

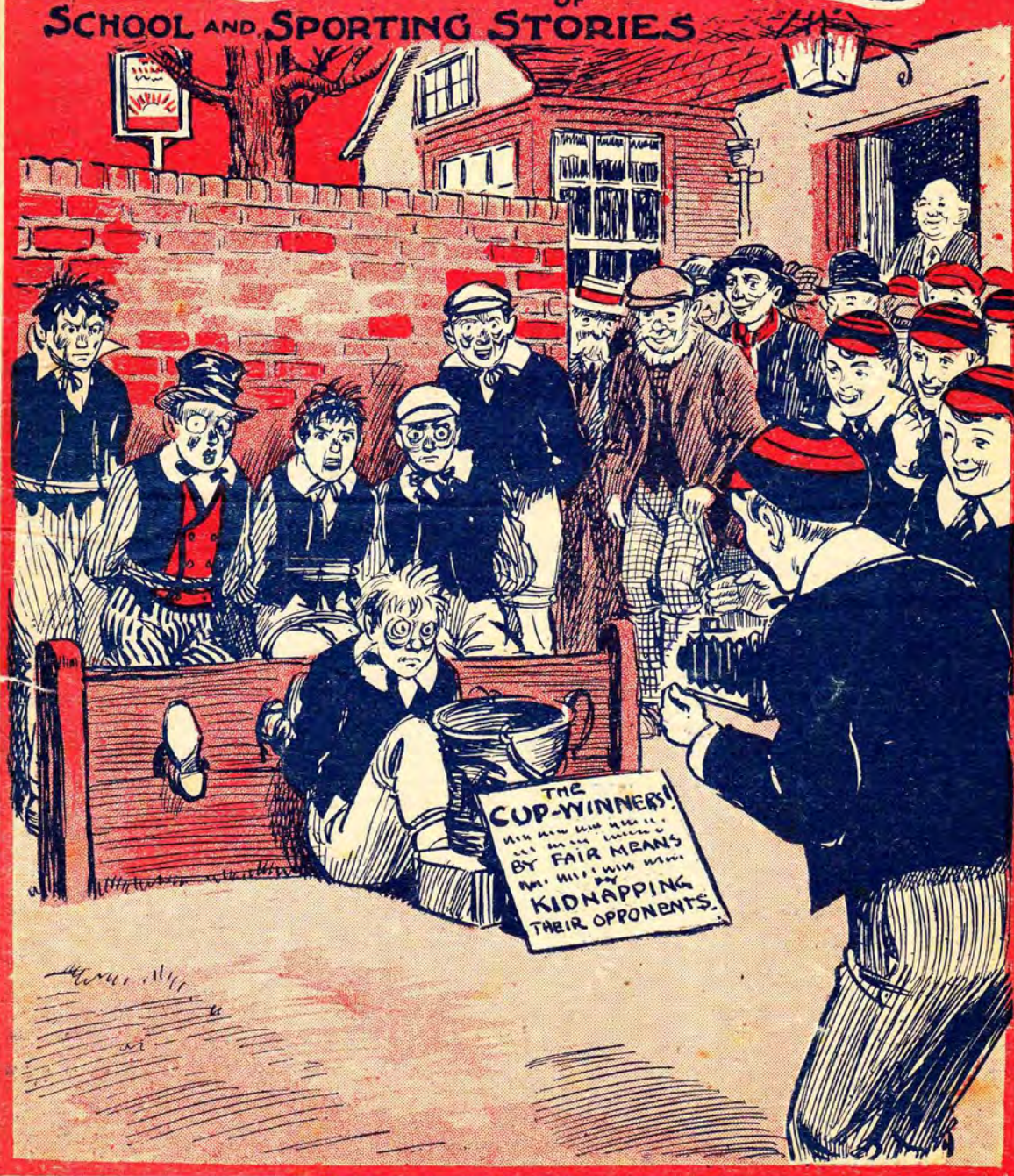
Special 22-Page St. Jim's Football Story "THE MAYOR'S CUP!" INSIDE.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

No. 870.
Vol. XXVI.
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1924.

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TOM MERRY & CO. IN THE STOCKS!

The Ohums of St. Jim's are "put through it," for once, by their rivals of the Grammar School! (An entertaining incident from the extra-long complete school story inside.)



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.—When one has something extra important to say, the best thing is to get on with it right away. Good news may keep. It is much wiser to spread it, quick. That's what I will do. My news deals with next week's Bumper Number of the "Gem." Make an extra special note of it! Jot the fact down! Keep the matter well in view! Tell yourself that you have got to order your "Gem" for October 18th early.

A REAL TIP-TOP ISSUE!

Now, listen to this, please! Our next number of the "Gem" will contain a simply magnificent programme of stories. Nothing new in that, you will say. Quite right! But the yarns for October 18th are a bit more out of the common, and of greater excellence than ever. But mark this, too. It does not end there!

SIX TUCK HAMPERS GIVEN AWAY!

That is part of my news. Only a portion of it! I am making our Special Number for next week the big boom issue of the year. The fame of the "Gem" grows apace. It will make a sensational move next week. There will be six jolly Hamperites next Wednesday in place of only one. Of late letters have reached me asking for more chances with the Tuck Hamper. Well, you will see from the above statement that I am doing my best.

TELL YOUR CHUMS!

Do me a favour by passing on this bright bit of news. Let your pals know that in our next issue there is this splendid Tuck Hamper sensation. Half a dozen Tuck Hampers and a grand budget of first line stories!

"D'ARCY'S ADOPTED!"

By Martin Clifford.

Now for St. Jim's. This is the title of next Wednesday's screamingly funny story of the famous school. Laugh and grow fat! Laugh till your sides ache! Whatever the effects of rishty, you are bound to laugh as you read Mr. Martin Clifford's latest and jolliest tale. It will go with a roar. Gussy, good old good-humoured, lispng Gussy of the kind heart and the staid ways, tumbles plo into the prize dilemma of the year. Never was there such a sceme! You cannot get away from it. D'Arcy the superfine, D'Arcy the generous bestower of "Fearful thwashes", finds himself in a most embarrassing situation. It is simply terrible! In order to do a kind action he allows himself to become the temporary custodian of a baby. The baby has no particular objection. Everybody likes Gussy. You always have a test of popularity when babies, dogs, and suchlike discerning creatures take to a fellow. But we need not go into that. D'Arcy obliges one of the fair sex by holding her baby for her, and he is left in the lurch with the infant. What is he to do? That you will see. Get our Bumper Number for next week!

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

A good wine needs no bush. So runs the hoary proverb. Neither really does the "Holiday Annual" require further words from me. All the same, I am just putting in this reminder to any friends who have not yet secured the prime book. They must look alive or the tempting chance will have vanished, like the morning dew when the sun rises.

STUDY No. 6 EDITION.

Don't be disappointed because the "St. Jim's News" gets crowded out now and again. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 870.

owing to the rush of new yarns. Just keep your eye on the coming issue of the Supplement. It is, as above, a "Study No. 6 Edition," and is a corker. Blake & Co. are right in the forefront. This will please the myriad correspondents who have been asking for the namesake of the celebrated admiral who swept the seas to keep them clean in the bygone.

"THE HEAD LAD'S REVENGE!"

By Cecil Fanshaw.

Revenge, they say, is sweet. I am not going to apologise for this sentiment, though it is a bit offside if you came to think of it. But be it remembered there are various kinds of revenge. Due chastisement for flagrant wrongdoing is something at which no one can cavil. Anyhow, this brilliant new racing complete story which appears next week is something which must call for praise. It brings into the blaze of the limelight our old favourite, Sid Morris. Young Sid Morris has won laurels many times. He is a fellow of parts. His qualities are big ones, and bound to take him far. In the new story he acts in such a way that Hall, the rascally trainer, comes to the decision that there are many advantages in having a straight lad like Sid in his stables. People talk about the hour and the man. What about the hour and the boy? That is more to the point. This is a gripping tale, the real stuff.

"CHUMS OF THE IRON WAY!"

By Roland Spencer and

Francis Warwick.

Our tense and vivid railway serial romps away. The collaboration of these two popular authors is about the happiest thing possible. "Gem" readers know them, and cannot say enough in laudation of their work. It is something to be remembered that Francis Warwick is the writer who contributed "Sherwood Gold" to the "Magnet," our Companion Paper. "Sherwood Gold" has never been equalled in the handling of a great theme. Then as regards Roland Spencer—well "Gem" supporters dot on him. He is the author of "The Secret of the Galleons," that brave and rousing serial about the old Spanish treasure ships and the fight for the possession of these argosies under the sea. Then there was "Tom of the Ajax," another of this author's great successes.

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE!

"Chums of the Iron Way" is the work of both of these writers. We can con over the ancient saying that I have dabbled in overhead with complacency. The partnership of two masters of the pen is producing such a story as can be set down as unique for dramatic interest and sympathy. Moreover, it is the real thing, for to write of our network of railway routes which link up all the centres of communication calls for very special knowledge. The grand new serial tells us what we all want to hear about. The plot is fascinating in the extreme. There is more than that. It gives a wondrous picture of the railway life. And the two true chums stand for no end in the history of our time.

ALWAYS A LAST WORD!

To sum up, I can promise you next week something even finer than usual. The "Gem" is in the van of story papers. Our coming issue will send it bounding forward to the biggest victory yet. Reserve a copy at once!

Your Editor.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

OUR TUCK HAMPERS ARE PRIME!

Remember, boys and girls, we award a delicious Tuck Hamper for the best storyette sent us each week—also half-a-crown is paid for each other contribution accepted. Cut out the coupon on this page, and send it, together with your joke, to me.

ANOTHER TUCK HAMPER WON!

READY WIT!

Magistrate (to prisoner suspected of gambling with disreputable characters in a certain club): "What special trade do you follow?" Prisoner: "I am a locksmith, your worship." Magistrate: "What were you doing when the police entered the den?" Prisoner: "Well, your worship, I was just making a bolt for the door!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to F. H. P. Jack, 21, Tudor Road, East Ham, E.

THE IRISHMAN'S DOG!

"Hallo, Pat, I hear that your dog is dead?" "It is." "Was it a lap-dog?" "Yes, it would lap up anything." "What did it die of?" "It died of a Tuesday." "I mean how did it die?" "It died on its back." "No, no. I mean how did it meet its death?" "It didn't meet its death; its death overtook it." "I want to know what was the complaint?" "No complaint; everybody for miles around seemed satisfied." "I wish to know how did it occur?" "The dog was no cur; he was a thoroughbred animal." "Tell me, what disease did the dog die of?" "He went to fight a circular saw." "What was the result?" "The dog only lasted one round!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Cooper, 285, De L'Espe Avenue, Outremont, Quebec, Canada.

NO WONDER!

A certain nigger had gained an extraordinary reputation. It had been said that he could consume four loaves of bread, two pounds of cheese, two pots of pickles, and seven pints of ginger-beer at one sitting. A man who had seen the nigger do this made a wager that the nigger would do it again. The nigger started to consume the eatables, but when he had nearly finished he said that he could not take any more. "You rascal!" shouted the man who had made the bet. "You have made me lose five pounds!" "I'm sorry, boss," answered the nigger. "I can't think what's the matter wid me, because I was all right at de rehearsal dis morning!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Maurice Mullane, 13, Elm Grove, Merfield, Rochdale, Lancashire.

