

THE OLDEST AND BEST ALL-SCHOOL STORY PAPER!

The GEM **1**
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1p 2

WELL WON! Grand School Story.



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(See the Splendid Complete School Story in this Issue.)

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WELL WON!

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

A Magnificent, Long, Complete Story Dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER I.

Talbot's Task!

"TUMBLE out, you kids!" Kildare of the Sixth rapped out the command as he looked into the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's.

"There's to be a general assembly in Big Hall in half an hour," he added.

"Phew!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, when Kildare's retreating footstep had died away. "What's the giddy rumpus, I wonder?"

"Looks as if somebody's going to get it in the neck," remarked Manners. "So long as the somebody isn't me," said George Alfred Grundy, "I don't mind in the least!"

The Shell fellows hurriedly performed their ablutions. They were curious to know what the trouble—for it certainly looked like trouble—was all about.

Two fellows in the dormitory already knew. They were Talbot and Aubrey Racke. But neither of them went out of his way to enlighten his schoolfellows.

Kildare had delivered his message in the other dormitories, and all St. Jim's was agog with excitement.

General assemblies were few and far between, and they usually portended trouble of a serious nature for somebody. Hence the excitement, with which was mingled a great deal of speculation as to the identity of the victim or victims.

At the appointed time the fellows filed into Big Hall.

The masters were already present, and one of them—Mr. Railton—was looking grave. The others were in blissful ignorance as to why the assembly had been summoned.

A buzz of animated conversation proceeded from the back of the Hall, where the fags were stationed; but the voices died away as the Head swept in with rustling gown.

"Now for the fireworks!" murmured Monty Lowther, when Dr. Holmes mounted the raised dais.

"My boys," said the Head, without any preamble, "I have called you together this morning to acquaint you with the details of a despicable outrage which occurred in the School House yesterday afternoon."

The New House fellows looked greatly relieved; but their School House fellows shuffled uneasily.

"Talbot, of the Shell Form, is com-

peting in the examination for the Founders' prize," the Head went on. "For some days he worked untiringly, and compiled an enormous number of notes, which he intended to commit to memory. Unfortunately, he will not now be able to do so, owing to the fact that one of his Form-fellows wantonly and maliciously destroyed his notes!"

A murmur of indignation arose. Somebody cried "Shame!" and sympathetic glances were cast in Talbot's direction. Talbot had forfeited a great deal of his popularity by entering for the Founders' exam.

The winner of the prize would receive a hundred pounds in cash, in addition to which his people would be relieved of the necessity of paying his term-fees for a whole year. It was, therefore, considered—though there was no law on the subject—that the examination should be confined to fellows who were in poor circumstances.

Redfern of the New House came under this category. His father had fallen on bad times; and unless Reddy won the prize he would have to be withdrawn from St. Jim's.

Another hard case was that of Dick Brooke, the day-boy.

But as for Talbot, there was not the slightest reason—so far as his schoolfellows were concerned—why he should wish to compete. His uncle, Colonel Lyndon, kept him well supplied with pocket-money; and the general opinion was that it was not fair to the other candidates that Talbot should enter. It had been openly hinted to him that he ought to keep off the grass. But Talbot had not taken the hint.

The St. Jim's fellows did not know—since Talbot did not choose to explain—that he was not competing for his own benefit, but for that of Marie Rivers' father—the professor—who stood in sore need of help.

Had the fellows known this, they would have rallied to Talbot's side, and given him every encouragement. But as he did not explain, they imagined that he was working for his own selfish ends, and he was strongly condemned for entering the exam.

Even so, the majority of the fellows felt that it was a mean and contemptible trick to destroy Talbot's notes.

To urge Talbot to stand down from the exam was one thing; to maliciously

spoil his chance of success was quite another matter.

"The boy who was responsible for this outrage," continued Dr. Holmes, "is Racke of the Shell."

"Three groans for Racke!" murmured Monty Lowther.

The fellows responded at once, and deep groans reverberated through the Hall.

"Silence!" rapped out the Head. "I have already administered a severe flogging to Racke. And I now call upon him to come forward and apologise to Talbot in the presence of the whole school!"

All eyes were turned upon Aubrey Racke.

The cad of the Shell, shrinking from the scornful glance of his schoolfellows, left his place and advanced up the centre gangway.

The Head beckoned to Talbot, who also left his place, and took up his position on the raised dais beside his persecutor.

"Now, Racke!" said the Head.

The wretched Aubrey, who would have given anything to be able to evade the ordeal, turned to Talbot.

"I—I'm sorry!" he mumbled, in a low tone.

"Your remark was scarcely audible, Racke," said Dr. Holmes. "I will trouble you to deliver your apology in a clear and lucid manner!"

Racke tried again.

"I'm sorry I destroyed your notes, Talbot," he said. "I didn't realise they were so valuable to you. I was a cad."

"You were!" said Talbot frankly.

"I—I hope you'll overlook what I did in a hasty moment."

"I bear no malice, if that's what you mean," said Talbot.

"You may go to your place, Racke," said the Head.

The cad of the Shell complied only too willingly.

"Am I to understand, Talbot," continued Dr. Holmes, "that, in spite of the serious set-back you have received, you still intend to compete in the Founders' examination?"

"Yes, sir," answered Talbot, squaring his jaw.

"Your decision reveals a very courageous and commendable spirit," said the Head. "Now that your notes have been destroyed, you are labouring under

a severe handicap, and your chances of success have been seriously jeopardised. Only two days remain before the examination takes place. You will be excused from all lessons during that interval, Talbot, in order that you may have a chance to make up some of the lost ground."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" Hope returned to Talbot in full flush. His chances of success, which had seemed slender indeed, were now considerably strengthened. As his girl chum, Marie Rivers, had said to him, much might be accomplished in two days. By devoting every available moment to his colossal task, he might yet be able to overhaul the other candidates.

"I have nothing further to say," remarked the Head. "The school will now dismiss."

On quitting Big Hall, Talbot went at once to the school sanatorium.

Marie Rivers was there, in her nurse's uniform, and she greeted Talbot with a bright smile.

"You seem to be bustling with good news, Toff!"

"I am!" said Talbot joyfully. "The Head's excused me from lessons from now onwards, so that I can make up some of the lee-way."

"Splendid!"

"For the next forty-eight hours," Talbot went on, "I shall work like a giddy Trojan. I feel just in the mood for a big fight."

Marie nodded approvingly.

"You must be careful not to overdo it, Toff," she said. "You will not deprive yourself of necessary sleep, I hope?"

"Sleep!" echoed Talbot, with a laugh. "Why, I don't intend to take even forty winks, if I can help it, until after the exam!"

"Oh, Toff, isn't that rather rash?"

"I don't think so. My constitution will stand the strain. Besides, it's absolutely vital that I should bag that hundred quid. Have you heard from your father, Marie?"

"Yes."

"He has had no luck in the way of finding work?"

"No luck whatever. He has tramped the streets of London; he has interviewed dozens of the big employers of labour, but without result. And the money we lent him, Toff, is almost exhausted. I am terribly afraid that—"

"That your father will turn crackman again?"

"Yes. He is becoming bitter. He seems hopeless of ever being able to earn his living again by honest means. Unless help is forthcoming soon, I fear his relapse is certain."

"That only emphasises the need for my winning the Founders' prize, Marie. The Professor must be saved, somehow. It's unthinkable that all the good work of the past few years should be undone. The hundred quid, if I win it, may not save the situation absolutely; but it will give you a long way towards it. It will give your father another month or two to hunt for work."

"It is splendid of you, Toff, to make this big effort on father's account."

"Nonsense, Marie! I should be a poor sort of worm if I let this opportunity go by. I must be off now. There's stacks of work waiting to be done."

And Talbot hurried away. He went to his study, got his books down from the shelf, and was soon pegging away as if his life depended upon it.

The breakfast-gong sounded shortly

afterwards. Talbot did not heed it. He decided to "cut" breakfast, and to eat a big dinner to make up for it.

There were three visitors for Talbot just before morning lessons commenced. They were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell.

"Sorry to intrude, Talbot!" said Tom Merry. "But we won't keep you a jiffy!"

Talbot looked up patiently from his books.

"What is it?" he asked.

"There's been a lot of feeling against you lately," said the captain of the Shell, "because you're entering for the Founders' exam. I must say that we feel as strongly about the matter as anybody. We think it's horribly unfair to Redfern, and other deserving cases, that you should compete. You're comfortably off, and there's no need for you to worry about money."

"Smart talk," from which, chimed in Manners, "you've left us badly in the lurch so far as the cricket is concerned. You haven't once turned out to practice, and when we play the New House the chances are that we shall get a thumping good licking."

"Is this all you've come to tell me?" asked Talbot.

"Not quite!" said Tom Merry. "We want to say that although we condemn your action in swotting for the exam, we don't uphold that caddish trick of Racke's."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners. "We consider Racke an out-and-out rotter for destroying your notes, Talbot."

"And we came to tell you this in case you thought we were hand-in-glove with Racke!" said Tom Merry.

Talbot smiled.

"Nothing would ever make me think that!" he said.

"Thanks!"

The Terrible Three had nothing more to say. Nodding rather curtly to Talbot, they quitted the study, and went along to the Form-room, leaving Talbot to wrestle manfully with the biggest task of his school career.

CHAPTER 2.

An Uphill Fight.

TALBOT got through mountains of work that morning.

Alone and uninterrupted, he was able to apply himself wholeheartedly to his studies.

For hour after hour he brought his concentrated energy to bear on the task, and at length a great shouting and stamping of feet in the corridors proclaimed the fact that morning lessons were over.

"How goes it, Talbot?" asked Gore, coming in the study.

"First-rate, thanks!"

"Got through much work?"

"Piles of it!"

"That's the style!"

George Gore was one of the very few fellows who wanted to see Talbot win the Founders' prize.

In any respect, Gore was not a nice person to know. But he had a genuine regard for Talbot, who had got him out of countless scrapes in the past.

Moreover, Gore guessed that Talbot was not working for his own ends, but for the sake of another. He asked no questions, but he felt quite convinced, in his own mind, that Talbot's aims were unselfish and honourable.

Talbot was about to close his books, when Gore intercepted him.

"Not going to slack off, surely?" he exclaimed.

"Afraid I must!" was the reply.

"Between now and dinner-time, I shall be getting all sorts of interruptions."

"Oh, no, you won't!" said Gore. "I'll see to that. You carry on, and I'll keep all would-be intruders at bay."

"You're a sport!" said Talbot, with enthusiasm.

And he returned to his task.

Meanwhile, Gore drew up the following placard, which he pinned to the outside of the door:

"NOTICE!

"No fellow is allowed to barge into this study under any consideration."

"By order."

"This will make the common herd keep their distance!" said Gore.

But he was wrong.

Instead of keeping the fellows at bay, the announcement attracted them to the spot like a magnet.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack Blake of the Fourth, coming up with Digby, Herries, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What's all this?"

The swell of St. Jim's surveyed Gore's announcement through his monocle.

"I regard this as a very wude an' offensive placard!" he exclaimed. "I shall wewpmand Talbot severely!"

"Talbot didn't stick that up on the door!" said Gore.

"Then who did, pway?"

"I did!"

"Then I considah—"

"What you consider, Gussy, doesn't count. Talbot isn't to be disturbed. He's busy swotting; and you fellows can keep your distance."

"Weally, Goah! I wish most expressly to speak to Talbot!"

"Well, you can't!"

"But I insist!"

"Oh! run away and pick flowers!" Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs and gave a snort, like a war-horse scenting the fray.

"Put up your hands, you wotah!" he said, advancing upon Gore.

Jack Blake seized his indignant chum by the arm, and swung him back.

"Come along, Gussy!" he said. "You can spill Gore's gore another time!"

"Welseas me, Blake—"

But Jack Blake hung on, and Arthur Augustus was piloted away.

Gore continued to hold the fort in fine style.

All sorts of people wanted an audience with Talbot, but they were unlucky. Gore indicated the notice on the door, and those who failed to take the hint were forcibly removed.

Talbot worked on in peace. When the dinner-bell rang, he put aside his books and went out into the passage, where Gore still mounted guard.

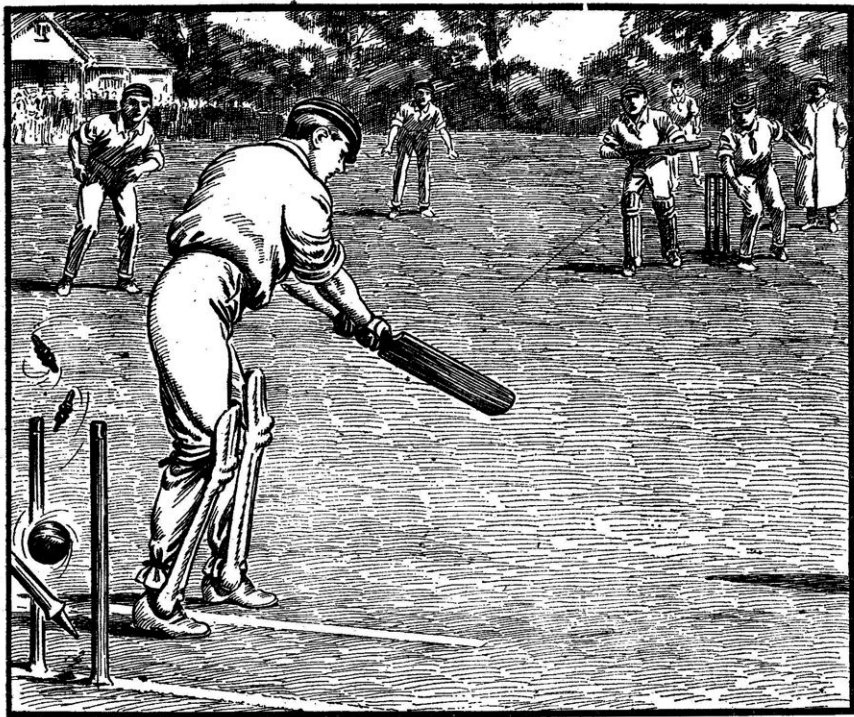
"Hallo!" ejaculated Talbot, staring at his study-mate. "You've been in the way!"

Gore nodded. He had not emerged scathless from his task of keeping would-be intruders at bay. Someone had given him what looked likely to develop into a black eye, his nose was swollen, and his collar and tie were streaming loose.

"I've had my hands full, keeping the fellows off the grass," he explained. "Still, it was worth it. I can stand hard knocks, and you were able to work without interruption. That's all that matters."

