.

"Tom!" grinned Monty Lowther. "On the full, Manners!" said Talbot, with a smile. Talbot was interested, too; he was a good player himself, though he had never thought of availing Manners' special provision by standing up for the Form at chess.

Manners frowned—or perhaps affected to frown.

"Pawn to king's fourth!" he said. The move was made for him.

Then it was up to Blythe to play, and the six champions of the Fourth reflected upon their reply move, with a due regard to the time-limit.

Those of them replied with pawn to king's fourth. But Julian chose the French Defence, pawn to king's third; Koorai Rao selected the Sicilian Defence, pawn to queen's bishop's fourth; and Kerr pitched upon the Pincetown Defence, pawn to queen's knight's third.

To the last three Manners rejoined with knight to king's bishop's third, intending to play the Ray Lopez opening to each case. To do this he needed pawn to queen's fourth; in Koorai Rao, king's knight to king's bishop's third; in Kerr, pawn to king's knight's third. Manners decided out those replies carefully, still sitting on the table with his hands in his pockets, the move being made for him by his friends.

And for the next had a dozen moves

Manners took only an occasional glance at the various boards, and sometimes replied without even looking at them.

After that he became a little more casual.

Redfern was the first to drop out, mated in seven moves. It was really going to a slip on Reddy's part, which Manners pointed out at once. It was not till the seventh move that Dick Julian had to give in, mated in two staring him in the face.

Rayburn of New Zealand was the next victim. He was rather good at chess, though not so good as he was at cricket, where he could beat Manners. Rayburn was mated in thirteen.

Three victims had fallen, and Kerr, Koorai Rao, and Levison remained. There was very keen interest in the contest now.

Levison minor stood by his brother's table, with Wally and Joe Frazer of the Third. Levison minor and Wally, being the sports committee, could not show favour to either side, but certainly Frank Levison was wishing very hard that his major would win.

But winning was no use! At the eleventh move Levison of the Fourth gave a rook's smile.

"I surrender," he said quietly.

Frank looked over the piece. It was some time before he could see why his major surrendered, but he detected it at last. Levison was mate in two, without hope, if he kept on.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther were smiling over cheerfully now.

Manners had beaten four of his opponents, and he certainly did not seem to have exerted himself unduly so far.

But Kerr and Koorai Rao were tougher antagonists.

The Jam of Bursledon was a good man at the game, and he was playing up from the Sicilian Defence in great style. Kerr was not so fortunate with the Pincetown, however, and his quiet, thoughtful face grew more and more serene as move succeeded move.

His chess, Eugene and Fatty Wynn, watched him anxiously.

"They had unbounded faith in George Francis Kerr, who was popularly supposed to be able to do nearly everything."

But Kerr, clever as he was, was not having the best fortune, and at the twentieth move he gave up, mate in one being sent to come.

"Five down!" murmured Monty Lowther, in great delight.

Blake & Co. looked serious.

This looked like a sweeping victory for the Sixth. But the Koorai Rao, the Indian, remained of the half-dozen champions of the Fourth.

But the Jam of Bursledon was playing remarkably well.

Manners had given up his way-going look. He was sitting at the last table, and his face was serene and thoughtful. It was clear that he was going all out with that game. Kerr, as he continued afterwards, had given him a twist, and the Indian junior was having better fortune than Kerr.

In a deep dip the juniors stood round the table, watching. School House and New House crowded together. Before the fifth, chairman of the sports committee, had come in to watch, and several other seniors were looking on over the heads of the juniors.

There was later breath in the common-room now.

The game had run on to thirty moves, and most of the pieces and nearly all the pawns were off the board.

Then returned to Koorai Rao the queen, two bishops, a knight, and three pawns, along with his king. Manners had queen, bishop, one knight, and one pawn. In the end game the knight was

more useful than the bishop, and this was a slight advantage; and though Manners had only one pawn against three, it was a passed pawn, and well up the board. Koorai Rao's pawns (counted as "passed," but were little an advance of their original squares. If it came to a pawn fight, Manners was very strong. And there was a deep breathing round the table when Manners forced an exchange of queens, following it up with giving away both his knights for one bishop.

Tom Merry's face fell a little, and Monty Lowther whistled softly.

Manners was left with a bishop and a pawn, against a bishop, knight, and three pawns. But Manners knew what he was about. The thirty-sixth move forced his pawn into a queen; that was what he had been aiming at. Koorai Rao raised his dark eyes and smiled at Manners.

"But Jones!" murmured Arthur Augustine D'Aery, under his breath. "Manners gets it, after all!"

Manners' success with the pawn gave that impression to most of the onlookers. But Koorai Rao was still considering the game very thoughtfully, and he made up all but the time limit before he moved again. In quick succession Manners swept off the pawns; and three, for more, Manners forgot his usual caution. Manners was not the fellow, as a rule, to yield to the temptation of post-mortem-ing, but the game was so well in his hands that he had yielded for once—and he repeated it.

The bishop followed the pawn off the board, and his queen was left to contend with bishop, knight, and Koorai Rao's final pawn. Black pawns were dislodged with the game, which had turned into a keen fight on an almost bare board. Manners was the stronger of the two, and even fellows who did not know the game well saw that all depended upon whether Koorai Rao could get his last pawn into the eighth square unscathed.

The struggle that followed was tense.

It grew monotonous for the onlookers, because Manners' plans, thought, and his move with long deliberation, and there was little to watch. But Kerr looked on with unflagging interest. It was a sight to watch the slow but sure progress of Koorai Rao's pawn up the board. Manners, considered at first, grew less confident, and more and more grim in expression.

He shrugged his shoulders at last.

The post-morteming had been his undoing, and he could have kicked himself for it. It was too late now. The Indian's pawn reached home, and was turned into a queen. From that point it was, naturally, a walk-over for Koorai Rao. Manners was not yet visible to the casual eye when Manners rose from the table.

"Your game!" he said.

Koorai Rao smiled.

"You made me a present of it," he said.

"I know I did!" grinned Manners.

"Kick me, somebody!"