SIX TUCK HAMPERS TO BE GIVEN AWAY NEXT WEEK!

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of the Coupons.

The thirty-guinea cup presented by the Mayor of Wayland is a trophy worth battling for. But the contest between St. Jim's and the Grammarians develops an unexpected bitterness, and the most amazing complications ensue!



CHAPTER 1. Poor Old Gussy!

"LOOK out!"
"But—"
"Hide, you asses!"
"What the thump—"
"Can't you see?" hissed Tom Merry of the Shell Form at St. Jim's. "Grammarians!"
"Oh!"
"Bai Jove!"

The word "Grammarians" had a magic effect upon Tom Merry's companions. They understood Tom's sudden warning, and they followed him in a flash as he jumped for the hedge.

In a couple of seconds the St. Jim's juniors were in ambush, crouching behind the hedge, their faces wearing anticipatory grins.

"Three of 'em," murmured Tom Merry gleefully. "That chump Gay and his pals—Wootton major and Frank Monk. Here's where we get a bit of our own back, my infants!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

As still as mice, the St. Jim's juniors crouched behind the sparse hedge, waiting for the unsuspecting Grammarians.

Tom Merry had already glimpsed the Grammarians through a gap in the hedge, and now Gordon Gay & Co. came into full view as they turned the bend in the quiet Rylcombe Lane.

Obviously, the Grammar School juniors were utterly unaware that their enemies were anywhere in the vicinity, for they came hurrying along, chatting and laughing rather excitedly.

"They're up to something," grinned Blake. "I shouldn't be surprised if they've got some little game on against us."

"What's Gay trying to hide under his coat?" whispered Herries.

"Only a blessed football. Looks like a new one," breathed Lowther. "We'll collar that as spoils of war."

"Good egg!"

"Shush!" whispered Tom Merry. "Here they come!"
The three Grammarians came abreast of the juniors in ambush. But they got no farther.

Even as Tom Merry spoke he leaped out from the hedge, and his eager chums came after him with a rush.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look out! Saints!"

Gordon Gay & Co. went to earth with yells of alarm and surprise as the St. Jim's juniors swarmed over them.

They fought desperately to stem the tide, but against the seven Saints they stood no chance whatever.

The ball that Gordon Gay had been carrying in such a curiously stealthy manner slid from his hands, and rolled away in a queer wobbly way along the lane.

Gordon Gay himself went to earth with a crash and a howl as Tom Merry and Jack Blake flung themselves upon him like a whirlwind.

THE MAYOR'S CUP!

A Rattling Yarn of Tom Merry
& Co. and their Rivals—the
Grammarians.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

In less than twenty seconds all three of the ambushed Grammarians were stretched out in the muddy lane with numerous feet pinning them down.

"This is just where we smile, old dears," chortled Tom Merry. "Gay, old son—"

"Lemmegeterrup!" gasped Gordon Gay frantically. "It's pax—"

"Not much, my dear man," chuckled Tom Merry. "You chased us out of Rylcombe last night, after pelting us with rotten eggs, didn't you? You wouldn't make it pax with us."

"I say, listen!"

"Nothing doing!" grinned Blake. "You were in the majority last night; now it's our turn! What about the ditch, Tommy?"

"Good wheeze!"

Gordon Gay gave a howl.

"Leggo, I tell you!" he yelled. "You're mucking up—"

"We've not started mucking you up yet. But we're going to."

"I mean, you're spoiling the jape of the season, you burbling asses!" fumed Gay, starting to struggle again.

"That ball—"

"Don't worry about that, old chap," said Tom blandly. "That ball's ours now, you know. Spoil of war! Fetch it, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here, you ass! Don't touch that ball!" howled Wootton major, in alarm. "It's—"

"Wats!" retorted Arthur Augustus.

And he hurried to capture the ball that had come to rest several yards away, ignoring the almost frantic yells of the Grammarians.

If anything, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was more overjoyed and gleeful at the capture of the Grammarians than his chums were. The swell of the Fourth was fair game for Gordon Gay & Co., and he had suffered many indignities at the hands of the cheery Grammarians. He had lost count of how many glossy "toppers" had come to grief at their hands, and Gussy was eager to pay off old scores.

He reached the ball, but instead of picking it up, he chuckled, and, after dribbling it gently for a couple of yards, took a pot-shot at Gordon Gay's head.

Arthur Augustus was a neat and deadly shot on the football-field, and, doubtless, the ball would have reached its mark now had it been a genuine football.

But it wasn't. It was an imitation football.

It was a terrific drive, and as shoe met ball there sounded an explosion, and a shower of reddish fluid spurted upwards. It caught Arthur Augustus under the chin and fairly swamped him from head to foot.

"Yawwoouh! Oh, bai Jove! Gwough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy's horrified wail of woe and gasp of grief was followed instantly by a terrific howl of laughter from Gordon Gay & Co.

"What the thump—"

For an instant the Terrible Three and D'Arcy's own chums stared at the dancing, howling Arthur Augustus, and then they also burst into a yell of hysterical laughter.

For the luckless swell of the Fourth was a picture—a nightmarish picture. His elegant clothes were bespattered with red ink and his aristocratic features were fairly dripping with it.

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But that was not all, as Arthur Augustus had already discovered.

Besides red ink, that imitation football had held something else—something that smelled like rotten eggs, and which was evidently a solution of hydrogen sulphide, or some chemical remarkably like it.

The hapless Arthur Augustus fairly reeked with the horrible odour. His eyes were almost starting from his head as he stood in petrified horror, with one hand clutching at his nose and the other frantically rubbing his crimson features with what once had been a dainty cambric handkerchief.

"Gwooh! Oh, bai Jove!" he wailed. "Oh, deah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors laughed heartlessly, until a waft of the vile odour reached them as Arthur Augustus came tottering towards them.

It was their turn to clasp their noses, and they sprang to their feet, friend and foe alike, and fled away from the unfortunate Arthur Augustus.

"Oh deah!" wailed Arthur Augustus feebly. "Ow! Gwooh!" This is frightful, bai Jove! Gwooh!"

He started off again after his chums and the howling Grammarians, who had come to a halt some thirty yards away.

"Keep off!" yelled Gordon Gay, almost hysterical with laughter. "Keep away, or we'll be forced to kill you, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you feahful wottahs!" replied Gussy, raising his voice to a muffled shout. "Oh deah! You dweadful wuffians! My clobber is uttably wuined, bai Jove! Gwooh!"

He hurried towards them, still clutching his nose, and once again the juniors retreated.

"Keep off, Gussy, you ass!" yelled Blake. "Keep away from us, for goodness' sake!"

"You—you—"

"Run home before somebody comes along!" called Tom Merry anxiously. "We'll settle with these merchants, you idiot!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Suddenly realising the horrible state he was in, the swell of the Fourth stopped with a groan. The thought of being seen in the lane in such a state filled him with fresh horror.

He finished mopping his face, and, throwing the ink-stained handkerchief away, he turned and took to his heels back towards St. Jim's.

He was followed by a howl of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Though deeply in sympathy with the unfortunate Arthur Augustus, his chums could not help their hilarity. Nor could Gordon Gay & Co. They had heard Tom Merry's threat to "settle" with them, but they were almost helpless with laughter, and utterly unable to attempt to escape.

"Oh dear!" gasped Tom Merry. "Poor old Gussy! It was too bad. But—but—ha, ha, ha!—we'll make these bounders sit up for it! Collar them—quick!"

Before Gordon Gay attempted to escape the St. Jim's juniors surrounded them, tears of merriment still streaming down their faces.

"Now, my lads!" gasped Tom Merry grimly. "You've had your laugh, and it's up to us to avenge poor old Gussy."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Blake weakly. "Oh dear!"

"It was—ha, ha, ha!—his own fault," choked Gordon Gay. "We warned the silly ass—tried to stop him touching the ball, didn't we?"

"That won't save you, though!" grinned Blake. "I suppose that little gadget was meant for us, eh? You were hoping to palm it off on to us?"

"No, we weren't," denied Frank Monk hurriedly, as he blinked at the grim faces around him. "It wasn't meant for you chaps!"

"You're off your gee-gees there!" chuckled Gordon Gay coolly. "Think we'd go to all that trouble to play a jape on insignificant bounders like you chaps?"

"You burbling rotter!"

"You've mucked up the jape of the season!" snorted Gordon Gay, becoming suddenly disgusted. "It was meant for that bumptious old bounder, Bagley!"

"You mean that fat bounder, the grocer?"

"Yes—grocer and giddy Mayor of Wayland!" grunted Gay. "We're up against the old blighter!"

"If he's anything like his blessed son, then I don't blame you!" grinned Blake. "We're on that cad's track already!"

"That's so," said Tom Merry, nodding at Gay. "The bullying cad collared poor old Skimmy the other day and gave him a frightful licking with his cane just because Skimmy bumped into him in the lane!"

"It's like the cad to do that!" said Gordon Gay grimly.

"We've more than one score to settle with him, too! His

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pater's trying to get him into the Grammar School. If he does get in—"

"Phew!" whistled Tom Merry. "The old buffer tried to get him into St. Jim's some weeks ago. But our Head wouldn't have him at any price! I suppose that's why his thumping son is up against us so."

"Quite likely!" grunted Gordon Gay. "We'll give the sneering, lazy cad socks if he does get in!"

"He won't," said Frank Monk confidently. "I heard the pater talking about it. He doesn't like giving the old fusspot a blunt refusal. The old beggar is a big man in Wayland, and it wouldn't do! But he's only putting him off with excuses. He won't admit the young cad!"

"Blow his blessed son, anyway!" sniffed Gay. "It's the old chap we're up against now. The crusty, interfering old buffer's always causing trouble at our place! He got us all licked last week just because we happened to be larking in Wayland High Street. He reported us and got us licked!"

"Not the first time, either!" put in Wootton major.

"Just because a crate of his blessed eggs happened to get smashed! They were rotten, anyway!" went on Gordon Gay, with a chuckle. "We offered to pay for 'em, but he wouldn't let us. And now that ass Gussy's spoiled our chance of getting our own back, blow him!"

"If these silly asses will make it pax, it's not too late now," said Frank Monk eagerly. "It's only about two o'clock now. Plenty of time to get to Wayland for another ball before the kick-off!"

"My hat, yes!"

Gordon Gay's eyes gleamed, and he turned excitedly to Tom Merry.

"Make it pax, Merry. Be a sport!" he exclaimed eagerly. "Don't spoil the best wheeze of the term! You ought to be up against the blessed mayor and his pest of a son as much as we are!"

"But—but what's the game?"

"Can't you see?" snapped Gordon Gay. "Our first team's playing the Wayland Shop Assistants this afternoon, and the giddy mayor's due to kick off at three-fifteen. The ball Gussy's just busted was the ball he was going to kick off with!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"We were going to change the balls—see?" grinned the leader of the Grammarians. "We bought that ball for his special benefit. The old buffer insisted on having a new ball to kick-off with, so he bought one and sent it along this morning. It's in the footer pavilion now, and we were just going to change 'em while nobody's about when you asses jumped on us!"

Tom Merry chuckled, and his chuckle was echoed by his chums.

"Jove, what a wheeze!" he breathed. "I say, I'm thundering sorry we mucked it up, Gay!"

"Hear, hear!"