"You're a brick, Gore!" said Talbot, gratefully. He realised that, but for his sturdy study-mate, the last hour would not have yielded much in the way of work, for his study would have been besieged by a swarm of fellows.

"Mind you tackle a big dinner," said Gore. "There's nothing like having



Talbot made no mistake this time. He sent down a ball which even Redfern could not stop. Crash! It caught the middle stump full and the balls were sent scattering to the winds. (See chapter 5.)

a solid foundation when you're swotting for an exam."

Talbot was ravenous. He had eaten no breakfast, but he made ample amends at the dinner-table.

After the meal, he went back to his books, and worked without a break until his schoolfellows were dismissed from afternoon lessons.

By this time, Talbot was conscious of a peculiar sensation of giddiness. He remembered Marie's warning about over-doing it, and he reflected that it would be wise to take an hour off. He strolled along to the cricket-ground, where he found the majority of the School House eleven at practice, in readiness for the forthcoming fixture with the new House.

Tom Merry's face lighted up when Talbot arrived.

"Going to take a hand?" he inquired. "If you like!"

Jack Blake was batting at the nets, and the wiles of the bowlers seemed to be completely wasted, for Blake made hay of their deliveries. He got the full face of the bat to a swift ball from Tom Merry, and drove the sphere to the farthest outskirts of the field. He then lashed out at a ball from Monty Lowther, and sent it perilously close to one of the windows of the gymnasium. Blake

was in great form, as the bowlers and fieldsmen knew to their cost.

"The beggar won't budge!" grumbled Manners. "He means to stand there and slog until sunset."

But Talbot ordained otherwise. He sent down an apparently simple ball, which curled round Blake's bat and uprooted the middle stump.

"Well bowled, sir!"

"It was a beauty!" said Jack Blake, with enthusiasm. "But I'll soon have my revenge!"

Talbot took his turn at the wicket. He was very shaky at first, but after a few narrow escapes of being clean bowled, he gained confidence, and hit out briskly. For twenty minutes he kept his wicket intact, and then he was brilliantly caught, on the boundary-line, by Harry Noble.

Tom Merry had witnessed Talbot's display with sparkling eyes. Contrary to expectations, lack of practice had not lessened Talbot's value as a cricketer.

"You simply must turn out for the School House!" said the captain of the Shell. "I intended to find a substitute, thinking that the swotting would upset your form. But after this display it's impossible to leave you out."

"It's decent of you to say that," said

Talbot. "But the House match will interfere with the Founders' exam."

"Oh, no, it won't! It's not going to be played until the exam's all over."

"In that case I'll turn out with pleasure. But I can't guarantee that I shall be in anything like form. After three or four hours in the examination-room I shall probably resemble a limp rag."

"We'll chance that!" said Tom Merry.

And Talbot's name promptly went down on the list of players.

At the end of a further half-hour's activity at the nets Talbot went back to his study. He worked solidly through the evening, the brief period of recreation having cleared his brain.

It was Talbot's intention to sit up all night, swotting, but he found it a physical impossibility to do so. He had had very little sleep of late, and shortly after midnight he fell into a doze.

He awoke with a start at five o'clock, and it was a shock to him to discover that five precious hours had been frittered away in sleep.

"This won't do!" he told himself resolutely. And, fighting down the desire to take a further spell of slumber, he applied himself anew to his task.

All through the day Talbot worked. By tea-time he had finished compiling

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his notes, and now came the hardest task of all—that of memorising what he had written. But the junior was undaunted, and he worked unremittingly all the evening.

Mr. Raitlon gave Talbot a look-in shortly before bed-time.

"How is work progressing, my boy?" inquired the House master.

"First-rate, sir! If the Head hadn't excused me from lessons, though, I shouldn't have stood an earthly chance."

It was Mr. Raitlon who had been instrumental in persuading the Head to relieve Talbot of Form-room attendance, but the House master refrained from mentioning that fact.

"You are looking worn-out, Talbot," he said. "You are overwrought. I suggest that you go to bed."

But Talbot wouldn't hear of it.

"This is my last night, sir," he said, "and if I don't take full advantage of it I shall be likely to regret it. The exam starts at ten o'clock in the morning."

"You are going to work all night?" exclaimed Mr. Raitlon incredulously.

"Yes, sir."

"I am not sure that I ought to allow you to do so."

Talbot threw an appealing glance at the House master.

"Don't stand in my way, sir!" he pleaded.

"Does this examination mean so much to you, Talbot?"

"It means everything, sir!" said the junior vehemently.

Mr. Raitlon was naturally astonished to know that Talbot had so much at stake. He half-suspected that the junior must be working on behalf of somebody else, but he asked no questions.

"Very well, my boy," he said. "You may stay up all night if you wish, but I think that such a course is very foolish. You will hardly be in a fit state in the morning to undergo a formidable and intricate examination."

"I'll risk that, sir. It would be fatal for me to slack off now. Much remains to be done. I'm through with the history and the Latin, but the other subjects have got to be tackled."

Mr. Raitlon nodded.

"It is extremely plucky of you to make this effort, Talbot," he said, "after the disheartening experience of having your notes destroyed. You have my sin-

cere wishes for your success. Good-night, my boy!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The House master retired, shaking his head gravely as he went along to his own quarters. He had been careful to say nothing which might have the effect of damping Talbot's ardour, but he had had an opportunity of seeing the other candidates at work. And he considered in his heart that Talbot of the Shell had no earthly chance of winning premier honours on the morrow.

CHAPTER 3.

The Examination.

BY breakfast-time next morning Talbot had succeeded in committing all his notes to memory. But the strain of the long night's swotting had proved almost too much for him. He was little short of a wreck when he appeared in the dining-hall.

"How goes it?" murmured Gore, as Talbot dropped into the next seat to him at the breakfast-table.

"Not too bad," said Talbot.

"You think you've a sporting chance of pulling off the prize?"

"Yes."

"Good! You deserve to win, if anybody ever did!"

Talbot glanced curiously at his study-mate.

"You seem jolly keen on my winning!" he remarked.

"I am!" said Gore.

"But why?"

"Because," answered Gore in a low tone, "it's obvious to me that you're not working for your own ends, but for somebody else's."

Talbot gave a start.

"Whom do you suppose I'm working for?" he muttered.

"For John Rivers, the professor. Ah, you're blushing! That's clear proof that I'm on the target!"

"How did you know?" asked Talbot.

"I guessed."

"Well, you've guessed rightly, as it happens. But look here, Gore. Promise me—honour bright—that you won't breathe a word about this to a soul!"

"I promise!" said Gore.

And Talbot knew that his study-mate, unreliable though he was in many respects, would keep his word.

Talbot's appetite failed miserably. He was thinking of the vital hours ahead—of the grim and silent struggle which was shortly to be contested in the examination-room. He glanced, in turn, at the three rival candidates who really mattered—Dick Redfern, Dick Brooke, and Dick Julian.

The face of the New House fellow wore a harassed and troubled expression. Evidently Dick Redfern was none too sanguine as to his chances.

Dick Brooke, on the other hand, looked very cheery and confident. And there was good cause for his confidence, since he was without doubt one of the finest scholars in the junior section of St. Jim's.

Dick Julian appeared quite indifferent, but his indifference was merely a mask. Inwardly, he was considerably agitated, for the examination meant much to him.

Talbot weighed his own chances of success, and he was bound to admit that they were none too fussy. The three Dicks had far more time than he in which to prepare for the struggle. But Talbot resolutely banished from his mind the thought of failure. He would not—no, not fail! he told himself almost fiercely. John Rivers must be saved from reverting to a career of dishonour. The three Dicks were good fellows—rattling good fellows—but it would not do for any one of them to figure higher on the list than Talbot.

Breakfast over, Talbot went out into the sunlit quadrangle.

"Good-morning, Toff!"

It was Marie Rivers who made that cheerful salutation.

To the girl's dismay Talbot did not reply. He swayed suddenly, with his hand pressed to his forehead, and he would certainly have fallen had not Marie's arm been stretched out to support him.

"Why, Toff, you are ill!"

Talbot pulled himself together with an effort.

"I—I'm all right, Marie," he said rather unsteadily.

"You are not all right!" retorted the girl. "It is as much as you can do to keep on your feet! You have been over-doing it, Toff!"

"I shall be as right as rain as soon as the exam's over."

"You are not fit to compete!" said Marie, with emphasis. "I will see Dr. Holmes. I will explain to him—"

"No, no!" said Talbot quickly. "It's nothing to make a fuss about, Marie. I assure you!"

"I will not have you ruin your health and constitution, Toff—not even for my father's sake!"

"I'm all right, I tell you!" said Talbot, almost angrily. "You must not interfere, Marie. Now that I've gone so far I must see the thing through. I insist upon it! Nothing you say can make a scrap of difference!"

Marie looked very anxious and concerned, but she realised that nothing would turn Talbot from his purpose. He was deaf to all argument. He had laboured, and he was determined, if possible, to enter into the fruits of his labours. Not for nothing had he endured all those weary hours of toil in his study.

"It seems that nothing can stop you, Toff," said Marie Rivers in a low tone. "You are foolish to go on, but it is a splendid folly! I admire you for it, Toff! And I hope from my heart that the honours may be yours!"

Talbot began to feel better. He filled his lungs with the fresh, pure air which

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Perched on the shoulders of Lowther, Tom Merry read out the report. "Reddy's won, good old Reddy—he's won the Founders' exam!" But it was a near thing. (See Chapter 5.)

had so long been denied him. And he made up his mind not to be conquered by the dizzy sensation which had so nearly brought about his collapse.

He remained in conversation with Marie Rivers until the bell rang, summoning the various candidates to the examination-room.

"I must be off, Marie," said Talbot. "The battle begins in earnest now."

Marie took the speaker's hand and gave it a tight little squeeze.

"Good luck, Toff!" she said. And then she turned abruptly away, lest Talbot should notice that tears were in her eyes.

Talbot made his way to the examination-room. He met the Terrible Three en route, and they nodded to him in a friendly enough way. But they did not wish him success, because they felt that they could not sincerely do so.

Talbot was the last of the candidates to reach the examination-room. He was motioned to a seat by the Head, who presided over the proceedings. And then, after a brief address by Dr. Holmes, the examination commenced.

It did not take Talbot long to get into his stride. He covered sheet after sheet of foolscap, seldom having to pause and puzzle things out.

Only once did he look up, and then he was somewhat surprised to see that Dick Redfern was in difficulties.

The first subject was an essay on the

Tudor period in English history, and Redfern seemed absolutely stumped. He had not yet written a couple of paragraphs; and Talbot had written twenty, and lengthy ones at that.

After a time, however, the positions reversed, and it was Talbot who was in difficulties.

The subject was mathematics, and Talbot found himself confronted with some problems which, to him, seemed appallingly difficult. To Dick Redfern, however, they appeared to be child's play; and Dick Brooke and Dick Julian were both working away industriously.

As for the other candidates, they seemed to have fallen hopelessly out of line. The examination was far more severe than they had anticipated, and they had soon found themselves out of their depth. It became increasingly obvious that Talbot had no one to fear, apart from the three Dicks.

An hour passed, and Talbot again found himself assailed by a sensation of giddiness. He battled against it, but on one occasion he was within an ace of collapse.

"Are you ill, Talbot?" inquired the Head, with some concern.

"No, sir," came the dozzed reply.

"You are looking decidedly pale, my boy. Perhaps the stuffy atmosphere of the room has something to do with it. I will have the windows opened."

The Head did so, and Talbot bent over his desk once more.

How he got through the remainder of the morning he never knew. It was like a ghastly nightmare. His head seemed to be on fire, and he felt utterly off-colour.

Yet, in spite of these handicaps, Talbot managed to concentrate on the task in hand. The energy he displayed that morning was indeed a triumph of mind over matter. The pluck of the fellow was inexhaustible. He determined to hold on and hold out. And his determination carried him through.

The ordeal was over at last.

Dr. Holmes collected all the examination-papers, and conveyed them to his study; and the candidates emerged only too willingly into the fresh air.

Out in the quadrangle they began to compare notes.

"How do you think you've fared, Reddy?" inquired Dick Julian.

"Better than I expected," was Redfern's reply. And the words made Talbot's heart sink.

"Did the Latin floor you?" continued Julian.

"Not a bit. The only subject I came a cropper over was English history. I had been sweating up the Stuart period, thinking it would be one of the subjects, and when I found that the Tudor period had been set I nearly fell through the floor!"

"What sort of a show did you put up, Brooke?" asked Julian.

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"Oh, a pretty moderate one!" said Dick Brooke. "I'm not hopeful of finishing at the top. If I do, then the others must have performed very badly."

"What about you, Julian?" said Talbot.

Dick Julian shrugged his shoulders. "I've done nothing to write home about," he said. "Afraid I had a bad attack of nerves. It passed off as the morning wore on; but I've a horrible feeling that I haven't done so well as I ought to have done."

"And you, Talbot?" said Redfern, with a note of anxiety in his tone.

"Well, I haven't exactly set the Three—or, rather, the Boy—on fire," said Talbot. "The problems set on the mathematics paper were teasers. But I did my best, in the circle."

"You looked awfully groggy," said Dick Brooke. "I thought you were going to faint once."

Talbot smiled.

"I stuck it out," he said, "and I don't think I'm any the worse for it."

"Are you playing in the House-match this afternoon?" inquired Redfern.

"Yes," said Talbot. "I am I. But I'm dashed if I feel like cricket just now! I'm impatient to hear the result of the exam."

"When will it be announced?" asked Julian.

"I don't know. But it will take them hours to wade through all the papers. We're not likely to hear the result until the match is over, anyway."

Now that the ordeal of the examination had passed, Talbot rapidly regained his strength and vitality. He didn't want to think about the result, and he looked forward eagerly to the House-match, which would take his mind off the subject.

After dinner, Talbot changed into his flannels. Then he sought out Marie Rivers.

"I'm as fit as a fiddle, Marie!" he assured her.

"I am so glad, Toff. I was afraid you were going to collapse. How did you get on?"

"Oh, fairly well! I think I had the measure of Brooke and Julian. But Redfern seems to have made a good job of it, and he may score a narrow victory. But there won't be much in it."

"It will be cruel luck if you finish anything but first," said Marie. "Are you playing cricket for the School House this afternoon?"

"Yes," said Talbot.

"Splendid! I'll come along and watch you."

"I shouldn't advise you to," said Talbot, with a smile. "I'm bound to make a duck's-egg, and to muff unlimited catches."

