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GEM L., 1923.

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Your Editor Chats With His Readers.

Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

My Dear Chums,—It has often been in my mind to spare a few words of my weekly Chat so as to say something about the way in which the GEM is prepared. I get letters from keen readers asking about how the GEM is printed, what machines are employed, and so on. One of these days I hope to deal with all the many questions which reach me concerning these and such matters as how authors work, and so on. But it will all have to keep for a bit. One fact is evident. The GEM, as you will see from the copy in your hands this week, is better than ever. And next week there will be still another step in advance.

"TRIMBLE TRIES IT ON!"

This is the title for next Wednesday's yarn of St. Jim's. Dear old Baggy Trimble is on the job again, nosing round for rewards without putting himself to the trouble of going in and earning them. For ways that are dark, and tricks that are vain, Trimble can give the heathen Chink points and a beating. But does Trimble make a success of his attempt to win a brand new cricket-bat offered very kindly and appropriately by Mr. Latham for an essay on the "Bard of Avon"? That you will see. So far Trimble has not exactly shone as an authority on Shakespeare. He may have deep knowledge of the great man of Stratford, but, if so, he must keep it in a remote place so far away that you would want a double-power telescope to see it. It is a great story, full of humour, and Ernest Levison's name comes in for mention. Levison is now at Greyfriars. You will be interested in Trimble's wonderful attempt to pull off the prize.

"THE HAUNTED MINE!"

Strange things go on in this haunted mine. It forms the central interest in next week's amazing Anthony Sharpe story. When a paying mine gets a bad name because of alleged ghosts it is tolerably evident there is a kink somewhere. But where did all the mystery come from? The detective himself is baffled a bit by the extraordinary happenings at the mine which has got an ill name for itself. There is plenty of good reason for the unpleasant reputation the mine has got, and you will read with intense interest the particulars of Sharpe's investigations. You will see next week how the "phantoms" are laid, and none too soon!

"ALL FOR A WAGER!"

The Sportsmen of Thunder Creek play up to the needs of the case in the new yarn in unerring style. They are engaged on an important bridge-constructing contract, but there was no reason whatever why they should put sport altogether aside while the big work of spanning ravines and rivers was proceeding. That, anyhow, is the sportsmanlike view they take, and, as good luck has it, the man at the head of affairs falls into the same cheery way of thinking. The wager is the pivot of a grand story packed full of thrills. The Thunder Creek fellows have faced perils in plenty before this, but on the special occasion concerned they are up against bigger odds than ever. There is a boxing contest in which something far more than usual is called for. Just keep your eye on Jim Raven next week. It will pay you to do it.

"THE SPIDER OF THE NORTH!"

It is no good whatever imagining that the opening chapters of this splendid serial will be found in next week's GEM, for such is not the case. The great mill-land tale of sport and peril does not start till the week after next. You can be sure of it then, and, what's more, I am sure a record success is awaiting the serial. The story is an achievement of which the author may well be proud. Meantime the GEM programme is doing well, and I must specially draw your attention to something which is of the season most seasonable.

A GRAND CRICKET COMPETITION!

This feature is bound to get a good reception next week. It is distinguished by heaps of novelty, and it is just one of those cheery attractions in which everybody has a chance, just as with the Tuck Hamper feature. The latter remains a prime favourite, and the Readers' Page can be relied upon to supply some bright and lively moments.

Your Editor.

ST. JIM'S at the CUP-FINAL!

A Grand Complete Story of the Chums of St. Jim's, combining fun, frolic, and footer.

Written by the best of boys' authors—

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Music Hath Charms!

"IT'S almost too good to be true!" said Monty Lowther. "But it's true enough," said Tom Merry gaily. "Belmont Rovers, the giddy Cup-Finalists, are coming to Rylcombe for special training."

"And they're coming to-day—this very afternoon—according to the papers," said Manners.

"Yes, rather!"

The Terrible Three of the Shell were excited. And they had good reason to be.

Interest in the great struggle for the English Cup was not confined to the outside world. The St. Jim's fellows were as interested as anybody. They had followed the competition from its earliest stages, and they had been particularly interested in the progress of Belmont Rovers.

The Rovers had one of the most skilful and dashing sides in the south of England. They had done little in the League, but they were gallant Cup fighters, with a whole wealth of tradition behind them.

Belmont Rovers had fought their way to the Final. It had been a hard, stern fight. The luck of the draw had not favoured them. They had been drawn, in practically every round, against powerful teams in the north. They had drawn their matches with these giants, and then won the replays at Belmont.

And so, step by step, Belmont Rovers had battled their way along the difficult path which led to Wembley Park, where the Cup Final was to be played.

St. Jim's had marked their progress with admiring eyes. Everybody at the school hoped that the Cup would come south, by way of a change. And Belmont Rovers were the last hope of the south.

Belmont's opponents in the Final would be the famous Loomshire County, from Lancashire.

The news that the Rovers were coming to Rylcombe for special training caused quite a flutter at St. Jim's.

"We've never seen the Rovers play," said Tom Merry, "but we shall be able to watch 'em every day now."

"Sure," said Monty Lowther. "We shall see them springing along the country lanes, and taking brine baths at the village pump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And, with a bit of luck, we'll persuade them to come up to the school," said Manners.

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors were still discussing the coming of the Rovers, when the door of Study No. 10 was thrown open without ceremony, and a burly youth appeared on the threshold.

"I say, you kids—"

"Kid yourself, Grundy!" growled Tom Merry. "What do you want?"

"If it's a thick ear," said Lowther, "I shall be delighted to deliver the goods!"

George Alfred Grundy glared at the Terrible Three.

"I didn't come here to be checked!" he said. "I want to know if you fellows are going to join my band?"

"Your—your band?" stuttered Tom Merry.

Grundy nodded.

"I'm getting up a band," he explained.

"What sort of a band?" asked Monty Lowther. "An indiarubber band, or a band of brigands?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean a brass band!" said Grundy, with a snort.

"Help!" groaned Tom Merry. "We've quite enough

music at the school already, what with Herries' cornet, and Gussy's tenor solos, and Glyn's gramophone."

"But we haven't a real band," said Grundy. "A real, live, go-ahead band is what we've been wanting for ages. Herries got one up once, but, of course, it was a wash-out. Herries is no organiser. He couldn't organise a blessed marbles tournament! It wants an enterprising fellow like me on this stunt."

The Terrible Three were not impressed. Their private opinion of George Alfred Grundy was that he was a duffer, a dolt, and a clumsy idiot. And they were not afraid to make their private opinion public when the occasion demanded.

"What do we want with a band?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, it will come in useful at important functions," said Grundy.

"For instance?"

"Belmont Rovers are coming this afternoon. Think how ripping it would be to meet them at the station, and give them a musical reception, then play them through the village."

"You might think it ripping," said Manners, "but Belmont Rovers wouldn't! They'd wonder what they'd done to deserve it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As I said before, I didn't come here to be checked," said Grundy. "Are you fellows going to join my band, or are you not?"

"Not!" said the Terrible Three, in chorus.

"Very well," said Grundy. "That's settled. When you see what a fine band I've organised, you'll come to me on bended knees and ask if you can join it. And I shall say 'Nothing doing.'"

"Rats!"

"Buzz off, Grundy!"

George Alfred lingered in the doorway.

"Got any instruments to lend me?" he asked.

"You can borrow my nasal organ, if you like," said Lowther humorously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy realised that there was nothing to be obtained from Study No. 10, in the way of musicians or instruments. So he shook his fist at the grinning juniors, and stamped out of the study.

Elsewhere Grundy met with better success.

Quite a lot of fellows were keen on the idea of a band, and they readily volunteered their services.

Herries, who owned a cornet, enlisted under Grundy's banner, though not without a long argument as to who should be bandmaster. Herries thought quite a lot of himself as a musician, and he considered he ought to be master of the ceremonies, so to speak. Grundy considered otherwise. And Grundy at length had his way.

Wilkins and Gunn, Grundy's study-mates, had already been enrolled. They had picked up a pair of bugles—not found them, but bought them at a second-hand music shop in Wayland.

Neither Wilkins nor Gunn knew anything about bugle-playing. And their knowledge of music, unlike Sam Weller's knowledge of London, was neither extensive nor peculiar.

After practising for an hour in the privacy of their study, however, Wilkins and Gunn managed to make certain weird sounds emerge from the bugles.

Not every fellow could make sounds come from a bugle, and Wilkins and Gunn considered they had good reason to pat one another on the back.

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Pat Reilly of the Fourth was Grundy's next recruit. "Faith, an' I've got nothin' but a mouth-organ, bedad," said Reilly. "But if that will do—"

"Ripping!" said Grundy. "No band is complete without mouth-organs. Do you happen to know of another good mouth-organist?"

Reilly did. He recommended Tompkins of the Fourth. Tompkins was interviewed, and he turned up trumps. But it is to be feared that both he and Pat Reilly joined Grundy's band simply for the sake of a lark.

"I'm getting on famously," said Grundy. "I only want a big-drummer and a kettle-drummer now."

Grundy also wanted a couple of drums—at short notice, too. But he was an optimistic youth, and he did not despair of being able to get them from somewhere.

Wilkins and Gunn reported that there was a big drum at the second-hand shop over at Wayland.

"It's a real beauty!" said Wilkins. "We couldn't afford to buy it, but the man at the shop is an awfully decent sort, and he might be willing to hire it out."

"Good!" said Grundy. "I'll bike over and see him."

"And try and pick up a kettle-drum while you're on the job," said Gunn.

Grundy nodded. He hurried away, and a few moments later he was speeding along the road to Wayland.

Mr. Fidler, who kept the second-hand music-shop, proved a very accommodating gentleman. He agreed to hire the big drum to Grundy at the rate of five shillings a week. But he added a rider to the effect that the drum was to be kept in good condition.

"No horseplay, mind!" said Mr. Fidler. "This is a splendid drum, but it won't stand too hard a hammering. You understand? Point out to your drummer that it isn't made of cast-iron."

"Certainly," said Grundy.

"If the drum gets seriously damaged, I shall have to charge you cost price," said Mr. Fidler.

"Oh, I'll take great care of it," said Grundy. "I'll keep it in a safe place when it's not in use. And when we're on the march I'll instruct the drummer to go lightly. Can I take the drum now?"

"Yes, if you pay the first instalment for the hire."

Grundy handed over five shillings, and the drum was attached to his person by means of a cord which went round his neck. It was a huge drum, and Grundy was almost lost behind it.

The drumsticks were thrust into Grundy's hands, and with difficulty he wormed his way through the doorway of Mr. Fidler's shop.

"Oh, by the way," said Grundy, turning his head, "do you happen to have a kettle-drum you could hire me?"

"Sorry," said Mr. Fidler. "I'm right out of kettle-drums at the moment."

"That's a pity. Never mind! I'll try and rake one up somewhere."

Grundy was now faced with the problem of conveying his bicycle and the big drum to St. Jim's. Handicapped as he was, he could not possibly ride the bicycle. Neither could he carry the drum and push the machine at the same time.

"This is a poser, and no mistake," muttered Grundy.

But a solution was speedily forthcoming.

A fat figure came rolling along the pavement. It was Baggy Trimble.

Baggy stared at George Alfred Grundy in amazement. "My hat! What have you got there, Grundy? Is it a drum?"

"Oh, no," said Grundy, with crushing sarcasm. "It's a gramophone. When you've finished asking potty questions, Baggy, you might do me a favour."

"Certainly, old chap," said Trimble graciously.

"Ride my bike back to St. Jim's."

"All serene!"

Baggy Trimble promptly mounted the machine and pedalled away. Grundy gazed after him rather anxiously. He didn't like entrusting his bicycle to the tender mercies of Trimble. But it was the only way.

Grundy himself set off on foot, with the big drum bulging out in front of him.

The whole population of Wayland seemed to have turned out to witness the strange spectacle. Pedestrians paused on the pavement, and people opened their windows and thrust their heads out.

"Might as well give 'em something to gape at!" muttered Grundy. And he brought the drumsticks into action.

Bang! Thump! Boom!

Had Grundy been a blacksmith, swinging his heavy sledge, he could not have wielded the drumsticks with more vigour. He quite forgot what Mr. Fidler had said about treating the

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drum gently. Grundy chastised it in savage frenzy as he strode along.

More windows were opened, more pedestrians stopped and stared.

George Alfred Grundy was causing quite a sensation in the old-fashioned High Street.

It was not until he was out of breath that Grundy desisted from his exertions. He had left Wayland far behind by this time, and was well on the way to St. Jim's.

On nearing the school, Grundy brought the drumsticks into action once more.

Thumpety-thumpety-thump! Crash! Bang! Crash!

"Sounds like a blessed army approachin'," muttered Taggles, the porter, shuffling out of his lodge.

But it was only Grundy. His face flushed, his arms going like windmills, George Alfred came marching through the school gateway.

"My heye!" gasped Taggles. "'Old 'ard, Master Grundy! The 'ead's havin' 'is usual 'alf-oliday nap, an' you'll go an' wake 'im up with that rumpus."

But Grundy neither heard nor heeded. He marched on through the quadrangle, making a hideous din.

Faces appeared at study windows.

Tom Merry & Co. gazed down at the amateur drummer, and roared to him to desist. But the drummer went on drumming.

Presently a window opened near at hand. It was the Head's.

Dr. Holmes, who had been dozing in his armchair, had been awakened by the commotion in the quadrangle. And when he saw the cause of the commotion he frowned.

"Grundy!"

Biff! Bang! Plonk!

"Grundy! Do you not hear me addressing you?" thundered the Head. "Cense that uproarious din immediately."

The Head's voice came faintly to Grundy's ears through the din. He lowered the drumsticks and halted, looking rather sheepish.

"Where did you procure that drum, Grundy?" demanded the Head.

"From a second-hand shop in Wayland, sir. I've hired it."

"Then I shall make you take it back again if you persist in making such an appalling noise. You are forbidden to beat that drum within the school precincts, Grundy. Do you understand?"

"Oh crumbs! Yessir."

The Head slammed his window down and withdrew.

Grundy marched on in silence. Baggy Trimble came rolling towards him.

"I've put your bike in the shed, Grundy," he said.

"Thanks. It's all right, I hope? Last time you had it you punctured the front tyre in about fifteen places."

"It's quite all right, I assure you," said Baggy. "I say, Grundy, I want to join your band."

"What can you play?"

"Nothing. But I know how to bash a drum."

"Good!" said Grundy. "You can be my big-drummer, if you like."

Baggy Trimble's face beamed like a full moon. He greatly fancied himself in the role of big-drummer.

"When do we get to business?" he asked.

"This afternoon," was the reply. "Belmont Rovers are coming, and we're going down to meet them, and play them through the village. They'll be on the three-thirty train, I think."

"Will you hand over the drum now?" asked Trimble eagerly.

"Certainly not! It's going to be kept in my study. And the Head says it's not to be beaten on the school premises."

Grundy passed on. He met Skimpole of the Shell on the way to his study.

"I hear you are wanting a kettle-drum, my dear Grundy," said Skimpole. "I happen to possess one. It was sent me for a birthday present, but I have never used it. If you would like me to join your band of musicians—"

Grundy closed with the offer at once. And then Buck Finn came on the scene with a pair of cymbals, and offered to place them—and himself—at Grundy's disposal.

The band was now complete. Grundy thought it had the makings of an excellent band. But Tom Merry & Co. thought otherwise. And probably Belmont Rovers, when Grundy's band met them at the station, would also think otherwise.



His face flushed, his arms going like windmills, George Alfred Grundy went marching on through the quadrangle, making a hideous din with his drumming. Dr. Holmes, who had been dozing in his armchair, was awakened by the commotion outside. Throwing open the window, his gaze fell upon the drummer. "Grundy!" he thundered. "Cease that din immediately!" (See page 4.)

CHAPTER 2.

A Slight Misunderstanding!

"FALL in, you fellows!"

Grundy marshalled his merry musicians in the roadway, just outside the school gates.

It was three o'clock, and in half an hour, if all went well, the famous footballers would arrive.

Baggy Trimble came waddling into view with the big drum. Baggy was looking very pompous and important, and he gripped the drum-sticks in a manner which suggested that he meant business.

Herries with his cornet, and Wilkins and Gunn with their bugles, took up their positions behind Baggy. Then came Skimpole with the kettle-drum, and Buck Finn with the cymbals, and Reilly and Tompkins with their mouth-organs.

Grundy himself had no instrument. He was content to conduct operations.

"What are we going to play?" asked Herries.

"Better have a tune that everybody knows," said Grundy.

"What about 'Rule Britannia'?"

"Right you are."

Herries could play "Rule Britannia"—after a fashion. And Reilly and Tompkins could manage it on their mouth-organs. But Wilkins and Gunn could not play any sort of a tune. Still, they could make a noise, and that was all that mattered.

"Now, when I say 'Quick march!' I want you all to strike up," said Grundy.

"Are you ready?"

The musicians nodded.

"Quick march!" roared Grundy.

The din that followed was sufficient to awaken the celebrated Seven Sleepers.

Grundy's band set off along the dusty road, making a most

hideous noise. Each fellow seemed to be trying to drown the others.

Baggy Trimble biffed at the big drum as if he owed it a grievance; Herries blared on his cornet as if he were sounding the Last Trump; Wilkins and Gunn made strange, guttural sounds come from the bugles; Buck Finn clashed the cymbals right merrily; and Skimpole beat a tattoo on the kettle-drum.

There was nothing musical or melodious about Grundy's band. In the words of Shakespeare, it was "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

The band was supposed to be playing "Rule Britannia!" but nobody could recognise the tune.

Grundy, however, was well satisfied with his performers. After all, you couldn't expect a brass band to become perfect in five minutes.

Tom Merry & Co. tacked themselves on to the rear of the procession. They were almost in hysterics.

"Oh, what a row!" gasped Manners, stopping his ears.

"Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"No, never," gurgled Monty Lowther. "I can only say that Grundy's band ought to be banned!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

To make matters worse, lots of fellows who did not belong to the band insisted on joining in with their mouth-organs and tin whistles.

The volume of sound that boomed along the country road was truly terrific.

Not until they reached the railway station did the musicians desist. They had to then, for they had puffed themselves out. Herries' face was like a beetroot, and Wilkins and Gunn were pumping in breath.

"That wasn't at all bad for a start," said Grundy. "But you musn't biff that drum so hard, Baggy, or you'll puncture it. Now, I want you fellows to take a rest until the train

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comes in. Then, when I give the word of command, you can strike up again for the benefit of Belmont Rovers."

"Poor old Rovers!" said Monty Lowther. "They'll wish they'd come to a quieter spot for their training."

"Yes, rather!"

The train was already signalled, and soon it came crawling in.

A dozen men alighted from the train, and the St. Jim's fellows, crowded on the platform, had no doubt that these were the celebrated Belmont Rovers. They were big, burly fellows, and each of them carried a small bag.

"Eleven players and the trainer," said Tom Merry. "By Jove, they're a hefty lot!"

They were not a nice-looking lot, either. And the St. Jim's juniors were disappointed at their first glimpse of the Rovers. They had hardly expected their favourite players to be as handsome as Greek gods. At the same time, they had expected them to be better-looking than this.

"That giant in the mackintosh seems to be the skipper," said Manners. "Going to speak to him, Tommy?"

Tom Merry nodded. He stepped up to the strapping young man whom Manners had pointed out.

"Are you the Rovers?" he inquired.

The man in the mackintosh nodded.

"We—we've come down to meet you," said Tom Merry hesitatingly.

"Very kind of you, I'm sure. But why all this fuss?"