Tom's own chums agreed with him there. Mr. Tobias Bagley, the Mayor of Wayland town, was an arrogant, pompous individual, who lived in a big house just outside Rylcombe. And though Tom Merry & Co. had scarcely come into contact with him, they had heard a great deal concerning him.

But they knew his son only too well. He was, like his father, fat, flabby, arrogant, and pompous. He was also a boulder and a bully, who delighted in bullying the smaller fry at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. were quite in sympathy with Gordon Gay's little scheme. The thought of the big man meeting with the sad fate of Arthur Augustus before a huge crowd on the Grammar School ground filled them with joyous anticipation.

"You—you say there's a chance of bringing it off even now?" asked Tom, with a chuckle.

"Yes, if we can get off at once," said Gay, his eyes sparkling hopefully. "We've just time to get to Wayland and get another balloon, and get the thing fixed up in time for the kick-off. Is it pax?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Tom. "My hat! That ball's a ripping gadget, Gay! What's it made of? And where is it from?"

"It's made of thin rubber, or something—painted and ribbed like a brand-new football," grinned Gay. "We put the ink and stuff in ourselves, of course. They sell the balls at a toyshop in Wayland—eighteenpence each. Anyway, we'll be off now. And thanks, Tommy!"

"Half a minute!" grinned Tom, glancing at Blake. "We're coming with you, old son. We're having some of those topping balls! I fancy we'll get some fun out of them if we can only persuade Ratty or Knox or Cutts to kick 'em—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom's chums roared, and nodded their agreement.

"Then we'll go," said Tom promptly. "Lead on, Gay, old man!"

And Gordon Gay chuckled, and led the way at a trot en route for Rylcombe Station. The incessant rows and japes



As Mr. Bagley charged into the carriage Gordon Gay jumped back, and tripping over several sprawling legs, sat down with a bump. He yelled angrily, and at the same moment other angry yells sounded as the mayor's gold-mounted broolly poked Tom Merry in the eye, while one of the mayor's feet came down heavily on Gordon Gay's toes, and the other caught Herries a fearful crack on the shin. (See page 6.)

between the St. Jim's juniors and their rivals of the Grammar School were many and oft; but there was only good-humoured fun beneath it all. And on more than one occasion they had combined to fight a common foe. And they had found a common foe to combine against now.

CHAPTER 2.

The Mayor's Escape!

"HIS noble nibs!"

"His giddy Worship himself!"

"His magnificence, the Mayor of Wayland!" added Gordon Gay solemnly.

The little crowd of St. Jim's juniors and Grammarians, on quite genial terms for once, stopped suddenly in Wayland High Street.

They had paid a successful visit to the little toyshop where the imitation footballs were sold, and, like Gordon Gay & Co., the chums of St. Jim's had provided themselves with a supply of the ingenious "spoofs." And Tom and his chums were more than pleased with them. They were excellent imitations, and the juniors looked forward to lots of fun with them.

And now they were hurrying back towards the station with their purchases folded in their pockets. If Gordon Gay was to give Mr. Tobias Bagley the benefit of one of the balls, it would be necessary to call at the Grammar School to get it loaded with red ink, etc., and there was none too much time to do that before the kick-off at 3.15.

So the young rascals were hurrying when they stopped suddenly on sighting the mayor himself in the High Street.

He was just emerging from the gorgeous doorway of a large grocer's shop, over which was a great, glaring sign which read: "Bagley's Universal Stores." And standing outside the shop was a glittering, crimson motor-car with

bright green stripes—as showy and shiny as the wealthy grocer himself.

Mr. Tobias Bagley looked a picture, from his shiny, patent-leather shoes and his glaring white spats, to his gorgeous fancy waistcoat, his gleaming silk hat, and the big, brilliant-hued flower in his buttonhole.

"Solomon in all his glory!" quoted Monty Lowther admiringly. "Doesn't he look in a wax, though?"

Evidently Mr. Tobias Bagley was in a wax. His flabby face was crimson with wrath, and he was storming at the chauffeur who was stooping under the bonnet of the car.

"Dolt! Blockhead! Incompetent imbecile!" fumed the irate Mayor of Wayland. "What is the matter with the confounded thing? 'Ow am I to get to Rylcombe by three-fifteen now, eh? Confound you—"

"It ain't my fault," said the man, showing a sulky, heated face for a moment. "It's them sparkin' plugs agen—"

"It's your incompetent tinkering, by George!" snarled the irate mayor. "Pshaw! I'll 'ave to catch the two-fifty; I can't wait no longer. If you get her going bring her along to the Grammar School for me, Jenkins. D'you hear?"

"Yessir!" grumbled Jenkins.

The mayor consulted a massive gold watch attached to an equally massive gold chain that hung like a glittering cable across his expansive waistcoat. Then he crammed the watch into his pocket, and dived inside the shop.

"He'll have to be sloppy if he's going to catch the two-fifty," grinned Lowther. "What a come-down for the great man to have to go by train!"

"We'll have to be sloppy, too," snapped Gay. "Come on!"

The juniors hurried on at top speed for the station. They reached it a couple of minutes later, to find the local train just in.

The juniors got their tickets, and, selecting an empty compartment, they tumbled inside.

"Let's see if the giddy mayor catches the train!" exclaimed Gordon Gay rather anxiously. "It would be a rotten shame if he missed it."

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

Gordon Gay closed the carriage door, and leaned out through the window. His anxiety in case the Mayor of Wayland missed his train was really pathetic.

He had not to wait long. Suddenly his brow cleared as there sounded a sudden commotion from the doorway of the booking-office, and a portly, red-faced old gentleman burst through and came charging along the platform just as the train began to move.

"Hip-hip!" exclaimed Gordon Gay disrespectfully. "Go it, old sport!"

Mr. Tobias Bagley "went it." He came rushing along the platform, and a porter who happened to be standing near the juniors' compartment became electrified into sudden activity at sight of such an important personage.

"Ere y'are, sir!" he yelled.

Jumping to the nearest compartment door—which happened to be the one which held the juniors—he grasped the handle and wrenched it open.

He bundled the perspiring and panting gentleman into the carriage and slammed the door upon him.

Though he had seen the mayor approaching, Gay had been scarcely expecting such a happening, and as Mr. Bagley charged in he jumped back, and, tripping over several sprawling legs, sat down with a bump.

He yelled angrily, and at the same moment other angry yells sounded as the mayor's gold-mounted brooch poked Tom Merry in the eye, while one of the mayor's feet came down heavily on Gordon Gay's toes, and the other caught Herries a fearful crack on the shin.

"Yarooogh!"

"Ow! My hat!"

"You careless, blundering dunny— Oh crumbs!"

Tom Merry's wrathful yell ended in a startled ejaculation as he recognised the mayor.

"Mum-my hat!" he stuttered. "It's the mayor!"

The rest of the juniors had also discovered that fact, and the wrathful exclamations ceased. Tom Merry doffed his cap and got up politely.

"Here's a seat, sir!" he exclaimed.

The mayor ignored Tom's offer. He scrambled to his feet, mopping a perspiring forehead, and then, after dusting himself down, he turned a glowering glare upon the juniors.

"You—you young ruffians!" he panted. "You careless young rascals!"

"Here, I say, sir—" Gordon Gay was remonstrating, when the mayor interrupted him with a snort.

"You impudent young villains!" he gasped angrily. "I believe you placed your confounded feet in the way deliberately—in order to cause me to fall!"

"Mum-my hat!"

"Don't dare to deny it!" thundered the mayor. "I recognise you, my fine fellows! It is not the first time you have insulted me, my lads, with your tricks. Huh! I will report this to your headmasters."

"Phew!"

The juniors looked at each other. As they had considered the mayor the aggressor, his charge rather took their breath away. Tom Merry eyed the angry man for a moment, and then he resumed his seat again. After that unjust charge he had no intention of giving his seat up.

But Mr. Tobias Bagley did not want Tom's seat. He turned a gleaming eye upon Lowther, who happened to be seated in the corner with his back to the engine.

"I want your seat, boy," he said pompously.

Lowther shook his head.

"Nothing doing, old top!" he said coolly.

"Wha-at?"

"Nothing doing, old haricot bean!" said Lowther. "You've been offered one seat, and refused it. You didn't even thank my chum for the offer of it, and you couldn't ask decently for this."

"You—you dare to speak to me like that, boy?"

"Why not?" inquired Lowther innocently. "I must say I'm rather surprised at you, Mr. Bagley," went on the irrepressible Lowther, shaking his head. "You claim on a card in your shop window that you insist upon politeness to your customers, don't you?"

"You—you young—"

"I want to know where it comes in?" asked the junior. "I'm a customer of yours; I bought a twopenny packet of fly-papers in your shop only two months ago. Is this what you call politeness?"

"You—you insolent young jackanapes!" spluttered the mayor.

"Thanks!" said Lowther, unmoved. "That's hardly polite, THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 870.

either, Mr. Bagley. That finishes it; I shall never spend another penny in any of your shops, Mr. Bagley."

Mr. Bagley glared at the grinning juniors, his features almost crimson. He clung to the luggage-rack in the rocking train, and pointed a threatening finger at Lowther.

"You shall suffer for this insolence, my boy. I might have expected it, however, from boys of St. James' School," he choked. "I am indeed thankful that I decided not to send my son, Cyril, to such a school. Bah!"

Tom Merry gave a soft chuckle.

"I may be mistaken, sir," he remarked, "but I thought it was Dr. Holmes who made that decision for you."

The mayor crimsoned, but he made no reply to that. He turned upon Lowther again.

"If you do not vacate that seat this instant, my lad, I shall be obliged to use force," he said huskily.

"Better not," said Lowther promptly. "I shall be obliged to resist, sir."

"You—you'll dare to resist?"

"Naturally, sir!"

"And we'll help him," added Tom Merry coolly. "He's only sticking to his rights, sir. If you'd asked decently you could have had any seat, Mr. Bagley."

Mr. Bagley spluttered incoherently for a moment as he glared at the smiling juniors. But he did not attempt to carry out his threat—fortunately, perhaps, for him. Instead, he stamped to the end of the compartment, and leaned his bulky back against the carriage door with a wrathful snort.

Then it happened—in the twinkling of an eye.

Even as the big man leaned against the carriage door Tom Merry glimpsed a movement of the door, and he gave a warning yell:

"Look out, sir—look out!"

Tom Merry's wild yell was echoed on the instant by a terrified yell from the mayor, as the door behind him flew open and he staggered backwards.

"Good heavens!"

Tom Merry fairly hurled himself forward, and his frantic clutch closed on the mayor's fur-lined overcoat.

At the same moment Gordon Gay grasped what had happened, and almost in the same instant his frantic clutch also closed on the mayor's coat.

The juniors felt themselves wrenched headlong forward by the falling man's weight, and for one terrible moment they thought all was lost as they glimpsed the earth racing past below them.

But even as the mayor lurched backwards, his outflung fingers gripped the edge of the doorway convulsively; but though that checked him somewhat, it could never have saved him.

The combined weight of the juniors, however, turned the scale, and their prompt action saved the situation.

The mayor's feet slid from under him, and he sprawled downwards with his knees on the edge of the carriage floor, and swayed there, clawing frantically for a hold.

"Hold on!" shrieked Tom. "Help—quick! Hold on!"

There followed a horrible moment of confused scrambling in the crowded carriage, with the fate of the mayor and the juniors in the balance, and then Lowther and Herries got the grip they were trying to get.