"Not you!" said Marie.

Marie Rivers expected big things of Talbot that afternoon.

The examination over, he would be able to throw himself heart and soul into task of a far more genial nature—that of assisting the School House to victory.

CHAPTER 4. King Cricket.

"FEELING fit?"

Tom Merry asked the question of Talbot as the latter mounted the pavilion steps.

"I'm ready for anything!" answered Talbot cheerfully.

"Good! I think we ought to just win; but it will be no walk-over."

"Are you ready, you School House shrimps?" sang out Figgins, who skived the New House side.

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"Yes, rather!" said Monty Lowther. "It won't take us long to dispose of the New House winkles!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was to be a single-innings match, and that the contest would prove a keen one was doubted by nobody.

Tom Merry won the toss, and as the wicket looked in excellent trim he decided to bat first. The seats in front of the pavilion were packed with spectators, and there was no lack of enthusiasm.

A ringing cheer went up as Tom Merry and Talbot walked out to open the School House innings.

"Hurrah!"

"Play up, you fellows!"

The opening was sensational.

Tom Merry had to face Fatty Wynn, and to the dismay of the School House supporters, and the delight of the New House partisans, Fatty's first ball snicked off the balls.

The captain of the Shell was astounded. He had not attempted to hit the ball, thinking it was right off the wicket. But it had curled in swiftly, with disastrous results.

"Rough luck, old man!" said Talbot, as Tom Merry started on the long, long trail to the pavilion.

"Fatty," said Figgins, clapping his plump chain on the shoulder, "you're worth your weight in doughnuts! Keep it up, old son, and half my kingdom is thine!"

Fatty Wynn laughed breathlessly.

"I'll do my best to skittle the beggars out," he promised. "But I fancy some of them will take some shifting."

Jack Blake was the next man in, and to him fell the honour of scoring the first run for his side.

It was now Talbot's turn to give a state of his quality, and the crowd looked on eagerly, wondering how the Shell fellow would fare after his recent ordeal in the examination-room.

Talbot made a wretched start. He strode forward, as if with the intention of despatching Fatty Wynn's first ball into the farthest limits of the horizon; then he suddenly changed his mind, and played back at it instead.

The ball was spooned into the air, and the wicket-keeper ought to have had it safe and sound in his gloved hands. But he was a little too slow.

"Careful, Talbot!" sang out Tom Merry, from the pavilion.

But Talbot continued to be ill-at-ease with Fatty Wynn's deliveries. The Falstaff of the New House had him guessing every time, and the School House supporters groaned. Talbot's downfall, they told themselves, was imminent.

The other bowler happened to be Dick Redfern, and Talbot was more at home with him.

Reddy's mind was centred upon the result of the Founders' exam. He could think of nothing else. In consequence, his bowling was atrocious.

Talbot hit two balls to the boundary in quick succession. Another ball, which happened to be a full toss, he deposited amongst the spectators in front of the pavilion.

"That's tons better!" said Tom Merry, with relish. "Hope they keep Redfern on. He's sending down some awfully feeble stuff."

But Figgins was wise in his generation, and he said to Redfern, at the end of the latter's first over:

"You're off-colour, old chap. Better let me take a turn."

After this change wickets fell with astonishing rapidity.

Jack Blake was clean bowled, and a similar fate befell Herries and Digby before either of them could score.

Talbot kept his wicket intact, and he was putting up a much better show now. He flogged Figgins' bowling unmercifully, and he even took liberties with Fatty Wynn's.

But Talbot could get nobody to stay with him.

Harry Noble hit up a dozen runs in an incredibly short space of time, but he soon fell an easy prey to Fatty Wynn.

And now Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, resplendent in his spotless flannels, lounged out to the wicket.

"Play up, Gussy!"

"Mind you don't spoil your bags!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus took guard, and he snicked Fatty Wynn's first ball through the slips for two. In trying to repeat the experiment, however, he played the ball on to his wicket.

"You silly duffer!" growled Tom Merry, when the swell of St. Jim's returned to the pavilion. "Why couldn't you keep your end up?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy! You have no wight to address me in that mannah! I made two moah wuns than you, anyway!"

"Look here—"

"Pax, you two!" said Monty Lowther. "If you want to see how runs are made, feast your eyes on me. I'm going to imagine I'm Jack Hobbs."

"It needs a jolly big stretch of the imagination!" growled Manners.

Monty Lowther looked more like a comedian than anything else as he sallied out to the wicket.

In view of the general collapse, Lowther was not expected to do much. To the surprise and delight of the School House fellows, however, he despatched his first ball far into the long-field. A couple of fieldsmen raced to retrieve it, but before the ball was returned Talbot and Monty Lowther had crossed four times.

"Bwavo, Lowthah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, clapping his hands with enthusiasm.

Monty heard the exclamation, and, turning towards the pavilion, he made a sweeping bow. Then he made ready to face Fatty Wynn once more.

The New House fellow sent down the best ball he knew. But Monty Lowther was equal to the occasion: He leapt out of his crease like a tiger, and smote. The ball didn't go exactly where he had intended it should go, but it was a good hit, all the same, and the batsmen ran three.

And now Talbot came into the picture once more. He played a forcing game, and the score rose swiftly.

The figures on the telegraph-board mounted from 50 to 60, from 60 to 70, and at 75 Monty Lowther was brilliantly caught at mid-on by Lawrence.

Loud cheers greeted Lowther as he walked back to the pavilion. He had scored 21 runs, and had greatly enhanced the prospects of his House.

Manners took Lowther's place, but he was not so successful. After scoring three singles, he was caught and bowled by Figgins.

Sidney Clive followed on, and assisted Talbot to take the score to ninety. Then he was clean bowled.

"Last man in," said Tom Merry.

Dick Brooke stepped out from the pavilion. He knew that much depended upon him. If the School House failed to total 100, it was improbable that they would win, since there were several fine batsmen in the New House camp.

Brooke played himself in very carefully, and he left the hitting to Talbot, who was in excellent trim.

Five minutes later the hundred went up.

"Hurrah!"
"Well played, Talbot!"
"Stick it out, Brooke!"
There was joy in the ranks of the School House. And the joy developed into riotous rapture as Talbot continued to make the fur fly.

Brooke played steadily and unselfishly. He put a straight bat in front of every ball, and although Fatty Wynn repeatedly tried to induce him to hit out, Brooke was not having any.

For upwards of twenty minutes Talbot and Brooke remained in partnership. Then Talbot endeavoured to snatch a single, and Brooke stumbled and fell midway between the wickets. Before he could recover he was run out.

"A hundred and twenty, by Jove!" said Jack Blake, as the players came off.

"How many has Talbot made?"
"Sixty-six, not out," said Lefevre, of the Fifth, who had charge of the scoring-book.

"Hurrah!"

Talbot received a tremendous ovation. After a shaky start, he had succeeded in scoring more than half of his side's total.

"Splendid, Toff—splendid!" said Marie Rivers, with sparkling eyes. "I fancy the School House will win easily."

But Talbot shook his head.

"A hundred and twenty is a jolly useful total," he said, "but the New House have got some first-rate batsmen, and they'll take some shifting."

In the interval that followed Talbot went along to the school notice-board. There was just a chance that the result of the Founders' exam would appear thereon.

Racke and Crooke were lounging by the notice-board. They sneered at Talbot as he came up.

"Notin' doin'!" said Aubrey Racke.

"The result hasn't been published yet."

"And when it's published," said Crooke, "I reckon you'll have a rude shock."

"Talbot smiled.

"I don't think so," he said. "I'm conceited enough to hope that I shall be in the first three."

To which Aubrey Racke replied with the time-honoured injunction:

"Wait an' see!"

CHAPTER 5.

A Staggering Blow.

"WELL hit, sir!"

"Jolly well hit!"

The faces of the New House supporters were flushed and radiant with hope.

Figgins and Kerr had opened the innings, to the bowling of Tom Merry and Jack Blake. And runs came thick and fast.

It was the fixed intention of Figgins and his partner to lay a solid foundation, and they certainly succeeded.

The School House bowling was good, the fielding was smart, the throwing-in very accurate. But the New House batting held the supremacy, and when 40 went up on the telegraph-board, Figgins and Kerr were still together.

Tom Merry looked grim as he tossed the ball to Clive.

"Give 'em some of your leg-breaks," he said. "If they don't shift them, nothing will!"

Clive was a useful bowler—an opinion to which Figgins readily subscribed when he saw his middle stump performing revolutions.

"Well bowled, Sidney, old top!" drawled Cardew, who was perched on the roller, watching the game.

And from the pavilion came a chorus of approval.

Figgins had scored 26, and he was clapped by both sets of supporters. He had played a faultless innings, and he cherished high hopes of a New House victory.

After Figgy's departure, however, not set in.

Stimulated by his success, Clive bowled with splendid effect.

One after another the New House batsmen trailed back to the pavilion.

"Stick it, School House! You've got 'em groggy!" shouted Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Seventy runs had been scored when the seventh wicket fell. It looked good odds on the School House winning by a comfortable margin.

But then Lawrence and Owen came together, and their partnership was no less brilliant than that of Talbot and Dick Brooke.

Playing with confidence and vigour, they took the score to a hundred before they were separated; Owen being smartly run out by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Twenty to tie—twenty-one to win!"

said Figgins. "We'll do it yet!"

But the next two batsmen failed miserably. After the score was still the same when Redfern, the last man in, went in to join Lawrence.

It was very unusual for Dick Redfern to go in last. On his day, he was the best bat in the New House bar none. But on this occasion the examination claimed all his thoughts. It was of far more importance to him than a House-match. If he won it, he would be able to assist his father, who would have no term fees to pay for a whole year. If, on the other hand, he finished anywhere but first, and he would have to leave St. Jim's.

And he could not bear the thought of severing his connection with the old school.

Reddy's suspense was terrible.

It was cruel, he reflected, that a fellow should have to wait such an age before the results were published.

The junior was still thinking of the examination, and of all that meant to him, as he walked out to the wicket.

Figgins endeavoured to rouse him from his gloomy reverie.

"Play up, Reddy!" he shouted. "All you need do is to keep your end up. Leave the hitting to Lawrence!"

Redfern nodded in a dazed sort of way, and went on.

Talbot was bowling now. It was a curious coincidence that these two should have been together, both in the examination-room and on the playing field. But there was this difference between them: Talbot was able to concentrate on cricket—Redfern had no place in his mind for anything save the examination.

Play!

Down came the ball, and Lawrence, watching from the other end, gave a shudder as the sphere just missed Reddy's off-stump.

"Pull yourself together, old man!" he counselled.

Redfern tried to take himself in hand—tried to fix his attention to the game.

But he failed lamentably, and soon his next ball into the hands of Herries at cover-point.

To the consternation of the School House supporters, Herries muffed the catch.

"Yah!"

"Betterfingers!"

A derisive shout greeted the unfortunate Herries, who devoutly wished that the earth would open and swallow him up.

And now it was Lawrence's turn to face the bowling.

Lawrence realised that if the match was to be won for the New House, he

must win it. It was no use relying on Redfern, who was shockingly off-colour.

Accordingly, Lawrence opened his shoulders, and in one over he managed to score 14.

Figgins was executing a sort of warden in front of the pavilion.

"Six to tie—7 to win!" he exclaimed. And he kept repeating the phrase like a parrot.

"We'll do it yet, Figgy!" said Kerr.

"If only Reddy can keep his end up!" There was a hush as Redfern once again faced Talbot.

It was generally considered that the game would be decided in this over. And so it proved.

Redfern blocked Talbot's first ball. He snicked the second ball through the slips, and started to run, but Lawrence waved him back. Brooke had fielded the ball in fine style.

Talbot's third ball was a beauty. It had the batsman beaten all the way. Redfern attempted to hit it, but he missed completely, and expected to hear a shattering sound behind him.

The ball, however, just skimmed the bats, and Redfern was saved.

Talbot's next delivery pitched short, and it would have been criminal neglect on Redfern's part to fail to smite it.

Reddy ran out, and hit the ball over the head of mid-wicket.

"Come on!" cried Lawrence, as he pelted down the pitch.

The batsmen crossed twice, so that Redfern still had the bowling.

Talbot made no mistake this time. He sent down a ball which would have baffled most batsmen. It certainly baffled Redfern.

Crash!

A second before the middle stump had been standing upright, in its wonted place. Now it was yard away, and the balls seemed to have been scattered to the winds.

"Out!"

"Well bowled, sir!"

The School House fieldsmen rushed up to Talbot and hugged him. The supporters who had been seated in front of the pavilion now swarmed on to the playing-pitch, and the air was rent with cheering.

"Hurrah!"

"School House for ever!"

"We've won by 4 runs—thanks to Talbot!"

It was a great moment for the Toff. The fellows seemed to have forgotten their resentment at his having entered the Founders' exam. It was solely of the School House victory that they were now thinking—the victory in which Talbot had played so prominent a part.

On the shoulders of the School House supporters Talbot was borne in triumph to the pavilion. He clamoured repeatedly to be set down, but his exuberant schoolfellows gave him quite a joy-ride before they acceded to his request. And when at last they set him on his feet, he found Marie Rivers confronting him with outstretched hand.

"Well played, Toff—well played, indeed!"

Talbot shook hands with his girl chum.

"Really, it's nothing to make a song about," he said, with a smile. "Redfern didn't give even a glimpse of his real form, and it wasn't difficult to bowl him out."

"I feel very sorry for Redfern," said Marie. "He's worrying about the exam."

"Don't you think I'm worrying, Marie?"

"Of course! But you were able to banish the affair from your mind during the match, and Redfern wasn't."

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The New House junior looked utterly crestfallen as he came off.

"It's my fault that we went under," he remarked to Figgins. "I shouldn't have played. I couldn't help thinking about the beastly exam."

"Don't reproach yourself, old man," said Figgins. "You did your best, in the circumstances. Anybody could see that you weren't fit to do the mark."

"I do hope Reddy's pulled off the exam," said Paddy Wynn. "He'll feel tons better then."

"The result ought to be out by now," said Kerr.

"Let's go and see," said Lawrence. The New House fellows hurried away towards the building, and Tom Merry & Co., guessing their intentions, followed hard on their heels.

"Wonder who's won?" panted Monty Lowther, as he sprinted along beside Tom Merry and Manners.

"I've a feeling that Dick Brooke has pulled it off," said Tom Merry.

"No; Redfern's the lucky dog!" declared Manners.

"Hallo! The result's out all right!" said Jack Blake, quickening his pace as the notice-board came in sight.