"But Jones!" said D'Aery. "I think you played awfully. Manners—especially the way you mopped up the queen, was nice."

Manners gave him a look.

"Idiot!" he replied.

"Whoo!"

"Dum!"

It was a most ungrateful remark, as Arthur Augustine was commending the Sixth champion. But as Manners had lost the game for that unfortunate moment of weakness, when he had watched pawn, it was reasonable.

"But Jones!" said Arthur Augustine.

"I regard you as simply a spruce fellow, Manners. I regard you as—"

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was not equal to prevent of Budge & Co. He lagged away after the other runners, and the three sharks were allowed to escape.

When the packers came in, Budge made his first dash to Budge's study, and from that study these three came outside of it and searched for several minutes. George Alfred looked on, and smiled when he left.

Budge & Co. didn't. But in such a case it was impossible to satisfy everybody.

CHAPTER 3.

What Tom's Name.

BADGEY TRIMBLE inspected himself into Tom Merry's study at five to a few days later. The Terrible Three were having tea, an unusually plentiful tea, as Tom Merry had received a cake from his old gardener, Miss Priscilla Parrott. Miss Priscilla had made that cake herself, with such skill that it seemed quite as nice as the cake of the piping time of peace. And the chance of the Shell finished their tea with that cake with great satisfaction. After tea that day the second round of the chess contest was coming off—Manners against Budge and his helpers. The chess agreed that Miss Priscilla had shown extraordinary foresight in providing the cake along time in time to break up Manners of the Shell for the day.

Perhaps Budge Trimble had worried the cake. He had a wonderful nose for such things. He grined immensely as he worked in, and did not seem to see that Tom Merry was waiting to tell him.

"You fellows having tea?" asked Budge.

"Yes, had yours?"

"No, yet."

"Get it here, then?"

"The best is, then, old chap—"

"Do you want to feel the weight of my hand?" inquired the captain of the Shell.

"Nonsense!"

"Well, you will, if you call me 'Tom' old chap again!"

"If that's how you're going to treat a pal, Tom Merry, I may as well get out."

And Budge, with dignity,

"Just as you wish," agreed Tom.

"I say, that's a rotten cake!" and Budge, waving it hurriedly. "Just the kind I used to get from Trimble's Hall."

"Don't speak Trimble's Hall as an enemy, for goodness sake!" said Tom.

"Take a drink of the cake and travel."

Budge Trimble promptly snatched a drink of the cake—a very large drink—but he did not travel. Instead, he closed the door.

"I've got something to tell you."

"Get away!"

"Get away!"

"I came here in a friend—"

"Get out, then, as a pal pal!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Can't you face another man?"

Trimble blushed indignantly at the Terrible Three. His reception in No. 10 of the Shell could not be called flattering.

"Perhaps you'd rather I didn't tell you what I'm going to tell you?" he exclaimed wrathfully.

"Much rather!" said Manners indignantly.

"Do you think we want to hear the tale of the passenger. Run out!"

"Oh, all right! You can have twelve guineas for the Shell, and be blessed is you!" exclaimed Budge.

"Are you going to give me a tip about chess?" asked Manners suavely.

"I could give you a tip about the game," said Trimble. "Suppose you'd going to lose by that play?"

"What?" exclaimed the Terrible Three together.

Trimble looked very mysterious.

"I mean what I mean!" he said.

"You're not?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"If you dare to suggest that Budge or Figgins would play foul, I'll whip you!"

"He's potty," said Manners. "How could there be foul play at chess? There he went on to believe that the Fourth are going to try to shove extra pieces on the board, the stupid old!"

"I suppose that would be Budge's idea of getting an advantage at chess, the silly cheap!"

"That's true," said Budge. "Suppose a Shell chap was trying to snipe you?"

"How could he, father?"

"You might be in harm for the game."

"Oh! I'm in that harm."

"You might be when you come to play Kismet!"

The Terrible Three simply blinked at Trimble. What he could possibly be driving at was a deep mystery to them.

"How about the matter?" said Manners to him.

"Look here, Trimble," said Tom Merry. "What you're saying sounds like a silly little building. But if you've got any more to say, add it, and get it over. What are you driving at?"

"That's all," said Trimble. "With a bit more."

"Oh you are! Cheap!"

"I know what I mean."

"I say, what's that?"

"Well, when a chap's going to meet you from losing tricks, point in, the more honest you might do it. You've got a bit of a trick, and get it over."

"That's all," said Trimble. "With a bit more."

"Oh you are! Cheap!"

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"Oh you are! Cheap!"

"I know what I mean."

"I say, what's that?"

"Well, when a chap's going to meet you from losing tricks, point in, the more honest you might do it. You've got a bit of a trick, and get it over."

Manners rose to his feet, his face grim, and took Trimble by the collar.

"You can explain what you mean, Trimble," he said quietly. "If you're not going, I'll give you the beating of your life! Is Budge's up to some dirty trick, and you know it, tell us what it is!"

"Leggo!"

"Tell us, you fat fool!" said Manners, shaking him angrily.

"You owl! I—I came here to tell you, didn't I?" gasped Budge. "Leggo my collar! The fat old pal. Well, can't you tell me a good if I do you a good one? Oh good—good—turn down another, leggo!"

"Tell us, fat!" said Tom, also looking very grave. "It was clear by this time that the egg of the Fourth had found something out, and an event in the game ought to be too serious a matter for the Shell fellows to run any risk with it. If what you tell us is worth the quid, you shall have it."

"And if it isn't, you shall have a jolly good laughing time at a cricket-club, you snivelling little sniveller!" said Manners, in disgust.

"I say, that ain't the way to talk to a friend, leggo!"

"Get it out!" exclaimed Manners, shaking him. "Now, then, what's it that Budge's up to? What was he trying to do when he offered me grandmother's perfume?"

"Griggs! Leggo, and I'll tell you!" gasped Trimble.

Manners raised him, but he put his back against the door. Trimble had said for him to be allowed to escape without saying more.

"You mean it about the quid, Tom Merry?" gasped Budge.

"You!" snapped Tom. "Get with it!"

"What, all right?"