They held on desperately, as did Tom Merry and Gordon Gay, while the rest of the juniors did what little they could by grasping their chums, and holding on.

"Pull!" yelled Tom Merry.

Headless of crushed feet and hacked shins, the juniors pulled for their lives, and after another confused moment of exciting struggle, their combined weight told, and the mayor was dragged into the carriage and safety.

Tom Merry reached over and pulled the swinging door to, and fastened it—securely this time. And as he did so, there sounded a rumbling roar, and blackness descended upon them as the local train plunged into a tunnel.

Tom had acted in the nick of time. Their prompt and plucky action had prevented what must have been a tragedy.

In the carriage there was silence save for the gasping breath of the juniors, and the roar of the train.

Then, quite suddenly, the train emerged into the cold sunlight, and the jammed mass between the seats sorted itself out.

Still panting from their exertions, they helped the almost fainting mayor into the corner seat—Lowther being willing enough to let him have it now.

He sank back into it panting heavily, hatless, his clothes rumpled and dusty, his face as white as chalk, and his flabby cheeks shaking like a jelly.

"Jingo!" panted Tom Merry, also sinking back on the cushions. "That was a thundering close call!"

"Yes, rather!"

The breathless juniors looked at Mr. Tobias Bagley, who still lay back with closed eyes. But before anyone could speak again, the train slowed up at the little platform of Rylcombe Station.



After backing a few paces Cyril Bagley took a run at the ball and kicked desperately. His foot met the ball fair and square and there was an explosion, and a torrent of reddish fluid shot upwards, dyeing the immaculate youth from head to foot. (See page 8.)

"Rylecombe!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We—we'll help you out, sir."

The mayor nodded without speaking. Then he opened his eyes, and staggered to his feet as the train came to a halt.

Gordon Gay opened the carriage door and jumped out, and a moment later the juniors were piloting the trembling Mayor of Wayland across to the waiting-room.

Obviously the narrow escape had been a severe shock to the old gentleman, but after sitting there with closed eyes for some moments, he soon showed signs of recovery, and he opened his eyes at last and regarded the scared juniors.

"You—you've saved my life, lads!" he gasped.

"We were glad to have been quick enough," said Tom Merry. "Can we do anything, sir—call the stationmaster?"

The mayor shook his head.

"I'll be all right presently," he muttered, all the bounce and bombast gone from his tone now. "If you could get me a conveyance, though—a cab or something to take me home, lads, I'd be glad."

"Home?" ejaculated Gordon Gay. "Then—then—"

"I don't feel up to no kick-off after this!" groaned the mayor. "And I couldn't go along before that crowd in this state, lads. Somebody else'll 'ave to kick-off. Here—"

The mayor brightened up a trifle as if struck by a sudden idea.

"Here, my son will 'ave to deputise for me," he went on, as if pleased with the thought. "Cyril will be there, and it'll do him good. Yes, that's it! Tell 'em my son, Cyril, will kick-off in my place. I'm hoping to get him into the Grammar School, and it ought to make 'im popular. That's it! His future schoolfellows will get to know 'im then."

"Oh!"

The juniors eyed him blankly. Privately they felt it more than likely that if the lanky and supercilious son of the

wealthy grocer attempted to "kick-off," he would stand a good chance of being kicked off the ground altogether. Cyril Bagley wasn't at all popular in Rylecombe.

But they did not air their views to Bagley senior.

"Very good, sir!" said Tom Merry politely. "We'll—ahem!—we'll tell Delamere—he's captain of the Grammar School team."

"Tell Dr. Monk," said Mr. Bagley, with a slight return of his pompous manner. "Tell Dr. Monk himself from me. You'd better 'urry off now, lads."

At that moment the stationmaster hurried in, having been told by a porter of the important personage occupying his waiting-room, and the juniors left the mayor in his charge, and hurried out—though not before Mr. Tobias Bagley had insisted upon shaking hands all round with the juniors.

"I sha'n't forget this, boys," were his parting words, "and, of course, I don't intend to report you lads after what's happened. Boys will be boys, and, after all, I admit it was my fault."

"Doesn't seem such a bad sort, after all," was Tom Merry's comment, as they ran out of the station. "I'm jolly glad now that we can't play that trick on the old buffer. It was a bit thick."

"Well, yes, perhaps so," grinned Gordon Gay ruefully. "But it's not too thick to play on dear Cyril. We're going ahead with it, my pippins."

"Yes, rather!"

"It's the chance of a lifetime to get a bit of our own back out of the bullying boulder. Burr! Fancy that cad kicking-off at a Grammar School match! My hat! The chaps will be furious!"

"Until he kicks the imitation ball!" grinned Frank Monk. "Then they'll be joyful."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You still intend to work the wheeze, then?" said Tom Merry doubtfully.

"What ho!" chuckled Gordon Gay. "Don't we just! I'll admit I was a bit dubious about playing such a dodge on the giddy mayor; but as for the dear, lofty Cyril, I'm on like a shot! If his pater's a bouncer, he's a beastly cad as well, and he deserves that—and more. We're doing it."

"Hear, hear!"

"This is our affair, though," grinned Gordon Gay. "You St. Jim's kids can keep out of it if you funk it. Anyway, it's got to be done. Come on!"

And with that Gordon Gay led the way at a brisk trot towards the Grammar School—and after a moment's hesitation, Tom Merry & Co. grinned and followed. Like the cheery Grammarians, the St. Jim's juniors had more than one score to settle with Master Cyril Bagley, of Rylcombe Towers.

CHAPTER 3.

The Kick-off!

TOM MERRY & CO. accompanied Gordon Gay & Co. to the Grammar School, but there they parted for the time being—Gordon Gay & Co. to proceed to their study in order to "load" the imitation football, and Tom Merry & Co. to make their way on to the ground.

They found a big crowd already gathered there—fellows from St. Jim's and the Grammar School, in addition to a great number of villagers, and friends of the mayor from Wayland. The big match was for a charitable purpose, and it was receiving general support.

It had been arranged that Gordon Gay & Co.—as the instigators of the plot—should keep in the background as much as possible, and Tom Merry & Co. had taken upon themselves the task of passing on the mayor's message to Dr. Monk.

They accordingly looked about for the headmaster of the Grammar School when they reached the ground. But it was not until a few minutes before the time to kick-off that he turned up.

He strolled on the ground then in company with Mr. Adams, the Fourth Form master, and looked about him—apparently in search of the mayor.

Tom Merry & Co. approached them, and doffed their caps.

"Excuse me, sir," said Tom, "but we have a message for you from the mayor."

"We were just looking for him," exclaimed Dr. Monk, peering over his glasses at the juniors. "Why, is he unable to come, my boys?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

And he related what had happened—carefully refraining from mentioning their little disagreement with Mr. Tobias Bagley in the train.

Dr. Monk gave Mr. Adams a glance.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed in alarm. "What an exceedingly fortunate escape! No wonder he has not arrived. But—but you say that he wishes his son to deputise?"

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Monk frowned, and glanced again meaningly at Mr. Adams.

"How exceedingly awkward!" he murmured. "The youth is anything but— However," he broke off abruptly. "I do not see how we can possibly refuse Mr. Bagley's wish."

"It would scarcely do, sir," agreed Mr. Adams.

At that moment a tall, languid, and elegantly dressed youth came strolling past the group. He was smoking a cigarette as he whirled a gold-mounted walking-cane, and from the velvet hat on his glossy hair to his polished, patent-leather shoes, he looked what he was—a useless slacker, and a dandy.

"H'm! Ah!" exclaimed Dr. Monk. "Here is Master Bagley!"

He beckoned to the languid youth. Master Cyril Bagley nodded coolly, and strolled up carelessly to the two masters, giving the juniors a lofty glare as he did so.

He removed neither his hat nor his cigarette. Master Cyril had no intention of showing respect to Dr. Monk. Mr. Bagley, senior, had great hopes and a keen desire to get his son in as a pupil at the Grammar School; his hopeful son had neither. It was rumoured that he had been expelled from his former school, and, whether that was true or not, the slacker had no intention of going to another school—if he could help it. With nothing to do, and plenty of cash from his indulgent parent, Master Cyril Bagley was having the time of his life, and his one desire and ambition was to go on doing so.

"How d'you do, sir?" he remarked, a trifle insolently.

Dr. Monk frowned, and eyed him coldly.

"You have not seen your father during the last hour, I presume?" he inquired.

Cyril shook his head.

"Not a glimpse of the old top," he said coolly. "Looks as if the old bean isn't turning up—what?"

"Apparently he is not," retorted Dr. Monk icily. "He has

sent me a message, however. He wishes you to deputise for him, Bagley—to kick-off in his place."

Cyril chuckled, and his eyes gleamed.

"Oh, good!" he exclaimed eagerly, giving the juniors a triumphant glance. "I'll do that quickly enough!"

The juniors grinned back at him. But what else was said they did not hear. At that moment several local big-wigs—local tradesmen and town councillors—came up and joined the group. And the St. Jim's juniors withdrew.

"What a pig and a bouncer!" growled Tom Merry in disgust, as they strolled away. "Let's hope old Gay's giddy wheeze doesn't fall through. I'd give a pension not to miss it coming off."

"Yes, rather!"

The rest of the juniors had just echoed Tom's hope when they sighted Gordon Gay and his chums. Those cheery rascals came up in great haste, their faces wearing cheerful grins.

"Well?" queried Tom eagerly. "All serene?"

"Right as rain!" chuckled Gay. "We've filled the dud ball, and planted it in place of the giddy mayor's new ball. It was in the pav, and we managed it easy as winking."

"Oh, good!"

The St. Jim's juniors reported the result of their meeting with the Grammar School Head, and the news that Cyril Bagley had accepted the task of kicking-off filled the juniors with glee.

"Let's only hope nobody busts the giddy ball beforehand," Gay murmured anxiously. "It would muck up the whole show."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes."

But Gordon Gay's almost pathetic anxiety proved to be groundless. The juniors took their stand on the touchline, and as they did so the two teams streamed on to the field amid a roar of cheering from their respective supporters.

But they came on without the ball, and the juniors drew deep breaths of relief. The next moment the referee came on, carrying the ball by the loop. He planted it carefully on the centre spot amid a general expectant silence.

Then Cyril Bagley appeared in full view of the public.

He stalked superciliously on the field, and a gasp of amazement rippled round the ground. Then arose a roar:

"Here, what the thump—"

"Chuck him off!"

"Sling that tailor's dummy off the field!"

"The cheeky, swanky cad—"

There was a roar of wrathful voices, and Dr. Monk smiled grimly, and spoke to those around him.

"Silence, boys! Master Cyril Bagley is deputising for his father."

"Oh!"

The news ran round the ground like wildfire, and the wrathful roar was followed by an ominous silence. Master Cyril was undoubtedly unpopular in Rylcombe.

But the general amazement and wrath did not last long.

Without troubling to get rid of his cigarette, or his gloves and stick, the dandy prepared to kick-off. With the cigarette hanging loosely from his lips he took a run at the waiting ball.

But he did not kick it. He was no footballer, and, moreover, he was excited and elated at the thought of how he was scoring over his enemies.

He missed the ball by a foot, at least, and as his foot swept round he reeled and almost measured his length on the muddy ground.