A large crowd of fellows buzzed like bees in front of the board, on which the results were posted.

The New House fellows were cheering vociferously.

"In right!" exclaimed Manners. "Reddy's got it! Ho and Robinson minor are the only New House fellows who entered, and you can bet your boots that Robinson hasn't won it!"

"I can't even see the blessed board!" grumbled Tom Merry.

"Let me hoist you on to my broad and muscular back, Tommy!" said Monty Lowther. "That's the way! Now tell us the result. We're simply dying to hear it!"

Perched none too securely on his chum's back, Tom Merry declaimed the announcement word for word.

It was as follows:

"FOUNDERS' EXAMINATION."

"The results of this examination are now available, and they are appended herewith:

	No. of Marks.
1st R. H. REDFERN	975.
2nd R. Brooke	972.
3rd R. Julian	930.
4th P. Wynn	856.
5th B. MacDonald	832.
6th R. Talbot	720.
7th W. T. Robinson	598.

"According to the conditions governing the examination, the winner—R. H. Redfern—will receive the sum of one hundred pounds, and no term-fee will be paid on his behalf for the period of one year."

"(Signed) RICHARD HOLMES, Headmaster."

"No wonder the New House fellows are going mad!" said Tom Merry, when he had finished his recital. "Reddy's won!"

"And he jolly well deserved to!" said Manners heartily.

"Good old Reddy!" Congratulations were simply rained upon Dick Redfern from all sides.

The long period of suspense was over, and the New House junior was smiling happily as his chums surrounded him and wrung his hands.

"It was a near thing," said Figgins. "Dick Brooke nearly dashed you for first place. Still, a miss is as good as a mile."

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"What I can't understand," said Redfern, "is Talbot being so low on the list."

"Same here!" said Lawrence. "He seems to have come a terrible cropper. Why, even Wyatt and MacDonald, who were regarded as hopeless outsiders, have left him standing!"

"Here he comes!" said Kerr. "Let's clear off, or it will look as if we're gloating over his failure!"

Instinctively, all the fellows moved away from the notice-board. They knew that the announcement would not make pleasant reading, so far as Talbot was concerned. And they did not wish to see the expression on his face when he discovered his fate.

Talbot's first impression, when he saw the crowd meeting away like mist before the morning sun, was that he had won the Founders' prize, and that his victory was not popular. But he was soon disillusioned. And when he halted in front of the notice-board, and saw Redfern's name at the top of the list, he nearly collapsed.

It was a staggering blow—a blow which even Talbot's iron fortitude could scarce withstand.

"I've lost!" he muttered. And in those two words lay a depth of tragedy.

The labour—the striving—the fight against time—all had been in vain.

The professor, tramping the London streets in search of employment, and hoping that the Toff would be able to stretch out a helping hand, would find his hopes shattered. Talbot would be unable to come to his rescue. In desperation, John Rivers would once again be compelled to take up a crackman's career.

With clenched hands and pale cheeks Talbot stood motionless. The Head's announcement seemed to mock him.

Not only had he failed, but his failure was crushing and complete. For the life of him he could not understand it. He could have sworn that he had fared better than Wyatt and MacDonald, who, although decent fellows, were neither clever nor studious. And yet he was last on the list, with the exception of Robinson, who didn't count.

A shattering blow, indeed, to the fellow who, but a short time since, had won the match for his side! Evidently Fate had not intended him to have a twofold triumph.

Dick Redfern had beaten Talbot by the overwhelming margin of two hundred and fifty-five marks!

And Talbot had said to Marie, "Redfern may secure a narrow victory, but there won't be much in it!"

Redfern's victory had certainly been a narrow one—but not so far as Talbot was concerned!

Sick at heart, the junior turned away from that gruesome record of his failure.

For once in a way his courage failed him utterly. He could not bear to go and communicate the result of the examination to Marie Rivers. Had he finished second or third, he might have done so; but how could he explain to Marie that he had finished "nowhere"?

With heavy steps Talbot went along to his study.

Goro was within. He had seen the result of the Founders' examination, and it had not pleased him.

"Rough luck, Talbot!" he said.

Without a word, Talbot flung himself into a chair.

"I'll clear out, if you like," said Goro. "I know how you must be feeling."

Talbot threw a grateful glance at his study-mate, who withdrew, leaving the unhappy junior alone with his thoughts.

CHAPTER 6.

Too Premature!

"GOOD old Reddy!" "Bring him along!" The New House juniors waxed very enthusiastic. They insisted upon "chairing" Dick Redfern, and carrying him in triumph through the quadrangle.

Redfern murmured. "Stop it, you fellows!" he said. "There's nothing to make a fuss about."

But Figgins & Co. thought otherwise. Despite his protestations, Dick Redfern was made to undergo the "chairing," and his chums cheered lustily as they carried him into the quad.

The cheering could have been heard all over St. Jim's; and in the Head's study, which was close at hand, it had an almost deafening sound.

Dr. Holmes, who was seated in the study with Messrs. Railton, Linton, and Latham, looked up in surprise as cheer after cheer rang out.

"Bless my soul!" he murmured. "What is the meaning of this vocal demonstration?"

Mr. Railton smiled. "I rather fancy, sir, that the junior House-match has just finished, and that the victors are receiving a substantial measure of applause."

"That is probably the case," agreed Mr. Latham.

Dr. Holmes was compelled to stop his ears as the procession passed his window.

Figgins & Co. were exercising their lung-power to excellent advantage.

"Really, I cannot tolerate this!" gasped the Head. "Enthusiasm is a splendid thing; but it may sometimes be carried too far. I shall have to remonstrate with these boys."

So saying, Dr. Holmes rose to his feet and crossed over to the window.

The seething, swaying, boisterous crowd in the quadrangle failed to notice him at first; but presently Kerr uttered a warning exclamation, and the cheering was hushed.

"I really must request you to make less noise, my boys!" said the Head. "You appear to be almost hysterical."

"Sorry, sir," stammered Figgins; "but we're so awfully bucked to know that, Reddy—I mean Redfern—has won."

The Head smiled. "You need not apologise, Figgins. I merely wish you to be a little less boisterous. We cannot concentrate upon our task of checking the examination-papers."

Figgins nearly fell down. And the rest of the juniors looked utterly flabbergasted.

"Ch-ch-checking the examination-papers, sir?" stammered Figgins.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Why do you speak in such a surprised tone, Figgins?"

"The—the result of the Founders' exam was posted over an hour ago, sir!"

"Nonsense, Wynn!" said the Head, rather tartly. "It has not been possible to draw up a tabulated list of results."

"But—but the list is on the notice-board, sir!" said Lawrence.

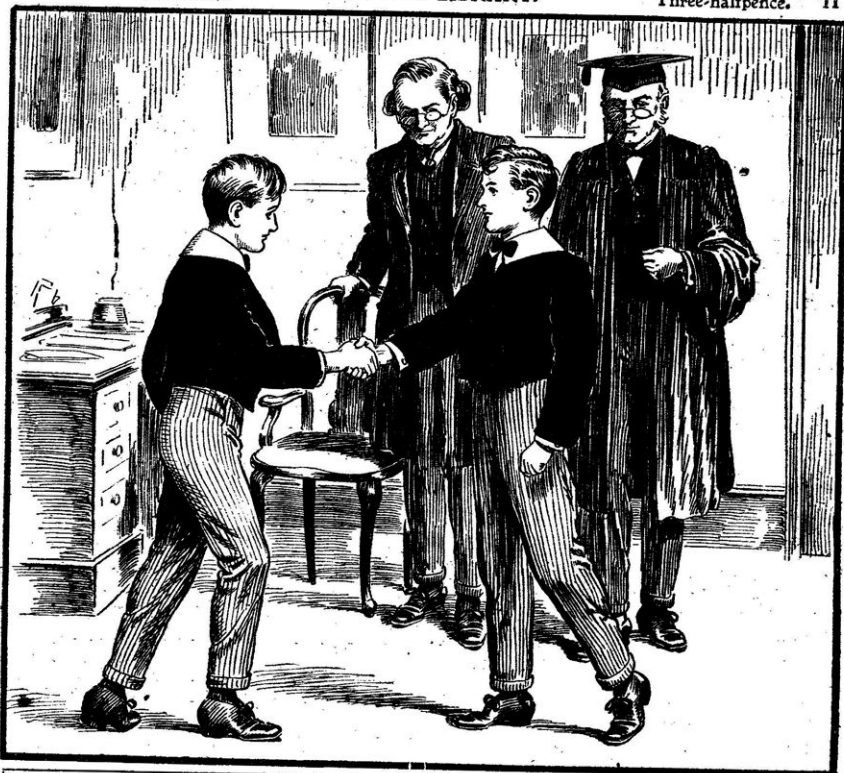
"What!"

"And Redfern's name is on the top, sir!" chimed in Owen.

The Head's brow grew stern.

"If, as you say, the results have already been posted up," he said, "I can only conclude that a practical joke has been played."

"My hat! Do you mean to say that



"Congrats, old man!" said Talbot, still smiling. And he came forward and shook Redfern by the hand. John Rivers followed suit, and so did the Head. (See chapter 9.)

the list on the notice-board isn't genuine, sir?" gasped Figgins.

"Emphatically it is not!"

"Oh, crumbe!"

Redfern turned pale. He was set down on his feet, and he stood blinking dazedly at the Head.

The news that the announcement on the notice-board was a "fake" seemed to set a hammer going in Reddy's brain. He felt on the verge of collapse.

"Now I come to think of it," said Kerr excitedly, "the announcement was typewritten. The only part that was written by hand was the Head's signature."

"Some cad has done this!" declared Figgins, clenching his hands.

A loud murmur of indignation arose. It was only too obvious that some unscrupulous person had published a bogus list of results, and had imitated the Head's signature.

"Figgins," said Dr. Holmes, "kindly bring me the announcement to which you refer."

The New House junior sprinted away. He returned inside a couple of minutes with the spoof results.

"Ah! It is as I thought," said the Head, glancing at the document. "This list is entirely false, and its publication is quite unauthorised."

"Hasn't Redfern won the Founders' prize, sir?" asked Lawrence anxiously.

"I am not yet in a position to say. Several more papers remain to be checked. The result of the examination will be publicly announced in due course. As for the instigators of this cruel, practical joke," added the Head sternly, "I shall leave no stone unturned to bring them to book!"

So saying, Dr. Holmes turned away from the window, and the New House juniors retired into the building, greatly discomfited.

Redfern was utterly cast down; but Lawrence and Owen rallied at once to his side, like the loyal chums they were.

"Buck up, old man!" said Lawrence. "It was a caddish trick to stick that list on the notice-board, but the chances are that you've finished at the top, after all!"

"Yes, rather!" said Owen. "The fellows who drew up the spoof results may prove to be true prophets!"

Dick Redfern, crushed and dispirited, made no reply.

The news that the list of results was false, spread rapidly, and great was the excitement and indignation in both Houses.

Talbot, seated alone in his study, knew nothing of what was going on.

It had never occurred to him that there had been any trickery.

Clang! Clang!

The notes of the school-bell clanged out in a harsh manner.

Talbot started to his feet.

What did this mean?

Seldom, indeed, had the school-bell been known to ring on a half-holiday. Something must be very much amiss, Talbot reflected. Was it possible that the school was on fire, or that some other calamity was impending?

Talbot stepped out into the passage. He saw quite a crowd of fellows hurrying past.

"What's going on?" he inquired.

"It's a general assembly in Big Hall," said Jack Blake. "Buck up!"

"But what the thump—"

"No time to explain," said Blake.

"You'll soon hear all about it."

Talbot joined the procession, and in a remarkably short space of time boys and masters were in their allotted places in Big Hall.

The Head was already present. He raised his hand for silence—rather a superfluous proceeding, for scarcely a murmur was audible.

Talbot was frankly puzzled. He could not see what was going on.

not for the life of him understand what it was all about.

But he was soon to learn!

CHAPTER 7. The Real Thing.

"I HAVE called you together, my boys," began the Head, "in connection with the Founders' examination. It appears that a cruel, a monstrous injustice, has been inflicted upon the candidates. Some person or persons concocted a list of results, and posted it up on the school notice-board."

The Head paused. It was an impressive pause, and for once in a way nobody—not even Monty Lowther—attempted to make a jest.

"It is impossible for me to take anything but the most serious view of the matter," continued Dr. Holmes. "The candidates have been grossly deceived as to their positions on the list."

Redfern gave a groan. He interpreted the Head's words to mean that he wasn't at the top of the list, after all.

"The bogus announcement," said the Head, "has been placed in my hands. It is a typewritten document, and my signature has been cunningly inscribed at the foot of it. I am not surprised that the announcement was taken to be genuine."

There was another pause. Then, with his stern gaze fixed upon the silent assembly, the Head exclaimed:

"I call upon the boy or boys responsible for this outrage to stand forward!"

Nobody moved.

"I am determined to get to the root of this matter," the Head went on. "Anyone who can throw any light on this matter is strongly advised to produce his evidence without delay!"

At this juncture, Baggy Trimble whispered in the ear of Aubrey Racke, who stood next to him:

"Ten bob!"

"What do you mean, you fat worm?" hissed Racke.

"Give me ten bob, and I won't breathe a word about what I heard," said Trimble *persuasively*.

"Dry up!" snarled the cad of the Shell.

"Oh, really, Racke! Ten bob won't break the bank. And it will get you out of an awful scrape! I should advise you to hand it over at once, or—"

"Trimble!"

The Head's voice rang out sternly. "Y-o-o-s, sir?" faltered Baggy.

"You were talking, Trimble?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"What were you saying to Racke? Tell me the truth at once, or you will be severely dealt with!"

"I—I was advising Racke to own up, sir!" stammered the fat junior.

"Shut up!" muttered Racke fiercely.

The Head frowned.

"Can you throw any light on this affair, Trimble?" he demanded.

"Nunno, sir!"

"Then what made you prompt Racke to own up?"

"I—I—"

"If you know anything about this, Baggy," muttered Tom Merry, who was standing immediately behind Trimble, "I should advise you to make a clean breast of it."

Baggy Trimble acted upon this advice. He was unable to extort any hush-money from Racke, and he, therefore, had no scruples in exposing him.

"I'll tell you all about it, sir!" said Trimble, and the whole school hung on his words. "I happened to hear Racke

and Crooke plotting this affair. They were saying that it would be a jolly good wheeze to go down to the printing-office in the village, and borrow the typewriter, and draw up a fake list of results. They wanted to give Talbot a shock by putting his name nearly last on the list. There was some difficulty about forging your signature, sir, but Racke said he thought he could wrangle it all right."