"Get it out, you fat old pal!" said the captain of the Shell impatiently.

And Budge got it out at last. In plain words, he said that the Terrible Three intended to visit Budge Trimble had overheard something at the department. Budge pointed out the whole story, saying that the quid was safe enough. It was, indeed, his last chance of making anything out of the secret, as he is a few hours it would be too late. So the whole story came out.

"There!" gasped Budge, at last. "Isn't that worth a quid?"

CHAPTER 4.

Budge Trim It On.

TOM MERRY and his chess played as Budge Trimble for a full minute at a time.

Well as they knew Budge's unscrupulous morality and his cruelty towards the Form competition, Budge's story took them by surprise.

George Alfred looked on in astonishment at telling the truth, the story. But all three of the Shell fellows had their doubts. It was not fair, anyway, to take Trimble's unsupported statement, even against an outsider like Arthur Budge.

"Is that the truth, you fat owl?" asked Manners, at last.

"If you can't take my word, Manners, I—"

"Oh, don't that! It's Budge's!"

"Kerry word!" said Budge. "I'm injured here. I'm telling you this as a friend, not because Budge left me out of the spread. In fact, I wouldn't have shared in the spread at any price. I'm too particular, you know."

"It looks as if the fat brawler has found Budge out," said Manners loudly. "Get—get—"

"Trimble's word is as good," said Tom Merry quietly.

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"Oh, I say—" began Baggy indignantly.

"Only Racks has been trying to be civil lately," remarked Manservant. "He seems to want to bury the hatchet; and I couldn't guess why—til now."

"You know now?" grinned Trimble.

"Now, look here, you fellows, if you're going to lead me that good—"

"You shall have the gold if your party's true," said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"But it's got to be proved first."

Trimble chuckled.

"It will be proved fast enough," he said.

"How?"

"Because Racks will try to get Manservant to drink something before the chess game begins," he answered. "He was on his feet yesterday, with the ginger-fort."

"We shall see," said Tom. "That will prove it, certainly, after what you've said, leave it at that."

"And then you'll lead me—"

"Yes, yes! Dry up, and get out!"

Baggy Trimble got out. He was looking pretty certain of his good now. But he put his bullet head back into the doorway the next moment.

"I say, Tom Merry, don't you tell Racks I told you, you know! I don't want him down on me, because—"

"All serene! Get off!"

And Baggy Trimble departed, satisfied. He was very glad to see Aubrey Racks that afternoon, but he did not want to quarrel with the help of the war-peddlers. Trimble was still anxious to share in the wealth that fell from the rich man's table.

The Terrible Three were left looking very thoughtful. They were thinking deeply as they finished Miss Priestley's cake. Racks's inexplicable utility of the last few days was explained now, and they could not help feeling that Trimble's story was true; but they waited for proof. If it was coming, it could not be long delayed, as the chess contest was due now.

"I fancy it's straight enough," said Leather. "Baggy was plainly wild because he was left out of the food-bazaar. If Racks plays that trick on Manservant—"

"He won't succeed now," said Manservant. "He didn't yesterday."

"No," Leather's eyes glimmered. "But it would be rather a good idea to let him believe that he's succeeded—rather too well!"

"How do you mean?" asked Tom.

"Chaps who monkey about with matches," explained Leather. "Suppose Racks gave Manservant the wrong dose, or an over-dose, and poisoned him by mistake?"

"What?"

"My idea is to let Racks give Manservant the dose—"

"What?"

"And then Manservant can die—"

"When?"

"And if Racks isn't frightened out of his wits, I'll set my cricket-bat!" said Leather, with a chuckle.

"You utter idiot!" gasped Manservant.

"Do you want me to kick the bucket as is in Racks's back end of his wits?"

"Fellow!" "Can't you speak Racks?"

"Oh, I see!"

"Time you did!" gasped Leather.

"Hello! Shook! I hear footprints—!"

A minute later there was a tap at the door. It opened, and Aubrey Racks looked in with a genial smile.

"Kiss me, you chaps—"

"Not at all," said Manservant, with polite politeness. "Come in, Racks!"

Racks came in.

"Finished your tea?" he asked.

"The Girl Lovers—No. 588.

Just wanted to spend a few minutes, Merry, about the Form contest."

"Oh, about?"

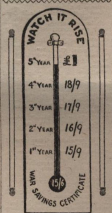
"I've been thinking about it," said Racks. "I'm a bit sorry for being such an unreasonable man on the subject. The fact is, I got my back up. Well, I've found it's done me a lot of good, the practice for the Marathon. I'm going to take up the running in good earnest."

"That's good news," said Tom Merry drily.

"I'm not much of a man at it," said Racks, with an air of great frankness. "I'm a bit of a dud, and I know it. But I'm pretty strong, and could become fit easily enough, and I don't see why I shouldn't have a chance of getting a good place. Would you fellows care to let me come with you on your run to-morrow, and give me any points you could on the subject?"

But for Baggy Trimble's consideration, Racks's speech would have softened the Terrible Three very considerably towards the slacker of the Shell.

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Any desire of Racks's part to take up a more manly line would certainly have been appreciated, and assisted, by Tom Merry.

But, knowing what he did, the captain of the Shell could scarcely regard this as anything but cover for Racks's intended treachery. Still, he was willing to give the end of the Shell the benefit of his doubt.

"Certainly!" he answered. "Come, and welcome!"

"Good!" said Racks. "I may do you credit yet. And—perhaps you'd think a bit better about me when I mention that I'm sending a lot of stuff to the Cottage Hospital—grab I had got away. I'm chucking that kind of thing."

"Glad to hear it!"

Racks turned to the door. If he had gone there, without further remark, the Terrible Three would really have believed that Aubrey Racks was on the path of reform, and that Trimble's information had been the product of the last prior's

terrible imagination. But Racks turned back at the door.

"By the way, we're making coffee in my study," he said. "I believe you fellows have water at tea-time—"

"That's so."

"Well, drop in and try my coffee," said Racks, with an air of the most cordial friendliness. "It's the last lot, and it's jolly good. I'm rather a dabbler at making coffee. I've heard you say that coffee clears the head for chess, Manservant."