A howl of derisive laughter rang across the ground. Cyril Bagley recovered himself and scowled about him like a demon. Then he prepared for another attempt at kicking-off.

"Oh, my hat!" choked Gordon Gay. "What a prize chump! He'll do it this time, though. Now for it!"

"If you have tears—of joy—prepare to shed them now," quoted Lowther.

After backing a few paces, the dandy took another run at the ball and kicked desperately. His foot met the ball fair and square this time, and there was an explosion, and a torrent of reddish fluid shot upwards, dyeing the immaculate youth from head to foot.

He stood there gasping, and streaming, and bewildered.

There was a tense silence—a silence of stupefaction, and then another explosion occurred—an explosion of hysterical laughter that swept like a hurricane round the packed ground.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole ground fairly rocked with delirious shrieks of laughter.

Tom Merry & Co. and Gordon Gay & Co. fell into each others' arms and fairly howled, the tears of joy streaming down their cheeks.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" wept Gordon Gay. "Look at him! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Out in the field Cyril Bagley still stood like a mottled statue, petrified with amazement and horror, but evidently there was something else beside red ink in that remarkable ball.

As Delamere and several other players started towards him to see what had happened, they started back again in

great haste, clutching their noses. Cyril Bagley also seemed suddenly to become aware of the reason, for he turned abruptly and fairly flew off the field as if attempting to flee from himself.

He emerged among the crowd at the spot where Dr. Monk and the rest of the officials were standing bewildered.

There was a rush to give the dandy plenty of room, and only Dr. Monk and Mr. Adams stood their ground.

"What—what—ejaculated Dr. Monk. "Why, the unfortunate boy appears to be covered with—with— Good heavens! What has happened?"

"It's only red ink, I fancy, sir," said Mr. Adams, who appeared to be choking. "I think this is a practical joke."

Evidently Cyril Bagley had grasped that fact, for his face was crimson with something more than ink, and he was almost dancing with helpless rage.

"My dear boy, what has happened?" stuttered Dr. Monk, his handkerchief to his nose. "You have—"

"Can't you see?" howled the dandy furiously. "It's a trick—a dirty trick! Those cads of yours have done it! They're up against me, and—"

He broke off, almost choking with rage and humiliation, and pointed an accusing finger at Gordon Gay & Co., who were only a few yards away, and who were still swaying about, helpless with laughter.

"Those cads did it—I know they did!" he yelled furiously. "They planted it on me, the howling cads! Can't you see—"

Dr. Monk turned his back on the fuming youth and stalked away off the ground with dignity, followed by Mr. Adams, who was laughing openly now. They vanished amid the crowd, and Cyril Bagley turned upon Gordon Gay & Co. almost choking with passion.

"You—you beasts!" he hissed, mopping his face and clothes with a delicately-scented handkerchief. "You beasts have done this! I—I'll pay you out—you see if I don't, you rotters! I'll never rest until I've squared with you for this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With a snort of fury the wealthy grocer's son turned and ran for it, followed by a howl of hilarious merriment.

"Oh, great pip!" choked Tom Merry, as he vanished from sight. "What a scream! The dear man won't want to show off again after this. Ha, ha, ha!"

"He won't want to come to the Grammar School now, anyway," said Gordon Gay, wiping his eyes. "Oh dear! This about puts us straight with the cad. He won't dare to show his face in Rylcombe again."

"Ha, ha! No!"

The juniors were just about recovering themselves when a well-known form appeared in view. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He had evidently been to St. Jim's for a wash and a change, for he was, as Lowther put it, "glorious in fine raiment" again.

He blinked through his monocle, rather surprised at the merriment around him.

"Pway whatevah is the mattah, deah boys?" he exclaimed. "Bai Jove!"

He suddenly caught sight of Gordon Gay & Co., and he eyed them frigidly.

"Bai Jove, Blake!" he said coldly. "I came heah expectin' to find you, but I nevah expected to find you in company with those awful wottahs! I utably wefuse to join the partay if they are to be pwesent."

"Go hon!" grinned Gordon Gay. "My dear old Gussy is—"

"Peace, my infants!" said Tom Merry pacifically. "It's all right, Gussy. It wasn't these kids' faults this afternoon."

He told Arthur Augustus the story of the dummy footballs, and the frown on the aristocratic features gradually relaxed until it broadened into a grin.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Gussy, with a chuckle. "And I have missed it all! How vewy annoyin', bai Jove! I would have given a gweat deal to see that wottah Bagley shown up! However, under the cires I can do nothin' less than forgive these wotten Gwammawians."

"Thanks, Gussy!" said Gordon Gay humbly. "We're grateful for that."

Wootton and Frank Monk nodded solemnly.

"Theah is one othah mattah, howevah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus suddenly. "I feah you fellows are in for it."

"Eh? How's that?" asked Tom Merry.

"When I was just leavin' St. Jim's," said Gussy, shaking his head, "the mayor's car was just drivin' through the gateway. He's gone in to see the Head, deah boys. That looks like twouble."

"Oh dear!"

The St. Jim's juniors looked at each other and groaned. "It does look like trouble," grunted Blake. "Anyway—Hallo, there's the whistle!"

While the juniors had been talking a new ball had been found, and dispensing with another kick-off, the game had

started. The juniors turned their attention promptly to the playing-field. But oft and anon, as they watched the swaying fortunes of the great game which followed, the St. Jim's juniors remembered Arthur Augustus' news, and they frowned thoughtfully. The visit of Mr. Tobias Bagley, to them, could only mean one thing—that he had reported them after all. And they felt gloomy forebodings that there was trouble looming ahead.

CHAPTER 4. Not Trouble!

THE Terrible Three and Blake & Co. arrived back at St. Jim's just as dusk was falling.

It had been an enjoyable afternoon in more ways than one. After enjoying every moment of a thrilling match which had ended in victory for the Grammar School, the St. Jim's juniors had accepted an invitation to tea with Gordon Gay & Co., and though it had been a bit of a crush, it had been a highly successful celebration. And they had taken their departure on the best possible terms with their friendly rivals.

And now they were returning—as they gloomily feared—to face the music.

True, they had been quite within their rights in opposing Mr. Tobias Bagley's overbearing demand for the corner seat in the train. But they felt that Dr. Holmes was scarcely likely to look at the matter in that light. Dr. Holmes insisted upon his pupils showing the utmost politeness and respect to townspeople, and the Mayor of Wayland was a very important townsman. And Lowther, certainly, had been scarcely respectful.

"Bound to be trouble!" said Tom Merry.

"Pity we didn't let the old buffer fall out," grinned Lowther ruefully. "It would have bumped some of the bounce out of him. Anyway, the orders of the day will be for us to proceed to the Head's study. You'll see."

And Monty was right there at all events. As the juniors entered the School House they were met by Kildare, who had evidently been looking for them.

"Head wants you kids," he said briefly. "Better shove off there now."

The juniors lost no time in repairing to the Headmaster's study, and there they got a surprise. Dr. Holmes fairly beamed over his spectacles at them.

"I understand that you boys were instrumental in saving the Mayor of Wayland from what must have been a serious accident this afternoon?" he queried, smiling round at them.

"Y-yes, sir!" gasped Tom.

"I am exceedingly pleased to hear it," beamed Dr. Holmes. "You have undoubtedly saved Mr. Bagley from what must have resulted in grave injury, if not death. It is very gratifying to me that boys of mine should have distinguished themselves by such pluck and promptness."

"Oh, sir!"

The juniors were astonished. It was not trouble, after all, then!

It wasn't.

"I also understand," resumed the Head, smiling again, "that certain boys from the Rylcombe Grammar School took a prominent part in the rescue?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Very good! I have had a visit from Mr. Bagley, who is naturally deeply grateful to you all for his providential escape. He wishes to show his—h'm!—his gratitude"—here the Head's voice was a trifle sarcastic—"in a practical manner, and one which will include the boys from the Grammar School."

"He proposes," resumed the Head, after a pause—"to offer a silver cup to be played for by teams chosen from the juniors of both schools."

"Mum-my hat!"

Tom Merry did not make that ejaculation aloud—fortunately.

"The cup, I may add," went on Dr. Holmes, "will cost thirty guineas, and therefore is well worth winning. As you doubtless know, Mr. Bagley is opening a branch establishment in Rylcombe High Street on Saturday, and the cup will be on view there, in the shop window, until it is presented by the mayor to the winning team after the match."

The Head paused again, and coughed.

"For good reasons of his own, doubtless, the mayor insists that the match be played on Wednesday next. Have you any important fixture for that date, Merry?"

"As it happens, sir," replied Tom Merry, whose eyes were gleaming now, "we were booked to play the Gram-marians on that day."

"That is fortunate. That is all, boys. You had better arrange with the Grammar School boys as to whose ground the match is to be played on. And I may add that Mr. Bagley's idea, in some respects, appeals to me. I am

hoping that it will increase still more the good feeling and sportsmanship that already exists between this school, the Grammar School, and the townspeople."

The Head nodded smilingly, and the juniors withdrew, their eyes shining with excitement.

Out in the passage they looked at each other expressively.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Tom Merry. "Who would have expected that? That old codger must be a bit of a sport, after all. It—it's ripping!"

"Topping!"

"Head seemed just a bit—well, dubious about it, though," grinned Blake. "Did you notice he was a bit sarcastic when he mentioned the mayor's gratitude?"

"Well, yes; but—"

"That's pretty plain," said Manners with a chuckle. "He suspects it isn't all gratitude on the giddy mayor's part. The old buffer's opening a branch shop in Rylcombe, isn't he? Well, I bet he's hoping to get our custom—and perhaps the Grammar School's. Not only that, it will be a jolly good advertisement for him, especially as the cup's on show in his new shop window. See?"

"And he's hoping to get his precious son in at the Grammar School," finished Herries.

"Crumbs! That's it!" breathed Blake.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, what does it matter to us?" he exclaimed eagerly. "The cup's jolly well worth winning, and, what's more, we're going to win it, you chaps."

"Yes, rather!"

"It'll be splendid if we do, and a tremendous score over the Grammar School!" went on Tom, his eyes glistening. "By Jove! I don't care a hang what the mayor's reasons for giving it are, but we're going all out to win it. We'll tell the chaps the news now, then I'll start to get the team out."

"Good egg!"

But when the juniors reached the Common-room they found that the great news had preceded them. The room was in a buzz of excitement, and Tom Merry was instantly surrounded by a crowd as he entered.

"It's quite true about the giddy Mayor of Wayland giving a cup, I suppose?" asked Levison, eyeing Tom Merry eagerly.

"Quite true," assented Tom, smiling.

"What's the team?" demanded a score of voices.

Tom chuckled. He saw that half the Fourth and Shell hoped for the chance to see their names inscribed on that thirty-guinea cup.

"Give me a chance," he laughed. "I'll get the team out soon enough."

"That's not good enough, Merry!" said Grundy loftily. Like the rest, George Alfred entertained a blissful hope that his name would also look well inscribed on the cup. "If you were any good as a skipper, you'd be able to put your finger on the men you want instantly."

"I could put my finger on one man I don't want instantly, anyway, Grundy!" grinned Tom. "And he happens to be the biggest duffer at footer in England. That's you, old chap."

"You burbling ass—"

"So buzz off, and don't worry people when they're discussing serious matters! You couldn't hit the side of a house with a ball, Grundy."

Grundy clenched his huge fists.