The Head nodded grimly.

"And what were you saying to Racke just now?" he exclaimed.

"I was urging him to own up, sir."

"Nothing of the sort!" snarled Racke, who saw that the game was up. "You were trying to get a bribe out of me, you worm!"

"Racke! Crooke! Trimble!" rapped out the Head. "Come here at once!"

The three precious rascals advanced towards the raised dais at the end of the hall.

Racke and Crooke were pale and sullen; and Baggy Trimble was quivering like a table-jelly. He could not understand why he had been ordered to join the offenders.

"Mr. Railton," said the Head, "perhaps you would be good enough to telephone to the printing-office in Rycombe and verify Trimble's statement?"

"Certainly, sir!" said the House-master.

And he quitted the hall.

The school waited in a state of expectancy for five minutes, and then Mr. Railton returned.

"Trimble's statement is quite correct, sir," he said. "Racke and Crooke paid a visit to the printing-office this afternoon, and borrowed the typewriter. They left behind them a sheet of paper, on which your signature had been copied several times."

"Thank you, Mr. Railton!" said the Head. "No further evidence is necessary. Racke and Crooke, you have been guilty of a most base and unpardonable action! Have you anything to say?"

Racke preserved a sullen silence, but Crooke blurted out:

"It was only a joke, sir. We saw no harm in it. We simply wanted to pull Talbot's leg."

The Head frowned.

"I do not understand that somewhat vulgar phrase, Crooke. All that I understand is that you have both behaved abominably and despicably; and in deciding to administer a public flogging, I am not sure that the punishment is adequate to the offence. Your conduct richly merits expulsion! To forge your headmaster's signature was a most unpardonable proceeding!"

"It was Racke who did that part of the business, sir."

The Head did not seem to hear Crooke's words. He motioned to Taggles, the porter, who was lounging in the doorway.

Taggles shuffled forward, and Racke and Crooke were hoisted, in turn, on to his broad shoulders, whilst the Head wielded the birch.

Public floggings had been witnessed at St. Jim's many a time and oft; but few had been so severe as this.

The screams of the unhappy victims rang through Big Hall, and the majority of the fellows had nothing but contempt for Racke and Crooke, neither of whom made any effort to endure the ordeal with fortitude.

"Now, Trimble!" said the Head, when the organisers of the cruel jape had been dealt with.

"Me, sir!" said the fat junior ungrammatically, and in tones of dire alarm,

"Yes, you!" said Dr. Holmes, taking a fresh grip on the implement of torture. "But—what have I done, sir?"

"You oversteered a most dastardly plot, and you failed to bring it to the notice of the authorities! Moreover, you attempted to blackmail Racke. I should not dream of overlooking such conduct. Taggles, do your duty!"

Baggy Trimble was duly hoisted on to the porter's shoulders, and again the birch rose and fell.

The victim was not of the stuff of which heroes are made. His piercing yells filled the assembly with disgust.

The Head laid down the birch at last, and he addressed the squirming trio.

"Go to your places!" he said sternly. "And understand that if there is any repetition of this sort of conduct, I shall punish you in a more drastic manner!"

When Racke, Crooke, and Trimble had returned to their places, the Head consulted a sheet of paper in his hand.

"It is now my pleasure to announce the true and correct result of the examination for the Founders' prize," he said.

There was a flutter of excitement in Big Hall.

Four of the candidates found it difficult—almost impossible—to conceal their emotion. Those four were Talbot, Redfern, Brown, and Julian.

The other three—Wyatt and Macdonald and Robinson minor—did not expect to find themselves anywhere near the top. It was patent to them that their four rivals were infinitely better scholars.

"In co-operation with a committee of masters," said Dr. Holmes, "I have checked the various papers, and allotted the necessary marks, with the following result."

Talbot's hands were tightly clenched, so that the knuckles stood out sharp and white.

Dick Redfern bit his lower lip. And Brooks and Julian were trembling.

Who had won the day?

The Head's next words supplied the solution.

"The winner of the Founders' prize is Reginald Talbot!"

"Hurrah!"

It was Gore of the Shell who led the cheering.

Others joined in; but the applause was by no means unanimous.

Talbot had won. But the majority of the fellows were still of the opinion that he had no right to enter for the examination.

As for Talbot himself, he could scarcely credit his good fortune. He felt like one who had suddenly emerged from the shadows into the sunshine. The Head's announcement raised him from the rut of despair. A short time before, his spirits had been utterly crushed. And now—everything in the garden was lovely!

And yet, even in that moment of triumph, Talbot experienced a pang.

It was rough luck—terribly rough luck—on Dick Redfern, who had been mistakenly hailed as the winner.

Redfern would now have to leave St. Jim's, since his father was no longer in a position to pay the necessary term-fee. Talbot glanced across to where Dick Redfern was standing, and his heart went out to his defeated rival.

John Rivers had been saved; at any rate, he would receive a hundred pounds to help him along. But one of the finest fellows in the New House would have to suffer. Redfern's school career would come to an untimely end.

And whilst Talbot was pondering on

these things, the Head continued his announcement.

"Talbot gained 960 marks out of a possible thousand—a very fine achievement indeed! You are to be warmly congratulated, Talbot. Though severely handicapped, owing to the fact that your notes were destroyed, you displayed great powers of perseverance; and it affords me very great pleasure indeed to proclaim your success!"

Once again Gore started to cheer; but the Head raised his hand, enjoining silence.

"Talbot's victory," he went on, "was by the narrowest possible margin. Second on the list comes Richard Redfern, who is only one point behind the winner."

There was no mistaking the wholeheartedness of the cheering on this occasion.

Redfern's achievement was scarcely less creditable than Talbot's, and School House and New House thundered their applause.

But what did that applause mean to Redfern? To him it was merely sound and clamour, signifying nothing. He might just as well have gained no marks at all, for all the benefit he had secured.

He had failed, and he was doomed—doomed to leave the school he loved.

And half an hour ago he had imagined that the Founders' prize was his!

Cruel indeed had been the hoax perpetrated by Racke and Crooke.

The Head went on speaking. But Redfern scarcely heard him.

"Redfern is to be deeply condoled with in what must be, to him, a bitter disappointment. It was thought, at first, that he had tied with Talbot for top place; but a scrutiny of the papers revealed the fact that Talbot had secured one more mark."

"A narrow shave, by Jove!" muttered Lawrence. "Poor old Reddy!"

"Third on the list comes Richard Brooke, with 932 marks." (Cheers.)

"Next comes Richard Julian, with 908." (More cheers.)

"Wyatt is one point behind Julian." (Cries of "Hard lines, Wyatt!")

"Macdonald is a very bad sixth, with 800 marks." (Shouts of "Pull your socks up, Mac!")

"And last of all comes Robinson minor, whose entry into the examination would appear to be a joke, since he has obtained less than five hundred marks." (Laughter, interspersed with cries of "Silly duffer!")

The results having been announced, the Head gave the word of dismissal, and, rank by rank, file by file, the St. Jim's fellows trooped out of the Big Hall.

"So Talbot's won!" said Tom Merry. "Well, I can't say I'm bursting with joy and gladness!"

"No jolly far!" growled Manners. "It's awfully rough on poor old Redfern. He'll have to leave St. Jim's now!"

"And all because he happened to drop one single, solitary mark!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Fate deals out some smashing left-handers sometimes, doesn't it?"

But Monty Lowther was a trifle hard on Fate, which intended shortly to do something in the way of levelling things up.

CHAPTER 8.

All Serene!

TALBOT had a private interview with the Head shortly after the assembly in the Big Hall.

It was a very pleasant interview, and Talbot emerged from the Head's study with bank-notes to the

value of a hundred pounds in his possession.

He was still feeling desperately sorry for Dick Redfern. Yet what could he do? John Rivers had the prior claim to Talbot's generosity. It was vital that the professor should be assisted without delay.

Talbot encountered quite a crowd of fellows in the quadrangle, and many contemptuous glances were turned upon him. But he paid no heed to them, and walked on.

His destination was the sanatorium.

Marie Rivers was seated in one of the wards, knitting. She looked up as Talbot entered, and there was a world of sympathy in her eyes.

"Poor old Toff!" she murmured.

To her surprise Talbot laughed heartily.

"I'm neither poor nor old, Marie!" he said. "I've money in my wallet, and I feel as frisky as a two-year-old!"

"Don't jest with me, Toff. I can't bear it. Tom Merry has been here and—"

"Tom Merry!"

"Yes! and he—he told me the result of the examination. I—I'm so sorry, Toff!"

"You can throw your sorrow out of the window, Marie. Tom Merry's news is out of date, and incorrect into the bargain."

Marie looked astonished.

"Are you suggesting that Merry would lie to me?"

"Not at all. But he was spoofed, like the rest of us. The result that was posted up on the notice-board wasn't genuine. It was a hoax on the part of a couple of eads!"

"Oh! And you—you mean to say that—"

"That I've won the Founders' prize? Precisely!"

Marie's eyes shone. She stepped forward and wrung Talbot's hand. But she was unable to speak—for a moment, at any rate. Then she said:

"How splendid, Toff! Then the days and nights of work and worry were not in vain?"

"No. I've got the money, and the next thing to be done is to get it to the professor."

"That will not be difficult," said Marie, with a smile. "I heard from father by the afternoon post. He wants us to meet him this evening at the Cafe Royal in Wayland."

"Oh, good!"

"He has told me no news," continued Marie, "and I rather fancy he is sick of the hopeless quest for employment."

Talbot nodded.

"I promised to wire him the result of the Founders' exam," he said. "But there's no need to do that now. Jove! Won't the professor be bucked up when I hand over the hundred quid?"

"It will be a most agreeable surprise, Toff—especially if father has come absolutely to the end of his resources."

The time stated by John Rivers for the appointment was seven o'clock. At six-thirty, therefore, Marie and Talbot set out together.

Talbot was smiling happily. And the Terrible Threes, who were standing in the school gateway as the couple passed, did not fail to notice the smile.

The juniors raised their caps to Miss Marie, but they ignored Talbot.

"The fellow's utterly callous!" said Tom Merry, at length. "Did you notice his grin?"

Manners nodded.

"He doesn't seem to feel a bit sorry for poor old Redfern," he remarked.

"All he seems to be thinking about is the cash he has won—the cash which

would have meant a great deal to Reddy, but which Talbot will only squander."

"It's a thundering shame!" declared Monty Lowther, speaking with unusual seriousness.

Blissfully unconscious of the fact that he was being criticised by the Terrible Threes, Talbot escorted his girl chum to Wayland, and they passed into the Cafe Royal together.

Both looked round for the professor, but for a moment they failed to recognise him. They had expected to see a shabby, haggard-faced man, but nobody answering to that description was to be seen.

Presently, however, Marie and Talbot caught sight of a well-dressed, intellectual-looking man—who was seated at one of the tables.

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Talbot.

"It's the professor!"

It was, indeed, Marie's father. He beckoned to the couple, and they joined him at the table.

John Rivers extended a cordial greeting to both; then he ordered dinner for three.

"It's my treat this time," he said with a smile. "You and the Toff footed the bill on the last occasion that we dined together, Marie, and this is where I reciprocate."

Marie was agreeably surprised at her father's cheerful tone. And his immaculate appearance surprised her even more. He looked anything but an out-of-work, down-at-heel individual who nobody wanted.

Both Marie and Talbot were burning to ask questions, but they knew that the professor would explain in his own good time.

The dinner was served, and the trio did full justice to it. Nothing was said during the meal beyond a few commonplace.

As soon as the waitress had brought the coffee, John Rivers lighted a cigar—an astonishing proceeding for a man who was supposed to be down on his luck—and then he turned to Talbot.

"Well, Toff, what luck in the exam?"

"Splendid luck!" answered Talbot.

"You defeated all comers?"

"Yes."

"Bravo! That was a remarkable achievement, Toff!"

"The more so, father, considering he had to battle his way against all sorts of obstacles," chimed in Marie.

"It was a jolly near thing," said Talbot. "I only scraped home by one point."

The junior took out his wallet, extracted a couple of banknotes, each for fifty pounds, and pushed them across the table to the professor.

John Rivers picked up the notes, a curious smile playing about his features as he did so. After a momentary pause, he handed the notes back to Talbot.

"I am thankful to say, Toff, that I have no use for these—now," he said.

Talbot stared.

"You are surely not too proud to accept my help?" he exclaimed.

"No, no; I appreciate your generosity and unselfishness, Toff, far more than I can say. Had I still been destitute, your assistance would have proved my salvation. Fortunately, however, I have been able to obtain employment."

Marie uttered a glad cry; and Talbot was overjoyed to hear of the professor's good fortune.

"Is it a good job?" inquired the St. Jim's junior, at length.

"A magnificent job, Toff—a job I never guessed or dreamed I should ever obtain! I have been given an appoint-

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ment in the Intelligence Department at Scotland Yard."

"Ripping!"

"Having been a crackman—and a master of that odious profession—I am peculiarly qualified for the post I now hold," said the professor. "I think I may say, without being accused of bumpiness, that my knowledge of criminology is very extensive. Anyway, I was able to satisfy the chief as to my capabilities, and he offered me the position right away. It is curious to reflect that a man who was once 'wanted' by the Scotland Yard officials should now be a Scotland Yard official himself!"

And the professor laughed happily and heartily.

"This is great news, father!" said Marie. "I have hoped and prayed continually that all would come right, and my prayers have been answered."

"What beats me," said John Rivers, after a pause, "is the cool way in which the Toff lifted the Founders' prize. He must have made a wonderful effort."

"He did!" said Marie. "Two days before the exam one of the cads destroyed his notes, and he had to start swotting all over again. But that is not all. His motives were misunderstood by the others. They could not understand why he was competing, since he did not stand in need of money, and he has been sneered at and condemned on every side."

The professor glanced towards Talbot.

"Is that so, Toff?"

"Yes."

"But why on earth didn't you explain that you were working for another's sake?"

"I didn't want it to be generally known that you were in poor circumstances."

"I see. So you vouchsafed no explanation whatever?"

"None!"

"Then," said the professor, rising to his feet, "the sooner I enlighten your schoolfellows as to the true facts of the case, Toff, the better!"

Talbot caught the speaker's arm.

"No, no!" he protested. "Don't say anything about it, Professor. It's all over now."

But John Rivers had made up his mind that Talbot should be speedily vindicated in the eyes of his schoolfellows. He paid the bill which the waitress presented, and then he chartered a taxicab to convey the trio to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

After Darkness, Light.