"Does," said Manservant.

"Well, will you come along?"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Well, come in," he said.

"Good! In ten minutes or so," said Racks.

"Right you are?"

Racks scattered out of the study. The clump of the Shell looked at one another faintly.

"Will you walk into my parlour," said the spider to the fly," sang Monty Leather satily.

"It's true, then," said Manservant, between his teeth. "The treacherous heard!"

Ten minutes later the Terrible Three dropped in at Racks's study.

CHAPTER 7. The Sudden Death of Manservant.

THERE was a pleasant smell of newly-made coffee in Racks's study.

To fellows who had had hot water along with their war-bread and marmite, instead of tea, that smell was very agreeable.

Crooks was in the study, not looking quite happy. He nodded to the newcomers and strolled out, without waiting for any coffee himself. Crooks was not pleased with the nerve of Aubrey Racks, and he did not care to have a hand in the usually scheme, as Tom Merry easily guessed.

Racks was all smiles.

The coffee-cups were ready on the table—beautiful cups, belonging to Racks's expensive set. Everything in Racks's study was expensive, and a few of the things were in good taste. Four cups and saucers were set out, and Racks was stirring the coffee.

"Here we are, all about!" said Monty Leather, with elaborate good-humour. "And here's the coffee," said Racks.

"It's dippin', though I say it myself. I can make coffee."

"Smells sweet!" said Manservant.

"Shall I pour it out?" asked Leather blandly.

"No, I'll do that," said Racks. "Sit down, will you?"

Charles had been placed at the table, and the three juniors sat down. Racks drew the cups towards him and poured out the coffee. Tom Merry's eyes glared for a moment. The colourless liquid from the plaid was doubtless already in one of the cups, which was to be passed to Manservant. Any flavour the draught had would be effectively disguised by the strong taste of the coffee. Racks had planned very cunningly, and there was no doubt that his victim would have fallen unsuspectingly into the trap but for the "information received."

Racks held the last cup, and passed three of them to his visitors in turn.

Tom Merry intentionally stretched out his hand, as if by mistake, to take the cup Racks was passing to Manservant. Racks drew back his hand quickly.

It would not have served his purpose if the captain of the Shell had taken the doctored cup.

"That's Manservant!" he said.

He placed the cup before Manservant, and passed the others to Tom Merry and Leather.

"I say, that smells ripping!" said Manners heartily. "Just the thing before a tough game of chess! This was really thoughtful of you, Racke."

"Glad you like it!" said Racke affably. Monty Leatherer started to his feet, with a sudden exclamation, pointing to the study window.

"My hat! Look there! It is a German, please!"

Racke spun round, staring at the window.

The instant his back was turned Manners, who had his coffee-cup in his hand, lowered it and poured the coffee under the table.

"I can't see a 'phace' at all!" said Racke, staring at the window.

"Wasn't it an aeroplane passing?" asked Leatherer.

"I don't think so."

"Nonsense, old chap!" said Tom Merry, smiling. "You'll be seeing him, please, coming down the chimney next!"

As Racke turned back from the window Manners had his cup to his lips, but the cup was empty.

Racke's eyes glittered.

Conning phaser as he was, he did not guess that he had been out-phased, and that Leatherer's sudden alarm had been planned to give Manners the opportunity of disposing of the coffee unseen.

"I say, that's good!" said Manners, clicking his cup on to the saucer. "You can make coffee, and no mistake, Racke! I don't think I've ever tasted quite that flavor in coffee before."

Racke drank his own coffee.

Arthur Augustus, D'Aery's cyclops glanced in at the door. The result of St. Joe's was rather surprised to find Tom Merry & Co. in Racke's study.

"You fellows break?" he said. "It's getting towards the time, dear boys. I may do not be late, Manners!"

"Oh!" said Manners.

"Pardon! Is for a great game, old sport?" asked D'Aery.

"Oh? I-I'm feeling rather sleepy," said Manners drowsily.

Astutely Racke smiled.

"Hi Jove! If you don't pull up your socks, dear boy, Kuanai Wan will mop you up at chess!" cried Arthur Augustus.

"Kerr and Waddy and Lovison are helping him, you know, and they will be with a dangerous team."

"Manners!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's the matter with you?"

Manners was breathing hard. He turned a heavy look on his chessman, Arthur Augustus, chuckled.

"Hi Jove! I'll tell the fellows that the champion of the Shell is going to take a nap over his chess!" he remarked, and he left the study grinning.

Manners staggered, and leaned heavily on the table.

"I-I feel bad!" he muttered.

"Manners, old chap—"

"I-I feel as if I've been poisoned!"

"What rot!" exclaimed Racke sharply.

"There was something in the coffee, I think!" groaned Manners, his face twisting up into an expression of great anguish.

"But we had the coffee, too!" said Tom. "It hasn't hurt us."

Manners groaned deeply.

"That villain Racke's put something in it!" he gasped. "He's poisoned me!"

"Good heavens!"

"What!" muttered Racke, as pale as a sheet. "Manners! I-I haven't! How dare you accuse me—"

"I'm poisoned!" shrieked Manners, his hands clutching the air in a very realistic style.

"I—I am dying!" Tom—Monty—le's poisoned me! Racke's done it! It will come out at the inquest! Oh, oh, oh!"

"Manners!" shrieked Tom.

Manners gave a piteous cry, and reeled and fell heavily to the floor.



A TROUBLE SCENE!

(See Chapter 4.)

There, he stirred once or twice, groaned feebly, and then lay still, only a faint twitching running through his limbs.

Racke stared down at him in utter horror.

He had expected his victim to show signs of drowsiness after taking a moderate sleeping draught. But this result certainly could not have been brought about by any sleeping-draught. Had there been a mistake at the chemist's? Such mistakes did occur. In fact, it was pretty clear that Racke had made a mistake, for Manners' looked at death's door.

"Tom!" It was a faint moan from Manners. "Tom!"

Tom Merry flung himself on his knees at his chessman's side.

"Manners, old man! Speak! For mercy's sake don't look like that! Manners!"