"Well, we're jolly keen on the Rovers, you know. We're from St. Jim's. Would you care to come up to the school and have a look round, and a—snack, and so forth?"

The man conferred with his comrades, and they seemed very surprised at Tom Merry's invitation. But they were pleased as well as surprised.

After a short conference with the others, the man in the mackintosh turned to Tom Merry.

"We've got an hour to kill," he said, "so we shall be very pleased to accept your kind invitation."

"Oh, good!"

The word went round that the Rovers were coming straight up to the school.

Grundy's band, which had been impatiently silent since the train had come in, now struck up. They marched off down the village street, with Tom Merry & Co. and the Rovers following up behind.

What the band was supposed to be playing nobody knew. Monty Lowther said it was "See the Conquering Hero Comes!" Tom Merry declared it was "The Death of Nelson." Manners said it was simply jazz music. And he was nearer the truth.

Baggy Trimble led the procession, thumping the big drum with reckless abandon.

Herries was in great form with the cornet, and Wilkins and Gunn were fairly letting themselves go.

It was one perpetual tumult of booming and banging. What the footballers thought of it could only be imagined. Judging by their broad grins, they hadn't a very high opinion of Grundy's musicians.

If Mr. Fidler, of the second-hand shop at Wayland, had seen how Baggy Trimble was bashing the big drum he would have had several sorts of a fit.

The perspiration was streaming down the fat junior's cheeks, and his arms were aching; but he kept going valiantly.

It was a triumphal march to St. Jim's.

The musicians halted in the school gateway. They dared not proceed any further, by order of the Head. They ranged themselves in a circle and continued playing, Grundy conducting the proceedings with his baton.

Tom Merry & Co. led the footballers into the quadrangle. They had not had official permission to invite Belmont Rovers to the school. But they felt sure the authorities would not mind.

Mr. Railton encountered the procession in the quad. He drew Tom Merry aside.

"Bless my soul," he ejaculated. "Who are these persons, Merry?"

"Belmont Rovers, sir!" answered Tom proudly.

"Oh!"

"I took the liberty of inviting them up to the school, sir," said Tom. "They are rather pressed for time, but they'd like to have a look round. You've no objection, sir, I hope?"

"None at all," said Mr. Railton. His keen eye took stock of the footballers. "They hardly seem like a first-class professional team," he added.

"Just what I was thinking, sir. I was hoping they'd be more—well—refined-looking."

"Still, one cannot expect every professional footballer to be an Adonis," said Mr. Railton, with a smile.

Tom Merry rejoined the others and the visitors were then escorted over the old school and shown all the sights of interest.

The footballers had very little to say to their schoolboy

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hosts. Tom Merry & Co. were hoping that they would start talking about the Cup Final; but they seemed very reticent.

When the tour of inspection was over, Tom Merry suggested tea.

It was not yet tea-time, but the footballers said they were quite game for a snack.

Tom Merry turned to his chums.

"Hustle along to the tuckshop and get some grub," he said. "We shall have to lay the meal in the Common-room. It would be too big a crush in the study."

Manners and Lowther promptly scuttled away to the tuckshop.

Tea for twelve footballers would make a big hole in the resources of the Terrible Three. Fortunately, however, they were in ample funds. Besides, lots of other fellows were willing to contribute to the expenses.

"Seems silly to buy tarts and pastries," remarked Manners as he entered the school shop with Lowther. "When footballers are in training they give those sort of things a miss."

"Well, we can hardly ask 'em to partake of dry toast and weak tea," said Monty Lowther. "Let's get the tarts and things, and if they don't eat them we can soon polish them off afterwards."

"That's so."

Having purchased ample supplies, Manners and Lowther conveyed them to the junior Common-room.

The long table had already been adorned with a spotless cloth. Everything possible was being done for the comfort of the famous Rovers.

The footballers, although they had talked very little, seemed quite happy. They lounged in the easy-chairs which had been specially brought in from various studies. And most of them were smoking cigarettes.

This rather shocked the St. Jim's juniors. A team which was supposed to be in strict training for the English Cup Final might well have been expected to eschew cigarettes.

Tom Merry supervised the preparations for the feed, and in less than ten minutes all was in readiness.

"Pile in, gentlemen!" said Tom, with a flourish of his hand towards the array of good things on the table.

The footballers needed no second bidding. They attacked the feed as if they had not had a square meal for days. From time to time Tom Merry & Co. overheard such remarks as "These tarts are prime, Bill!" and "These 'ere doughnuts is perfectly priceless, Alf!"

The juniors marvelled more and more.

Whenever a St. Jim's team trained for a big match cakes and pastries were strictly taboo. Even Fatty Wynn, who was reputed to polish off a dozen doughnuts a day, was never allowed to touch them when the team was in training.

And yet the Rovers, who were shortly to take part in the greatest football-match of the year, were stuffing cakes and pastries at a truly alarming rate!

The supplies speedily ran out, and Manners and Lowther had to pay a second visit to the tuckshop. Their funds had dwindled by this time, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came nobly to the rescue.

"You'd better take this quid, deah boys," said Gussy. "Bai Jove! What tewwific appetites those fellahs have got!"

"They're a team of Trimble's!" said Manners in disgust. "I used to hero-worship them almost. But now that I've seen them in the flesh, and know what they're like—well, I can hardly help despising them!"

"Same here," said Lowther. "Thanks awfully for the quid, Gussy! You're a Good Samaritan!"

"That's all wight," said Gussy cheerfully.

The fresh supplies were taken to the Common-room, and the footballers quickly disposed of them. After which their leader glanced at the clock.

"We shall have to be going," he remarked, "or we shall be late for the match."

"The—the match?" echoed Tom Merry, in wonder.

"Yes. We're playing Wayland Early-Closers this afternoon. The kick-off's late as it is, and we don't want to make it any later. Match starts at five o'clock."

Tom Merry gazed at the speaker like a fellow in a dream, and the rest of the juniors were spellbound.

"I—I don't understand!" gasped Tom Merry. "You—you say you're playing Wayland Early-Closers?"

"Yes."

"My hat! Fancy condescending to play against a potty little team like that. Is it to be part of your training?"

It was now the turn of the Rovers' skipper to look surprised.

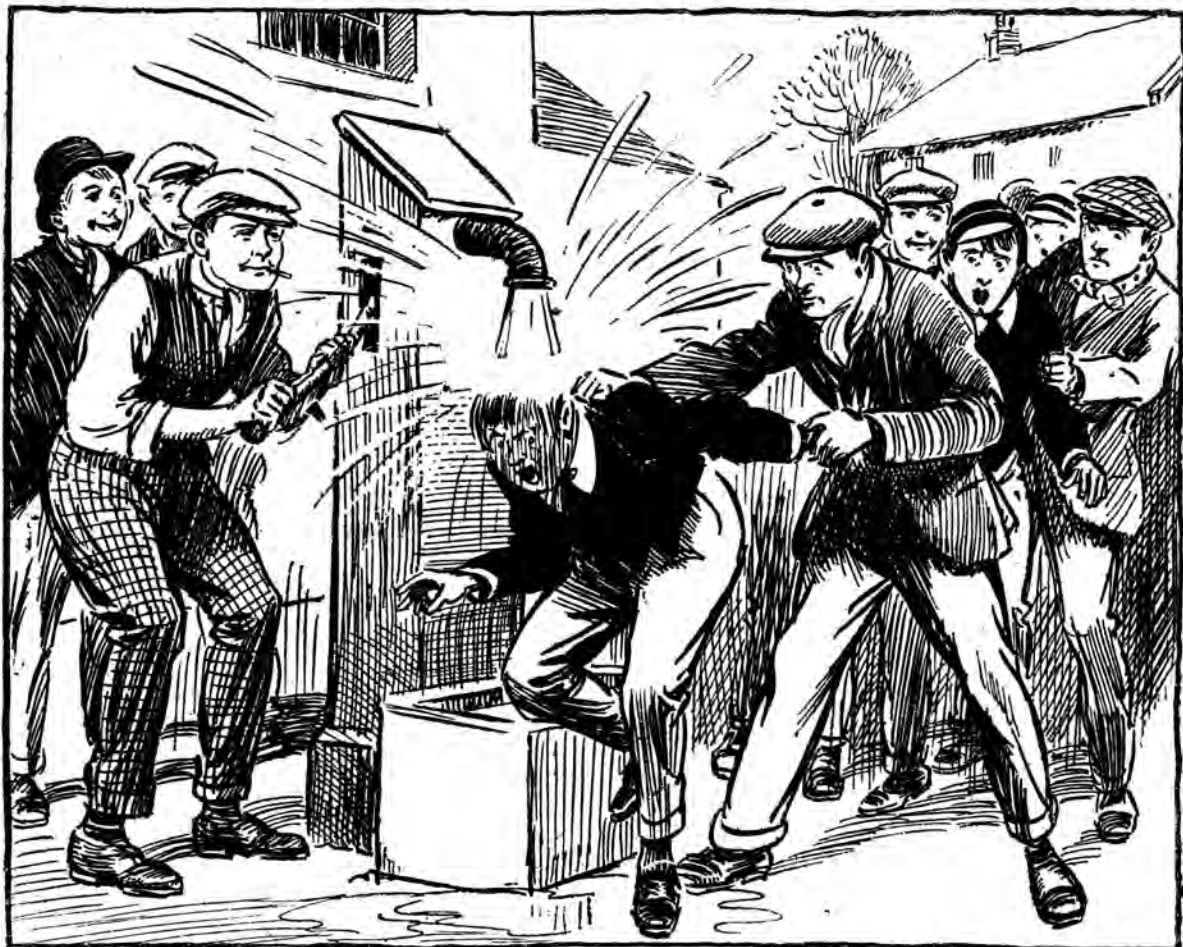
"Training!" he said blankly. "What do you mean by that, kid?"

"Why, you've come here to train for the English Cup Final, surely?" said Tom Merry, in bewilderment.

The footballers looked at one another, and then went off into peals of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"



Huggins and his fellow-hooligans did not stand on ceremony. They dealt with Grundy first. His head was forcibly held under the spout of the pump, while Huggins, doffing his coat and rolling up his sleeves, worked the pump-handle. Swish! Swoosh! "Yoooop! Gug-gug-gug!" spluttered the hapless George Alfred. "This water's cold, you beasts!" (See page 8.)

"Training for the English Cup Final—us! Oh, jiminy!"

Suddenly an awful doubt flashed into Tom Merry's mind. He faced round upon the leader of the footballers with a point-blank question.

"Are you Belmont Rovers?"

"Eh? Of course not!"

There was a buzz of amazement from the crowd in the Common-room.

Tom Merry flushed hotly.

"Then you've deceived us!" he exclaimed. "When I asked you at the station who you were you said the Rovers!"

"True. But not Belmont Rovers. We're Puddleton Rovers, a village team."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We couldn't understand why you were making so much fuss of us. But we've tumbled to it now. You thought we were Belmont Rovers, the Cup Finalists? Well, I'm jiggered!"

The St. Jim's juniors were fairly flabbergasted. They realised that they had taken things too quickly for granted, and, instead of meeting and greeting the famous Belmont Rovers, they had been lavishly entertaining a common or garden village team!

"Carry me home to die, somebody!" murmured Monty Lowther. "This beats the band, takes the cake, and fairly prances off with the whole giddy box of tricks!"

"And I took my band down to the station for nothing!" hooted George Alfred Grundy. "It's a jolly shame!"

"It was all a ghastly misunderstanding," said Tom Merry. "We can't blame these fellows. We pressed them to come up to the school, and they came."

The skipper of Puddleton Rovers noted the looks of dismay on the faces of the juniors, and he felt genuinely sorry for them.

"I'm sorry this has happened!" he said frankly. "We honestly had no idea why you were lushing us up like this. I think it only fair, mates," he added, "that we should have a whip-round, and pay for this feed."

"'Ear, 'ear!"

"Well spoken, Bert!"

"No, no!" said Tom Merry. "That's all right! We made the mistake, and it's our funeral!"

But the Rovers from Puddleton had a sense of what was right and just, and they insisted upon paying for what they had consumed. When they parted from the St. Jim's juniors it was on the best of terms. And Tom Merry & Co. saw them off at the school gates, and wished them luck in their match with Wayland Early-Closers.

CHAPTER 3.

The Real Rovers!

"OH, what a sell!"

Tom Merry looked as if he hardly knew whether to laugh or to howl.

"We've been entertaining the lads of the village instead of the heroes of the football world!" said Monty Lowther. "We've been making tin gods of the burly boys of Puddleton-on-Slosh, or whatever their village is called! Still, it's all for the best. If they had been the real Rovers, I should have been awfully disappointed."

"Same here!" said Manners. "They were quite all right in a rough sort of way, but they weren't the sort of fellows one could rave over."

"Wonder what's happened to the real Cup-fighters?" said Tom Merry. "I made sure they'd be on that train."

"They were on the next, I expect!" growled Grundy. "Just my luck! After all the trouble I went with my band—"

"The sooner you disband those mad musicians of yours, Grundy, the better!" said Jack Blake.

"What's that?" shouted Herries. "Are you calling me a mad musician, Blake?"

"Yes!" said Blake cheerfully. "Fellows who kick up a

hullabaloo on cornets ought to be put in padded cells! It's a sure sign that they've got bats in their belfry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries looked very annoyed.

"You haven't a soul for music," he said.

"Well, if you call that harmonious music," said Blake,

"I shouldn't care to hear a discord!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You leave my band alone," said Grundy wrathfully.

"You're only jealous because you don't belong to it, Blake.

Those Puddleton fellows thought the music was top-hole."

"That's because their own village band isn't much

better," said Tom Merry. "But if you start playing to the

real Rovers, you're likely to get brickbats chucked at you."

Grundy gave a snort.

"When the real Rovers turn up——" he began.

Suddenly the door of the Common-room was thrown open,

and Toby the page burst in. Toby's eyes were gleaming

with excitement.

"Wherefore that excited look, Tobias?" said Monty

Lowther.

"Which I've just seen the Rovers go by—the real Bel-

mont Rovers!" said Toby.

"My hat!"

"They didn't come by train at all," Toby went on.

"They was in one of them there sharra-bongs."

"Then we're too late to see them?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, Master Merry. Went by like a flash of lightning,"

they did. But I knew they was the Rovers, because there

was a red-an'-white flag flyin' in front of the sharra-bong.

An' that's the Rovers' colours."

"Where are their training quarters?" asked Grundy.

"Do you know?"

"Yes. They're staying at the Sportsman, Master Grundy

—that sleepy little hotel at the end of the village street."

"Good!" said Grundy. "Members of the band, fall in!"

Grundy's musicians promptly obeyed.

"Now, listen to me," said the youthful conductor.

"You're going to get your instruments, and then we'll

march down to the village, and play selections outside the

Sportsman."

"Selections from what?" asked Wilkins.

"Oh—er—anybody," said Grundy vaguely. "Handel, or

Mozart, or Oliver Cromwell—I don't care which."

"First time I knew Cromwell was a giddy composer!"

murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry gave Grundy a word of warning.

"If you start kicking up a shindy in the village street,

you silly dunder, you'll be put under arrest," he said.

"And you'll be charged before the magistrates with

causing a piece of the breach—I mean, a breach of the

peace," said Lowther.

"Funny, aren't you?" scoffed Grundy.

"Not nearly so funny as your comic band," said Monty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy turned his back on the joker of the Shell, and

addressed his musicians, who were ranged meekly before

him.

"When I say 'Dismiss!' " he said, "I want you to fetch

your instruments, and parade in the school gateway.

'Smis!"

The bandmen sped away in quest of their instruments.

They were putting in a pretty strenuous afternoon. But

nobody seemed to mind.

Baggy Trimble and Skimpole took their duties quite

seriously. So did Herries. Wilkins and Gunn were partly

serious. They had to be, because they were half-afraid of

their leader, Grundy.

As for the other three—Reilly and Tompkins and Buck

Finn—they regarded the affair as a tremendous joke.

Armed with their instruments, the musicians lined up in

the school gateway. Grundy joined them, and marched

them off in the direction of the village.

"You needn't start playing till we get to the Sportsman,"

he said. "Save your breath till then."

The musicians proceeded in silence to Rylcombe, though

Baggy Trimble was simply itching to smite the big drum,

and Buck Finn was dying to clash the cymbals.

The village street was as quiet as usual. The arrival of

Belmont Rovers did not seem to have caused much of a

stir.

"These people want waking up," said Grundy. "Never

saw such a dozey lot!"

"You'd have thought the whole giddy population would

have turned out to welcome Belmont Rovers," said

Wilkins.

"We'll jolly soon wake 'em up!" said Gunn, with a

chuckle.

The juniors halted when they came to the Sportsman.

The quiet little hotel stood back from the village street.

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There was a cobbled square in front of it, and in this square Grundy halted his musicians.

"Now, what are we going to play?" asked Herries.

"Let's have something that everybody knows."

"Faith, an' what about 'Tipperary'?" said Pat Reilly.

"Why, that's as old as the hills!" said Grundy. "A

blessed beaver, in fact. Still, everybody seems to know

it. So go ahead."

The band went ahead in great style.

Not since the Christmas wails came round had the inhabi-

tants experienced such a disturbance.

Wilkins and Gunn blew their bugles with gusto. And

Herries did his level best to drown them both.

Reilly and Tompkins made merry with their mouth-

organs. Skimpole rattled away on the kettle-drum. Buck

Finn crashed the cymbals together. And Baggy Trimble

crowned it all by belabouring the big drum with all his

might. George Alfred Grundy stood in the centre of the

circle wielding his baton.

Grundy was proud of his band. The players showed no

regard for either time or tune. But they made a most

terrific din, and in this respect no other band could have

equalled them. In fact, half a dozen bands playing at once

could hardly have made more noise.

The village awoke out of its stupor. Doors and windows

were opened up and down the street. And people flocked

out in droves to see where all the noise was coming from.

The parlour door of the Sportsman was thrown open, and

a number of athletic young men stared out in astonishment.

Grundy caught sight of them, and grinned genially. He

had no doubt that these athletic young men belonged to

the Belmont Rovers team.

Grundy grinned, but he got no grins in return. The

Rovers were frowning and pressing their hands to their

ears—as well they might.

"Clear off!" thundered a tall young fellow with a shock

of black hair.

Grundy gave a gasp.

"Are you speaking to me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"But we're doing this for your benefit!" bawled Grundy.

He had to hawl in order to make himself heard amid the

din.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the shock-headed young man.

"Anybody would think you owed us a grudge, kicking up

that frightful row! Chuck it, for goodness' sake! It's

enough to deafen anybody."

But the band went on playing. Whereupon one of the

footballers tossed a couple of pennies out of the window.

They landed on top of the big drum.

"There you are!" shouted the generous donor. "Now

perhaps you'll move on, and give somebody else a turn!"

But the musicians from St. Jim's, now thoroughly wound

up, showed no signs of stopping. It looked as if they would

emulate the brook, and go on for ever. In their sublime

ignorance, they thought they were giving pleasure to their

hearers, instead of anguish.

By this time a number of village roughs had assembled.

And they meant mischief.

Baggy Trimble recognised the leader of the roughs. He

was a burly lout named Huggins, who had molested Baggy

in the past.

The fat junior instantly desisted from his exertions.

"I—I say, you fellows," he exclaimed, in tones of alarm.

"We'd better buzz off, or those rotters will start ragging

us!"

Even as Baggy Trimble spoke, the village louts advanced

towards Grundy's band.

"Collar 'em!" shouted Huggins. "Let's duck 'em at the

pump!"

George Alfred Grundy spun round in great alarm.

"Don't you dare——" he began.