"Now look here, Merry," he snapped wrathfully, "I'm about fed-up with this! I'm sick and tired of waiting for you to give me my chance. I'm not standing it. It's the same with cricket and rowing as with footer! Worry you—bah! I'm thundering well going to worry you until I do get my chance—that's flat!"

"Oh, dry up, Grundy! You can't play footer, and you never will!"

"You must admit that, old chap," said Lowther, shaking his head and winking at Tom. "You can't even kick a ball. I bet you couldn't hit that cupboard door from here, now!"

"You silly idiot, of course I could!"

"I bet you couldn't!"

"I could!" snorted Grundy. "You—"

"I bet you couldn't," said Lowther, eyeing the cupboard critically.

"I could, you silly owl!" hooted Grundy.

"Well, you can jolly soon prove it," said Lowther doggedly. "Look here, Tommy; Grundy's grousing about never getting his chance; let him have one now. I'll fetch a ball, and if Grundy can hit the cupboard door with that ball from here, I vote he has his chance in the match on Wednesday."

Tom Merry grinned. He had not failed to see his chum's sly wink—and he was fed-up with Grundy. He knew that unless Grundy's ardour was damped he wouldn't get a moment's peace before the match.

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"I'm on!" he said.

"Right!" said Lowther. "I'll fetch the ball."

He left the room promptly. Grundy could scarcely believe his ears. His heart leaped at the thought of his good fortune. He had got his chance at last—a child of six could scarcely have missed hitting the cupboard from such a distance. He fairly beamed.

The rest of the company simply stared dumbfounded at Tom Merry.

"You—you don't mean it!" gasped Clive. "He's bound to hit it, and—that hopeless duffer—"

"Wait and see!" chuckled Tom.

They waited, and at the end of three minutes Lowther returned with a brand-new football in his hand—or what looked like a brand-new football. He placed it gently on the floor half a dozen yards from the cupboard.

"There you are, Grundy!" he said. "Go in and win!"

Half the juniors were grinning—they knew Lowther. The rest were looking mystified and alarmed. Grundy was doing neither.

He wasted no time. Taking a couple of steps forward, he set his eyes grimly on the cupboard door, then he let fly at the ball.

It was a mighty kick, and the ball would have split the panels of the door—had it hit it.

But it didn't. It simply exploded as the other two imitation balls had done, and the contents shot up and swept over the luckless Grundy like a sudden shower bath.

Fortunately for Grundy, the contents were only water this time. But for all that Grundy was angry—fearfully angry.

For two seconds he stood, dripping with water, as if rooted to the floor, and then, as a howl of laughter rang through the Common-room, he gave a strangled howl and went for Monty Lowther like a whirlwind.

Lowther turned and bolted for his life, and after him went Grundy, and their thudding feet died away along the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardew looked closely at Tom Merry when he had recovered himself.

"So you are one of the merchants who played that neat little dodge on the giddy mayor's son and heir this afternoon, Thomas?" he said blandly. "Good man!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry made no reply to the question. He chuckled, and went up to Study No. 10 to start work on the list for the team. And he chuckled still more ten minutes later when Lowther entered the study. The joker's nose was red and swollen, and one of his eyes was shady and closed. He looked very sorry for himself indeed.

Evidently George Alfred had caught Monty Lowther, and it was equally evident that the practical joker himself had not enjoyed the joke quite so much as the onlookers had done.

CHAPTER 5.

A Mystery!

"THERE'S something queer about this, you fellows," said Tom Merry.

It was three days later, and the day before the great match for the mayor's silver cup. Tom Merry was in Study No. 10, with Manners and Lowther, and he held a note in his hand.

Since the mayor's offer of the thirty-guinea cup on the Saturday, little else had been talked about in the Lower School at St. Jim's. The motives of Mr. Tobias Bagley in making such a magnificent gift scarcely troubled the juniors, and the Lower School were looking forward with keen delight to the match. There had been a constant pilgrimage of fellows to the mayor's new branch shop in Rylcombe, and practically every fellow in the school had seen the cup.

And it had proved to be worth seeing. It was, everyone admitted, a magnificent silver cup, and well worth fighting for.

It had been a busy time for Tom Merry. But he had chosen the team at last, and he had also had a confab with Gordon Gay, and settled all details that needed settling. They had tossed to decide the ground, and, having won the toss, Gordon Gay had naturally chosen the Grammar School ground to be the scene of the conflict. Despite their general dislike of the mayor and his mischief-making son, the Graminarians were as delighted about the cup as were the St. Jim's juniors.

Tom Merry had paid his visit to Gordon Gay only at noon that afternoon, and this was why he was rather puzzled as he looked at the note in his hand.

"There's something queer about this," he repeated, frowning thoughtfully. "It's from Gordon Gay, and yet I only saw him at noon. What's up, I wonder?"

He handed the note to Lowther and Manners to look at. The note was brief, and read as follows:



Frank Monk gave a warning cry, but it came too late to prevent the catastrophe. Even as he went sprawling on hands and knees the door crashed shut behind him. It was Cyril Bagley who shut it, and as he did so his two chums jumped to his aid, putting their weight against the door while Cyril swung the iron bar into place. The Grammarians had been made prisoners! (See page 13.)

"Dear Merry,—Will you come to meet me under the trees by the stile leading through the woods at about six o'clock this evening. Come alone, as I want to tell you something—something private concerning the match to-morrow. Don't fail to come!"

The note was signed "Gordon Gay."

"Think it's spoof?" asked Lowther suspiciously.

Tom shook his head.

"It's Gay's fist all serene—must be," he said thoughtfully. "But—but what can the dummy want to see me about—alone, too?"

"Looks like a jape," said Manners sagely. "Don't go—alone, anyway."

Tom shook his head.

"Gay wouldn't play a trick of that kind," he said promptly. "It's genuine enough! I'd better go. I'll do it easily before lock-up!"

And, having come to that decision, Tom started out, though much against his chums' advice, and in a very uneasy frame of mind himself.

For his own part, he suspected nothing wrong about the message itself. But what Gordon Gay could want to divulge in regard to the match was a mystery to him. And the fact that it was something obviously secret, to be kept even from his own chums, made him a trifle uneasy.

Ten minutes' brisk walking brought him to the stile in Rylcombe Lane, and he leaped over it, and hurried towards the dim woods.

In the shadow of the trees he halted. There wasn't a soul

in sight, and, leaning against the trunk of a tree, he waited. From where he stood he could see part of the Rylcombe Lane. If Gordon Gay came along he would see him. Behind him stretched the dark recesses of Rylcombe Woods. All was still, save for a gentle breeze stirring the trees in the late autumn evening, and the soft rustle of falling leaves.

For five minutes Tom waited in growing uneasiness, and then, quite suddenly, something happened.

From somewhere behind him sounded a louder rustle, and then a sudden crashing, and three dim forms leaped upon the startled junior with the suddenness of a thunderbolt.

Taken utterly by surprise, Tom Merry went headlong, and before he could think of defending himself he was sprawling on his face with knees and hands pinning him down to the carpet of dead leaves.

"Here, what the thump—"

A hand, clapped abruptly over the junior's open mouth, checked his yell of alarm.

There followed a quiet chuckle in the shadows, and as he heard it, Tom started to struggle furiously. He realised then that it was a jape, after all.

But his unknown attackers numbered three, at least, and his furious struggles availed him little. He desisted at last, realising the futility of resistance, and he lay still, with his face jammed amid the undergrowth, in a state of fury and bewilderment.

Save for that chuckle his attackers had made no sound, nor did he get a chance to see their faces. His bewilderment increased as he felt a hand running through his pockets.

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Highway robbery! Was it possible? Then it couldn't be the work of Gordon Gay & Co. In any case, Tom had already decided it was not them. The cheery Grammarians would scarcely have made such a raid in silence; their raids and their japes were carried through openly, and there was no reason why they should act so stealthily.

Scarcely had Tom reached that decision when he felt himself suddenly released, and his unknown captors left him as suddenly as they had pounced upon him.

Their thudding footsteps died away in the quiet evening, and silence reigned.

Tom sat up, gasping.

Then he leaped to his feet with the intention of following, but, realising the futility of pursuit even as he did so, he halted, and began to go through his pockets instead.

His watch and purse were intact, as were his wallet, and his silver pencil-case and fountain-pen. Nothing appeared to have been stolen—or nothing of value, at all events. As far as he could remember, the contents of his pockets were intact.

"Well, my hat!"

In a state of increased mystification, Tom Merry walked slowly to the stile, and dropped over into Rylcombe Lane.

A fat, well-known form was just passing from the direction of the village, and Tom stopped.

It was Baggy Trimble of the Fourth at St. Jim's, and Baggy was grousing and mumbling about something.

"Seen any fellows on the road—Grammarians?" demanded Tom Merry.

Baggy grunted.

"Yes, the beasts!" he snorted. "Three of 'em! They knocked my cap off, the beasts!"

"Who were they, Baggy?" gasped Tom eagerly.

"That rotter Gordon Gay, and two of his pals," answered Baggy grumblingly. "I say, Tom Merry, you ought to stop those rotters. They're always playing rotten tricks on me!"

Tom Merry said nothing, but his eyes were gleaming as he accompanied Baggy Trimble back to St. Jim's. So it was Gordon Gay & Co., after all! They had met Baggy after leaving him, and had knocked his cap off as they passed him.

Certainly there was nothing unusual in that! The cheerful jokers from the Grammar School were wont to do little things like that out of the exuberance of sheer high spirits.

But the very fact of their being so close at hand at that time was proof enough for Tom.

But why had they played such a senseless, stupid trick? Why had they tricked him into coming there, just to let them run their hands through his pockets and take nothing?

It was a baffling problem, and Tom Merry returned to Study No. 10 completely mystified.

Lowther and Manners eyed him expectantly as he came in and dropped into the easy-chair.

"Well," queried Manners, "what's the trouble?"

"Seen Gay?" asked Lowther curiously. "You look as if you'd been in a bit of a scrap, old man."

Tom Merry straightened his collar and tie and grunted, a frown shadowing his usually cheery face.

"I have," he said quietly. "I've had a rummy experience, you fellows. It was spoof, after all."

And he told them what had happened under the trees.

His chums whistled, but they forebore to say, "I told you so." They eyed him blankly.

"What a jolly rummy thing!" ejaculated Lowther. "It isn't like those merchants to play a silly ass game like that. And they took nothing?"

"Nothing as far as I can see," said Tom.

"You—you're sure of that?" gasped Manners.

Tom Merry turned out his pockets, and examined the contents again.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "That's funny. I didn't notice before. My handkerchief's missing. I'm sure I had one when I went out. My pocket-knife seems to be missing, too."

"Oh!"

"It may have dropped in the grass when I went down, of course," said Tom. "Or I may have had my knife in the study this afternoon," he added, looking about him. "Anyway, I can't see why they should take them just for a lark. It's the queerest affair out."

"Phew!"

Monty Lowther and Manners agreed with him there. It was queer undoubtedly.

"I'll go and search the spot to-morrow, anyway," said Tom, at last grimly. "I expect they'll be there all serene. Must have fallen from my pockets. It's absurd to think those silly idiots have stolen them! The knife was worth nothing, too. We'll get a chance to see that idiot Gordon Gay to-morrow, anyway."