"Tom's voice broke in a sob.

"Tom, I'm dying!" It was a low but distinct whisper. "I'm dying, Tom, and Racke has poisoned me! Remember that, Tom!"

He groaned faintly and lay still.

"Good heavens!" groaned Leatherer.

Tom Merry passed a trembling hand over Manners' head, as if to see whether it still beat.

He decided as he drew it away.

Racke saw the shudder, and he trembled from head to foot. What had he done?

"Merry!" he gasped hoarsely. "Don't say he—he's—he's—!" His tongue refused to form the terrible word.

Tom Merry made no reply.

His hands covered his face, and he was shaking with sobs.

Racke pressed his hand to his brow.

What had he done?

Monty Leatherer pulled his arm, pointing an accusing finger at Racke, his eyes blazing.

"Murderer!"

Racke started back as if a bullet had struck him.

"What! What! Leatherer—"

"Poisoner!"

"I—I didn't! I never did!" screamed Racke. "I swear it!"

"Murderer! I'll swear you have the bottle about you now that the poison came from!" shrieked Leatherer.

Racke remembered, with a shudder, that the phial was in his pocket. The fearful truth showed that it could not have contained the harmless draught he had supposed. He clutched the phial out and rushed to the window, to hold away the evidence of his guilt.

Leatherer sprang forward and caught his wrist in time.

"No, you don't, you murderer!" he shouted.

"Let me go!" cried Racke.

Leatherer forced him back and dragged the phial from his hand.

The door opened, and Crooks looked in.

"Coming out, Racke? Hallo! What—?"

Gerald Crooks looked on again at the heart-rending scene.

"What's happened? What—?"

"Manners!" cried Tom Merry.

"Dead?" Oh, Manners, old fellow!"

"Dead!" shrieked Crooks.

"Racke has poisoned him!" shrieked Leatherer.

"And this is the bottle the poison was in! He will be hanged for it, that's one comfort!"

"Racke, you said foul!" muttered Crooks in deadly terror. "Oh, you foul! You foul foul!"

"I never did!" shrieked Racke. "I tell you it wasn't poison. I never knew it was poison. I thought it was a sleeping-draught."

"Tell that to the judge and jury, you lying villain!" shouted Leatherer.

"They'll be likely to believe you wanted to give a chap a sleeping-draught in the daytime!"

"It—I was to make him lose the chess game!" shrieked Racke, feeling that the truth was better than what he was likely to be accused of. "I swear it was holy to be accused of."

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nothing worse than that. I bought that stuff as a sleeping-draught. I assure it, and I never dreamed it could harm Minerva."

"Assurin'!" called Lovelace.
"What on earth!" called of the Shell looked in. "Lovelace, old man—Hullo, where's the matter with Minerva?"

"Nothing, old man!" answered Minerva, sitting up on the floor. "Only getting Rache's leg."

"What?" questioned Rache.
"That Minerva took his hands away from his legs. He was not sleeping, but Rache could see now that it was with his hands, not with feet.
"The one of his feet seemed to be the floor. Several fellows, attracted by the loud voices, had gathered about the doorway, and all eyes were fixed upon Anthony Rache."

CHAPTER 8.

Rache Goes Through It.

"WHAT'S the name of this case?" asked Jack Blake.
"But I don't know," answered Rache, "but I heard you said some very strong expressions, Lovelace!" and Arthur Augustus Wacey severely.

"Oh, you rascals!" pointed Rache, as Minerva rose to his feet, grinning. "You rascals, you were speaking awfully."

"And making you give yourself away, you said!" said Tom Merry.

"But what?" questioned Talbot.
"Rache was lower than," continued Tom. "Rache asked us to leave to leave coffee, and to leave Minerva with a sleeping-draught to make him see how she does things in the form context."

"My hat!"
"And this is the bottle!" said Minerva Lovelace, holding it up. "You see, Minerva died after taking the drug, and Rache thought he had poisoned him, so he opened up that he was only trying to drag him to make him see the case. Really, Minerva has come to life again."

"He has, he has!"
"Oh, you rascals!" growled out Rache between his teeth in helpless rage. "You speaking matters!"

He clenched his hands angrily.
He realized now how he had been taken in all along the line by the insidious abilities of the Terrible Three, who had really played out that little scene in a manner worthy of the best traditions of the Justice Deceit Society.

Grumpy grinned, and shifted out of the study. He could guess that a worse time was coming for Anthony Rache, and he had no desire to share it.

"And the one who owned up!" exclaimed Rache, with a glance of very scorn at the black sheep of the Shell.

"It's a lie!" shouted Rache. "I know it!"

"You deny it now?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yes, I do!" said Rache desperately.
"Right-ho!" said Lovelace. "This little goes to the Home-matter, of course, and Mr. Rache can judge between us. Come on, you fellows! This kind of thing is a bit too serious to keep dark."

"Yes, wait!"
"Come with us, Rache," said Tom Merry quietly.

Rache went.
He did not go before the Home-matter on such a charge. It meant his instant expulsion from the school if he was found, and the witnesses were three to one, and there was the bottle with his name on the label. The terror in his face was visible to all eyes.

"You wait!" said Rache, "wait!"

Arthur Augustus Wacey. "You will be asked for this, you wait, wait!" I warned you with horror, Wacey!"

"I-I say, hold on, you fellows!" stammered Rache.
"You don't come with us, you'll be sent to!" said Minerva Lovelace. "You can take your choice, of course."

"I-I say—"
"But how is it Minerva is all right if he's really taken the dose?" asked Rache.

"I haven't said," answered Minerva. "We had a tip in advance, and we were here knowing what to expect."

"Oh!" pointed Rache. "You're not taking us, you're not taking us," grumbled Lovelace. "You've been fooled all along the line, dear boy!"

"And I checked the stuff under the table while the girls and Jack were away," said Minerva. "He thought I had poisoned it. Keep that bottle, Lovelace. It's evidence."

"I mean to!" said Lovelace.
"But Jack!" Go to the Home-matter at once, dear boy. That toward that cannot be allowed to remain at St. Mark's," exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"My hat!" said Rache.
"Come on!" said Tom Merry.