The next moment Grundy was struggling in the grasp

of two sturdy villagers. He put up a great fight for free-

dom, but his efforts were futile.

The rest of the musicians fell an easy prey to the enemy.

Two of them—Skimpole and Baggy Trimble—offered no

resistance.

Uttering shrill cries of protest, the St. Jim's juniors were

hustled away down the street.

At the far end of the thoroughfare stood that familiar

landmark, the village pump.

"Share, an' we're in for a good old duckin' now!" groaned

Reilly.

And the rest of the musicians groaned in chorus. They had

not bargained for this.

Huggins and his fellow-hooligans did not stand on ceremony.

They dealt with Grundy first.

Grundy's head was forcibly held under the spout of the

pump, while Huggins, doffing his coat and rolling up his

sleeves, worked the pump-handle.

Swish! Swoosh!

"Yoooop! Gug-gug-gug!" spluttered the hapless Grundy,

as a jet of water smote him on the head and proceeded to trickle down his back. "This water's jolly cold, you beasts!"

"An' damp, too, I expect!" grinned Huggins.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

The lads of the village were thoroughly enjoying the fun. The same could not have been said of the St. Jim's juniors.

One by one they were taken to the pump, their musical instruments being commandeered beforehand by the villagers.

Gallons of water must have been wasted during the performance. Huggins pumped away until his arms ached, and then he was relieved by one of his pals.

The victims were soon soaked to the skin, and their Etons were reduced to limp rags. They felt like limp rags themselves, too!

Quite a crowd of people had watched the ducking. The Belmont Rovers eleven had come out of the Sportsman, and they stood looking on. They did not feel called upon to interfere. After all, Grundy & Co. deserved to be punished for having caused such a fearful disturbance.

But when the village refused to hand the juniors back their instruments the footballers felt called upon to take a hand.

The tall fellow with the shock of black hair—this was Jimmy Renton, the Rovers' skipper—strode up to Huggins.

"This has gone far enough," he said.

Huggins glared at the speaker.

"You mind your own business!" he growled.

"I'm going to see fair play," said Jimmy Renton. "You've ducked these kids at the pump, and they're simply swamped. Aren't you satisfied? Now hand them back their instruments."

"No fear!"

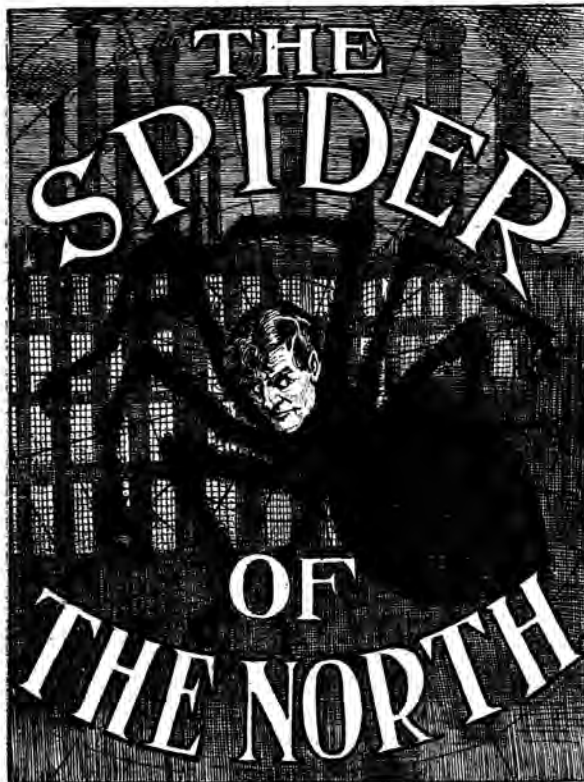
"Then we'll make you!"

Jimmy Renton glanced round at his comrades, to see whether they approved of his attitude. They did.

"Go it, Jimmy!"

"We'll back you up!"

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Jimmy Renton rushed at the burly Huggins. Right and left his fists shot out, and Huggins spun round and round like a human catharine-wheel, and then landed with a crash on the pavement.

This was the signal for a general outbreak of hostilities.

A battle royal was soon in progress. Footballers and villagers threw themselves into the fray with eager zest.

Belmont Rovers were outnumbered, but they were far and away the better fighting men.

The village louts contented themselves with rustic blows of the sledgehammer variety. But the footballers showed science and nippiness. They were far too nimble on their feet for the cumbersome villagers.

Man after man went down, with a footballer sprawling on top of him.

Grundy & Co., drenched and miserable though they were, raised a cheer.

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, the Rovers!"

"Give 'em socks!"

Huggins scrambled to his feet, only to be floored again by a straight left from Jimmy Renton.

"Ow! We—we give in!" muttered Huggins.

"You've no choice in the matter," said Jimmy Renton grimly.

The footballers had won the day. The village battlefield was strewn with the recumbent forms of the yokels. None of them showed any desire to renew the combat. They realised that they had no chance against the agile, hard-hitting footballers.

There were many casualties among the villagers, in the shape of black eyes and swollen noses. But the Rovers were unscathed, or practically so.

The whole affair had not lasted more than ten minutes. And in that short time the Rovers had done great execution.

"I rather fancy we've got the whip-hand," said Jimmy Renton. "Anybody else spoiling for a scrap? Don't all speak at once!"

They didn't! The onlookers, with the exception of the St. Jim's juniors, melted away like mists before the morning sun.

Belmont Rovers had already given a taste of their quality—not as footballers, but as fighting-men.

"If they play footer as well as they fight," said Grundy, "they'll win the English Cup!"

A sentiment with which Grundy's followers heartily agreed.

CHAPTER 4.

The Match at St. Jim's!

"**H**AND these kids back their instruments!" said Jimmy Renton.

The villagers offered no resistance while this was done. The instruments had not been damaged during the affray, and they were handed back in good condition to the St. Jim's juniors.

George Alfred Grundy looked very grateful.

"It was awfully decent of you fellows to chip in," he said.

"Not at all!" said Jimmy Renton. "Fair play's a jewel. We had no objection to your being ducked at the pump. You deserved it, you know. But when it came to confiscating your instruments, we thought it was a bit too thick."

"We'd better see these kids back to their school," said Jimmy Carr, the Rovers' outside-right. "They'll need a bodyguard, in case of another attack."

Jimmy Renton nodded. And the good-natured Rovers proceeded to accompany Grundy & Co. to St. Jim's.

The musicians looked like drowned rats. But they were more cheerful now.

"We'll play you up to the school if you like," volunteered Grundy.

"If you do," said Jimmy Renton grimly, "we'll leave you into the ditch and leave you there!"

"You don't seem to care for music," said Grundy.

"We're very fond of music, but we can't stand that awful row that you kick up."

"This band has only just been formed," explained Herries.

"We shall improve with practice."

"So long as you don't practice in our presence, we sha'n't mind," said Jimmy Renton.

Tom Merry & Co. were standing in the school gateway when Grundy's musicians arrived with their stalwart escort.

"My only aunt!" ejaculated the captain of the Shell.

"Have your fellows been bathing in the duckpond?"

"I say, you fellows," said Baggy Trimble, "we've been ducked at the village pump!"

"Great Scott!"

"We'd have had our instruments taken away, too, if these fellows hadn't chipped in. They're the Rovers, you know—the real Rovers!"

Tom Merry & Co. turned admiring eyes upon the footballers. They could not doubt that these were indeed the genuine Belmont Rovers. Tall, athletic, clear-eyed sportsmen, there was no mistaking their identity.

"We thought we'd see your friends back to the school," said Jimmy Renton to Tom Merry. "They want looking after, you know. If they persist in going around the country kicking up such an appalling din they must expect to be mobbed."

Grundy & Co. hurried away to change their clothes. They had to run the gauntlet of a grinning crowd in the quadrangle.

The footballers were gazing with keen interest at the majestic school tower.

"Like to see over the place?" asked Tom Merry.

"Thanks! We'd love to!"

The famous Rovers were promptly piloted round the school building. Fellows came rushing from all parts of the building to get a glimpse of the Cup Finalists.

Kildare of the Sixth, head of the school and captain of games, was particularly pleased to see them.

"I was wondering," he said, "if you could possibly fix up a match with our first eleven on Saturday?"

"Delighted!" said Jimmy Renton.

"Of course, we're not conceited enough to imagine that we could put up any sort of a fight against your full eleven," Kildare went on. "You'd simply waltz round us, and there would be no fun in it. But if you'd care to field a weakened team—say, nine men instead of eleven—"

"It shall be done," said Jimmy Renton. "We'll bring over a team of nine. That will give you a sporting chance of winning."

The news that the Rovers had agreed to play a match against the school spread like wildfire.

Everybody was anxious to see how the famous Rovers shaped on the field of play.

With two men short, they would be terribly handicapped. It would mean playing two half-backs instead of three, and four forwards instead of five. The Saints had quite a rosy chance of victory.

Tom Merry & Co. pressed their visitors to stay to tea. But Jimmy Renton shook his head.

"Sorry," he said. "But no schoolboy orgies for us. We're in training, you know. And we could never expect to win the English Cup on a diet of dough-nuts and jam-tarts."

"Ha, ha! Hardly!"

"By the way," said Manners, "what do you think of your chances of lifting the Cup?"

Jimmy Renton looked thoughtful.

"It's going to be a grim battle," he said. "The other Finalists—Loamshire County—are a fine side, a rattling good side. They play the long-passing game, swinging the ball across from wing to wing, and they believe in potting for goal at every opportunity. Those sort of teams are always dangerous. The close-passing, pattern-weaving sort of game is very clever, but it's no use whatever in a Cup Final. Speed and dash will win the Cup; and those are the very qualities for which Loamshire County are famous. But then, we happen to be speed and dash merchants as well. So, as I say, it's going to be a grim battle."

"And you think you'll win?" said Tom Merry eagerly.

Jimmy Renton smiled.

"Every team thinks it will win," he said. "Each one of the sixty-four clubs whose names went into the hat had high hopes of lifting the English Cup. But all of them have fallen by the way, except two—Loamshire County and ourselves. Nobody expected us to get into the Final, either. Look at our position in the League. We're half-way down the table. Still, between League football and Cup football there's a great gulf fixed; and the public would do well to recognise it. We're only a Second Division club, and lots of people have already marked us down as losers. But—well, we must wait and see."

Jimmy Renton declined to say anything more on that all-important topic. But it was easy to see that Belmont Rovers were hopeful and confident of winning that most coveted of all football trophies.

There was great excitement at St. Jim's during the next few days. It reached its zenith on the Saturday, when Belmont Rovers brought their team to the school.

Kildare had been keeping his men up to the scratch. Every afternoon they had put in a hard spell of practice.

All St. Jim's flocked down to the football-ground to see the match.

The Rovers' colours were red-and-white striped jerseys and black knickers. The St. Jim's colours happened to be the same—a curious coincidence.

To avoid confusion, Kildare arranged for his team to play all in white.

Tom Merry & Co. occupied prominent positions on the touchline. And they heartily cheered both teams when they came out.

"It's going to be a battle royal," said Tom Merry.

"But we shall win all right," said Manners confidently.

"The Rovers will feel the draught, with only nine men."

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"Hallo! What's happening?" exclaimed Monty Lowther suddenly.

A thunderous din broke out over the playing-pitch.

George Alfred Grundy was marching on the scene at the head of his band.

In spite of the trials and tribulations which the musicians had suffered, Grundy had no thought of breaking up the band. He simply could not get it into his thick head that his band wasn't wanted. And he had now planned a little "music" for this auspicious occasion.

There was an angry roar from the touchline.

"Buzz off, Grundy!"

"Go home!"

"Stop that awful row, and pack up!"

But Grundy showed no inclination to buzz off, go home, or pack up. He halted his musicians in the centre of the playing-pitch, and wielded his baton with a flourish.

The St. Jim's eleven glared at the performers. Belmont Rovers glared, too. Everybody glared.

But the crowd on the touchline did not content themselves with simply glaring. They swarmed on to the pitch, breathing threatenings and slaughter.

"Collar the mad duffers!"

"Mob them!"

That time-honoured tune, "Rule, Britannia!" was broken off abruptly in the middle.

The musicians stopped playing very suddenly, on finding themselves surrounded by a hostile crowd.

The mob did not stand on ceremony. They chased Grundy & Co. off the pitch, planting their boots behind them.

Fellows like Reilly and Tompkins, who only had mouth-organs to carry, escaped without much difficulty. But Baggy Trimble, who had to struggle along with the big drum, was terribly handicapped. He got it "in the neck"—and in other parts of his anatomy as well.

"Yow-wow-ow!" yelled Baggy, as he ran. "Chuckit! Stop it! I'm not a blessed football! Yoooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's musicians fled wildly towards the school building. They were not wanted on the football-field, and the crowd told them so—not with words, but with kicks.

When the little diversion was over the match started.

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"On the ball!"

The school forwards broke clean away at the start. They got within shooting distance in the very first minute, and found themselves with only the goalkeeper to beat.

But that goalie wanted some beating! He was "Tiny" Marshall, one of the finest custodians in the country. His nickname was due to his tremendous height. No high shot would have beaten him, for he could reach the crossbar with ease.

It seemed that no low shot could beat him, either.

Kildare and his comrades rained in shot after shot, only to see the ball gathered up and kicked clear.

"That's fellow's a giddy marvel!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I believe he could stop a blessed cannon-ball! Just look at him!"

"Cool as a cucumber, too," said Monty Lowther.

But even Tiny Marshall was beaten at last.

Darrel of St. Jim's forced a corner on the right. He took the kick himself, and the ball came straight to Kildare, who promptly nodded it into the net.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

St. Jim's had done all the pressing, so far. But it was now the Rovers' turn. From the kick-off, they went down the field in splendid style. Despite the fact that they had only four forwards, they set up a hurricane attack.

North, in the St. Jim's goal, had a busy time. He fielded a couple of hard drives, but he was beaten by a third, from the foot of Jimmy Renton.

"Level pegging!" said Tom Merry. "We shall see some fun now!"

Both teams fought hard for the lead. But no more goals were taken before half-time.

St. Jim's had more than held their own up to the interval. And their prospects of victory appeared quite rosy.

In the second half, however, a remarkable change came over the game.

The superior training and stamina of the Rovers told their tale. They simply overran the St. Jim's defence, piling on three goals in quick succession.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Aroy. "It's like a firework display, deah boys!"

"Did you ever see such shooting?" said Jack Blake.

"Dead on the mark every time!"

The Rovers were going great guns. They regarded this game with St. Jim's as an excellent bit of training, and they threw themselves heart and soul into the tussle.

The St. Jim's defenders played pluckily, but they might



Purple with rage, the colonel rose to his feet and stamped and roared and raved. But the musicians heeded him not. Unable to bear it any longer, the colonel gave a savage wrench at the communication cord, and the train slowed down. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Grundy. "That's fairly done it!" (See page 16.)

as well have attempted to stem the onrush of a mighty torrent.

Yet another goal fell to the Rovers before Rushden got through for St. Jim's. And when the final whistle went the Saints were as tired a team as ever donned football jerseys.

In spite of their big handicap, Belmont Rovers had beaten the school by five goals to two.

The air rang with cheering for the victors. And Kildare was the first to shake Jimmy Renton's hand.

"You were much too good for us," he said. "I expect you thought it awful cheek of me to suggest such a match."

"On the contrary," said Jimmy Renton. "We thoroughly enjoyed the tussle, and your fellows played well. We had to fight for our goals. They weren't free gifts by any means."

Tom Merry & Co. invited the Rovers to stay to tea. And on this occasion they did. But they didn't make an orgy of it, like Puddleton Rovers had done. They ate very sparingly.

During the meal they related many thrilling stories of the football field to the St. Jim's juniors.

Belmont Rovers had been popular before they came to Rylcombe. They were almost idolised now. They seemed to be such splendid sportsmen—not merely as footballers, but in the wider sense of the term. From Jimmy Renton, their skipper, down to "Baby" Logan, their youngest player, they were rattling fine fellows. And the good wishes of the whole school would be with them when they entered the arena at Wembley Park to fight for the English Cup.

CHAPTER 5. Glory for Grundy!

"THIS is where we make a stir!" It was Grundy who spoke.

George Alfred Grundy had already made a stir—a very considerable stir—with his little army of musicians. But he was not yet satisfied.

The fact that certain people, who hadn't an ear for music,

had boycotted Grundy's band did not seriously alarm George Alfred.

"We're not appreciated at St. Jim's," said Grundy; "but the general public would simply rave over us!"

So they would—but not in the sense Grundy meant!

Wilkins and Gunn looked questioningly at their leader. Grundy had a newspaper in his hand.

"They are advertising for a band to play at the Cup Final," he said; "and, as I say, this is where we make a stir!"

"Not thinking of offering your services, surely?" gasped Wilkins.

"That's precisely what I am thinking of doing!"

"My hat!"

Wilkins and Gunn stared at Grundy in amazement. Grundy was truly an amazing fellow. One never knew what he would do next.

"I don't see why we shouldn't go and play at the Cup Final," said Grundy. "Cup Final crowds like music. I'll write to the Football Association right away and place my band at their disposal. We'll offer our services free. No need to make capital out of it."

"But we—we can't call ourselves a first-class band!" protested Gunn.

It was an unfortunate remark, and it roused Grundy's wrath.

"Eh? Who says we aren't a first-class band?" he demanded. "Look here, William Gunn, if you start criticising my band I'll chuck you out, and get another bugler in your place!"

William Gunn promptly turned off the tap of criticism. He saw that the great Grundy was in earnest.

"There's no harm in applying for the job, even if we're not accepted," said Grundy. "Personally, I think they'll jump at the chance of getting a trained band for nothing. Other bands will apply; but then, they'll demand big fees."

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Grundy sat down at once and drafted a letter to the Football Association. The art of letter-writing was one in which Grundy did not excel. His handwriting was sprawling and uneven, and his spelling was the limit.

No wonder Wilkins and Gunn found it difficult to keep their faces straight when Grundy showed them his epistle.

"To Mr. the Honourable Chairman, Esq.,
Football Association.

"Dear Sir,—I hear that you are wanting a band to play of the Cup Final. I have formed a trained band of moosicians at St. Jim's, and we shall be pleased to offer you our services, free, gratts, and for nicks.

"My band konsists of a kornet-player, a cupple of bewgfers, a big drummer, a little drummer, a cupple of mouth-organists, a fellow with a pair of simbles, and me as konduktor.

"We have already had the plezzure of playing before Belmont Rovers, and they say that my band beggars all deskription; so you may guess it's a jolly good one.

"Pleese let me know by return if you would like us to play at the Cup Final.

"Thanking you in antissipation.—Yours sinseerly,
"GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY."

"What do you think of it?" asked Grundy.
Wilkins just managed to convert a chuckle into a cough in the nick of time.

"Quite a good letter, old chap," he said.

"That ought to do the trick," said Gunn.

But neither Wilkins nor Gunn seriously believed that Grundy's letter would do anything beyond bringing a smile to the face of the chairman of the Football Association.

Grundy sealed his letter, and posted it in the letter-box in the quad. He told Tom Merry & Co. what he had done, and they simply shrieked with laughter.

"Oh, Grundy, Grundy, you'll be the death of me!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "Fancy thinking that your mad musicians will be chosen to play at the Cup Final! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you'd be lynched by the crowd!" said Tom Merry. "But, then, what's the use of imagining things? Your band would never be selected—not in a thousand years!"

"Not even if it was the only band in the country!" said Manners. "Grundy, old chap, you're the biggest duffer that ever duffed!"