And as it was close on calling-over, the juniors dropped the subject and went out. After calling-over they met Blake & Co., and told them the story. But, like the Terrible Three, they were just as amazed and mystified, and could offer no feasible suggestion to account for the queer affair. It was a puzzling mystery, and for that day, at least, it had to remain a mystery.

CHAPTER 6.

Gordon Gay & Co's Turn!

"THE great day hath arrived!" quoth Gordon Gay. "The day of days!" grinned Frank Monk. "I'm feeling like doing big things this afternoon, old nuts! We're out to bag that stunning cup, you fellows!"

"We is!"

"We are!"

All the members of the select circle, known as Gordon Gay & Co., were agreed and determined upon that.

It was just after dinner the next day—Wednesday, and the day of the great match. And the faces of Gordon Gay and his chums—Frank Monk and the brothers Wootton—were merry and bright. All four looked as fit as fiddles, and quite capable of doing "big things." Gordon Gay, who was seated swinging his legs on top of the study table, jumped down suddenly.

"We've got plenty of time before the match," he said. "Kick-off's at three-fifteen, and it's only two now. What shall we do with our giddy selves?"

"A gentle walk, I suggest, my infants," went on the leader of the Grammarians, "will put us in trim for the fray. I suggest that we stroll into the village and have another look at the giddy cup. The giddy sight of it will arouse our flagging energies, and make us gird up our loins for the battle. Come on!"

"Good egg!"

Gordon Gay & Co. had already seen the cup more than once, but they were itching to feast their eyes upon it once again. Like the St. Jim's footballers, they felt that their names would look very nice inscribed thereon.

The juniors got their caps, and were just leaving the study when a Third Form fag entered and handed Gordon Gay an envelope.

"Chap handed it to the porter at the gates," he said briefly. And he quitted the study, leaving Gordon Gay to open the letter.

"From Tom Merry, perhaps," said Gordon Gay, unfolding the sheet of paper the envelope contained.

"Doesn't look much like his fist," said Jack Wootton.

"My hat! It is, though!" said Gordon Gay, in wonder. "What the thump—Jove! Listen to this, you chaps!"

He read out the note aloud.

"Dear Gay," he read. "Will you and Monk and the Woottons meet me at the old woodman's hut in Rylcombe Woods—the one on the Wayland Moor side—at about two o'clock this afternoon. Be sure to come without fail, as I've something to tell you about the cup—something you ought to know before the match. Keep mum about this."

That was all, and the letter was signed "Tom Merry."

"Sounds like a jape," remarked Frank Monk, shaking his head. "Let 'em rip, old chap."

"I don't know about that," said Gordon Gay thoughtfully. "Tom Merry may have found out something queer about the conditions of the cup."

"H'm! But why does he want us to meet him at such a lonely spot?" grunted Monk.

"Blest if I know! It's on the way to St. Jim's—about halfway. I should think. He's got his reasons, perhaps."

"It's rummy, though!" said Harry Wootton. "Better go for all that, I think. No good taking risks of anything being wrong about the cup."

"Just my view," said Gordon Gay, nodding. "Anyway, we're four, and we can look after ourselves, I suppose. In any case, it isn't like Tom Merry to get up to tricks so soon before a match."

"That's so."

"We'll go!" said Gordon Gay promptly. "We'll have a squint at the cup first, though. Plenty of time."

The other juniors made no demur. Their curiosity to know what Tom Merry had to say overcame their caution, and they followed their leader as he left the study.

Making their way into Rylcombe village, they were soon standing in front of Mr. Tobias Bagley's new branch shop

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window. A crowd of staring urchins and loungers were before the shop, which was gleaming with fresh varnish and gold paint.

But they were not looking at the shop itself, or at the neat array of groceries in the window, but at the shining silver cup that stood in the centre of the window. Beneath it was a printed card, stating what the cup was for.

The Grammarians feasted their eyes upon it.

"A ripping cup, and no mistake!" said Monk.

"Well worth fighting for," agreed Gordon Gay. "Hallo!"

Gordon Gay grinned as three elegantly dressed youths emerged from the shop on to the pavement. The first dandy halted and scowled at the Grammarians.

"His nibs!" murmured Gordon Gay, with a chuckle. "And his giddy toadies! Hallo, he's going to speak to us!"

It was Cyril Bagley, and the two with him were also sons of local tradesmen and cronies of his. A youth with money to burn, like Cyril Bagley, was not likely to be without pals even in Rylcombe.

He seemed about to speak to the juniors, and then he turned haughtily and strode away.

"Dear old Cyril!" chuckled Gordon Gay. "How dare we look inside his pater's shop! I thought he was going to kick up a shindy."

"Hardly likely to do that here," said Monk.

"I don't know. He'd just delight in making us look small before the crowd, if he could," said Gordon Gay. "Anyway, he looked rather queerly at us, I thought. We'd better watch the rotter. He's a vengeful brute, you know. He'll not forgive that showing up the other afternoon in a hurry."

"Blow him!" grunted Frank Monk. "What about getting along to see Merry? Better not dawdle."

"My hat, no!"

And Gordon Gay & Co. stared off along the High Street, dismissing Cyril Bagley from their minds. They would not have done that so lightly, however, had they heard what took place between Cyril Bagley and his chums as they hurried away a few moments before.

They had scarcely gone a dozen yards when one of his chums turned to him.

Gordon Gay they looked about them warily. Gordon Gay looked cautiously into the shed.

"All serene!" he announced. "Nobody here, anyway. This beats the band, you fellows."

He stepped into the hut, and walked across to the inner room, which was without a door. Harry Wootton and his brother, followed, but Frank Monk, the more cautious member of the Co., stopped in the doorway.

His caution availed him little, however. There sounded a sudden, stealthy step behind him, and before he could even turn his head a hand thumped into his back and sent him headlong into the shed.

He yelled warningly, but his yell came too late to prevent the catastrophe. Even as he went sprawling, on hands and knees, the door crashed to behind him.

It was Cyril Bagley who crashed it to, and as he did so his two chums—lively enough now—jumped to his aid, and put their weight against it as Cyril swung the iron bar into place and jammed a peg of wood into the hole that had once held the padlock. This done, he jammed another wedge of wood beneath the door and kicked it tight with his foot.

"That's good enough," he grinned, as a series of thunderous blows sounded on the door from inside. "Go on—kick away, you cads! Keep away from the cracks in the door, you chappies."

Cyril Bagley spoke in a low whisper, and as his chums backed away he took a pocket-knife from his pocket and opened the blade. He dropped it on the ground where it could easily be seen. Then from his pocket he took something else—a handkerchief. He dropped this close to the knife, and heedless of the yells of fury from within the shed, the three plotters then took their departure.

"Done it, by gad!" chuckled the grocer's son gleefully. "It worked like a charm. Oh, the fools! That will about settle their hash. I'll teach the cads to make a public fool of me!"

"How are we to let 'em out?" asked one of his pals suddenly.

"They can stay there for ever for all I care!" snarled Cyril, his eyes glittering spitefully. "I'm not letting them out,

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"Looks as if the cads haven't swallowed the bait," he said in disgust.

"Hang them!" hissed Cyril Bagley, his eyes glittering. "There's a chance still, though. Plenty of time for them to go there yet."

"May be all for nothing if we go," grumbled the other. "They must have tumbled to it that the letter was a spoof."

"Not much use going, I think," said the third languid youth. "Chuck the idea up, Cyril."

"Will I thump!" said Cyril, setting his teeth. "We're chancing it, I tell you. And if they don't turn up I'll jolly soon find some other plan to get my own back out of the cads. Come on!"

He hastened his steps, and his cronies did likewise, though obviously unwilling. They left the village in a few moments, and started off along the Rylcombe Lane.

They stopped at length where the woods lined the lane, and plunged into the brown woods. For five minutes they tramped on through the rank undergrowth, and then, striking a pathway strewn with dead leaves, they trod this until they came out at last in a large clearing.

In front of them was an old woodman's hut—a fairly large, two-room structure, untenanted and gloomy.

The door swung half open, and, after examining the little, tiny-paned window at the rear, Cyril looked inside the shed. Then he came out grinning.

"All serene, chappies," he muttered. "They can't get out of that in a hurry. Hide now, and leave the rest of the business to me."

The three retired into the shelter of a high mass of brown thickets to watch and wait.

They had not to wait very long. To their relief and joy, footsteps sounded suddenly, and cheery, boyish voices.

The next moment four juniors wearing Grammar School caps emerged from the pathway on to the clearing.

It was Gordon Gay & Co. Watched by three pairs of gleeful eyes, they stepped towards the silent shed and glanced about them rather suspiciously.

"Nobody here," said Gordon Gay, frowning. "I hardly like the look of this, you fellows."

The others plainly didn't, either, and as they followed

anyway. Anyway, that's one job done. I fancy our little plot will cause ructions between them and their confounded pals at St. Jim's, what? We've not finished yet, though."

"You're still going through with the other job?" asked the second dandy with a scared look at Cyril.

"Of course," was the sneering reply. "I'll thundering well see if the dashed pater's going to give thirty guinea cups to those beastly cads! The old fool won't listen to me; he's mad on his idea, and he's mad on getting me into the dashed Grammar School. I'm not thundering well going! You'll see!"

And with that Master Cyril Bagley led his chums leisurely out of the woods. It was pretty plain that Bagley junior did not at all approve of his father's generous gift of a thirty guinea cup to the schoolboy footballers.

CHAPTER 7.

The Great Match—And Afterwards!

"YOU fellows ready?"

Tom Merry asked that brisk query as he looked into Study No. 6 on the Fourth passage. Behind Tom was Monty Lowther and Manners. Like Tom, Lowther carried his bag in his hand, and all three were dressed for out-of-doors. Manners had no footer bag, however. He was not playing in the match—greatly to that junior's sorrow and regret.

Three other bags stood on the table in the study, and Blake & Co. were putting their coats on. Like Manners, Digby was looking a trifle glum—he had also not been chosen to play. But the rest had, and their faces were bright and cheery.

"Won't be a sec," said Blake, looking up. "Wait for us, will you?"

"Can't!" said Tom briefly. "I've got to look the other chaps up. Make for the gates and wait there. It's less than an hour to kick-off."

"And don't forget your eyeglass, Gussy," advised Lowther. "We'll never win without our giddy mascot. It strikes terror into the hearts of our enemies."

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"Weally, Lowthah—"

Laughing, the Terrible Three withdrew and began a round of the studies. The team Tom had finally settled upon was an admittedly strong one—Lowther, Talbot, Noble, and himself out of the Shell, Figgins, Levison, Redfern, Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy from the Fourth, with Fatty Wynn in goal.

In a very few minutes Tom had his team collected at the gates, and then they started out on the tramp to Rylcombe Grammar School.

They were not alone by any means. Practically every junior in the school intended to see the match, and the lane was swarming with fellows, all heading for the ground. It was likely to prove a hotly contested game, and few intended to miss it.

And when the St. Jim's fellows arrived at their destination they found that the fellows from the Grammar School were equally as enthusiastic. The ground was packed, not only with juniors, but a goodly number of seniors were there in addition to many villagers.

The Mayor of Wayland was there, in all his glory, with a few friends, and Dr. Monk was there with Mr. Adams, and Mr. Ralston.

"My hat, I feel quite nervous!" grinned Tom Merry, as they were piloted to their dressing-room. "Did any of you chaps see anything of Gay and his pals, by the way?"