"Hold on!" shouted Rache desperately. "Look here, I-I own up, I-I only want it as a joke, really. I-I'll do anything you like. I shall be asked if you go to Rache."

"You own up!" demanded Tom Merry sternly.

"Yes!" answered Rache.
"You admit it all the fellows that you intended to leave Minerva so that you could have the stuff in the form context!" said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"Yes," answered Rache.
"You admit it!" said Lovelace.

"You admit it!" said Lovelace.
"Oh all the fellows!" said Rache.

Rache's pale face had flushed and now, his eyes were on the floor. Every Rache could see how the anger and scornful glances that were cast on him by the School House fathers. He had sworn up to save himself from a worse fate, but he was not immune to the shame and humiliation.

"That's enough, Rache!" said Tom Merry, with cold scorn. "You've said enough. It was interest you now to know that we were intended to take the matter before the Home-matter at all."

Rache's eyes blazed. Again he had been fooled, and he had only his own cowardly face to thank for it.

"Come on, you fellows!" said Tom. "Let's get out of this. That fellow will make a bit of it."

"Hold on!" said the last, continued the scene of George Alfred Grumpy, who had joined the scene in the doorway. "Not so fast, Rache's got to be punished."

"Punish him if you like," answered Tom Merry. "I think he's too dirty to touch."

The Terrible Three left the study. It was time for Minerva to get ready for the chess, and they had no further time to waste upon Anthony Rache. The resolution of his cowardly was a severe punishment, and they were willing to leave it at that. But Grumpy was for serious measures, and certainly a good many of the fellows agreed with George Alfred for once.

"If this case or the other would be asked, or at least stopped," said Grumpy. "If he's let off a dragging here in the House, he's going to have a dragging here in his own study. That's his."

"Mind your own business!" barked Rache.

"This is my business," said Grumpy calmly. "You're going to be dragged, Rache, or you're going to be sent to the House, or you're going to be sent to the House, or you're going to be sent to the House."

"How, how?" cried Rache, the justice.

"You wait! I expect that as the people cough!" said Arthur Augustus Wacey.

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CHAPTER 9.
Chess and the Race.

THE Commencement was attended. Gentlemen of both houses had gathered there to watch the final round in the chess contest.

Manners had scored for the third in the first round, and certainly the first had been a difficult one. But the second round was, as Manners admitted in private to his chess, a corker.

The best man of the Fourth Form six was to play him, in consultation with any three of the others. Kismet had won the player, and he had chosen as his advisers Kerr and Redfern and Loversoe. With such a combination against him Manners could not hope for any superior advantages for studying his opponent's weaknesses at any point. Indeed, Kerr had observed that, against such a combination, Kismet would never have brought off his celebrated victory in the "Loversoe Game." Not a point would be left unguarded. The hidden significance of a move would never escape observation. Manners had to win this game by sheer good play and hard work if he was to win it at all.

The second round consisted of three games, "best two out of three." Two games had been played, and each side had scored one success. It was upon the third game now to be played, that all depended. Manners had explained to his chesses at great length how he had come to lose the second game of the three; and Tom and Monty had accepted his lengthy explanations with sweet smiles, without understanding them in the least.

Their private opinion was that Manners couldn't expect to score at all this time, but Manners had apparently expected it, and he felt that his failure had to be explained somehow; he employed it away, to his own satisfaction at least.

He had won one game with the Ray Lopez opening, and he had lost a game with the Stone opening. He intended to have both these openings alone on the final occasion, he hoped.

Manners was in great form that evening, and keen for the contest. And others, who did not take much interest in chess at a rule were keen to watch the play. For one thing, tactics played in the great game were dependent on it. But that was not all. The struggle was a keen one, and interesting in itself, though a purely intellectual one.

Kismet was there, with his helpers, Lord and Duke and Redfern. There was even a crowd about the tables, and he was glad to have the presence of his three assistants, especially Kerr. With Kerr to counsel on every move certainly it was not likely to be taken by surprise, and Loversoe and Redfern were both useful, too.

Manners, with an air of rather exaggerated confidence, sat down at the chess-table, and Kismet sat opposite. His three aides were close round him. The crowds of juniors gave them plenty of room, but there was some whispering to see, "Charm had to be placed on the key-making table, where follows out to lead near the front of the others."

Outside it was a beautiful moonlight evening. But the lights in the Common-room were severely dimmed, on account of the lighting regulations. Gentlemen crossed and passed over St. John's before, and it was pretty certain that they would pass over it again as the air was intolerable. Many a night had the juniors been awakened in the dormitories by the distant howling of the gale.

But no one was thinking about sleepable now. Every Thistle had announced, with a lightning face, that

the moon was shining like daylight, and that it was a topping night for Gothic. Somebody threw a cushion at him as a reward for his mischievous information, and Harry had retreated to Kismet's study, where, in the delights of books and cigarettes, he forgot moonlight and Thistles.

Manners moved his King's pawn to the fourth square with a cool calmness. His opponent repeated with power king's knight, the French defence. Manners pushed up a pawn to queen's fourth. Pawn to queen's fourth was the answer. Knight to queen's bishop's third came from Manners; and Kismet flung, without hesitation, put his knight at king's bishop's third.

Manners, of course, took the pawn. Kismet also & Co. followed his example.

Manners continued with knight to bishop's third. There was consultation among the four, and while it was going on Manners took a turn round the Common-room.

Bishop to queen's third was the outcome of Kismet's consultation.

Manners duplicated the move.

Pawn to bishop's third came from black.

Manners smiled, and Kismet flung called. Manners put his knight to king's second, and Kismet flung called.

Manners took another stroll. Perhaps Manners rather enjoyed these careful strolls while his opponents were in careful consultation. Kismet flung his move. Manners and down the third side, and was looking out into the bright moonlight.

"Manners!" called out Tom Merry. "What's the move?" called back Manners.

"Bishop to king's knight's fifth." "Knight to knight's third," purred Manners.

Tom Merry, with a smile, made the move for him. Manners had to move good quickly that a suspicion of awkward could be suggested with a smile.