"If I'm anything of a prophet, he'll finish up in Colney Hatch," said Monty Lowther. "Grundy's like a jerry-built house. He's got a tile loose in his upper story!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy shook his fists at the hilarious juniors.

"Just you wait!" he growled. "You'll change your tune in a couple of days, when I get a reply to my letter."

"You're not likely to get a reply," said Tom Merry. "If you do, it will consist of three words—Declined without thanks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy stamped wrathfully away. And for the next two days he fretted and fumed for the postman to bring a reply to his letter.

The reply came all right. And it was what Grundy expected, and what the rest of St. Jim's did not expect.

"Dear Sir,—In reply to your letter, we shall be pleased to accept the services of your band on the terms you mention.

"You will be required to play selections before the Cup Final commences, and also during the interval. Choice of music will be left entirely to you."

Quite a crowd gathered round Grundy while he read the letter.

"What luck?" asked Wilkins.

"Buck up and tell us, Grundy," said Baggy Trimble. "This suspense is awful!"

Grundy looked up after reading the letter. There was a triumphant grin on his far from beautiful countenance.

"It's all serene!" he said joyfully.

"What!"

"You—you don't mean to say—" began Gunn.

"My band's been chosen to play at the Cup Final!" said Grundy proudly.

There was a yell from the juniors.

"Gammon!"

"Draw it mild, Grundy!"

Grundy held up the letter for all the world to see.

"Read it for yourselves, you doubting Thomases!" he said.

Wilkins and Gunn read the letter and gasped. Tom Merry & Co. read it and looked utterly dazed.

"It—it must be a spoof letter, sent by somebody as a jape!" muttered Lowther.

"Rats!" said Grundy. "Here's the envelope. Just look at the postmark. It's London, right enough. If a practical joker had sent this letter it would bear a local postmark."

"Unless the practical joker had a pal in London, and arranged for him to post the letter," said Tom Merry.

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"Oh, now you're talking absolute piffle!" said Grundy. "This letter is perfectly genuine. Besides, it's signed by one of the big pots on the Football Association."

Tom Merry & Co. had to admit that the letter seemed genuine. Yet they could not understand why the Football Association, a sane and sensible body of men, had selected Grundy's band to play at the Cup Final. It was amazing—it was well-nigh incredible!

As a matter of fact, the whole thing was due to a clerical error.

An office-boy was to blame for the blunder.

There had been many applications from bands all over the country, and a certain military band had been selected to play at the Cup Final. A letter was written informing them of the fact, and that letter had been placed in the wrong envelope. Instead of going to the military bandmaster, it had gone to George Alfred Grundy, of St. Jim's.

A letter of rejection had been written to Grundy, and that letter had been sent to the military bandmaster.

The office-boy who had put the letters in the wrong envelopes had much to answer for. But office-boys are not infallible, and it was the sort of mistake that might easily be made on a busy day.

Fortunately, the authorities discovered the blunder the very next day. They wrote to the military bandmaster, apologising for having sent him a letter of rejection, and stating that they would be pleased to engage his band for the Cup Final.

They wrote also to Grundy, telling him of the blunder, and regretfully informing him that his services would not be required.

But Grundy never got that letter. It arrived at an unusual time—at two o'clock in the afternoon. It happened to be the only letter for St. Jim's.

Taggles, the porter, saved the postman the fag of tramping through the quadrangle with the solitary letter. He relieved him of it, and slipped it into his pocket, intending to hand it to Grundy when afternoon lessons were over.

But Taggles, in the hurry and scurry of his duties, clean forgot to hand that letter to Grundy. The missive nestled in his pocket, with a number of miscellaneous articles, and there it was destined to remain until the Cup Final had been fought and won.

So George Alfred Grundy, in his blissful ignorance, imagined that his band would be required at Wembley Park on the day of the Cup Final.

Grundy was simply bursting with pride and self-importance. There was no holding him. As Monty Lowther remarked, Grundy would require a new size in hats, owing to his swelled head.

Grundy was excited, and his musicians were excited, and all St. Jim's was excited.

The Head came to hear of the matter, and he sent for Grundy.

"I understand, Grundy," he said, when the burly Shell fellow stepped into his study, "that your band has been engaged to play at the English Cup Final?"

"That's so, sir!" said Grundy proudly.

"It is strange—very strange!" murmured the Head. "Frankly, I cannot understand the action of the Football Association. They must have had many bands to choose from, and why they selected yours is a mystery."

"They knew what a ripping band mine was, sir," said Grundy.

The Head frowned.

"I am sorry to say, Grundy, that I can only regard your band in the light of a nuisance," he said. "In fact, I have seriously thought of ordering it to be disbanded."

"Oh crumbs!"

"However, since you have been selected to play at the Cup Final I will not stand in your way," Dr. Holmes went on. "But I hope you will improve vastly before you make your first big public appearance. Football crowds appreciate good music, but they cannot tolerate mere noise. In the short time that remains before the Cup Final is played you will have to put in plenty of practice."

Grundy nodded.

"We'll practice every minute we get, sir," he said. "I'm sorry you don't think much of my band; but, then, you're no judge of good music, sir."

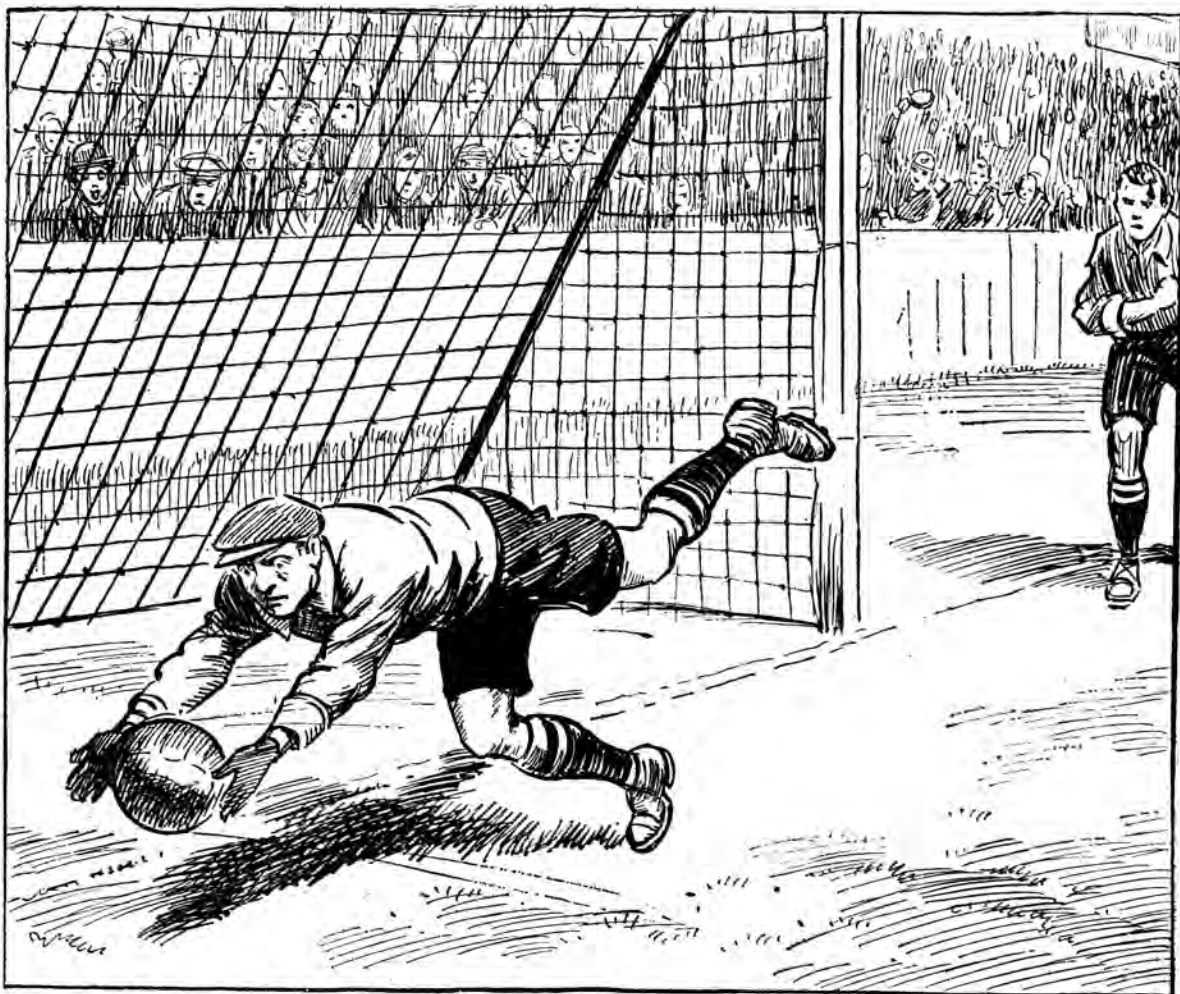
"Boy!" thundered the Head.

"No offence meant, sir. We can't all be musical critics. If you were any judge of music, sir, you'd agree that my band was top-hole—"

"Grundy, leave my study at once!" roared the Head.

Grundy wondered what he had said to cause Dr. Holmes to roar at him like that; but he did not stop to inquire. He noted the storm-clouds on the Head's brow, and he very wisely withdrew.

"The silly old buffer!" he muttered, when he was out in the passage. "He hasn't a soul for music. My band's absolutely wasted at St. Jim's. It's like casting pearls before swine, playing good music in this one-eyed show. But wait till we get to Wembley Park! We'll make things hum then!"



The leather was placed on the penalty spot, and the Loamshire skipper, known as the Penalty King—the man who never missed—was elected to take the kick. He made a terrific drive for the bottom corner of the net. Tiny Marshall, the Rovers' goalie, swift as a panther, made a lightning dive for the leather, and in the nick of time stopped it from crossing the line. There was an immediate rush to gain possession of the leather. (See page 18.)

And—as the gentleman in the "Gondoliers" observed—"Of that there is no manner of doubt, no probable, possible shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever!"

CHAPTER 6. The Day of Days!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY was a very busy person during the next week or so.

It was quite impossible for Grundy to concentrate upon such trifling things as lessons. There were far more important things to think about.

Grundy devoted every spare moment to training and coaching his musicians. His great grievance was that he was not allowed to hold band practices on the school premises. The other fellows couldn't stand it. So Grundy was obliged to seek out a lonely spot in Rylcombe Woods—a disused barn—and here he held his rehearsals.

Grundy was a hard taskmaster. He kept his men up to scratch. There was no slacking allowed.

Reilly and Tompkins, the two mouth-organists, began to regret that they had ever joined Grundy's band. It was too much like hard work. But they had committed themselves to the great cause, and there was no backing out now.

As for the other fellows, they threw themselves heart and soul into the business.

Grundy's band actually improved. Every day, in every way, it grew better and better and better. Soon it was actually able to play tunes that the public would be able to recognise!

But the band was still sadly lacking in harmony. The musicians flatly refused to keep time. Everybody seemed to try to play quicker than everybody else. The result was discord.

But Grundy was satisfied. He was blind to the defects of his musicians. In his eyes they were as near perfection as any band of musicians could hope to be.

At last the great day dawned—the day that everyone had been longing for—in short, the day of the English Cup Final. Belmont Rovers had completed their training. They had travelled overnight to London, and every man was reported as being fighting fit.

Crowds of St. Jim's fellows were going to see the Final. Tom Merry & Co., Jack Blake & Co., Figgins & Co., and many others. All had booked seats in advance, with the Head's permission.

Grundy & Co. had not booked seats; but then there was no need for them to do so. They would occupy a proud position in the centre of the playing-pitch. They would play selections before the great match started, and when the players came out they would retire with their instruments behind one of the goals. At half-time they would play further selections, and the public would applaud them to the echo. So Grundy thought, anyway; but he was likely to be disappointed!

On the morning of the great day Grundy paraded his musicians in the quadrangle. Then he passed along the line of juniors, surveying them with a critical eye.

"You haven't washed your neck, Trimble!" he said severely.

"Oh, really, Grundy—"

"Go and wash it at once! This isn't a nigger troupe!"

Leaving his big drum on the ground Baggy Trimble rolled sullenly into the building, and made tracks for the nearest bath-room.

Grundy continued his inspection. He gave a snort when he came to Wilkins and Gunn.

"Your bugles want cleaning!" he said sternly. "They're absolutely rusty! Go and get some metal-polish, and give 'em a jolly good rubbing-up until you can see your faces in 'em!"

(Continued on page 16.)

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EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

THE stage has now been set for the English Cup Final. And all roads will lead to Wembley Park on Saturday.

The Cup Final has a thrill and a glamour of its own. Only the University Boat Race and the Derby can compare with it as a great sporting event.

The Final comes as the climax to the long series of desperately-fought encounters on the football field. And what staggering surprises these encounters bring! Certain big teams are strongly fancied for the Cup at the beginning of the season, and then, hey presto! they are knocked out of the competition by teams which are "small and of no reputation." Many a fancied team falls by the way; and many a lesser known team fights its way to the front. Football is, was, and always will be a game of surprises. One can never predict with certainty what will happen next.

Hats off to the two teams that have fought their way from the first round to the last great struggle! And may it prove a struggle well worth watching!

The St. Jim's Cup Finals are over. And this is the most successful season we have had. For our junior eleven has won the Public Schools' Challenge Cup, after four tussles with Greyfriars and other famous schools.

The senior eleven has also reaped plenty of honour and glory, and on the whole it has been a wonderful season.

I suppose many hundreds of my readers will be going to Wembley Park on Saturday. I hope they will enjoy themselves to the full. But they must not expect too much from the players. Cup Final football is a very nervy business. There will doubtless be some wild kicking and some scrappy play. But there will be no lack of excitement.

Those who are unable to attend the Cup Final will doubtless see it on the cinematograph at their local picture-houses, and they will get a very good idea of how the great game went.

When the Cup Final is over and won, our thoughts will turn once again to King Cricket. He has been absent from his throne for a long time, but when he returns he will get a rousing reception from the thousands of schoolboy sportsmen in Great Britain.

Farewell to the "muddled oafs!" Welcome to the "flannelled fools!"

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OUR FOOTBALL COLUMN.

By Jack Blake.

WE are now nearing the tail-end of the season—and a splendidly successful season it has proved for the St. Jim's junior eleven, for after a series of terrific tussles we won the Public Schools' Cup, which now occupies a proud position on the mantelpiece in the junior Common-room.

I don't propose to describe all the Cup-ties in this column. Mr. Martin Clifford has already done that. But I think a hearty vote of thanks is due to Tom Merry, the energetic skipper, for his fine generalship. And another vote of thanks, no less hearty, is due to Ralph Reckness Cardew for the way he led the St. Jim's eleven to victory against Greyfriars, when half the team was down with influenza.

We played one of the most important matches of the season last Saturday. It was a very novel fixture—St. Jim's versus the Rest. This was the team that took the field against us:

G. Bulstrode, Greyfriars; J. Bull, Greyfriars, and T. Doyle, Rookwood; M. Linley, Greyfriars, R. Cherry, Greyfriars, and K. Erroll, Rookwood; R. de Courcy, Highcliffe, F. Courtenay, Highcliffe, H. Wharton, Greyfriars, J. Silver, Rookwood, and H. Vernon-Smith, Greyfriars.

This was the strongest team we have ever had to contend with. Jimmy Silver and Vernon-Smith made a wonderful wing, and so did Courtenay and the Caterpillar, the David and Jonathan of Highcliffe.

St. Jim's scored first, Talbot converting a centre from Cardew. Harry Wharton equalised just before the interval. In the second half we found our opponents too strong for us. They overran our defence, Courtenay, Silver, and Vernon-Smith scoring. Tom Merry replied for St. Jim's; and the Rest gained a capital victory by 4-2.

At the general meeting of the St. Jim's Football Club (junior section) our President, Tom Merry, reported that the club was in a very sound and flourishing condition. Every subscription had been paid up, and the balance-sheet showed a profit of fifteen pounds. We shall want to draw upon this next season, however, in order to purchase new gear.

(Continued at foot of next column.)

A FAMOUS FOOTBALLER!

By Baggy Trimble.

I AM a player of repute. You ought to see me pass and shoot! And, though you may not think it true,

I "dribbled" at the age of two!

A chap like me, of sturdy limbs, Is simply wasted at St. Jim's. I'd like to get a real good billet— A football pro's—I'd nobly fill it!

I sent a letter to the Spurs: "Please, if a vacancy occurs For a new forward in your team, Try Trimble—he's a perfect dream!"

The Spurs replied, alack, alas! "Precocious youth, keep off the grass!" And then I wrote to Cardiff City; They wouldn't have me, more's the pity!

I dropped a line to Liverpool: They said, "There's nothing doing, fool!"

I wrote to Manchester United. But all my hopes were sadly blighted.

"See what a sturdy lad I am!" I told the people at West Ham. And they replied, with looks of scorn: "The biggest duffer ever born!"

Rejected here, ejected there, Turned down and jeered at everywhere, Mine is, indeed, a sorry plight. I lay awake and howl at night!

And yet I think that there is still a Good chance of joining Aston Villa. At least, from what I've heard concerning 'em, They've good judges up at Birmingham.

Let's hope the day will dawn with speed When I get all the praise I need; And people shout, "How fast and nimble Is that fine player, Bagley Trimble!"

Lots of speeches were made at the general meeting. Tom Merry was loudly applauded for his oration; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was soundly bumped for his! Gussy spoke for forty minutes on end, and his listeners soon got fed-up.

The cricket pitch is now being rolled in readiness for the coming season. St. Jim's expect to have as good a team as ever.



The FAGS' FOOTBALL FINAL!

By JACK BLAKE.

"HALLO, Gussy, old top!" Wally D'Arcy, showing none of the respect which a minor should have for his major, hailed Arthur Augustus in the quad.

Wally was in football garb, and he looked spotlessly clean from top to toe. His hair was parted in the centre in the approved D'Arcy style. It was not likely to remain parted for long; neither was Wally D'Arcy likely to be spotlessly clean for more than five minutes. For the great football final between the fags of St. Jim's and Greyfriars was about to be played.

Arthur Augustus halted, surveying his minor through his monocle with a critical eye.

"Weady for the fway, deah boy?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" said Wally cheerfully. "This is a red-letter day for me, and no mistake! It's a jolly responsible job, being skipper of the St. Jim's team!"

Wally did not look as if his responsibilities sat heavily upon him.

"The pater's going to give me a gold watch if we win," Wally went on, "and cousin Ethel's going to give me some silk handkerchiefs. What are you going to give me, Gussy?"

"Some advice," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Eh?" "I'll give you some advice befoah the match, an' a feed at the tuckshop afterwards—if you win," said Arthur Augustus.

"Very kind of you," said Wally. "I can do with the feed, but I don't want the advice."

"Weally, Wally! As a fellah of tact an' judgment, an' a wide expewience in Cupties, I feel that I ought to advise you how to lick Gwefyriahs."

"You can put your advice in your pocket!" said Wally. "I don't want any instruction in the art of bagging goals, thanks! And if I did, I shouldn't come to you for it. You're not exactly a Steve Bloomer, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus flushed crimson. "You cheeky young wascal—" he began.

"Don't forget you've promised to stand me a feed if we win!" said Wally. And he sprinted away in the direction of the football-ground, leaving his elegant major staring after him very reproachfully.

A great crowd had already assembled round the ropes. The Greyfriars eleven, captained by Dicky Nugent, had turned up, and were indulging in pot-shots at goal.

Lord Eastwood, the donor of the cup, was also present. And cousin Ethel was with him.

Even the Head, who seldom condescended to come and watch a fags' fixture, had turned out to see the final.