DICK REDFERN knelt on the floor of his study in the New House, packing his belongings. He had failed to win the Founders' prize, and that meant that he must go.

True, he was entitled to remain at St. Jim's until the end of the term. But as the term was already drawing to a close, there seemed to be no object in staying on at the school, and Redfern decided to take time by the forelock and go at once. He felt sure that the Head's permission would readily be forthcoming. He intended to ask for it as soon as he had packed his things.

Redfern's heart was heavy. Never before had he felt so utterly wretched, so completely down and out.

So this was the end! His school career—which had been so bright and full of promise—was to terminate forthwith.

And the person directly responsible for this calamity was Talbot of the Shell!

"Why did the fellow want to compete?" muttered Redfern. "I wonder if he knows—or even guesses—what his victory means to me? If only he had stood down—if only he had been willing to keep off the grass—"

Redfern's soliloquy was interrupted by Lawrence and Owen, who came into the study at that moment.

"Why, Reddy," exclaimed Lawrence, staring in astonishment at his chum, "what does this mean?"

"It means good-bye," said Redfern.

"What!" almost shouted Owen.

"You're leaving St. Jim's at once?"

"Yes."

"But, my dear old duffer—"

"What's the use of staying on?" said Redfern wearily. "I should have to go at the end of the term, anyway. And it will be much better, for the pater's sake, that I leave school and get a job right away."

Lawrence and Owen were silent. They scarcely knew what to say. The sight of Dick Redfern packing his things sent a pang through the heart of each. They were quite unable to resign themselves to the loss of the best chum they had ever known.

"The outlook's pretty dismal," said Redfern. "but it might be worse. I sha'n't have to tramp the streets for employment, like so many poor beggars have to do. During one of the vacations I did some work for the editor of the 'Hampshire Herald,' and he told me that if ever I wanted a permanent job on the staff, it was mine for the asking."

"What sort of a job?" asked Owen.

"Reporting. I did a bit for the local rag here at one time, if you remember. It's not a bad life. The work's hard, but I don't mind that. All the same, I'd give anything to be able to stay on at St. Jim's."

"Is there no chance that your pater's prospects will improve?" asked Lawrence.

Redfern shook his head.

"They may improve in time," he said; "but I can't hang on at St. Jim's on the off chance that they will. There's nothing else for it, I'm afraid, but to clear out."

"Have you seen the Head about it?" questioned Owen.

"No; I'm going to see him now."

"Perhaps he will be able to help you," Reddy suggested Lawrence.

"I'm afraid that's too much to hope for."

Having packed his bag, Redfern went along to the Head's study, and tapped on the door.

"Come in!" said Dr. Holmes.

Redfern was surprised, on entering the study, to find Talbot and John Rivers present.

"Ah, Redfern," said the Head, "you have arrived at an opportune moment! Allow me to congratulate you most heartily, my boy, upon your success!"

The junior thus addressed wondered if he had heard aright. He saw that everybody in the study was smiling at him, but his brain was in a fog.

"What did it all mean?"

"My—my success, sir?" he stammered.

"I don't understand—"

"You are the winner of the Founders' prize!"

Redfern stared blankly at the Head.

"How can that be, sir? Talbot finished at the top of the list—"

"True. But Talbot has declined the prize, which automatically goes to you, in consequence."

And then the Head proceeded to make everything clear to the astonished Redfern. He explained that Talbot had competed for the sake of John Rivers, and that the latter was no longer in need of financial assistance. Talbot had therefore relinquished the hundred pounds and the other privileges in favour of Redfern. "Congrats, old man!" said Talbot, still smiling.

And he came forward and shook Redfern by the hand.

John Rivers followed suit, and so did the Head.

Dick Redfern was so overwhelmed that he was unable to say a word. Tears welled into his eyes—tears of infinite gladness and relief.

At the eleventh hour the miracle had happened, and Redfern was to remain at St. Jim's.

It was not until he emerged into the quadrangle, where Lawrence and Owen were waiting for him, that Redfern recovered the power of speech.

"It's all serene, you fellows!" he exclaimed.

And then, before Lawrence and Owen could press for an explanation, they were being waltzed to and fro by their exuberant chum.

Not until he was utterly devoid of

(Continued on page 19.)

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CHIPS

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WELCOMING A HERO!



A Splendid Complete Story of the Chums of St. Katie's: By MICHAEL POOLE.

CHAPTER 1.

A Bolt from the Blue!
DEADLY calm had settled over the Transitus. There was quite a serious possibility that their reputation would gradually fade away, and become nothing more than a bad memory.

The Head himself had been to test their mental progress, both by word of mouth, and by written paper. He was surprised and pleased at the change which had taken place.

Already Mr. Roger Blant's methods were bearing fruit. In one or two cases the results were highly gratifying.

"Your performances," said Jolly Roger, when he reported the Head's opinion of them, "still leave a very large margin for improvement. Nevertheless, the headmaster is hopeful that, by devoting more time to you, I may yet bring you up to the desired standard. Grubb! Blunting!"

"Yes, sir!" The two youths looked anxiously towards Roger.

"The Head noted your translations into French, and was pleased with them. You appear to take an interest in your studies. Dexter!"

"Yes, sir?" The Kid felt pretty certain that his French translation hadn't been a brilliant affair.

"Your essay on 'True Education' was also specially remarked upon by the Head. A little more care, Dexter, and it would have been excellent. Nevertheless, the Head was gratified with the intelligence shown. Dobbin!"

Nearly one-third of the Form were mildly complimented. Not one single member was really elated! Such a thing had never happened before, and the Transitus gasped a little.

"Now that you have begun to show some signs of interest in your work," Roger concluded, "I shall expect swift developments. We will redouble our

efforts! We will concentrate still more! Our standard will become higher! There will be no slackening, no weakening of our determination! Let us begin the morning's lessons in that spirit!"

There was no slackening; there wasn't a chance to grow weak. Roger saw to that! It had taken the Transitus some time to discover it, but there was no escape from Roger. He knew everything, saw everything, understood everything!

The Transitus felt the change slowly creeping over them. The secret society known as the Wasps had died—killed by Roger! No more could midnight revels be held, or pleasant little jaunts into the open after lights out. There were bars to the windows. Roger had done that!

No longer was prep a pleasant interlude for letter-writing or reading a novel in an old geography book-back. It made no difference who was taking prep. The Transitus worked. Otherwise—the eagle eye of Roger would perceive what had happened!

"It's getting worse and worse," Bill Strong remarked dolefully. "Fancy the Head chucking bouquets to us about that exam! S'pose the day will come, Kid, when you'll be going up for a good-conduct prize? You'll be like that poor little toad, Wilkins, in the Fourth, you will, Kid! Going for long walks and learning poetry all by your little self!"

"He'll be going to tea twice a week with Jolly Roger," said Dobbie. "He'll be the Pride of the Sixth then, though, and probably won't mix with low fellows like us, Bill!"

The Kid smiled weakly at their jests. He really felt in a feeble state. Only ten days ago Jolly Roger had had twelve of them from Dormitory C, on the carpet. He had devoted special attention to Dexter, and the Kid had realized more fully than anyone else that it would be wise to go carefully for a time.

The result was really surprising. His

strenuous efforts to please Jolly Roger with his work had brought their reward. The Head had remarked upon his essay; Roger had two or three times handed him back papers with one hundred per cent. marks, and had spoken kindly to the lad.

"What's it feel like being good?" Bill Strong was surprised at the Kid's lack of retort. "D'you feel any pain, or—"

"Bill," said the Kid solemnly, "don't taunt me! I'm going on being good—till next Wednesday! Then we'll have a little day out, and even Jolly Roger will not say us nay. I've got one or two little ideas in my mighty brain!"

"Good egg!" said Bill, and Dobbin also sat up, and took notice.

Wednesday was going to be a great day in the town of Dulchester. A civic welcome was to be accorded to the famous hero, General Sir Grimston Grail, V.C., C.M.G., and so on. The mayor of the town was receiving him in state, and there was to be a luncheon at the town-hall, after a triumphal progress through the streets.

On such occasions, Katie's turned out to a man. The Head usually gave a mild warning beforehand, but in the main both the townspeople and the school authorities appreciated the efforts of the boys to add a little air of jollity to such festivities.

The Head and one or two of the masters were going to the luncheon. It was rumoured, indeed, that General Grail was an old friend of the Beak's. He was certainly on the Board of Governors of the school, though his other little jobs in odd parts of the world had kept him from attending for a long time.

And Katie's meant to let the conquering hero have a real welcome home! Big Hallam of the Sixth had actually seriously discussed plans with the Beak! The mayor and councillors would, of

course, have first show, but Katie's proposed to add the liveliness!

They would wait for him, too, after the lufcheon, and drag his carriage through the streets again. It was understood that on Wednesday next the ordinary rules about returning to school would be relaxed.

"You want to keep clear of horse-play," Big Hallam had told several fellows from junior Forms, "but you can go all out on the noise! We'll give the mayor a good time, too! What we want to do is to let the general know he's back home again, and we're all pleased to see him! You grip the idea?"

They did! In the Transitus they discussed ideas of their own, and carefully evolved plans. The general would have the time of his life! He would realise that Katie's was proud of him, Dulchester was proud, the country was proud, and they weren't keeping it secret, either.

You will gather that, from the Head himself, down to the last little scout in the Preparatory Form, everybody in Katie's was looking forward to Wednesday afternoon.

Then came the sickening blow.

It was Monday morning, and just after prayers. The Head stood with the master for the week on the platform. Usually he raised his hat from the table, and the instant he put it on, Big Hallam led the twelve prefects from the Hall, and then everyone else slowly followed.

This morning, Big Hallam almost started, but the Head didn't put his mortar-board on, and you could feel a little quiver as Hallam realised he'd nearly made a bloomer.

"Ah!" said the Head, and toyed with his cap. "Ah!" It was arranged, as you know, that all of us from this school should take some little part in the welcome which is being accorded to one of our distinguished soldiers on his return to his native town. Ah! Circumstances have now arisen which render it necessary for me to issue an order that no boy from this school will be permitted to go into Dulchester on Wednesday. You are forbidden to go! Ah—I hope that order will be strictly obeyed!"

The school gasped. This wasn't like the Head at all. Apart from the brutal, idiotic order, he spoke almost apologetically!

"Ah—I feel that I ought to add that I make this order contrary to my own wishes. I regret that I am compelled to do so. I am hopeful that the—the pleasure we should all have had in taking part in such a welcome, may perhaps be attained in some other manner at a later date. I shall do my best!"

He put on his cap, but Big Hallam almost forgot to move off. Like everyone else, he was stunned. No one could understand it.

But the truth became public at last. The Head had received a letter from the new Mayor of Dulchester. It was a patronising sort of epistle, and it was likewise insulting.

The mayor said that he was glad to hear that Mr. Bird would be present on Wednesday next. He hoped, however, that he would take steps to prevent any of the boys from St. Katherine's School being in the town on that day. Their disgraceful behaviour on the occasion of the last public function, filled the mayor with fear. On this occasion he hoped to avoid unnecessary rowdiness, and Mr. Bird would doubtless assist him by keeping his boys in school that afternoon.

Before taking any drastic action, the Head had made inquiries. They confirmed his worst fears. The mayor had not raised any objection to the other

schools in the district being present, but he had publicly referred to St. Katherine's boys as "Bird's hooligans."

Now Mr. J. A. Bird was, above all things, a just man. He did not flatter himself that the boys in his charge were milk-and-water youths. He was under no delusions whatever about them. But they were not "hooligans"; they had not behaved "disgracefully" on the day of the last public reception in Dulchester. They had, in his opinion, and in the opinion of many other competent people, added considerably to the success of the day.

The general was a governor of the school and a personal friend of Mr. Bird's. Altogether, the mayor's letter pained the Head very considerably, but he did not act rashly.

He decided not to interfere in any way with the town's welcome. No boys from St. Katherine's would go to the town. Nor would he nor any of the masters be at the luncheon and the speech-making. Later on, when the welcome home was over, Mr. Bird would raise the matter in the proper quarters.

Later on, too, he would try to get the general to come to the school for some function of their own. St. Katherine's would give him a welcome entirely on their own. But the general should know nothing of the little trouble until after he had been received by the town.

"In the circumstances," said Jolly Roger to his Form after he had read out the formal notice putting the town out of bounds for Wednesday, "I think we shall all support the headmaster very strongly in the wise course he has taken. It is a matter which affects us all equally. There will be no caps from St. Katherine's among the cheering crowds on Wednesday. That is all."

And with that the public welcome to General Sir Grinston Grail was finished, so far as St. Katherine's was concerned.

CHAPTER 2.

Brutus Answers the Call!

"Of course," said the Kid loftily, "you please yourselves, but I am going to welcome my friend the general! I shall not go officially, of course, because the Head doesn't want any of Katie's fellows to be there. I shall go incog., in my well-known disguise of Tod Sloan, the jockey of the dukes. I shall be dressed absolutely regardless, in my little holiday-cap, and that striking thing in gold jackets, and when the crowd isn't looking at the general they can stare at me!"

"My giddy, and admire me," said Jolly Roger. "That's a brain-wave, Kid! I never thought—"

"You never do!" the Kid retorted calmly. "That's the trouble in this place. You start talking hot air about the Head not wanting Katie's to be represented. Who's going to represent Katie's? Not me! I'm going as a free and independent representative of Richard Dexter, Esquire, one of the Great British Public! That's all."

This finished the long and tedious discussion which had raged round the Head's announcement. You see, they wanted to see the general, mayor or no mayor, and the question of bounds didn't worry them one little bit. Yet they didn't want to let the Head down over this particular job, because they knew he was on their side.

Dexter found the way out, of course. Wherefore at least half the members of the Transitus strolled off quietly and circumspectly that Wednesday afternoon to Dulchester. They did not wear their

school caps, and ancient holiday attire had been dragged out.

Bill Strong wore a strange slouch tweed hat, which had seemed a noble adornment when he bought it in Scotland last summer; while the Kid wore a most remarkable cap, very flat and wide, the peak of which nearly hid his face.

They had no intention of taking any part in the proceedings. They were merely there as spectators to-day, and mingled with the crowd near the town-hall in the Market Square. For a time they were separated in their efforts to secure front seats, but eventually Strong, Dobbin, Dexter, and Bunting were together, while a little lower down was another collection of Trans' fellows.