"But Jones!" murmured Arthur Argenteo to Blake. "Manners has made that move without even looking at the board!"

"He's got the board in his mind's eye, of course," said Talbot.

But down that he remembered where all pieces were!

"Of course!" "Of course!" said Arthur Argenteo. "I couldn't, you know?"

"Go on!" murmured Blake.

"Manners is, perhaps, a tough player than Tom, after all," said Arthur Argenteo, very thoughtfully.

Blake grunted.

Kismet flung his move was given to bishop's second. Tom Merry called it out to Manners, who was still interested in the result of play.

"Bishop to king's third," said Manners, without a flicker of doubt.

Tom Merry moved the "knight." Queen's knight to queen's second was the answer.

Manners deliberated for a moment over to the board and moved his queen to the queen's second square with his own hand. He looked along and looked at a picture on the wall, while Kismet & Co. looked on the king's rook to the king's square.

Queen's rook to the king's square," purred Manners.

"Knight to king's fifth!" called out Tom Merry, as the champions of the Fourth made their move.

"Queen to bishop's square," answered Manners, still regarding the picture on the wall.

Now!

The sudden report from the distance echoed throughout St. John's. And Tom

Merry jumped, and very nearly knocked over several pawns.

Now, hoarse!

"But down! That's a gun!" exclaimed Arthur Argenteo excitedly.

Now!

"It's an alarm," said Loversoe.

Now, hoarse, hoarse!

In a moment all attention was turned from the chess. From the distance the sudden booming of the battery came the thunder.

The bright moonlight, after all, had lit up the Gothic out of their line, and a flare had been in progress.

And the fact that the battery on Westward Hill was firing was good enough that the thin flames were very near St. John's.

Now, hoarse!

Manners of the chess glared round. "What that move?" he asked.

"Manners," purred Tom Merry. "Why haven't you?"

"It's an alarm, isn't it?"

"I told you to be the bishop's square," answered Manners mildly. "Now to keep your wits, Kismet flung, the came over to the chess-table, and made the move White!"

Now, hoarse, hoarse, hoarse!

CHAPTER 10.

A Fight to a Finish.

KOMET HAD won on his feet, his dark eyes gleaming with excitement.

It was evident that the fans of Kismet were more interested in the German match than in the chess final.

"The finish!" he exclaimed.

Now!

Manners looked a little irritated.

"Isn't it just like that out of a Kismet to interfere with chess with this silly battery?" he exclaimed. "Well, there's no need to take any notice of that. Your move, you follow."

"Rather the move!" answered Redfern.

Manners glanced at the clock.

"I couldn't hurry you," he said. "But perhaps I'd better remind you that there's a three-hour."

"Manners, all day!" began Tom Merry.

"Better put talk with the chesses are making their move," said Manners. "It may put them out."

"The chesses may put us all out, you see!" purred Blake.

"Yes, watch!"

"Right! we better put off the game!" asked Kerr quietly. "It's a bit awkward to play chess with that row going on."

"What not?" said Manners. "We're not going to put off deciding the form until the end of the war, are we?"

"Of course not! But—"

"Well, those high-grade men come any time, moonlight or daylight. It's a bit better to allow a silly-boddy Kismet to interrupt our game. You're jolly near the time-honoured, Kismet flung."

Kismet flung looked at him in amazement.

Kismet flung was certainly not afraid, but he was almost quivering with excitement.

"This is nonsense!" he exclaimed. "Put the game off!"

Manners shook his head.

"I'm on as this," he said. "I'm getting on! I don't agree to putting the game off. You fellows can resign if you like."

"But," said Redfern earnestly.

"You may as well I'm beginning to get you lost," said Manners kindly.

"Fiddle!"

"Well, make your move, then,"

Now!

"I will make a move!" exclaimed

Tom Kerr Loversoe, No. 88.

Has would have been finished off quicker if he had played it out."

"By the way, why didn't Kenna Rao go out?" asked Manners, suddenly looking at his surroundings, as if aware. "And Levison and Kellgren were helping. Where are they? You're really giving up some of your chances."

"You are!" roared Redfern. "We're waiting for the bombs."

"Oh, the bombs!" said Manners. "You ought to have been watching the game. Turning, did you notice my move at twenty-third?"

"No, I didn't!" granted Tom Merry. "I noticed that a Hun bomb dropped not more than two hundred yards off."

"Oh, you're an ass!" said Manners testily. "I can't understand you, Tom. I think you might have kept an eye on the game, when there's thirteen points in the Fours pocket depending on it. The Shell bags these points. Is that Levison aware of that?"

"How I am," said Frank Levison.

"Have you got your book of records with you?"

"Yes, rather!" answered Frank proudly.

"Wally of the Third gave a short."

"The young are stopped to get that, of course," he said.

"Quite right," said Manners. "Winger's Letter!" Levison, there's twelve points to be scored for the Shell."

"But! What for?" asked the captain of the Fifth.

"Thirteen points, final round, won by the Shell."

"Do you mean to say you've finished that game?" howled Levison.

Manners stared at him.

"Of course. Why shouldn't we?" he asked.

"Bombs, bombs, bombs, bombs!"

"It's getting further off," said Tom Merry.

The roar of the game was growing a little quieter now, and the German heavy shells could no longer be heard. Bombs had fallen in the open fields round the school, but St. Jim's had escaped in its another half-hour, however, before the fellows were allowed up out of the vaults.

There was silence, then, as they looked out in the morning fields. But on the edge of the playing fields was the trace of the Hun—a gigantic hole in the ground, large enough to have built a cottage in. The juniors stared into it in the semi-light with beating hearts.

They were in a splendid mood as they trooped off to the dormitories that night. After lights out, when the fellows were settling down to sleep, Manners suddenly sat up in bed in the Shell dormitory.

"Tom!"

Tom started up, thinking of Han sidens at once.

"Hello! What is it?" he exclaimed. "Can you hear them?"

"But I can't hear anything. I was going to tell you about my twenty-third move in that game." "Vrooom!"

But!