When Wally D'Arcy led his men on to

the field there was a cheer which could be heard in Rylcombe.

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"Go it, the Lilliputians!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally D'Arcy and Dicky Nugent came together in the centre of the pitch, and shook hands. And the referee, Kildare of the Sixth, shook hands with each of them, and gave them his blessing.

Greyfriars won the toss.

"Good!" said Dicky Nugent. "We'll kick with the wind."

"Puzzle, find it!" said Wally D'Arcy.

"It's just beginning to get up."

"What, at three o'clock in the afternoon? Then it must be a fearful slacker!"

Dicky Nugent grinned, and beckoned to his comrades to line up.

The teams were fairly evenly matched as regards build. Quite the biggest fellow on the field was George Tubb of Greyfriars. The smallest was little Frank Levison, on the home side. But Frank was a sterling player, and what he lacked in inches he made up for in pluck.



Wally D'Arcy notches the winning goal against Greyfriars.

Phoop! went the whistle. And Wally D'Arcy kicked off amid tense excitement.

Play was of a typical Cuptie order. Kick-and-rush tactics were the order of the day.

Within two minutes Wally D'Arcy was transformed from a spotless little cherub into what Kipling calls a muddled oaf. He sprawled headlong in the mire, and when he staggered to his feet he looked as if he had just emerged from a mud-bath.

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"Go it, ye midgets!"

"Put your beef into it!"

But Wally D'Arcy's men were unable to make much headway.

Dicky Nugent was a cute youngster, and when he said there was a wind getting up he knew what he was talking about. Quite a boisterous wind had sprung up—a miniature gale, in fact—and it blew lengthwise down the ground, to the advantage of Greyfriars.

The Friars, nimble, speedy, and clever, started to swarm round the St. Jim's goal, which was guarded by Curly Gibson.

Curly fisted out a fierce shot from Dicky Nugent; then he ran out and took the ball from the very toes of another forward. He slung the ball clear, but before he could get back into position, Tubbs sent in a hard drive which found the net.

"Goal!"

Greyfriars had drawn first blood, after eight minutes' play.

Arthur Augustus, who had arrived on the ground, shook his noble head sadly.

"This is what comes of vefusin' to listen to my advice," he said. "I ofahed to instwuct young Wally, an' he told me I could put my advice in my pocket."

"Sensible kid!" said Digby, with a grin.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Hallo! Those Greyfriars kids mean business. They're swarming round the goal again!"

Curly Gibson was called into action. He was bombarded with shots, and he held the fort in capital style. But he wasn't tall enough to cope with high shots, and there was a groan from the St. Jim's onlookers when Dicky Nugent put the ball in the top corner of the net.

"Two up, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's all ovah, bar shoutin'."

The Friars continued to press, but they got no more goals in the first half. And when the second half started, Wally D'Arcy & Co. had the wind at their backs, and they put up a much better show.

Wally worked like a Trojan. He was plastered with mud from head to foot, and he was all bruises and bumps, owing to the heavy charging he had received. But he didn't seem to care. He was desperately anxious to wipe off the arrears. Presently Frank Levison sent him a perfect pass, and Wally made no mistake. He crashed the ball into the net amid thunders of applause.

"Goal!"

It was a ding-dong struggle after this. The fags revelled in the mud, bowling over their opponents without ceremony.

Wally's men played like heroes. But they seemed fated not to score again. They did everything but score. Wally hit the crossbar, an unstoppable shot from Jameson struck one of the uprights, and Joe Frayne actually netted the ball, but Kildare's whistle had sounded for off-side.

The score remained at 2-1 for Greyfriars until five minutes from the end. Then the visitors' defence seemed to go all to pieces. It crumbled up under persistent pressure.

Joe Frayne forced his way between the two backs and scored a lovely goal. And no sooner was the ball kicked off again than Wally D'Arcy ran half the length of the field crowning a fine solo run with the best goal of the match.

It was the last goal, too, and the winning goal.

"They—they've won!" gasped Arthur Augustus, like a fellow in a dream.

"Wally wefused my advice, an' yet—"

"That's why they won!" chuckled Herries.

Wally D'Arcy was the hero of the hour. After the match he was presented with the silver cup, and had to make a speech before the whole school. Then he was entertained to a tuckshop feed by his major, and he received the gold watch and the silk handkerchiefs at the hands of Lord Eastwood and cousin Ethel respectively.

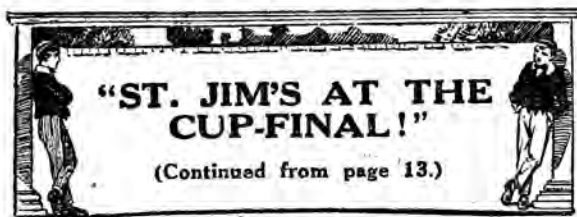
Wally is now of the opinion that winning a cup final is well worth while!

And so it is, too!

THE END.

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ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2s



"ST. JIM'S AT THE CUP-FINAL!"

(Continued from page 13.)

Wilkins and Gunn left the ranks to comply with their leader's orders.

Grundy had further faults to find. He wasn't satisfied with the way Buck Finn was dressed.

"All the others have put on their Sunday best," said Grundy; "but you—why, you look like a down-at-heel tramp! Haven't you got a better suit than that?"

"Of course!"

"Go and put it on, then! Dash it all, this is a great occasion! You've got to appear before about a hundred thousand people, and I'm not going to have any of my men looking like coal-heavers!"

Buck Finn sprinted away in search of a more respectable-looking suit of Etons.

Herries was the next victim of Grundy's wrath. Herries had decided, without asking Grundy's permission, to take his bulldog, Towser, to see the Cup Final. Towser was now curled up at his master's feet.

Grundy glared at the recumbent animal.

"What's this ugly beast doing here?" he demanded.

"He's coming," said Herries.

"Eh? Coming where?"

"To Wembley Park, of course!"

"Your mistake!" said Grundy. "We don't want any yapping mongrels prancing around while we're playing."

"Look here!" said Herries angrily. "If you call my Towser a yapping mongrel I'll do you on the boko!"

"Go and chain him up!" said Grundy.

"I'll do nothing of the sort! Towser's coming to see the Final!"

"I tell you he isn't!"

"I tell you he is!"

This battle of words went on for quite a long time. Herries was quite determined to take Towser. He threatened to resign from the band unless he was allowed this concession. And at last Grundy, like the person in Byron's poem saying, "I will ne'er consent," consented.

It was quite a long time before Grundy was satisfied with the appearance of his tribe of musicians and their instruments. But at last everything was cleaned and polished to perfection, and Grundy marched his men off to the railway-station.

There was quite a big exodus from St. Jim's.

Masters and prefects, juniors and fags were flocking down to the station. Taggles, the porter, stood in the school gateway and gazed after the throng.

"Wot I says is this 'ere! I don't 'old with these 'ere Cup Finals!" grumbled Taggles. "'Ooligans—that's wot these 'ere professional footballers is! 'Ooligans! Why, I've 'eard as 'ow they're allowed to take free kicks, an' even to shoot! Disgustful, I calls it, permittin' firearms on a football-field!"

And Taggles shook his head sadly and wondered what the present generation was coming to.

The St. Jim's fellows travelled on the little local line to Wayland Junction, where they caught a special football-train to London.

*From London to Wembley Park was not a far cry, and they expected to be on the ground quite early.

Grundy's musicians held a final rehearsal in the railway-carriage, to the intense annoyance of a peppery old colonel who sat in one of the corner seats.

The peppery gentleman bawled to the musicians to desist. But they took no heed.

Purple with rage, the colonel rose to his feet and stamped and roared and raved. He commanded the din to cease. He might with equal success have commanded the earth to stop revolving.

Grundy continued to beat time with his baton. Baggy Trimble continued to thump the big drum, which was wedged between the two seats of the carriage. The buglers continued their heroic endeavours to blow their front teeth out. The cornet went on blaring, the cymbals went on clashing, and the din was truly terrific.

"Unseemly uproar! Disgraceful! It must be stopped! Worse than the Tower of Babel, begad!"

The voice of the peppery colonel was almost drowned by the din.

At last, unable to endure it any longer, the colonel, after knocking the heads of the two mouth-organists together, gave a savage wrench at the communication-cord.

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"Oh, my hat!" gasped Grundy. "That's fairly done it!" It had!

The train slowed down, and, after a brief interval, the bearded face of the guard appeared at the carriage window.

"Beaver!" said Reilly and Tompkins together.

"I had him first!" said Tompkins.

"Shure, an' ye're a fibber, Tompkins! It's my capture!"

The voice of the guard broke in upon the argument.

"Who pulled that there cord?" he demanded.

"I did!" hooted the peppery colonel.

"Name an' address, please!" said the guard. "You'll be fined five pounds for pullin' the communication-cord without just an' lawful cause!"

"Without just cause!" roared the colonel. "D'you think I'm goin' to sit here an' be permanently deafened by this appallin' din?"

"What appallin' din?"

"The young rascals have stopped now!" said the colonel.

"But they've been makin' row enough to wake the dead, begad!"

The guard glared at the St. Jim's juniors.

"Just you keep quiet!" he commanded. "No more of this 'ere din an' emotion! Do you 'ear?"

"We were only rehearsing—" began Grundy.

"Well, don't do it again, or I'll 'ave the lor on yer for causin' a disturbance!"

With this Partisan shot, the guard withdrew. And from that time onwards silence reigned in the carriage. The peppery colonel buried his head in a newspaper, and the train rumbled on to its destination.

Wembley Park was reached by noon.

Although the Cup Final was not due to be played for some time yet, a vast throng was clamouring for admission to the ground.

People of every rank and station in life had come to see the Cup Final. Never had the St. Jim's juniors seen such a crowd.

The majority of the people had not booked seats. They were taking pot-luck. The turnstiles were clicking merrily, and hawkers of every description were touting their wares outside the gates.

"Follow your leader!" exclaimed Grundy. And he elbowed his way through the throng.

It was no easy matter for the St. Jim's musicians to get into the ground. They were hampered by their instruments, to begin with. Moreover, the official at the turnstiles shook his head when he caught sight of the big drum and the cornet and the bugles.

"No objection to rattles and tin whistles," he said, "but I can't allow instruments of this sort on the ground."

"But we're the band!" shouted Grundy.

"What?"

"We've been specially engaged to play at the Cup Final!"

"What? A parcel of schoolkids?" scoffed the official. "Tell that to the Marines!"

Grundy groped in his pocket for the letter of authority. He produced it with a triumphant flourish and thrust it under the nose of the official.

"There you are!" he said. "Now p'raps you'll let us in!"

There was a marked change in the official's manner. He became suddenly respectful.

"Quite all right, sir!" he said. "In you go!"

And Grundy & Co. passed through the turnstiles one by one and entered the ground.

"We won't go on to the playing-pitch yet," said Grundy, "or we shall puff ourselves out before the game starts. Better wait a bit."

Meanwhile, the crowd grew bigger and bigger.

Hundreds of people were wearing red-and-white rosettes, the colours of Belmont Rovers. Hundreds more wore plain red, the colour of Leamshire County.

It was a great, good-humoured crowd that thronged into the enclosure. Some had waited for hours to get in. And a few enthusiasts had actually made an all-night vigil of it.

An hour before the kick-off George Alfred Grundy considered it was time he got busy.

"Fall in and follow me!" he said.

And he forthwith marched his mad musicians on to the green sward.

CHAPTER 7.

A Certain Liveliness!

"THIS is where the fun begins!" said Monty Lowther. The Terrible Three had seats in the grandstand, with Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Talbot, and Marie Rivers. They looked on in amusement—not unmingled with apprehension for the fate of the musicians—as Grundy led his men on to the playing-pitch.

"As soon as Grundy's band strikes up," said Jack Blake, "there'll be a riot!"

"Afraid so!" agreed Tom Merry. "It's a good-tempered crowd, but it will never be able to endure Grundy's music!"

"I cannot think what the authorities were about when they engaged Grundy's band," said Miss Marie. "Surely they could have had a military band?"

"You'd have thought so," said Lowther. "Hallo! They're striking up!"

The members of Grundy's band had ranged themselves in a circle in the centre of the pitch.

George Alfred Grundy was inside the circle, looking very dignified and important, as befitted the occasion.

Herries tested his cornet by making a doleful blare. Wilkins and Gunn tested their bugles. And then Grundy, with a flourish of his baton, set the ball rolling.

The spectators had marvelled to see a schoolboy band go on to the pitch. They marvelled still more when that schoolboy band started to play!

Instead of a novel, up-to-date tune which would please the ears of the populace, the musicians struck up "Rule, Britannia!"

Even that ancient "beaver" of a refrain would have been tolerated had it been properly played. But the appalling din created by Grundy's merry men would not have been tolerated by any Cuptie crowd.

A roar of indignation went up. Somebody in the grandstand started it, and it was taken up all over the ground.

"Stop that row!"

"Pack up, there!"

"Go home!"

Grundy glanced up in surprise and a certain amount of alarm. Things were not working out so well as he had hoped.

Grundy's band had been barracked and boycotted at St. Jim's, where, according to Grundy, no one could appreciate good music. But he had not imagined for one moment that it would be boycotted here.

"P'raps we're playing too softly for 'em," muttered Grundy. "Play up, you fellows! Put your beef into it, Trimble!"

Baggy Trimble thumped the big drum so lustily that it was a wonder it did not burst. And Herries puffed and blew so vigorously that he nearly broke a blood-vessel.

But the crowd, instead of simmering down, as Grundy hoped, grew more and more indignant.

Grundy began to quake in his shoes. He realised that he and his band were at the mercy of thousands of people, and if those people liked to become aggressive—

Grundy turned quite pale. And his followers shared his uneasiness. But they went on playing.

"Never let it be said that we shirked our duty!" said Buck Finn, as he crashed the cymbals together.

But Grundy's band was not destined to play for more than five minutes.

Another band came on the scene—a real band—a band consisting of uniformed soldiers.

The military bandmaster came striding towards Grundy.

"Stop!" he commanded.

Grundy promptly ordered his followers to cease fire, as it were.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the military gentleman. "What right have you to be here?"

"We've been engaged for the Cup Final," said Grundy.

"Nonsense!"

Grundy produced his written authority. The bandmaster glanced at it, and then stared at the St. Jim's junior.

"Surely you must be aware that this letter was written in error!" he exclaimed.

"In—in error!" stuttered Grundy.

"Yes. It was sent to you by mistake. The letter which should have come to me, engaging my band, went to you."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Grundy.

"Surely you had a further letter from the authorities, pointing out that an error had been made?" said the bandmaster.

Grundy shook his head.

"This is the only letter I've had," he said, "and I acted upon it. If I had received a further letter, saying that my band wasn't required, do you think I should have the cheek to come out here and start playing?"

The bandmaster's somewhat harsh countenance softened into a smile.

"It is all a misunderstanding, my boy," he said. "You are not wanted. Great Scott! Do you seriously imagine that the Football Association would engage schoolboy mouth-organists to play at the Cup Final?"

Grundy was utterly taken aback. Slowly it dawned upon his dull brain that his band was not wanted, and never had been.

"Then we—we'd better pack up?" he faltered.

"Certainly, before you rouse the ire of the crowd any further," replied the military bandmaster.

Very reluctantly Grundy led his men off the pitch. They followed him in a sheepish procession.

A couple of policemen hurried forward to escort them, in

case there should be any trouble. But now that a real band had supplanted the fifth-rate one the crowd was quite happy.

The police took charge of Grundy's instruments, and they were stored in one of the dressing-rooms. Grundy was informed that he could collect them after the match.

The burly Shell fellow was almost in tears.

To think that this tragic climax should crown all his efforts! To think that his fond dreams of winning honour and glory should be so ruthlessly shattered!

"Oh, what a sell!" groaned Grundy.

"Not wanted!" muttered Herries. "Oh, my hat! Fancy them preferring a military band to ours!"

Herries, too, looked very cut up about the whole business; but Towser, who had accompanied the band on to the pitch, and stood on his hind legs and joined in the music, rubbed his head caressingly against his master's trouser-leg, and looked up to him as much as to say, "Never mind! P'raps they'll let you play at next year's Cup Final!"

"I say, you fellows," wailed Baggy Trimble, "what are we going to do now?"

"Watch the match, of course," growled Grundy, "and listen to that awful band. Why, it isn't a patch on ours!"

"Any chance of getting seats in the stand?" asked Wilkins.

"Afraid not," said Grundy. "The stands are full already. And, anyway, we ought to have booked seats in advance. We shall have to watch the match standing up."

"Well, so long as it's worth watching I sha'n't mind," said Gunn. "Some Cup Finals in the past have been absolute wash-outs!"

"This one won't be a wash-out," said Grundy. "It's going to be one of the best matches of the season!"

And George Alfred Grundy, for once in a way, proved a true prophet.

CHAPTER 8.

The Fight for the Cup!

HERE they come!"

"Hurrah!"

From eighty thousand throats came a mighty roar as eleven athletic figures came sprinting out from the dressing-room.

Rattles and megaphones and tin-whistles were everywhere in evidence. Cameras were clicking. Cinematographs were being operated.

Loamshire County had come out first, every man fit and eager for the fray.

None of the Loamshires men looked at all nervous. They did not suffer from stage-fright. In the course of their triumphal progress to the Final they had gathered much experience of big crowds and mighty demonstrations.

Their captain, Bobbie Jones, who had been a dozen years with the club, led his men on to the field. The ball was at his feet, and he gave it a terrific punt, which sent it towards one of the goals.

At this stage Herries, of St. Jim's, happened to miss his dog.

"Where's old Towser?" he asked, looking round.

Then a sudden roar of laughter caused Herries to turn his gaze towards the playing-pitch, and he saw Towser engaged in a frantic chase after the ball.

Two other dogs bobbed up suddenly from nowhere, and they joined in the hunt. Having got within reach of the ball, they fought and rolled with each other for possession.

In the midst of this scene of yapping and scrapping, a couple of fat policemen waddled on to the pitch. They dispersed the dogs, and Towser came running back to his master. It was marvellous how he managed to single out Herries in such a vast crowd.

"Here, Towsey, you come and lie down!" said Herries.

"This is a footer match, not a blessed dog fight!"

Then another mighty and prolonged roar went up.

Jimmy Renton was leading Belmont Rovers on to the field of battle.

Tom Merry & Co., in the grand-stand, were on their feet, cheering wildly.

"Play up, the Rovers!"

"Hurrah!"

The crowd were busy taking stock of the rival teams. The Rovers were tall, but they were not nearly so sturdy as the men from Loamshire County. The County had all the weight, and they looked as if they would not scruple to use it, either.

Jimmy Renton and Bobbie Jones, the rival skippers, met together in the centre of the pitch. The referee shook hands with each of them, then they shook hands with each other.

Loamshire County won the toss, but this carried very little advantage with it, for there was no wind to speak of.

There was a further tumult of shouting when the teams lined up. People had come from north, south, east, and west to witness this titanic tussle, and they made their presence felt.

The voices of the St. Jim's fellows were drowned in the general clamour. But the school caps, dotted here and there in the grand-stand, were very conspicuous.

Promptly to the advertised time Jimmy Renton kicked off for the Rovers.

The football was rather wild and aimless at first; the teams taking some time to settle down to their normal game. One thing became very apparent. The defences dominated the attacks.

Loamshire County had a pair of burly backs who did not stand on ceremony. Whenever the Rovers' forwards tried to break away they came up against a cast-iron defence.

For a quarter of an hour the ball bobbed about in midfield, and then came the first big sensation.