"I hope the mayor falls on that old carpet and strangles himself with his chain!" said Bill Strong bitterly, for the scene on which they gazed awoke many feelings in his breast.

They were in the crowd. It was little short of a tragedy that they had to be here in a passive capacity. Everything spoke of jollity and gladness. The sun was shining on the red carpet which was laid down the steps of the town-hall. The bunting and the flags fluttered in the breeze. At the top of the steps were two bandsmen or buglers, with great curly brass instruments. Policemen in their best clothes slowly paraded in front of the crowd, and on the far side of the square you could see two superior sorts of bobbies riding in stately fashion behind the crowd, their noble steeds gaily adorned with bright ribbons.

"Here they come!" The glad cry went up, and from the distance came the strains of the Dulchester Brass Band making martial music, which mingled joyously with the huzzas of the populace.

But to Bill Strong and Dexter the cheering lacked vim. It was all right, but nobody would have a sore-throat after it. If only Katie's lads had been here!

And then at last came the carriage with the general and the mayor. The horses were pulling the carriage sedately. It nearly broke Bill Strong's heart to see it. What a way to welcome a general! Katie's would have had those horses unharnessed long ago, and Big Hallam and his merry men would have pulled the general through the town! That's the stuff to give a conquering hero!

"Oo! yell! Shout, Kid! Let it rip!" Bill couldn't stand this gentle murmuring which passed for cheering.

They did their best. But what were four, or even eight, among so many? Some even said "Sh-sh!" when the carriage stopped right in front of the town-hall.

Fancy saying "Sh-sh!" to a V.C. general!

General Sir Grinston Grail was a tall man, with a great fierce moustache, a brownish-red face, and a broad chest, on which were row after row of pretty little ribbons. As he stepped down from the carriage on to the council's best stair-carpet he looked a noble and commanding figure.

In that same moment the two band arrangements at the top of the steps began their effort. They had been playing about with their queer curly brass instruments for some little time, but they really got to business the very second the general stepped down.

It was a noble, triumphant blast! They knew their job, and they put their whole heart and lungs into the business. Even the general gave a little jerk of surprise, but it did him good. You could see that he was the sort of man who liked a bit

of vim and heartiness behind the "Welcome Home!" stuff.

It was a deafening, soul-inspiring call those trumpeters played, and it stirred the fighting-blood in all the assembled people.

It did more. On the far side of the square was a horse, hired from the local mews, where its reputation for weddings, processions, and local celebrations was of the highest. A quiet, well-trained animal was Brutus, but he had a pedigree, and long ago, in the dim, distant past, his ancestors had heard calls on the trumpet, and had learned the answer.

It is only fair to Brutus to mention this, because one of the local reporters who was present actually had it put in the paper that "At this juncture, unfortunately, a horse," ridden by Sergeant Green, took flight."

That is absolutely and hopelessly incorrect. Brutus heard the call, and, so far as he could tell, it was exactly the same as the one his great-grandfather heard at the Battle of Balclava. "Charge for the guns, he said—"

Brutus pawed the ground, pushed his head forward, and gently heaved some of the people out of the way. He didn't dash through them, or anything of that sort, but he let them understand as quickly as possible that he'd got a job on, and that he knew what the bugle was saying, even if they didn't.

Not a single person was hurt or even roughly handled. Brutus pranced and hopped about a little, it is true, but that was just to warn them off the course. Once he had a clear field he stopped prancing and rearing, and with a cheerful neigh dashed forward for a non-stop charge.

Sergeant Green, on his back, got the impression that Brutus was a racehorse, and decided to try the American seat high up on the neck. It was a bit awkward, because he'd never practised it before, but he clung on like grim death, and tried to talk kindly to Brutus.

But Brutus never heard. He guessed where the row was coming from, and saw the red carpet up the stairs, because already the driver of the general's carriage had urged his pair of horses forward to give Brutus a clear field.

The impression at that juncture was that Brutus would do the hundred yards across the Market Square in about seven and two-fifths seconds. Strong men gasped, women shrieked, and children cheered. But everybody within fifty yards of Brutus moved as swiftly as possible out of his way, because you could see he was in a hurry.

The general heard the cries and the shouting and the clatter of Brutus' hoofs. He stopped on the top step, turned round, then waited. Brutus was coming straight for him, and the Lord Mayor yelled out to him to take cover. But the general wasn't that sort.

It has been said that everybody got out of Brutus' way. That's not quite true.

Bill Strong saw Brutus, and said to the kid:

"We ought to stop that gee-gee, kid! He'll hurt himself if he doesn't steady down."

"Come on!" said the Kid to Dobbin and Bunting. "One on either side!"

There wasn't much time for more explanation. The general's impression was of two youths simply throwing themselves under the animal's feet. No, they weren't! They were on the other side of him, and two others were already clinging on to Brutus on the right side!

Now, the moment Brutus felt himself being pulled up it confirmed a suspicion

that had been growing in his mind that the guns weren't this way. Also the trumpets had ceased, and the fellow on his back was doing silly things.

Brutus stopped instantly. He was panting a little, but he turned an inquiring eye to the big fellow holding his right rein.

"Good old boy! Steady! Steady, boy!" said Bill Strong.

"My noble quadruped! My little Derby winner!" cooed a gentler voice round the left rein. "Don't you know me? Your old pal, Tod Sloan!"

Brutus rubbed his head against the cap of the little chap. He knew that they were friends, and would doubtless explain presently all about the battle.

"He's all right now," Bill Strong said. "You're a nice old gee-gee, aren't you? But you haven't got a ticket for the Town Hall, old son! And, anyhow, they're a polite crowd, and don't like rowdiness! Take it gently!"

"My hat!" said Dobbin. "He can travel! I'll bet they could train—"

"Bring—those—boys—here!"

It wasn't exactly a voice that spoke. It was a sort of cross between a heavy gun in action and a loud peal of thunder, with just a nice dash of a steam-hammer in it to give it clearness of tone.

General Sir Grinston Grail had uttered a command.

Instantly the cheaper edition of himself, who always accompanied the general, dashed forward. Policemen sprang to attention, clicked their heels, and sprang swiftly away. From all parts of the square, officials, soldiers, Royal Marines, and ex-sailors advanced at the double. The general's command must be obeyed!

And, anyhow, they wanted to have a front seat in the next act.

Hands were laid upon Dexter, Dobbin, Strong, and Bunting; heavy hands, firm hands, all sorts of hands, gripped and grabbed them.

"The general wants you!" fifty people whispered, and urged them forward.

In two minutes they were on the step just below the general. He hadn't moved a fraction of an inch since he first turned round to see Brutus' performance. Now all that he did was to raise his right hand calmly in salute, because most of the fifty were saluting him, and telling him what he already knew.

"These are the boys, sir," they said. "They are here, sir!"

Talk about eyes! They said that Grinston Grail could see the man in the fiftieth row move an eyelid on parade. And those eyes were now fixed on Bill Strong and his chums.

"Wouf!" said the general. "Wouf!"

He always said that first because it's what is called the cautionary word. You knew he was going to speak when he said "Wouf!"

"What are you boys named? Where do you come from? Major Rapple! Take these boys' names!"

CHAPTER 3.

What The General Said.

THE reduced edition of the general sprang forward like an automatic affair. He ripped out a note-book, opened it, had a pencil right on the page, and said "Sir!" before the echo of the general's voice had died away.

"Your names?" said Major Rapple. He didn't ask it rudely, or unkindly, or anything at all. It just jumped out, and before you could say anything they were giving their names.

"Address?" said Major Rapple, and Bill Strong whispered: "St. Katherine's School, sir."

"Wouf!" said the general. "Wouf!" That was only to warn them, but when he spoke it was in quite a mild voice. He had different brands for different occasions.

"You are from St. Katherine's? Good! Excellent! I wondered where the school badge was to-day. Don't you wear it?"

Strong looked at Dexter appealingly. It was up to the Kid now to think of one of his fairy-stories quickly. Never was the need so great!

Dexter had got over his first feeling of awe and wonder. He was beginning to feel cheery again.

"No, sir," he chirruped. "I think the Head is communicating with you, sir. There was some little difficulty about the day, sir—but he'll explain all that!"

"Wouf! He isn't here to-day? Why is—"

The mayor was rushing forward, trying to explain that Mr. Bird had been asked, but a previous engagement—

"Wouf!" It was not only a warning, but it acted as an extinguisher. "He couldn't come! He is not fit!"

"Well, sir," Dexter looked seriously at the general. "I think, sir, he's just a little sick—his heart, you know. But we all hope he will be well again to-morrow."

"Heart? J. A. B.—heart! Wouf!" Sir Grinston Grail shut his jaws tightly. "Very well! Thank you! You have got their names, Major Rapple? And their Form?"

"Sir!" said Major Rapple, and jerked forward, note-book, pencil, and all, switched his head on to Strong, and rapped out: "Form?"

"Transitus, sir," murmured Bill.

Click. Note-book closed, pencil gone. "Sir!" said Major Rapple.

"Wouf!" The general fixed the four youths. "Can't wait now. Four brave boys; splendid fellows; tell the Head personally. Calling. Fino discipline! I'm proud! Wouf!"

He swung round. He fell into step with the mayor. Major Rapple and the deputy-mayor fell into step behind.

A soldier standing on the side of the steps whistled softly to Strong and waved his hand sharply. Bill understood his meaning. They were holding up the procession.

Swiftly and gladly they cleared from the steps. One or two people tried to call to them; three or four gave them a cheer.

"Well done, you boys!" someone called out; and, away in the far background, Brutus, calmed and contented, gave a gentle whinny. He wanted to talk again to the little boy with the large cap.

"You'll get a medal!" another idiot called out jovially. "Bravo! Beg pardon of the school, please!"

"Cut and run!" said Bill Strong to Dexter. "I want to get out of this!"

They got out of the crowd and away to the fields which led back to Katie's. Not until they were far from the town did they discuss the situation and face the facts.

They quite appreciated the fact that the general was pleased with them, despite his "Woufs!" They realised that he would possibly say nice things about them to the Beak. But—

The Beak had a wonderfully clear view of everything. He might even say that he was glad they had pleased the general; might even express pleasure that they had prevented damage being done, and had acted promptly. Then he would turn on to the question of their deliberate, flagrant, and unwarranted

breach of the order which he had issued! And he'd forget all about his pleasure over the other details.

"You'd better pick him a yarn, Kid," Strong suggested. "I mean, something about going in disguise, and thinking he wouldn't mind. Think it's a sound scheme?"

"Then he'd get us for wearing other caps!" said Dobbin.

"We'll have to think about it," Dexter said slowly. "The trouble will be if the jolly old general really does come and see the Beak and says anything about what I said. Mean to say, the Beak is sick, isn't he? And it's his heart that's touched. Only, of course, he can't tell him little tales like that! He's not that sort."

They reached the school at last, and became undisguised. Anyhow, nothing could happen for a day or two, so it was no use worrying. Only it was a rotten sort of feeling to have hanging over you.

That night they went to prep. just as usual. They settled down to two hours' sweating. Apart from other inducements Jolly Roger himself was the master on duty to-night. There wasn't any escape or any just-as-good substitute with Roger—is meant work!

It was just about the end of the first hour when Gribbin, the Beak's own butler-manservant-guard, entered the Hall. It was the rarest of rare events, and everyone sat up and watched as he approached Jolly Roger.

Roger took the note and read it carefully. Then he came down from his seat on the platform and slowly walked along the Hall, conversing with Gribbin.

Not until he was right by the form where Strong and his chums sat did Roger look at them. Then he came along.

"Ah, Strong!" he smiled, and spoke very quietly. "The Head wishes to see you. And—ah—Dexter. Yes, and Dobbin and Bunting! Just the four of you. He is in his own house, but Gribbin will take you. You may leave your preparation. I will bear it in mind to-morrow!"

He spoke affably, kindly, and graciously. They rose, and wonderingly, followed the noble Gribbin and his massive white shirt-front. He was an impressive fellow, was Gribbin.

"You will come with me, young gentlemen," said Gribbin, when they were outside. "I will announce you to the headmaster. I understand that General Sir Grimston Grail desires to meet you. He will take the headmaster in the library at present."

"My giddy aunt!" said Bill Strong softly. "I say, Kid! You'll have to do the pow-wow business! Be careful! For pity's sake, treat 'em kindly! Wonder why the Beak wants us now?" Dobbin and Bunting said nothing. They felt forlorn and nervous.

Dexter was attaching himself to Gribbin, and trying to find out just how the land lay. When had the general come? How did the Head seem to come? Was he cheerful and contented? Had he taken his food gladly?

But Gribbin wasn't helpful. He failed to realise that this was an important and possibly awkward visit.

Somehow they found themselves filing into the library in the Head's house. They perceived that the Head was rising, and that General Grimston Grail was standing in front of the fireplace.

They observed, too, that the general was wearing a large cigar just under his fierce moustache. The Beak himself

was toying with a singular adornment, and blew a gentle cloud of smoke into the air before he spoke.

"Come in, boys!" he said, and somehow they didn't quite think of him as the Beak. Perhaps it was because he was dressed differently, or because the cigar was making him smile.

"Aha!" said the general. "Aha! Come along in, boys! Let me have a real look at you! I had to leave you this afternoon, of course! These functions—yes, very trying! But duty—duty, my boys! Now, then! Which is Dexter?" This is Dexter," said the Head, still smiling gently. "He is one of our good boys. But—no. I don't think you got the good conduct prize last term, did you, Dexter?"

The Kid dared to look at the Head, and blinked a little.

"Aha!" The general was roaring and rocking. "Aha! Good! Splendid, Bird! Your Head has a sense of humour, boys! What! Always had! And you're Strong? Fine back, I hear. Splendid! And Dobbin, the camera man. Excellent! Nothing like a good hobby. And Bunting. Always fond of hard work. I hear, Bunting? Good!"

He rambled on, or, rather, jerked on. They had to sit down while the general talked to them. He insisted on telling the Head once again the story of this afternoon, and that cheered Dexter, because he realised that the general was a pretty good hand at fairy stories himself.

"Pon my soul, Bird, I stood there astounded!" The general addressed himself to the Head. "The boys will bear me out! Nothing—nothing could have stopped that animal! It cleared everything before it! In a few seconds it would have cleared me. Rattle, the mayor, and the town hall—and like a flash these boys seized the reins, clung on to them, and before I recovered from my stupor, they were patting it just as though it were a pet lamb! 'Pon my soul, I never saw anything like it—never! Wouldn't have missed such a sight for worlds. Made me young again. Ask Kipple what he thinks! He'll talk about it for weeks! It's done him a world of good. You ought to have seen it, Bird!"