A bomb whined through the place and struck Manners. And he did not tell Tom Merry about this famous twenty-third move.

The next day, when nerves were in more normal state, there was a good deal of chuckling over that curious chess game, played out to an accompaniment of dropping Gothic and thundering guns.

The juniors had been won for the Shell, and Manners had won those, and there was great satisfaction in the Shell.

"Never mind," said Blake. "We'll beat the wonders in the Marathons, anyhow."

"We will," said Higgins.

And Arthur Augustus chimed in:

"Tut, tut!"

But that remained to be seen.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"AGAINST ALL COMERS!")

by Martin Clifford.)

CADET NOTES.

DIFFERENT kinds of our readers are already members of Cadet Corps and taking an active part in the work of the movement, and they may be interested to know that the Central Association of Volunteer Cadets, which is a non-commercial scheme, to which Cadet officers and N.C.O.'s will be admitted. These classes are intended to give training in military subjects to those engaged in the conduct of Cadet Corps. They were originally started in connection with the Volunteer Movement, where they have been a very great success, several thousand officers and N.C.O.'s in the Volunteer Force having passed through the various courses and obtained certificates. The War Office has been officially recognised the Cadet Corps officers and N.C.O.'s, and has laid down in an A.C.C. that such officers, etc., when proceeding to these classes, will be considered to be travelling on duty, and travelling warrants will be issued in the usual manner. Agents anxious to take advantage of training offered by these classes can obtain full particulars and information from the Secretary of the Central Association of Volunteer Cadets, 10, Queen's Square, East Court of Justice, Strand, London, W.C.2.

Under the auspices of the Worcestershire County Council, for the encouragement and coordination of Cadet Corps, War Office, War Office, and similar organisations, a very active campaign has been carried on throughout the county during the past week or two. The Cadet staff of the Central Association of Volunteer Cadets was engaged for a week or more, and displayed in the local newspapers in all the principal towns of the county, in some cases, as at Worcester, the time being down several times at different houses in the same town. The Central Association of Volunteer Cadets also sent a representative speaker, Mr. F. G. Cooke, C.I.E., who delivered stirring addresses to large audiences of boys at all the meetings arranged. The campaign was well supported in the local press, which was it is gratifying to be able to say that a large number of new members joined the various Cadet Corps which have been formed to in the towns referred to. At one meeting, held at Stratford-upon-Avon, Mr. Herbert Austin, the principal speaker, over 100 boys gave in their names to join the corps, a result which certainly ought to be most encouraging to the organisers of the movement.

One of the most satisfactory of the recently established Cadet Corps connected with the Volunteer Movement, is the unit attached to the 10th County of London Volunteer Regiment. This unit was only quite a comparatively recent date, but already numbers about 100 members, between 16 and 17 years of age, and about half of them are already in uniform. One of the difficulties of such a corps in a poor neighbourhood like Lambeth is that, of course, members can pay very little in subscription, and their uniform and equipment has to be purchased from the funds of the corps. This is a difficulty which can only be got over by appealing to the public for support, and we are glad to hear that in this connection the corps are being much helped by the large employers and wealthy residents of the neighbourhood.

In this connection we have already mentioned the very successful work done by recent efforts on the part of the civil authorities, who raised funds for the establishment and maintenance of Cadet Corps. A further example recently came to hand from Wolverhampton, where the appearance of the Corps for the Cadet Corps has been progressing by leaps and bounds, and the last list of subscriptions showed total receipts to date of £1,100. The Cadet Corps started in making much progress in the last few months, giving in their drill, and last wonderfully well in the drill and serviceable uniform provided. The corps is now accommodated in a building kindly lent by Messrs. John Perkins & Co., Ltd., and it is very gratifying to hear that there are many engaged in being read, practising on the gymnastic apparatus, or playing with the various table games provided, etc. The appearance of Wolverhampton and other towns in the matter of raising funds for the Cadet Movement, should encourage Cadet organisers in other places to take the matter up.

Colonel Sir William White, K.C.B., commanding the City of London Cadet Brigade, recently led a list inspecting of the Marston, Somerset, 10th City of London Cadets. There was a very good number on parade, Captain Villenaveau in command, with eight non-commissioned officers and thirty-five Cadets, and a large number of friends of the corps and members of the public were also present. Colonel Sir William White made a thorough inspection of the corps, and subsequently addressed a few words to the boys, telling

them he was very pleased with the care they had shown in order to make a good appearance on parade, and added that he regarded the corps as one of the most satisfactory units in his command, and congratulated Captain Villenaveau very heartily on the successful way the company had been carried out under difficult circumstances during the past few years. It should perhaps be mentioned that all the visiting officers and major non-commissioned officers have told the corps and gave an active report.

It is much to be hoped that the desired amount of success will attend the efforts which are now being made in London to form a local company in connection with the Cadet Corps at the King's Liverpool Regiment. The Mayor of London, Mr. George Lansbury, is active support to the movement, which is being taken up enthusiastically by many well-known residents of the borough. The material and value of such corps for both between the age of 16 and 17 years is generally appreciated, and certainly a town with a large population as that of London ought not to continue without having at least a company of a battalion, but, if possible, a whole battalion. Any of our readers residing in London should make enquiries of the new company, and join and support it.

St. George's Day was celebrated in November by numerous ceremonies of a military character, and among which London was distinguished by the fact that the Cadet Corps attached to the King's Liverpool Regiment held a parade and presentation to the winners of the Queen's Troop medals won by members of the unit. Major-General Sir John Dill, who inspected the corps, and presented the medals, was accompanied by the Lord Mayor, the Lord of Northumberland, who was also present, assured them of the keen interest of the County Territorial Association in the Cadet Movement, and commended the commanding officer—Captain Brown—upon his zeal and ability in connection with the corps.

A platoon of the King's Royal Rifle Corps (K.R.R.C.) recently formed at Watlington, Somerset. Recent press reports show a strong company of the same brigade in the town, but its operations have been suspended for a long time. Watlington certainly ought not to be without a unit of this famous company. We are glad to hear that work has been made, and hope it will meet with strong support from the boys of the town.

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