Jimmy Carr raced away on the Rovers' right-wing. His turn of speed was dazzling. Presently he cut in towards goal, and just as one of the backs loomed up to tackle him he slipped the ball to Jimmy Renton.

"Shoot!"

It was a stentorian shout from thousands of throats. Jimmy Renton let fly with his right foot, and the great crowd looked on breathlessly.

It was a hard, powerful drive from close range, and it had the goalkeeper tied up in knots.

But the ball did not enter the net. It crashed against the crossbar, and came away with a patch of white on it.

"Oh, hard luck, sir!"

It was, indeed, a lucky let-off for Loamshire. Had the ball been a couple of inches lower— But it was no use pondering over what might have been.

When the ball rebounded from the bar one of the Loamshire backs headed it clear of the danger-zone. And play was transferred to midfield once more.

And now it was the turn of Loamshire County to break away. They made ground by means of long, swinging passes from wing to wing. Their forwards were very fast and dangerous.

"Tiny" Marshall, in the Rovers' goal, was on the alert. He dodged this way and that, with hands outstretched in readiness. A wonderfully safe pair of hands had Tiny, and he fielded the first hot shot that came his way in a most masterly manner.

One of the Loamshire forwards rushed him, but Tiny booted the ball clear in cool fashion, and the forward somersaulted past him into the net. There was a yell of laughter from the crowd.

Loamshire continued to press. And the Rovers' defence had a gruelling time.

Three corners were forced in quick succession. On two occasions Tiny Marshall, who seemed to dwarf the other players, fisted the ball away.

When the third corner-kick was taken there was a glorious mix-up in the goalmouth. Players were sprawling on top of each other, the Loamshire men struggling to get the ball in the net, and the Rovers striving desperately to clear.

It was a thrilling moment. The people in the grandstand were quite unable to keep their seats. They were on their feet, their eyes craned eagerly forward to watch that drama in the Rovers' goalmouth.

"Do you know, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I wathah fancy Loamshire are goin' to score!"

"Let's hope not!" muttered Tom Merry. "Oh, why don't they get it away? Boot it clear, somebody!"

The Loamshire centre-forward, who had been heavily but fairly grassed, struggled to his feet and managed to get to the ball. He sent it whizzing in at point-blank range, with Tiny Marshall prostrate on the ground and unable to save.

But one of the Rovers' backs was standing in goal, underneath the cross-bar. And, in the excitement of the moment, and without deliberate intent, he handled the ball.

There was a roar. The Loamshire players flung their arms wide in appeal.

"Hands!"

The referee had not missed the incident. He blew his whistle and pointed to the dreaded penalty-mark.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Tom Merry. "It's all up now! A penalty, by Jove!"

Bobbie Jones, the Loamshire skipper, elected to take the fateful kick himself. And the supporters of Belmont Rovers groaned loud and long. For Bobbie Jones was known as the Penalty King—the man who never missed.

Tiny Marshall, looking as cool and composed as ever, stood waiting for the shot. And when the ball came in, with the velocity of a cannon-ball almost, it seemed that no human power could stop it.

But Tiny Marshall, swift as a panther, dived for the leather, and in the very nick of time he stopped it from crossing the line.

"Saved, sir!"

"Oh, well saved!"

It had been a very narrow squeak for the Rovers. This was the first time in a whole season that Bobbie Jones had failed to score from the penalty-mark. But he had failed now, thanks to that brilliant save of Tiny Marshall's.

Play continued in ding-dong fashion until half-time, when the score-sheet was blank.

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"Nothing doing yet," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Hope it isn't going to be a goalless draw," said Jack Blake.

"I think we shall see some goals in the second half," said Marie Rivers.

And Talbot, who sat at her side, nodded in agreement.

It was the military band that rendered selections during the interval. Then the teams came out again, after their "breather," and were given a further tremendous ovation. "Play up, the Rovers!"

"Come along, the County!"

The first minute of the second half produced a goal. Jimmy Renton got it.

After a brilliant bout of passing between the Rovers' forwards, the ball came to Jimmy. He was within shooting distance, and he made no mistake. He crashed the ball into the net with terrific force.

"Goal!"

The Rovers' supporters went into ecstasies. Hats and caps went whirling into the air, and thunders of applause boomed across the ground.

Having drawn first blood, the Rovers warmed to their work.

Jimmy Renton was again making a bee-line for goal when he was brought down rather heavily by one of the burly backs. In falling, one of his legs was crumpled under him.

The referee stopped the game, and a trainer came hurrying on the scene.

Jimmy Renton received prompt attention. But his injury was no light one. He refused to leave the field, but from that time onwards he was little more than a passenger.

Shortly afterwards another of the Rovers' forwards—"Baby" Logan—was crocked. And the Rovers found themselves with only nine sound men.

It was a terrible handicap. But the red-and-whites struggled on valiantly against heavy odds.

Thereafter the Loamshire forwards attacked frequently and furiously. But they never succeeded in getting the ball past Tiny Marshall. That giant played a game worthy of one of the Spartans of old. Time and again he saved his side when the downfall of the goal seemed inevitable. Time and again he alone stood between the Loamshire forwards and the net. But they could not beat him. High shots, low shots, twisting shots, twirling shots, long shots, and point-blank shots—Tiny dealt with them all.

The Rovers' attack faded right out of the picture. Their forward-line was utterly disorganised by the injuries to Jimmy Renton and Baby Logan.

The half-backs dropped back to assist the defence. And the great game neared its end, with the Rovers still clinging tenaciously to their solitary goal lead.

They were tired, they were footsore, they were on the verge of collapse. But they were unconquerable.

The St. Jim's fellows looked on with shining eyes. They were hoping and praying that Tiny Marshall would keep his charge intact until the final tootle. And he did!

At long last the referee's whistle rang out. And the curtain went down on one of the sternest Cup Finals in football history.

Already the result was being flashed to the newspaper-offices. And within a matter of moments special editions came out, with the result standing out boldly in the "Stop Press" column.

"ENGLISH CUP FINAL.

BELMONT ROVERS	1
LOAMSHIRE COUNTY	0.

Tiny Marshall and Jimmy Renton were carried shoulder-high from the field—a procedure in which the St. Jim's juniors assisted.

It was a very happy throng that returned to the old school that evening.

Even Grundy & Co. were happy, in spite of the untimely fate of their band. For they had thoroughly enjoyed the Cup Final. In the keen excitement of the game, they had forgotten their own tribulations.

"I suppose I must admit," said Grundy, when he was back at St. Jim's, "that my band has been a failure and a wash-out! It wasn't the fault of the band! It was the fault of the general public, for not appreciating good music when they heard it. The British public badly wants educating in musical matters! But I'm going to leave it to somebody else to do the educating! No more bands for me!"

"For which we are truly thankful!" said Monty Lowther.

And so said all St. Jim's!

THE END.

(Look out for next week's grand long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co., by Martin Clifford, entitled: "TRIMBLE TRIES IT ON!" It is one long laugh from beginning to end.)



A Trial Race!

by MALCOLM ARNOLD.

That popular character Tu Sin once again proves that he is very much "all there"!

CHAPTER 1.

Tu Sin is Suspicious!

"I've been thinking, Dan!"
"Better not do too much of that, Tu Sin, or you'll get brain-fag!"

"We got velly little money, Dan."
"That isn't a thought, that's a fact, you yellow image."

The old, patched-up caravan was halted on the brow of the hill above Newdale. To the left ran a wide, white road that led to the innumerable training establishments that dotted the vast heath.

Dan and Tu Sin, after varying fortunes, had touched again one of those bad patches that seem to haunt the care-free vagabond of the road. Even old Bill, the sheep-dog, a forager of parts, was beginning to have a very lop-sided look about his shaggy coat. The only member of the outfit that seemed to find life pleasant enough was the old, grey nag that drew the caravan from halt to halt; for it was springtime, and the young grasses were very sweet. But dogs and human beings cannot live on grass, and Tu Sin, squatting on the little flight of stairs, turned and glanced into the caravan where Dan was hard at work fixing a patch to his nether garments.

"What you say if I go up to one of those stables and ask for job, Dan?" Tu Sin went on. "You think they give me one, eh?"

"I don't think you've got a snowball's chance of getting a job in a stable, Tu Sin," Dan sighed. "In the first place, you hardly know the head of a horse from its tail; and in the second place, most of these stables can get as many youngsters as they want to do their rough work!"

Tu Sin hunched his shoulders.

"Rough work not velly nice," he commented. "I not want to do rough work, Dan. What I mean is go get job to ride race!"

Dan put down his needle and thread and looked at the lean, lazy Chink seated on the steps in the sun-filled doorway.

He knew that Tu Sin had a nerve that was colossal in its boundless conceit, but this sudden suggestion to blossom out as a full fledged jockey was beyond the mark.

"Don't be a silly ass, Tu," Ginger Dan said. "Takes years before a fellow's allowed to ride a racehorse in this country. You've got to be registered and apprenticed and all sorts of things."

Tu Sin rubbed his long, thin nose.

"Last night, when I went to get the bread, I spoke to horsey gentleman in shop. He asked me if I can ride horses, and I say 'yes'—"

"And that's where you told a thumping story," said Dan.

"I say I ride horses all my life," Tu Sin went on placidly. "Then horsey gentleman ask me where I stay, and I tell him. He say that mebbe he come along this morning and give me job up at stables."

Now Tu Sin's luck in matters of this kind was proverbial. Dan shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, don't you ask me to back you up, you old stick," he warned. "The only horses I've ever seen you ride are those that have a brass rod through 'em, and they charge you tuppence a ride!"

Tu Sin grinned, and rose to his feet, stretching his lanky limbs.

"To tell you thuth, Dan, I did not like look of horsey gentleman's eye. I think him velly likely crook—bad fellow."

The almond eyes narrowed.

"I velly often find that bad fellow much easier to get cash out of than other sort. They always think they are the clever ones, and everybody else fools!"

"Well, don't you get up to anything risky," said Ginger Dan, as he slipped into his ragged trousers. "I got to go into the town this morning, and I don't suppose I'll be back until after five o'clock. I'm taking Bill with me, so you'll be on your own. For the love of goodness don't get mixed up in any crook stuff, Tu Sin—and if I were you, I'd give the race-horsing business a wide berth."

Half an hour after Dan had vanished down the slope, Tu Sin's quick ears heard the tap-tap of shod hoofs on the road, and, rising from behind the caravan, he came round to the doorway.

A horsey-looking, red-faced man was just in the act of wheeling a cob on to the stretch of turf, and, as he drew nearer, Tu Sin recognised his chance acquaintance of the previous day. The red-faced man waved his riding-crop to Tu Sin, at the same time checking his mount.

Tu Sin's lanky body came forward in that easy, swayless way that is typical of his race, halting beside the rider.

"Well, Chink, how goes it with you this morning?"

Tu Sin bowed.

"The arrival of the honourable personage has made the morning to this obscure individual a pleasant one," he said in his floweriest fashion.

The florid-faced man grinned, as he slipped from the saddle and hooked the bridle under his arm.

"When did you say you won the Pekin Cup?" he demanded.

The almond eyes of Tu Sin flickered.

"Two year ago I won him," said Tu Sin placidly.

He was not even sure if there was a racecourse in Pekin or if there was a cup of that name, for he had never been in China in all his life. But his imagination, that curious kink in his character that made him pretend to be perfect in all things, had goaded Tu Sin into making many rash statements in that first meeting between himself and Mr. Bert Blake.

Mr. Bert Blake was a farmer and a breeder of horses—and was also an occasional bookmaker and many other things. Occasionally Mr. Bert Blake was honest—when it paid him to be. He was honest enough now when he studied Tu Sin.

"I don't believe you," he said. "But that ain't to say that you won't be useful to me."

He dropped his hand on his pocket. "Would you like to earn £5?" he asked.

If there was one thing more than another that Tu Sin did desire at that moment it was £ s. d.

"Tell me what I'll have to do, mister?" he said.

"Oh, half a mo'! It ain't so easily earned as all that!" Mr. Bert Blake retorted.

He produced a ten-shilling note and held it out.

"That's all you'll get to go on with," he said, "the rest will come when you've earned it. Now, I want you to be at my place at Markers' Stud Farm at two o'clock this afternoon, and don't forget that you don't know me—you've never set eyes on me in your life before—you understand?"

Mr. Blake drew a letter from his pocket and spoke to Tu Sin for several minutes.

Finally the letter was exchanged, Tu Sin slipping it away into one of the mysterious folds of his loose-fitting garment, and Mr. Bert Blake climbed on his cob.

"Two o'clock sharp! And you ain't ever set eyes on me before!"

He waved his hand and rode off at a rapid pace. Tu Sin watching the stocky figure until horse and rider had vanished round a bend in the white road. Then he thrust his fingers through his shock of bristly hair, which was all he had in the way of head covering, and a look of grave doubt crossed his sallow features.

"I think you crook, and I think you velly bad man. But I think I get that five pound," he observed.

CHAPTER 2.

Against Greater Odds!

IT was just exactly half-past two when that lazy, shuffling figure came through the high gates of Markers' Stud Farm and halted in the cobbled space beyond.

There were a group of stable-lads chatting together at one of the horse-troughs, and presently one of them spied the motionless figure at the gate.

"Jimmy!" he cried aloud. "Look what's blown in! A blinking Chink!"

At the whoop of alarm the rest of them

wheeled round, and a general guffaw went up. From one of the loose-boxes there emerged a stocky, wiry figure that halted and scowled first at the group, then across towards the lonely figure at the gate.

The scowl deepened, and the man—for he was a man despite his small stature—strode across towards the youngsters.

"Who is that fellow? Tell him to clear out, one of you!"

"Right-ho, Mr. Sam!"

Samuel Booth was head jockey at the big training stables run by Sir Albert Selder two miles away from Markers' Stud Farm. Although he was not in the first rank of the profession, Samuel Booth was, nevertheless, a well-known rider, his greatest handicap being a morose and sullen temper, and a jealous, vindictive disposition.

He stood aside now, watching a couple of the lads as they darted off across the yard to obey his wishes.

Strictly speaking, Mr. Samuel Booth had no right to give any orders at the stud farm. But he was a privileged visitor, and the average stable-boy is only too ready to obey the orders of a man in Sam's position.

"Hi! You pigtail! Push off!"

The nearest lad, a rangy lout, a good head and shoulders taller than Tu Sin, halted a yard or so away from the Chink and waved a long arm across his face.

"This ain't a chop-suey depot!" he went on. "Beat it!"

Tu Sin bowed.

"If the honourable personage with the sheep-face will permit this wretched creature to explain—"

The other lad guffawed.

"D'you hear that, Ted?" he gasped.

"He called you 'sheep-face,' and—and blow me, you do look a bit like a sheep, coming to think of it!"

There was a certain pastiness and length of jowl that made the shaft strike home.

The would-be humorist always hates to have the tables turned on him, and Ted, without standing on further ceremony, made a lunge at his yellow critic.

"Sheep-face, am I?" he yelped. "Right-ho! Well, watch me spoil yours!"

If that knuckly fist had landed on Tu Sin's long nose it would certainly have done damage, but, even as Ted made his punch, the lazy figure doubled itself up, and the arm swung harmlessly over Tu Sin's sinewy shoulders.

Being already doubled up, Tu Sin did the next obvious thing. He lunged forward, and his long, hammer-like head landed in the pit of Ted's stomach. There was a noise like an exploding gun, a howl of pain, and Ted, staggering back a couple of paces, flopped heavily on to the cobbles, clapping both hands to his injured body.

His lips were open, but he was unable to speak, for the breath had been knocked half out of him, and he could only roll his eyes and gasp.

"You skunk! Come on, lads! Give him what for!"

The youngster who had accompanied Ted, angered by the fall of his chum, made a rush at Tu Sin, and managed to land one punch under the Chink's ear.

Tu Sin whipped round, then one of his long legs shot out, and his heel slipped behind his attacker's knee, giving it a swift, deft blow. Ted's chum found himself sprawling on his back with his legs in the air, and his head drumming through contact with the hard cobbles.

But now the rest of the lads round the trough had commenced their rush, and in another moment four or five of them were hurling themselves on the audacious stranger.

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Tu Sin in action in a fight was a treat to behold. He had no real skill, but he had a wild-cat agility that had made him the terror of that quarrelsome quarter of Limehouse from whence he came.

The first rush of his antagonists drove him back almost through the gates, and he received a shower of blows from eager, angry fists. They grabbed at him, tugging him this way and that, punching him from left and right. They were six to one, but Tu Sin seemed to have arms like elastic, and he flung himself from side to side, his fists whirling, his whole body on the move.

One sturdy youngster was knocked out by a forward drive of Tu Sin's long foot, as he grabbed at the Chink and tried to throw him. Another managed to lock his arms round Tu Sin's throat for a moment, but only a moment. Next instant Tu Sin had ducked, grabbing at the straining arm, and the stable-boy had gone headlong over his shoulder with a howl that set every echo in the old farm alive.

It was fortunate for him that he fell in among some of his companions, otherwise he might have broken his neck.

Tu Sin's almond eyes were like slits, and his face was grey and drawn, and that grey, drawn face was in itself a terrible thing to face.

But the average stable-lad is a tough youngster, and their dander was up. And so a final combined rush under the encouraging shouts of Sam Booth saw Tu Sin go down with his enemies heaped on top of him. His arms and legs were held by sturdy hands, and, at another command from Sam, he was lifted from the ground and carried face forward across the cobbles.

"Give him a dip before he goes!" the surly jockey ordered. "E fought more like a mad dog than a human, anyhow."

Tu Sin struggled desperately to free himself, tugging and straining with his long, lean limbs, and the stable-lads carrying him were jerked to and fro as though rolled by a heavy sea.

FULHAM FOOTBALL COMPETITION RESULT.

In this competition no competitor sent in a correct solution of the picture. The First Prize of £5 has therefore been awarded to the following competitor, whose solution contained one error:

ALFRED CARR,
70, Bargate,
Boston, Lincs.

The Second Prize of £2 10s. has been divided among the following three competitors, whose solutions contained two errors each:

Wilfred Barnes, 5, Grange Street South, Grangetown, Sunderland.
John Kennedy, 4, Fishers Vennel, Perth.
Mrs. A. Barrie, 19, Barrie Terrace, Ardrossan.

Twenty-eight competitors, with three errors each, divide the Ten Prizes of 5/- each. The names and addresses of these prize-winners can be seen on application at this office.

SOLUTION.

Fulham had its beginning, like many other renowned football teams, in a Sunday-school. It was commenced in 1880 by a band of young fellows from St. Andrew's Church, West Kensington. Their ground at Craven Cottage has been a source of much cash to them.

Ten paces away from the trough Tu Sin made another desperate effort, and for a moment the battle hung by a thread. The strength in those lean, pipe-like arms and legs made their sweating bearers gasp.

"It—it's like trying to hold a blinking electric battery," one staggering youth cried.

They made another blundering run forward, then suddenly another voice sounded, a clear, commanding voice.

"What is the matter there? What are you lads doing? Release that fellow at once! Do you hear?"

The hands fell away from Tu Sin, and he flopped on to the cobbles, to lie for a moment half-dazed. He was bruised and sore from head to foot, and, when his brain cleared, he sat up and found himself looking into the clean-cut face of a tall, good-looking, elderly man with silver hair and close-cropped moustache.

The stable-lads had vanished, whisking away to the various loose-boxes, and only Sam Booth, his hands in his pockets, had stood his ground.

"What is the matter?" the newcomer asked. "Why did those fellows attack you?"

Tu Sin looked round, and his eyes levelled themselves on Sam Booth for a moment. Tu Sin noted that Sam Booth looked just a little scared, and the yellow, bruised face widened into a grin.