"I wish I had," said the Head. "And, by the way, you wanted to ask about my—ah—illness!"

"Pon my soul!" said the general. "So I did! Where's Dexter? You're right, Bird! It was Dexter! You said it would be. Now, Dexter! What did you mean when you said your headmaster was in with the trouble?"

Dexter took a deep breath. "I—I said he was sick, sir," he said. "He was—at least, we all thought he was very sick about not coming to the 'Welcome Home,' sir. That's all, sir. Except—it would be his heart, wouldn't it, sir? 'Sick at heart,' sir, they always say in the books."

The general made a queer gurgling sound, because the Head had suddenly looked at him, and the smile had faded from the Head's face—nearly.

"An excellent excuse, Dexter," said the Beak mildly. "In the circumstances, I would say it was a tactful answer. Yes. Very tactful. But don't become too tactful, Dexter, because it can be overdone, you know. However, the general wished to meet you boys, and he wished me to say how much he admired your prompt action this afternoon. I am very glad you behaved in the manner you did."

"We're proud of you!" interjected the general, and again Mr. Bird looked at him. Dexter saw it, and realised that it was no disgrace to him that he always felt cold when the Beak fixed his eyes on him. The Beak had quietened General Sir Grimston Grail, V.C., in two glances!

"The general will be paying a visit to the school later on," the Head continued. "We shall then be able to show him our own feelings concerning his very distinguished services. You may now return to your studies. Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir!" they said quietly. The general stopped forward. His massive hand gripped Bill Strong's. "Good-night, Strong!" he said. "Glad to have met you!"

And so to the four of them. Each of them retired with a crushed hand and a glad feeling of pride in his heart. They had welcomed the general, and the general had welcomed them.

"It's been a great day!" said Bill Strong, as they wandered, very slowly, back to the Hall. "Not a word about going into the town. You don't think he'll rake it up against us later on, Kid?"

"You never know," the Kid answered, quite cheerfully. "The Beak isn't the sort of chap to overlook little details of that kind. He'll remember it all right!"

Mr. Bird did remember it, but he mentioned it to one man only. That was Jolly Roger, and to him he told the whole story.

"A most fortunate occurrence, really," Mr. Bird told Roger. "Grail is coming down for Ponders' Day, for which I am very glad. Then he himself has taken the matter up with the council, and I think the mayor has regretted his very indiscreet letter. None of the others knew about it, and they are very angry. Very!"

"A little awkward to explain why St. Katherine's boys were there after all," remarked Roger.

"No!" Mr. Bird answered. "No; Dexter apparently remarked to the general's officer that they were there 'incoog,' and the excuse appears to have gained currency and popularity. I had to be very careful, however, when the general saw them the other night. He was inclined to be a little too—ah—encouraging. He thought that Dexter's excuse about my heart-sickness was the sure sign of a quick and original mind."

"It is," said Roger thoughtfully. "But, of course, Sir Grimston Grail hasn't to handle them."

"That's what I thought," said the Head. "Still, I shall say nothing about the breach of the order, or the wearing of caps. We'll forget it. Blunt. I think you are getting them very well in hand now."

"Slowly," said Roger. "Very slowly, sir. But I am hopeful. It is little incidents such as the praise of conquering heroes which tends to unsettle their minds slightly. But you have nothing to fear, sir. I shall reform them!"

He smiled with grim cheerfulness, and the Head smiled, too. He understood and appreciated. Concerning heroes might come and go, noble deeds might be done and forgotten. But the reforms of Jolly Roger would go on—steadily, surely, and with deadly certainty!

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of St. Katie's next Wednesday, entitled "The Taming of Bronto." By Michael Poole. Don't miss it!)

WELL WON!

(Continued from page 14.)

breath did Redfern desist. Then he panted forth the glad tidings; and the wild whoop of delight which burst from the lips of Lawrence and Owen brought quite a crowd of juniors to the spot.

"What's all the merry rumpus about?" demanded Figgins.

"Have you fellows suddenly gone potty?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Owen summed up the situation in two words.

"Reddy's saved!" he said.

"Hurrah!"

Without stopping to inquire as to the why and wherefore of Redfern's salvation, the juniors surged round the winner of the Founders' prize, and cheered until they were husky.

And into the midst of the cheering through stepped John Rivers. He was accompanied by Talbot.

It was some time before the professor could make himself heard; but when at last the cheering had died away, he made an eloquent five-minute speech—a speech which completely vindicated Talbot, and restored that junior's popularity in full measure.

As soon as the professor had finished, Talbot found himself hemmed in by a crowd of School House and New House fellows. Most of them were looking decidedly shamefaced. The only person who had no cause to look thus was Gore, who was grinning cheerfully.

"Talbot, old man," said Tom Merry, "we've made champion asses of ourselves! We accused you of being a selfish cad—"

"And we were the cads!" said Jack Blake remorsefully.

"The footer season is over," added Monty Lowther; "but we shall be greatly obliged, Talbot, if you'll kick us round the quad!"

"Yaa, wathah! We deserve it, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Talbot laughed.

"You were in the dark as to my motives," he said. "And you can hardly be blamed for thinking as you did."

"I appeal to Miss Marie!" said Figgins, turning to the school nurse, who was approaching the throng. "Isn't Talbot a hero, Miss Marie?"

"Most emphatically!" said that young lady, with a smile.

"And he merits a hero's reward!" said Tom Merry. "Carry him shoulder-high, you fellows!"

But Talbot considered that quite enough fuss had been made already. He showed the crowd a clean pair of heels, and even the fleetest runners of both Houses were unable to catch him. However, they caught him later, and he was made to occupy the place of honour at a magnificent spread which was held in the junior Common-room.

Marie Rivers and the professor were present at the feed, which was by way of being a record one in the history of the old school.

And Talbot of the Shell was more than recompensed for his strenuous endeavours, and for the fine fighting spirit he had displayed in connection with the Founders' exam, which had terminated so happily for him and for that other "jolly good fellow"—Dick Redfern!

THE END.

(Another grand long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled "FOILED AT THE FINISH" By Martin Clifford. Avoid disappointment by ordering your copy EARLY!)

THE EDITOR'S CHAT.

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers.
Address: Editor, The "Gem," The Fleetway House,
Farrington Street, London, E.C. 4.

For Next Wednesday:

"FOILED AT THE FINISH!"

By Martin Clifford.

In this splendid, long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's, a sensation is caused by the arrival of a team of French boys, who are promptly challenged by Tom Merry & Co. to a cricket-match.

But Gordon Gay thinks that the Grammar School has more right to play the Frenchmen, which results in a prolonged battle of wits between the old rivals.

"FOILED AT THE FINISH!"

is highly amusing and exciting all through, and all Geniutes will be delighted by a story of the type in which Martin Clifford is unsurpassed.

"THE TAMING OF BRONTO!"

By Michael Poole.

According to Richard Dexter, to give him his full name, Aloysius Brontox was the savagiest little animal that ever trod the primeval forest, a specimen of the wild and noble brontosaurus.

Lord Velwood had told the Head of St. Katie's that Aloysius had been spoiled, and that he wanted Mr. Bird, as a special favour, to take the nephew in hand and unspoil him. Mr. Bird agrees, and thus Aloysius Brontox comes to St. Katie's to be put under the atherly hand of the three chums. As Dexter says: "The Beak hands him over to me, and he says, 'Treat it kindly, Richard. Don't be too rough, and—'"

But

"THE TAMING OF BRONTO!"

is harder than the chums had imagined, as you will understand when you read next week's yarn.

A NEW FEATURE.

On page 18 of this issue my chums will find an article which strikes a new note. "A New Chum in Australia" is contributed by a gentleman who has lived in that delightful country for sixteen years, and has an extensive knowledge of the animal and bird life of the wider parts of the country. By following the history of Jack Thornton in this and subsequent articles, my chums will pick up much interesting information about Australia.

AND ANOTHER!

I am going to reserve a special "corner" of the good old GEM for contributions from my readers. Many interesting paragraphs, jokes, and stories reach me from readers which are too good to be relegated to obscurity. In the near future I shall begin to publish the best of these, and I shall pay half-a-crown to the sender of each one published. So I hope my readers will set their wits to work more than ever, and let me have plenty of bright little original "pars." Anything will do, as long as it is short—a good joke, a description of a holiday, a bright idea for increasing the popularity of the GEM, a good anecdote. "Pars" should not be more than three hundred words long—the shorter the better. The briefer they are the more of them I shall be able to print—and the more half-crowns I shall give away!

THE OLD QUESTION.

Only this very day I had a visit from a friend who asked me if the characters in the Greyfriars stories were real! Well, they are real enough in a sense, for the various characters are so carefully delineated. But you will not find Greyfriars on the map. And now two correspondents at Chelmsford ask the same thing; and they also want to know whether Harry Wharton has any brothers and sisters. The answer is, he has not—unfortunately. For we could do with more of the Wharton family.

CORRESPONDENCE WANTED.

J. Martin, 32, Lesbia Road, Lower Clapton Park, N.E., tells me that he wants correspondence. His has just been one of those disagreeable experiences which come at times, and about which there is nothing to be said, for it is pretty much of a chance. "I have," he writes, "been answering applications for correspondence almost since the Correspondence Column was started, but have had absolutely no luck whatever. Therefore, as an old reader, I should be glad if you could help me."

All I can do, I have done. I should not be surprised if my chum gets more correspondence now than he can find time to answer.

FOR READERS OVERSEAS.

Non poss! I cannot supply Francis Coppins, 75, Cleveland Road, Church Road, Islington, N.1, London, with the names and addresses of readers in Australia, South Africa, Canada, Malay Peninsula, or any British possession, but I have no doubt that many of my chums abroad will see the request of this correspondent, and drop the individual in question a line.

THE MERCANTILE MARINE.

Joining the Merchant Service is much like taking employment in any other business. A correspondent in Birmingham wants particulars on the matter. He will have to apply at the docks when a vessel is taking on fresh hands. I should advise him to study the capital title handbook by Mr. John Margeson, called "The Sea Services," and issued at 1s. 3d. by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, Warwick Square, London, E.C.

THE HAPPY OLD DAYS.

That is what some folks call the old times. They are never weary of praising the past. Certainly there would seem to be a great merit in, say, the period when the income-tax was sixpence in the pound. Yes, it was so. You might not believe it. That was the state of things in 1869, the year before the Franco-German War. I came across a book dealing with that year, and found what a very interesting time it was. Yet people were grumbling just as much then as now.

Your Editor

A NEW CHUM IN AUSTRALIA!

By "COOOE"

JACK THORNTON had arrived late one night at his uncle's house after an exciting voyage from London, but he was up early, and he set out joyfully with his uncle for a day in the bush.

They had not gone over a hundred yards when most wonderful shrieks of laughter filled the air, and made Jack think that crowds of people were being highly amused at something. The uncle watched Jack's face, and immensely enjoyed its puzzled look.

"Where are these people, and what are they laughing at, uncle?" said he.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Thornton, with a twinkle in his eye, "they're laughing at the new chum with the strange cap, and the leggings too big for him."

Jack looked down at his legs, and began laughing, too.

Presently, another burst of laughter came, and Jack saw nothing but some birds sitting on the long arms of a withered gum-tree. All at once he remembered hearing or reading about the laughing jacks, and as he stood looking and joining in the glee of the feathered humorists, his uncle wished he had brought his camera to catch his expression of wonder and amazement.

Mr. Thornton then told him about these wonderful birds.

"Their scientific name is Dacelo Gigantea, and they are really kingfishers, with plain buff vests and olive-brown back and wings. The tail is rounded, as you can see; the bill is very

strong, and about three inches long. You would scarcely believe it, but they start laughing before they are three months old."

"What do they live on?" asked Jack.

"Oh, they eat mussels and grubs, and actually kill snakes for food. They dart down upon the snake, strike him with their strong bill on the back, close up to his head, and are off out of reach in a moment."

"They are full of curiosity, and I wouldn't wonder but they are anxious to see what we are about. A black tracker and some policemen were once after a bushranger when the tracker heard the birds laughing in an excited way, and knew by experience that they were watching someone. True enough, they laid upon the bushranger, and when the police had got him he declared he would have got clean away but for those kookaburras."

"Why are they called 'kookaburras'?" asked Jack.

"Well, the native name was 'gogobera,' and I suppose the settlers pronounced it 'kookaburra.' They are often seen with a young snake in their mouth, and they have been known to play with a disabled snake as a cat plays with a mouse. They eat rats, too. When they get mussels they crack them against logs."

Mr. Thornton and Jack now began to climb the gentle slope of one of the foothills of the Australian Alps. A narrow track had been made by man and beast, and Mr. Thornton led the way. When they had been going in single file for about half an hour they came to a more level part where some of the bush and scrub had been cleared and there was a fair growth of grass.

Suddenly Mr. Thornton stopped, drew in behind a tree, and beckoned Jack to do the same. They heard a thud, thud ahead of them, and, peeping out cautiously, saw a mob of kangaroos

coming along at a tremendous pace as if they were being chased.

Mr. Thornton, wishing Jack to see how they could jump, suddenly raised a great shout and ran forward, and in a moment the whole mob were leaping over bushes eight or nine feet high.

It was a great sight for Jack, and he was much excited.

"They can jump," he said.

"Yes," said Mr. Thornton, "they can clear a fence eleven feet high. Two of them will eat as much grass as three sheep, so the farmers shoot them, and hunt them with dogs. These dogs need to be very fast and strong, and are a cross between a lurcher and a greyhound. The kangaroo cannot keep up his pace for more than a mile, and the men on horseback soon catch up to him. The ears of the kangaroo are not well suited to seeing straight in front, and as he has a trick of looking back on his pursuers, he sometimes commits suicide by bumping against a tree-stump."

"Do they use their tails to help them to jump?" asked Jack.

"No," said his uncle, "I think not. For one thing, the tail shows no sign of such special muscular development, and, again, when the kangaroo stands straight up the tail barely touches the ground."

"Why are they called marsupials?"

"Well, you see, the word 'marsupium' is Latin for a pouch, and all animals with pouches are marsupials. When the kangaroo is born, the mother puts the baby carefully into the pouch, and keeps it there till it grows. As soon as it is able it hops out, and at the least danger hops in again."

"When hunted, the poor mother has to carry her extra burden, and when hard-pressed the instinct of self-preservation overcomes maternal love, and she throws the young one away in order that she herself may escape."

(Another interesting story next week.)

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