"This humble personage velly unwisely called one of those honourable stable-boys a 'sheep-face.' I think it was as much my fault as anyone else's, mister."

The stern-jowled man's lips twitched for a moment, as he smiled.

"Well, by Jove, you're a good sport. Chink though you are," he said. "And you gave those fellows all they could do to hold you."

Tu Sin's hands were searching rapidly through the folds of his garments, and now the fingers closed on the letter. Then he held it out.

"I have to deliver this letter from my honourable patron, Captain Richard Morris, to his honourable uncle, Sir Evelyn Morris. I was told that I would find the honourable and martial Sir Evelyn Morris here."

The tall man held out his hand. "From my nephew, are you?" he said. "Give me the letter. I am Sir Evelyn."

Tu Sin watched the face of the baronet as he opened the envelope and read the single sheet it contained. He saw a frown cross the tanned features for a moment, then Sir Evelyn looked at him and shrugged his shoulders.

"So you are going to ride Ladbroke Lad to-morrow, are you, eh? Well, my nephew must think a great deal of you to let you handle his horse at a trial."

"What's that, Sir Evelyn?"

Unnoticed by Tu Sin and the others, the ruddy-faced farmer-trainer had appeared in the yard and had walked quietly across towards the horse-trough.

Mr. Bert Blake's eyes fell on Tu Sin, but they did not give the slightest waver of recognition, and Tu Sin's expressionless face remained equally blank; but that did not prevent Tu Sin from thinking, thinking very hard.

"What do you think of it, Blake?" the tall baronet asked, turning to the stocky figure, and thrusting the letter into his hand. "My nephew writes to me about Ladbroke Lad, and the trials to-morrow. He has sent this jockey—this yellow youngster."

Mr. Bert Blake pretended to show great amazement, glancing at the note, then turning an unfavourable eye on Tu Sin.

"What is your name?"

"I am Li Fu of Pekin," said Tu Sin, the fabricator.

"Do you know what was in this letter?"

"Yes; I got to ride horse to-morrow for gentleman."

"How did you get to know my nephew, anyhow?" Sir Evelyn asked.

Mr. Bert Blake held his breath, but Tu Sin came out with the concocted story without the slightest difficulty.

"An honourable gentleman, Major Derwent, know me when I ride plenty races in Pekin. I go see him when I come to London, and he bring me letter to give to Mr. Richard Morris at Voyagers Club. Mr. Morris ask me if I like ride for him, and I say yes, and he send me down here with other letter."

"Oh! Very well, then, that settles it!" said Sir Evelyn, with a shrug of his shoulders. "My nephew, Richard, must know what he's getting up to, but you know what hangs on this trial, Blake?"

Mr. Blake knew all too well what hung on that trial—a cool £500, for it was really a private match between Richard Morris' Ladbroke Lad, and one of Blake's own colts, Gipsy Jack.

"I will be on the heath at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, Blake," Sir Evelyn said, as he moved away. "It's rather a pity that the Government have held up my nephew so that he won't be here in person, but this letter clinches the matter. I'll get Grey to bring over the Lad to-morrow morning, and I suppose you'll arrange to have Li Fu here looked after in the meanwhile."

"Oh, yes, sir, you can leave that to me!" the breeder-farmer said, rubbing his podgy hands together.

CHAPTER 3. The Wager!

DAN'S visit to the town of Newdale had been entirely unsuccessful. He had hoped to get a few odd jobs, but had not done so, and with the exception of a few stale buns that a baker had given to him, he had not broken his fast.

And so, when about half-past eight, Tu Sin came bursting into the caravan and proceeded to remove from various portions of his anatomy a loaf, a chunk of cheese, a tin of marmalade, a pound of butter and the greater part of a splendid leg of lamb, Dan stared in blank amazement at the feast.

"Look here, Tu Sin," Dan began, "you remember our arrangements. No pinching. Do you mean to tell me that you've earned all that grub?"

Tu Sin turned the lamp up a little higher, and Dan saw the marks of battle on the long, lean face.

"I earn 'em all right, Dan," said Tu Sin stolidly. "Honourable personage say that I should have as much as I like for dinner, so I take away with me what I think I eat if I velly hungry."

He began to cut up the bread, covering it with a generous helping of butter, and Dan set to work on his meal, Tu Sin watching him with kindly contentment in his eye.

When the meal was over and cleared, the two chums stretched themselves out on the bunks; then presently Tu Sin, who had been fidgeting for some time, looked across at Dan.

"What would you do to make horse bolt, Dan?" he asked.

Dan yawned and stretched himself.

"All depends on the horse, old chap," he said. "But in any case, I don't want to make a horse bolt if I can help it. It's bad for the horse and sometimes it's bad for the rider."

Tu Sin turned again, and the bunk creaked as he moved.

"You ever hear of horse Ladbroke Lad, Dan?"

Dan opened his eyes suddenly. He was a keen student of horsemanship, and he could give chapter and verse for most famous races for some years past.

"Ladbroke Lad?" he repeated.

"Yes, of course I have. He's entered for the Crambourn Cup next Wednesday. He's being trained somewhere about here, too. His owner is Mr. Richard Morris, I believe. You're darned interested in horses all of a sudden, Tu Sin," he added. "What's the idea?"

"I just go think a little, Dan," Tu Sin returned. "You say a horse bolt, him no win race, and mebbe do himself harm—eh?"

"But they don't let thoroughbreds bolt nowadays; it's too expensive."

Tu Sin covered his eyes, then a few moments later a thin snore came from his berth. Dan, very sleepy, reached out and extinguished the light, and presently he fell into a deep slumber—a

slumber so deep that he did not hear the bunk opposite creak, nor did he see the slim, lanky figure step towards the door, whispering a warning to the sheep-dog.

"All right, Bill. You go sleep. I got learn lot of things, Bill—little things—how horse bolt and how you stop 'em."

Half an hour later the watchdog at Markers' Stud Farm barked repeatedly until Mr. Bert Blake thrust his head out of his bed-room window and bawled at the animal to cease. But Mr. Bert Blake did not see the lanky shape as it turned into the side road that led up to Sir Evelyn Morris' stately house midway across the quiet, wind-swept downs.

That chance meeting with Tu Sin in the quiet town of Newdale had given, or, rather, supplied a plan that had been simmering for a long time in Mr. Bert Blake's brain.

Weeks ago he had boasted of the speed of his four-year-old colt, in the hearing of young Richard Morris, the owner of Ladbroke Lad, and a half-jesting challenge had been the result.

"I'll bet you anything you like that Ladbroke Lad can give Gipsy Jack a stone and a beating in anything up to a mile," Richard Morris had remarked. "And you can run it off any time you like, Blake. You train your horse out on the downs, and so do I. Just fix up the morning; so long as it's before the week of the Crambourn Cup, it can be arranged."

Bert Blake had promptly seen possibilities in this rather brusquely-worded challenge, and he had named the sum.

"I'll bet you £500 that under those conditions my colt will beat Ladbroke Lad," he returned.

Young Morris had been rather taken aback at the sum that the breeder-farmer had mentioned, but he duly accepted it.

So, cudgelling his brains to make a scheme whereby he could win that wager, Mr. Bert Blake had come across Tu Sin, and his plan had been formed. He knew that Ladbroke Lad was an extraordinarily nerry animal, and if that grotesque, ungainly figure were thrust upon its back, there was no telling what might happen.

CHAPTER 4. A Bolt to Victory!

"IT'S all right, Mr. Blake!" Sam Booth, the jockey cried. "Ere's the blinking Chink after all!"

The red-faced farmer-broeder's face had been wearing a savage scowl all morning, but it lighted up as he caught sight of the lanky figure coming through the gateway.

It was almost nine o'clock, and already Mr. Bert Blake's colt, Gipsy Jack, had been saddled and was waiting in the yard along with two or three other thoroughbreds.

The stout man hurried across to Tu Sin.

"Where the dickens have you been?" he demanded angrily. "I thought you'd got cold feet and bolted. Where have you been, anyhow?"

Tu Sin looked, if possible, more lean and hungry than ever. If Mr. Blake had been a close observer, he might have noted that the Chink moved rather stiffly as he walked.

"Got lost," said Tu Sin quietly; "but I found a benevolent haystack, and I sleep there all light!"

Mr. Blake's cob was waiting for him outside the house, and Tu Sin and he walked towards it. As the stout man gathered the bridle together, he turned and nodded to the yellow youngster.

"You know what you've got to do," he said, in a low voice. "As soon as the

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trial's over to-day, you get out of it as fast as you can."

His ruddy face twisted into a grim smile.

"Sam will give you the time when you've got to 'ave your accident," he went on. "Slip your stirrup and take your toss. You're 'ard enough not to hurt yourself, no matter how you land."

He stretched out his hand in which a small wad of Treasury notes was folded.

"Ere's the rest of the five," he said. "If you take my tip you'll get out of this district in quick time. You savvy?"

Again the expressionless face of the Chink deceived his companion.

"I savvy," said Tu Sin. "Me go start race. I wait till Sam do something frighten Ladbroke Lad, then I take toss, and Ladbroke Lad he bolt—eh?"

"You've got it. Accidents 'appen to the best of riders—even the winner of the Pekin Cup!"

Bert Blake guffawed at his own joke as he climbed slowly into the saddle; then presently Tu Sin found himself walking along beside the string of horses as they were led out across the downs.

They kept up a steady pace over the vast expanse, and presently, as they reached a slight rise, Tu Sin caught sight of another string of horses waiting at the foot of the slope.

Sir Evelyn Morris, with the head groom of his training stables, rode up to meet the newcomers and finally the beautiful, grey Ladbroke Lad was ridden out of the circle of racers by his lad. Sir Evelyn beckoned to the ragged Chink.

"It's all right, Bates," he said to the lad. "You can hand over the colt now."

Bates scowled hard at Tu Sin as he dropped from the racing saddle.

"So you're the crack jockey, are you?" he said under his breath. "Blow me, you don't look as though you could ride a traction engine, much less an 'orse!"

Eversley, the head groom, watched Tu Sin as he climbed into the saddle. Ladbroke Lad was a high-standing colt, but Tu Sin managed that feat with commendable skill. With the shortened stirrup-leathers, his seat, however, was a remarkably monkey-like one on the tiny saddle, and when he leaned forward, his chin threatened to come in between his knees.

The head groom from the big establishment glanced disgustedly at the seated figure, then turned to Sir Evelyn.

"Well, Sir Evelyn," he snorted, "perhaps that's the Pekin way of riding a horse, but, by jinks, it don't look very safe to me. All I hope is that the Lad doesn't get his tail up or there'll be ructions!"

It seemed to the head groom as though the hint of a smile crossed the clean-cut features of Sir Evelyn Morris, but he made no reply. Presently Ladbroke Lad, with his ungainly rider, and Gipsy Jack, with Sam up, moved off to a gnarled, old willow stump at the end of the valley.

The mile course was a straight run along the side of the hill, and, after a word with Mr. Blake, Sir Evelyn turned to the head groom.

"I think you'd better start them, Eversley," he observed. "Mr. Blake and I will go up and judge the finish. We are much more interested in that."

The stout farmer-trainer and the tall well-groomed figure rode off together along the side of the fill; but Mr. Blake might have noted that Sir Evelyn kept well ahead, thus preventing any conversation from taking place.

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They reached the clump of ferns beside which the tall, white-painted post stood to mark the mile course.

Sir Evelyn swung his horse round beside the post and halted, then nodded towards his companion.

"Better get on the other side, Blake," he called. "If it's a close finish we'll both be able to judge."

Blake rode across to a thorn bush opposite the post and dismounted. Then, taking his field glasses from his case, he directed them towards the groups of horses at the other end of the valley.

There was a roadway some seven or eight hundred yards beyond the flag post, and on it there appeared a sturdy, square-shouldered, tattered youngster with a huge sheep-dog ambling by his side. Ginger Dan had awakened at an early hour that morning, discovering Tu Sin's absence, and had been searching for his companion ever since.

"Hallo, Bill! Something's happening here!" Dan said to the sheep-dog.

It did not take the youngster long to realise what it was. The two figures by the white post and the knot of horses in the distance suggested a trial; and presently Dan saw a white rag drop and two horses come streaking along for the post, a grey colt and a brown colt, moving like the wind.

With a word to Bill, Dan began to run across the turf till he reached a mound that gave him a full view of the latter half of the mile. He caught sight of the racers again. They were drumming along side by side, heads craned forward, slender limbs outstretched, as they flashed through the crisp, morning air.

"By Jove, they can go all right—jumpin' smoke, who's that?"

The grey colt was on the side furthest away from Dan, and, running neck and neck as they were, Dan had only been able to see the thickest figure of Sam. Now, however, the brown colt began to gain on its rival, and Dan's keen eyes picked out the doubled-up shape on the grey.

Tu Sin's voluminous garments were billowing out behind him, and his long, lean, hammer head was thrust forward. It seemed that he was almost sitting astride of the grey's neck, so hunched was his pose.

"Well, I'm jiggered—that limb. Tu Sin!" gasped Dan. "What on earth is he getting at?"

Drawing a deep breath, Dan stared in blank amazement at the extraordinary scene. The brown had now about a half-length's lead on the grey, and they were pounding along, drawing nearer and nearer to where Dan stood.

Tu Sin was making no attempt to move in his seat; indeed, it seemed to Dan as though the lanky shape were merely hanging on like grim death as the fleeting grey carried him onward.

"He must be balmy. He never rode a horse in his life before."

Nearer and nearer the racers drew. Sam, riding with his quiet, professional skill, had the mount well in hand. Ahead appeared a single furze bush, a point that marked two-thirds distance, and it was at that point that Sam had to carry out his instructions from Mr. Bert Blake.

Dan, watching the two riders, saw the brown cheek suddenly, as Sam's powerful wrists pulled on the bridle. The brown

tossed its head, swerved slightly, and Sam, making it appear that he was trying to get his own mount into order again, raised his whip.

He thrust it backward as though to land his blow on the brown's flank, but Dan was the only person who saw what had happened. The end of the whip struck the grey on its soft muzzle as it tore along close to the brown's heels.

Over his shoulder Sam glanced at Tu Sin, giving the yellow youngster a quick, furtive nod.

"Now, son—this is where you earn your five—quick!"

Ladbroke Lad had swerved, a sudden dizzy movement, that saw the clinging shape sway hazily to the left. Dan gasped as he witnessed that wild lunge.

For a moment Tu Sin seemed to be all arms and legs. Half out of the saddle, he clung for a desperate moment; then, instead of taking his toss, the lanky, yellow youngster, by a miracle, managed to climb back into the saddle, and Ladbroke Lad, already half-way across the course and almost into a bolt, was checked and turned.

"Oh! Well done, Tu Sin! Well done, Tu Sin!" Dan bawled, as the grey settled into his stride again.

Sam Booth, three lengths ahead, heard the thunder of hoofs behind him and, next moment, the red, flashing nostrils of the grey had crept up on the right level with his saddle. Tu Sin, half upright in his seat, was leaning forward guiding the grey with a short grip, and the long, yellow face was almost on a line with the outstretched neck.

"You skunk—you perishing double-crosser!"

Realising the trap now, Sam Booth settled himself to his work, and a ding-dong struggle followed. With whip and spur, the professional jockey drove his willing mount onward, galloping headlong for the post; but Ladbroke Lad was in his stride now, and every forward surge of that bunched-up shape that guided it, seemed to thrust the long-striding colt further and further ahead.

Ladbroke Lad flashed past Sir Evelyn Morris and Mr. Bert Blake like a comet with a good three lengths to spare, and went on drumming across the turf, its yellow-skinned jockey still urging it further and further ahead.

As Sam Booth brought Gipsy Jack to a halt and looked in the direction of his rival, he was just in time to see Tu Sin on Ladbroke Lad thunder across the road and vanish down the slope on the opposite side.

"By Jove, I believe the colt has bolted with him!" Sir Evelyn called. "All right, Mr. Blake, I'll try and get him."

There was no possible hope of Mr. Blake on his stocky cob reaching the flying Ladbroke Lad, and Sir Evelyn, slipping on to his own tall hunter, sped off in a hard gallop across the turf towards the road.

Dan, sprinting like mad, reached the road some four or five hundred yards to the left and, with Bill at his heels, shot across it, gaining the slope on the other side.

He was just in time to see the end of that amazing comedy. Ladbroke Lad was standing quietly at the foot of the slope, and Tu Sin, who had slipped from the saddle, was holding the colt's head.

Sir Evelyn, pounding down the slope drew rein, and Dan saw him lean forward, say something to the Chink; then Sir Evelyn took Ladbroke Lad's bridle and, Tu Sin, turning round, bolted for all he was worth across a patch of gorse-grown down to vanish into a little coppice.

Sir Evelyn was half-way up the slope now, leading Ladbroke Lad, and, when he gained the road, Mr. Bert Blake and Sam and Eversley and one or two of the

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The odds against Tu Sin were great, but he seemed to have arms like elastic. One sturdy youngster was knocked out by a forward drive of Tu Sin's foot, and another he sent flying over his shoulder to land sprawling among his companions.

other stable lads on thoroughbreds met him.

Dan walked quietly down to the group, and, as he drew within earshot, he heard Sir Evelyn's cool voice.

"I was quite right, Mr. Blake," he said. "Ladbrook Lad bolted with Li Fu. It appears that he lost control back there by the furze bushes, but fortunately Ladbrook Lad bolted the right way—for the finish!"

The head groom reached out and took the grey colt's bridle, glancing over the wet, steaming shape.

"Nothing wrong with him, I hope, Sir Evelyn?" the man said anxiously.

The grey-haired gentleman smiled.

"Not a thing," he returned. "I found him standing quite quietly at the foot of the slope—but I couldn't persuade that Chink to come back again. He was afraid he disgraced himself, and he's cleared off."

Mr. Bert Blake sidled to the edge of the road and, standing up in his saddle now, the thickest figure looked long and angrily across the expanse on the other side.

"I think you owe my nephew £500, Mr. Blake," Sir Evelyn Morris drawled. "You'll let me have a cheque to-night, I hope?"

"Er—yes—yes, I—I always pay by cheque!"

But the look of absolute rage on the heavy, bloated face indicated just how Mr. Bert Blake felt over the matter.

The group turned and rode quietly back across the downs, the two parties separating as they reached the mile measure again. Suddenly Bill, who had been peering intently through his shaggy eyebrows up the road, gave vent to a low bark and bounded off.

"Here!" Dan called. "Here, Bill, where are you—"

He turned to look after the dog, and caught sight of a long, lanky figure slipping from one patch of furze to another. Dan sprinted towards the clump of furze and swung round it to find Tu Sin seated there, nursing his knee, while Bill made frantic efforts to lick the yellow, begrimed face.

"Look here, Tu Sin, I want an explanation from you?" Ginger Dan broke out. "What was the idea, anyhow?"

Tu Sin heaved a sigh, then, slipping his hand into a pocket in his garment, he drew out a wad of Treasury notes, also a clean, crisp ten-pound note, which he revealed to the astounded Dan.

"Where did you get all that money?" Dan asked.

Tu Sin separated the notes, putting the clean one on the right and the Treasury notes on the left.

"You saw the honourable gentleman with the red face, Dan?" he began.

"Yes."

"Well, he gave me £5 for riding Ladbrook Lad and making him bolt!"

"Bolt, eh? So that's what you were trying to get at last night, was it?"

Tu Sin nodded.

"I not know what bolt mean until you told me, Dan," Tu Sin retorted. "Then, when I find out, I think it good. I go and see other gentleman, and tell him what going to happen."

The long, lanky fingers reached out for the tenners.

"The other gentleman gave me this—and gave me two hours riding lessons this morning—so that Ladbrook Lad not bolt until he win the race."

Dan looked first at the money, then hard at Tu Sin.

"But why did that tall gentleman call you Li Fu?" he demanded.

Tu Sin's inscrutable face twitched for a moment.

"That part of the game, Dan," he said. He lifted the notes and handed them to his broad-shouldered chum.

"But I think it good idea we clear out from Newdale right now, Dan," he continued with a smile.

THE END.

(Another splendid complete story next week, boys, entitled, "ALL FOR A WAGER!" by Gordon Wallace. This is the right kind of tale for you, full of adventure, sport and drama. Be advised and order next week's GEM well in advance as there is sure to be a record rush for it!)

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Introduction.

Jack Wabbygong, James Ready, Sweet, and a Chinese named Lung, chums together in the great school of St. Beowulf's, together with Viscount Waffington, a relation of the Countess of Castlewood, are instrumental in bringing about the capture of a gang of international burglars.

John Lincoln, one of the governors, takes an interest in the lads, and arranges to take them on a world tour.

The great day comes, and aboard the Pole Star the happy party set off on their great adventure.

After an exciting sea trip, the Pole Star drops anchor at San Carlo, where the boys make things so lively they have to dash back to the ship to avoid arrest. Immediately they get back they are told they are to rout out a number of pirates—a prospect they hail with joy. The journey is continued until the coast of Morocco is reached. Here the party land, and, armed to the teeth, they advance upon the stronghold of Suini Baba, the pirate chief.

They are captured, however, by a party of mounted Moors, and marched to the residence of El Took, the nigger governor of Suini Baba. Things would have gone badly for the boys, but for the sudden appearance of Nobby, whose strange antics help them in effecting their escape. They prepare a further attack, this time with the aid of some of Suini Baba's own riders, to whom the party had shown great hospitality. The rush meets with no resistance. Suini Baba, knowing his fate, leaps to his doom.

Confiscating his ill-gotten gains, the party again board the Kipper King, to turn their attentions next to Juan Pereira, a Portuguese who has played false whilst working for Mr. Lincoln on his estates up the Ivory River.

"It'll be a ticklish job," said Mr. Hobbs, taking the wheel.

(Now read on.)

A Rough Passage!

"IN the old days I was slavin' on this coast," said Mr. Hobbs. "I spent two months waiting with a small boat's crew for a dhow that was coming down from the interior, and I spent the two months in taking all the bearings and cross-bearings of the entrance and the channel.

"I know the Sloopgee channel as well as I know my little front parlour at home, where I can move about in the dark without hitting a chair, and can grab the matches in the dark without knocking the china nigger off the mantelpiece. But it's when we get up the river that I shall start to put in the fine

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work. I will show you a few little bits of my very own. Now, Master Wobby, will you kindly ask that bear of yours to keep 'is dirty paws out of the margarine, and I'll be obliged. Clump 'is 'ead and teach 'im table manners."

When supper was over the boys coiled down on the crowded decks of the trawler and did their best to get a sleep, using Dempsey for a pillow.

They all woke when the first grey of the dawn showed in the sky, and Mr. Hobbs went to the wheel.

There was no sign of land on the horizon, only great seas rolling landwards, and growing steeper as the water changed colour, turning to a muddy green that betrayed that some great river entered the sea in this neighbourhood.

It was not blowing hard, but the great rollers began to bank and pile about the little ship.

Now and then a great swell would heave up like a wall, a white bobble of surf would show on its crest, and down it would come in acres of foam with a thundering roar.

Now and then Slushy would put his head out of the galley where he was busy preparing breakfast, and would gaze with rolling eyes on this sullen sea.

"Law sakes, young gents!" he said, as one of the great rollers crashed down within a hundred yards of the Kipper King. "I nebber did see such a dirty sea. If one ob dem combers catches us we shall be washed out."

Mr. Hobbs was apparently of the same opinion, for he ordered life-lines to be rigged across the decks, and called to the boys to come out of the lower deck to the little bridge.

"It's all waves and no water, young gents," he said, as he spun the wheel in his hands. "The ship steers like a bucket, and she's near dragging on the mudbanks already."

"But where's the land, Hobbo?" asked Wobby.

"All round us, Master Wobby," said Mr. Hobbs. "See how the water is changing colour. It's like cocoa now, and there's a four-knot current sweeping down against the tide. You'll see the land in a minute or two. Then you'll see what sort of a jigsaw puzzle the entrance to the Sloopgee Channel is like."

The words were hardly out of Mr. Hobbs' mouth when a dark line of

mangroves showed through a mist that lay on the sea ahead.

"What's that mist?" asked Stickjaw.

"Surf," replied Mr. Hobbs. "That's the bar of the river. Look out, young gents! Hang tight! This is where she feels the fight between the current and the tide."

The Kipper King was rolling wildly now in the tide race that piled and broke like the Niagara Rapids.

There was a crash of plates in the galley, and Slushy shoved his black face out at the scuttle.

His eyes goggled as he saw a huge wall of water charging sideways at the trawler.

It was not a wave; it was a wall, higher than her stumpy masts.

"Hold tight, young gents!" shouted Mr. Hobbs from the wheelhouse.

The boys clung to the rail, and Dempsey got his great claws into a ring-bolt as he saw the water coming at them in a boiling, chocolate-coloured surge. Dempsey had been at sea long enough to look after himself.

Mr. Hobbs rang for full speed ahead, and the trawler drove on, rolling almost over on her beam-ends as the huge surge crossed her.

"Hold tight!" roared Mr. Hobbs, spinning the wheel in his hands. "Hold tight for your lives!"

There was a crash and a roar, and the hull of the little ship disappeared beneath a boil of dirty foam. The Kipper King had been pooped by the chasing sea and washed from end to end. Only her stumpy masts and funnel and her steering house showed above the blinding of the breakers.

Up she bobbed again, emptying the water in great gushes from her sea taps as she cleared her decks.

A puff of steam went up from her galley, and a faint yell inside showed that Slushy had caught a packet of the Indian Ocean into his cooking range.

"Crums!" exclaimed Wobby. "There's breakfast gone west. She took that lot into the oven."

Slushy's head popped out of the scuttle amidst a cloud of steam.

"What yo' doin' wid de steering, Mistah Hobbs?" he cried. "You hab put out ma galley fire an' spiled a fryin' ob bacon."

But Mr. Hobbs was too busy to attend to Slushy's moan. Watching the line of

mangroves that showed over the breakers, he steered right across to the south bank of the estuary.

It did not call for much knowledge of the sea to tell the boys what sort of Davy Jones boneyard they were in. There was little wonder that even the watchful rascal, Pereira, did not think it worth while to keep a watch on the Sloop Channel of the Ivory River.

Sandbars and mudbars were everywhere, showing through the roaring surf. It was a perfect labyrinth of sandbanks, through which the swift current of the river roared and fought and snarled with the tides of the sea.

"My hat!" whispered Wobby, as, soaked to the skin, they clung to the rail of the bridge and watched. "Hobbs has gone off his chump, and he's going to put us on the putty!"

With his engines running at full speed, Mr. Hobbs seemed to be charging straight at the wall of mangroves, whose knotted roots were washed by the swift tide of the river.

But of a sudden the wheel spun in his hands. It looked as though the Kipper King were going straight ashore. But, heeling under the pull of her rudder, she turned and swung on her stern, racing seawards again across the estuary, which here was some four miles wide.

Smash! Crash! Bang! went the seas again, washing her from stem to stern as she kicked and bucked and rolled, throwing the sprays from end to end. She was midway through the boiling race of water when Mr. Hobbs suddenly straightened her up and charged her at a great bar of tumbling water.

A terrific current was running here, and, with her engines racing under a full head of steam, the trawler could but just hold her own, for there had been heavy rains in the interior of the country, and she was fighting the full force of the river forced between two reefs of rock. Here the bones of Africa were beginning to stick out.

Wobby's jaw dropped as out from the welter of water, not fifteen feet from the side of the little craft, a jagged mass of rock showed for a second and disappeared.

On the other side of the ship a similar jagged pinnacle tore through the troubled water.

A sea hit them astern with a smash, blotting everything out with spray, and sending the boys flying across the bridge as the Kipper King flung herself down as though she were never going to get up again.

But she came up streaming, shining, and wet, and a few seconds later shot clear of sandbars and rapids and rocks on to the broad bosom of a great, smooth, sunlit river. Looking behind, the boys saw whence they had come—a four-mile stretch of white, broken, leaping water, which seemed to be clamouring for the prey which had escaped it.

"My aunt!" whispered Wobby. "I wouldn't run that passage again for a hundred pounds."

Mr. Hobbs took off his cap and wiped his forehead and lowered the spray-dimmed windows of the wheel-house.

"There, young gents!" he said, leaning out. "We are all safe now. What did you think of that?"

"Not much!" replied Wobby. "I'd sooner go over the Niagara Falls."

breached us I began to think that we'd never see old England again. If we'd hit there, the current would have just rolled us down and rolled us under. But a miss is as good as a mile, and we are in at the back door. The rest is plane sailing. All we've got to do is to steam up one hundred miles and down forty on the other branch, and we'll catch Steady Steve napping, all Sir Garney-o!"

Mr. Hobbs wiped his face with his red handkerchief, for the perspiration was streaming down his forehead.

"No, young gents," he added, "there's only one man in the world could have done that and that's me—Hobbs. The Navy won't believe it when they hear o' it. But you never can tell where you can take a ship till you try."

Slushy was busy with a pail heaving the water and soot out of his drowned galley.

"De breakfast am gone to glory!" he complained. "It will be half hour late!"

"Cheer up, Curly!" called Mr. Hobbs. "Thank your lucky stars you are 'ere to cook it. If I'd made any mistakes you wouldn't have wanted any breakfast, you wouldn't."

He looked round at the three-mile stream which, dark and oily, was racing down to the sea between its distant walls of dreary mangroves.

The smell of heat and mud and rotting vegetation was in the air.

"Pooh!" sniffed Mr. Hobbs. "Place stinks of fever. You'd better all have some quinine before breakfast, young gents."

It was a merry breakfast party that gathered on deck as the Kipper King pushed her way up against the swift current.

In celebration of their crossing of the Sloop Channel, Dempsey was awarded a three-pound tin of marmalade, which he hooked out of the tin with his paws. Nobby, the kangaroo, was awarded a bale of hay and a bowl of lettuce. Then all set to work to clean arms and to get ready for dropping down that night on Steady Steve, as Mr. Hobbs called their enemy.

There were no eyes to watch them from those dark, sinister banks, where the mangroves rose like a wall from the river. The land was waterlogged for many miles, and not even a bird showed on the river.

"There's nothing here," said Mr. Hobbs, "only crocodiles, sharks, and

fever. Noontime we shall pass the mouth of the Ingwe River, that's bringing down most of this water. Then we'll make better speed of it."

After eleven o'clock, Mr. Hobbs took the wheel again, for the brimming river began to show obstacles.

The boys saw ahead of them what they thought to be an island. It was a hundred yards of bushes and small palms smothered with creepers and surrounded by tall reeds.

"The island was on the move, too!"

Mr. Hobbs sheered aside as it approached, and it slid past on the chocolate current a hundred yards to port.

"Ever seen an island afloat before, young gents?" asked Mr. Hobbs. "There's lots of 'em like that come down this river when it's in flood. They hit on the sandbars and go to pieces; and that's where all that mud and sand comes from down below. It's bits that break off from the banks."

"Here comes another," said Wobby.

"Any amount of 'em will come down. It always happens when the river's on the rise," said Mr. Hobbs. "I've seen the same thing on the Parana, in South America, where the lily pads come down in such clumps as to make a vessel pull her anchors. That's queer, ain't it? Reg'lar battle o' flowers. But there's some weight in them lily islands—camelotas as they calls 'em."

After that Mr. Hobbs was kept busy, for the Ingwe River, in full flood, was pouring down floating islands and great snags of fallen trees which had been dumped into the river with the caving banks.

The great butts of these snags twisted and turned and rolled as they swung down on the current, and a blow from one of them would have been disastrous to the Kipper King.

So the wheel was constantly spinning, till, half an hour after noontide, they steamed past the entrance of the Ingwe River, and got into the quieter waters of the Sloop Channel of the Great Ivory River.

Here the great river narrowed to a mile in width, and the current ran clearer and deeper. There were fewer big trees coming down on the current, but still there were many of the strange, floating islands of matted vegetation and trees, torn away from the banks hundreds of miles above by the undercutting and fretting of the current and the swift rise of the river after rain.

The scenery began to alter here, for the wall of mangroves gave way to a brighter and more cheerful forest of thick bush and tall palms. Here, too, were beaches and sandbars, where crocodiles lay like logs of wood, their noses turned upwind, ready to scent any titbit that might be coming down on the current.

As the Kipper King steamed past, these slid swiftly from their sandbanks into the water.

"That's a good sign for us!" said John Lincoln, as he pointed it out to the boys. "Shows that the brutes are not accustomed to any traffic on this river!"

Through the sweltering heat of the day the trawler plugged on through this monotonous country. But towards sunset Mr. Hobbs kept a close eye on the banks, and finally steered in towards the shore. He chose a bank of the river where there is always deep water alongside the shore.

There was a snort and a rush as the Kipper King slowly glided into this bank, bumping an old hippopotamus, who was taking a snooze in the slack water.

"That chap did not expect to get a trawler bumping into his tail," said Mr. Hobbs, grinning, as he laid the trawler alongside the bank, which was as good

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Camouflage!

MAKES you laugh, don't it—when it's all over?" said Mr. Hobbs, who was plainly very well pleased with himself. "It was taking a risk. When that sea

as a fendered quay, with its soft earth and springy roots. "Now, young gents, when we've moored it's all hands to work with the axes. This is where we get ready for Stealthy Steve. We are eight miles down from the junction of this channel with the main stream. I want to get ready to drop down on him in the dark, quiet and natural-like. First of all, get down a couple of them shortish palms."

The boys could not help wondering what on earth Mr. Hobbs was after, demanding these two stumpy palms, which looked like scaffold-poles with a cabbage tied atop of them. But as soon as the trawler was moored they leaped ashore, followed by the faithful Dempsey and Nobby, and started to work with their axes to get down the two trees.

They were not long in felling them. "Now bring them aboard!" ordered Mr. Hobbs.

The boys whistled for some of the hands, and twenty of them carried the first palm aboard.

"That's a treat," said Mr. Hobbs, as they laid it along the deck. "Now get a tackle here, and bring down the gilsen and make it fast."

The wire rope that ran to the fore masthead was made fast to the palm and carried to the steam winch.

"Heave up!" ordered Mr. Hobbs.

The winch was started, and the palm rose till it was standing on its butt against the stumpy fore-mast, almost hiding it from sight.

"That's a treat!" said Mr. Hobbs,

locking up at the palm with a critical eye. "Pon my word, it looks just as if the ole packet was growing a conservatory on deck!"

Wobby rubbed his hands and grinned. He saw what Mr. Hobbs was up to now. He was going to disguise the Kipper King as one of the floating islands of the river. And in that guise they would drift down on Stealthy Steve as he watched down-river for the coming of the Pole Star.

"Camouflage!" said Wobby.

"That's about it," said Mr. Hobbs. "I want you boys to cut me a nice lot of that Christmas stuff to blot out the wheel-house and bridge, and some of those twenty-foot papyrus reeds to put round her sides. We'll have her as natural as nature by dark. It's the quickness of the 'and that deceives the eye,' as the three-card men say."

The boys set to work with a will when they found what Mr. Hobbs was after.

They slashed away at the stumpy evergreen trees, the mimosa, and at the huge reeds that grew by the waterside. And swiftly the Kipper King was blotted out—masts, funnels, and all.

As the boys worked, John Lincoln, accompanied by Blackbeard Teach, forced his way through the undergrowth to a spot three hundred yards from the bank.

The boys could not see it. But in the tangle of creepers, John Lincoln's trained eyes could see the last traces of civilization blotted out by the forest.

He called to Stubbs and to Mr. Travers, and they followed him into the thick

bush, where they came upon a small clearing.

John Lincoln had been here once in his life before. He had built a small village for a group of native families, hippo-hunters, who provided meat for his settlement on the Ivory River. These were all good men and old servants, for they had been his porters in his great marches through Africa.

His brow grew black as he traced out with Mr. Travers the concrete foundations of a group of native dwellings built on an improved plan.

First he picked up a spearhead, then the broken stock of a matchlock. These were both Arab weapons. Then he called to Stubbs, for he had found a skull.

"What do you make of that, Stubbs?" he demanded.

Stubbs took the skull and looked at it. The front teeth were filed after the fashion of the Mandigoes. One of the back teeth had a small gold filling.

"It's poor old Fred, sir," said Stubbs. "I took him myself to the dentist in Beira, and he had that gold filling put in by the dentist. You paid. You said that you were not going to have your gun-boy roaring with toothache on the march. Fred didn't like having his tooth stopped, but I told him that it was either that or he'd be left behind!"

John Lincoln nodded, and there was no mercy in his face as he laid down the skull of his faithful old gun-boy.

(Make sure of reading the conclusion of this grand serial by ordering next week's GEM well in advance.)

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**THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER.
"WEIGHT" AND SEE!**

With a view to letting nothing escape her vigilance, Mrs. Muggins cross-examined the prospective housemaid. "You have to answer the door to visitors, wait at table, and—" "Oh, yes, mum!" said Mary Jane. "I'm quite sure I shall know how to do that." Mrs. Muggins was on the point of turning away, when a thought struck her. "Oh, by the way, do you know your way to announce?" she said. "Well," replied Mary Jane innocently, "I'm not sure about that, but I think I know my weight to a pound or so!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to Harold Chappell, 227, Brierley Wood, Marsden Road, Huddersfield.

A FALSE STEP!

A young man, nineteen years of age, steady and reliable as a rule, was immensely keen on singing at smoking concerts during the winter months. He found, however, some difficulty in indulging in his favourite pastime, because every time he stayed away from the hotel where he was employed his chief sent a note to his father. One day, however, he decided to get round this difficulty. He rang up his chief from a call-office, and disguising his voice as well as he was able, said: "I have rung up to tell you that my son will not be on duty to-night." "Oh, very well," replied the chief. "Who is speaking?" To this unexpected question the poor boy replied: "This is my father speaking!" And so gave the show away.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Search, 64, Silvester Road, E. Dulwich.

PARLEY-VOUS FRANCAIS?

A certain town has a coalman who knows some French, and occasionally little phrases keep slipping into his casual speech. Recently he was asked by a lady customer the price of his coal. "Well, madam," he replied, "if you take it a la carte, it's forty-nine shillings the ton; but if you take it cul-de-sac, it's a shilling extra for the bags!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to M. A. Elbourne, 17, Ullswater Road, West Norwood, S.E. 27.

'T WAS BUT A JOKE!

When Tom was taking his father his dinner he stopped for a moment to watch a workman emptying a sewer. "That," remarked Tommy interestedly, "is the hole my brother lost a shilling down." The workman's eyes lit up. "Well, young man," he said, with a show of carelessness, "you'd better get forward with that dinner before it's cold." In about half an hour Tommy returned to find the man still at the same hole. "Are you quite sure it was this hole the shilling was lost in?" said the workman, as Tom paused again. "Certain of it," replied Thomas. "I saw my father get it out with a shovel!" And he passed on with such a happy smile.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. A. Atherton, 62, Columbia Road, Prescot, near Liverpool.

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