There was a general shaking of heads, and hardly had the juniors started changing when all were reminded of Tom's question.

Delamere, the captain of the Grammar School, looked in, and glanced round the dressing-room, his face puzzled.

"Any of our chaps here?" he asked. "No! Well, I'm hanged! You fellows seen anything of Gay, Monk, and the Wootton brothers?"

"Not this afternoon," said Tom. "Why—"

"The young idiots are missing!" snapped Delamere.

"Well, we can't hold the match up. If they don't turn up soon, we'll have to start without them."

And Delamere shrugged his shoulders, and vanished.

"That's rummy!" exclaimed Tom.

"They've three minutes yet," said Blake. "Trust them not to give us the cup by not turning up."

"Yes, rather!"

The St. Jim's footballers were soon changed, and, greeted by a rousing cheer from their supporters, they ran out on to the field, and began to punt the ball about.

"The giddy enemy are cutting it fine," remarked Tom Merry after a while. "It's on the dot of time now, and—Hullo! Here they come!"

The Grammar School team came running out on to the playing field, and a far from cheery crowd they looked. They were led by Carboy of the Fourth, and Tom Merry gasped aloud as he scanned their numbers in vain for Gordon Gay and his chums.

"Mum-my hat!" he ejaculated. "Where's Gay and the others? Great pip!"

"They've not turned up, then!" grinned Lowther. "They've evidently decided to make us a free present of the cup. Now, isn't that just generous of 'em?"

Tom Merry frowned, and ran across to Carboy.

"What's happened, Carboy?" he asked. "Where's Gay and the others?"

Carboy grunted.

"That's just what we'd give a good deal to know, Merry," he said grimly. "They're missing—went out at about two, and haven't been seen since."

"Phew!"

"That's rotten!" said Tom. "Look here, this won't do, Carboy. They're your best men. We want a fight, not a walk-over! We're willing to postpone the kick-off for a time, if you like."

Carboy shook his head.

"Got to start on schedule time," he said. "This is not an ordinary match—can't keep the spectators waiting. The thumping officials won't hear of it. Anyway, you needn't think it's going to be a walk-over, you bouncer. We'll give you a run for your money."

And with that Carboy rejoined his men.

Next moment the whistle shrilled, and the game began. Very soon Tom Merry and his men made the rather surprising discovery that they were not going to have it all their own way by any means.

The game had started in an atmosphere of deep gloom and amazement for the Grammar School supporters. If Tom Merry & Co. were amazed at the non-appearance of Gordon Gay & Co., they were astounded and filled with consternation.

But before the game was three minutes old, their spirits and enthusiasm revived with astonishing celerity.

Carboy and his men were obviously resolved to play the game of their lives. At the kick-off the Grammar School

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forwards got the ball, and they took it down the field with a pretty concerted movement and a fierce determination that beat the visiting backs by its sheer fury and unexpectedness.

Despite the Saints' efforts, they retained their control of the ball, and, sweeping towards the visiting team's citadel, they fairly bombarded it with shots from every angle.

For two solid minutes Fatty Wynn had the time of his life, and then Carboy got the ball and sent in a shot that must have beaten even the amazing St. Jim's custodian—had it been as sure as it was swift and unexpected.

But it struck the cross-bar, and glanced off, and a loud groan of disappointment swept round the ground from the Grammarians.

"Only a flash in the pan!" panted Blake, as they ran back up the field. "We'll have 'em presently."

"Don't be too sure," warned Tom Merry, his face grim. "We mustn't treat 'em too lightly, you chaps. Pull your socks up, for goodness' sake. The beggars mean business."

After that the Saints took no chances. They took Tom's warning to heart, and they took their rivals more seriously. In his own mind Tom Merry felt confident that the Grammarians, without their best men, hadn't the ghost of a chance. He knew they were going "all out" now to hold the fort until Gordon Gay & Co. arrived.

But he was too good a skipper to take chances. Football was an uncertain game at best, and he did not allow his men to take things easily.

Another ten minutes of sultry play followed, and in that time the sheer fury of the Grammarians' attacks brought them dangerously near to scoring, on two occasions at least.

But Tom kept his men well in hand, and their steady play began to wear down their bustling opponents. And then Tom Merry sent in a low, daisy-cutter that beat the Grammarian goalie to the wide.

It hurtled into the net like a shot from a gun, and as it climbed the rigging, a roar went up.

"Goal!"

"Good shot, Tommy!"

"Hurrah!"

It was the first goal of the match, but not the last.

"Good man, Tommy!" said Levison, as they trotted up the field together. "I rather fancy that will about put the damper on 'em. They can't keep their game up much longer."

"We've got 'em!" said Jack Blake.

And Blake and Levison proved to be both right.

The Grammarians had known they stood little chance of winning. They had resolved to put up a terrific fight for all that. And up to that goal they had done so—had played a plucky and forceful game at high tension.

But their courage seemed to fail them somewhat after that goal. Certainly they made heroic efforts to equalise, and once they narrowly escaped doing so from a corner kick. But Fatty Wynn was ready, and kept his goal intact by an almost superhuman save that brought a roar of praise from friend and foe alike.

That was the last time they ever looked like scoring, however. And after that Fatty Wynn had little to do save keeping a watchful eye on the struggle at the far end of the field, and dream of the jam-tarts and other good things that would be forthcoming after the match.

The centre of excitement shifted to the Grammar School half of the ground, and for the rest of the game it rarely left there.

Carboy, who had taken Gay's place as skipper, was playing a magnificent game, but even he had met more than his match in Tom Merry. And the four weak spots in his team soon told their tale.

Twice within the next five minutes the Saints found the net—Tom Merry with another low, raking shot, and Talbot by heading the ball in from a corner-kick.

The St. Jim's supporters were almost dancing with glee, and the Grammarians were looking on in hopeless dismay.

After that third goal Carboy managed to whip up his team's flagging energies, and they managed to get the play away from their own goal, and for a sultry few moments even threatened the Saints' goal.

But the attack led to nothing, and when half-time came, the score was unchanged—three up for St. Jim's.

The St. Jim's team left the field amid a roar of cheering, and with heated, beaming faces.

"That cup's ours for a cert!" said Talbot.

"Looks like it," said Tom. "But—but I wish Gay and his pals had been playing, for all that. It won't be such a score for us. Anyway, I fancy we're pretty safe now for the giddy cup."

"Safe as houses, even if Gay does turn up!" chortled Lowther. "We'll be drinking ginger-pop out of the giddy cup this evening, my pippins!"

But Monty Lowther had spoken a little too soon there.



One by one the fuming but helpless Grammarians were stuffed legs foremost into the flour sacks until only their heads were visible, and then the tops of the sacks were tied round their necks with string. "Now they can go!" cried Figgins. With final pokes at the hapless and almost frantic Grammarians with their sticks, the triumphant St. Jim's juniors left them to wend their weary and painful way homewards. (See page 21.)

CHAPTER 8. Ructions!

CRASH, crash, crash!

Until long after Cyril Bagley and his fellow-plotters had left the quiet clearing in the deep recesses of Rylecombe Woods, the imprisoned Grammarians attacked the door of the hut with thunderous blows, and the shed rang with their yells.

But at last the silence without told them that their unknown captors had departed, and they desisted from their futile efforts, and eyed each other in the gloom with furious faces.

Gordon Gay's features were almost white with passion and humiliation. But he felt almost as furious with himself as with the unknown persons who had tricked them so simply.

Gordon Gay had always prided himself on being a fellow who was not easily taken in. And the ease with which he had been taken in now made him grind his teeth and want to kick himself.

It was pretty obvious now that the whole thing was spoof—that the letter was a decoy, either from Tom Merry himself or from someone who had copied his handwriting and used his name.

And the reason for it all Gordon Gay & Co. did not doubt for one moment. They had been kidnapped to keep them away from the match!

"Oh, what hopeless fools we were!" groaned Frank Monk. "It was a trap, and we walked into it like brainless infants."

"We'll be late for the match," groaned Jack Wootton.

"Late!" ejaculated Gordon Gay through his teeth. "Can't you see, you ass, that this game is to keep us away from the match altogether? Oh, the—the cads!"

"You—you think Tom Merry's at the bottom of this?" breathed Frank Monk.

"It—it's almost unbelievable," muttered Gay, his usually sunny face clouded. "And yet, who else could it be? Who else has a motive for playing such a dirty trick?"

"It may be some fellows from St. Jim's; but that doesn't say it was Tom Merry and his pals," said Harry Wootton quietly. "Tom Merry's a sport. He wouldn't do a thing like this, surely."

"But the note?" insisted his brother. "That was from him, you ass!"

"It may have been a forgery," said Gordon Gay slowly. "But it was jolly like Merry's fist if it was. Anyway, we're not done yet," he added, with sudden fierceness. "We've got to get out of this."

But this was, as Gordon Gay & Co. very soon found out, easier said than done. Though ancient enough, the building was built of stout timbers, and the window was out of the question as a means of escape. Its small panes of glass had long since been smashed, but the framework resisted all their efforts to break.

The door was just as hopeless. It stood as firm as a rock against their desperate batterings.

"No good shouting, I suppose," groaned Frank Monk, as they rested from their efforts. "Nobody comes near this hole in a month of Sundays. Oh, hang the awful luck!"

"No good grousing at our luck," muttered Gay irritably. "It's our own fault for having been spoofed so simply. We're going to get out, though!"

Gordon Gay spoke doggedly, and while his chums rested

against the wall he prowled around the hut like a caged lion. He examined every inch of the planking, with growing rage and hopelessness.

"If only we'd got a balk of wood or something heavy, we'd jolly soon drive a way through," he growled.

"Try biffing the wall with your napper, then," suggested Frank Monk, who was never serious for long. "You can then—"

"Shut up!" snarled Gay. "This is not a time for piffing jokes, Monk!"

Obviously Gordon Gay was in an unusually bitter mood—which was, perhaps, no wonder; and Frank Monk made no more humorous suggestions.

"Kicking-off time now!" groaned Harry Wootton, consulting his watch. "Oh, my hat! I suppose Carboy will pick some chaps to replace us. They'll hardly postpone the match."

"Of course not!" snapped Gordon Gay.

The other juniors got tired of standing still, and they joined their leader in roaming the gloomy shed. Several times they raised their voices, and made the shed ring with their yells; but, as they expected, there came no answering shout.

They got tired of doing even this at last, and seated themselves on the dirty brick floor. And it was only after they had been sitting thus for about an hour that Gay discovered it was a brick floor.

He leaped to his feet as a sudden idea came to him.

"What about tunnelling a way out, you fellows?" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming with sudden hope. "We could get these bricks up near the wall, and tunnel underneath to the far side."

"My hat! That's it!" said Wootton major. "Why the thump didn't we think of it sooner!"

In a moment the juniors were at work feverishly. A broken, rusty scythe, and an equally broken and rusty spade had already been noted lying amid a heap of rubbish, and in a moment these were in use.

It was a comparatively easy matter to prise up the bricks, but the ground beneath proved to be as hard as iron for a foot down, and progress was slow.

But they stuck it doggedly, and taking turns using the implements, they tunnelled beneath the wall, and suddenly a fall of earth into the hole they had dug let in the daylight from outside.

"Good egg!"

"Done it, by jingo!" panted Gay, mopping his dirt-stained features with his handkerchief. "We'll jolly soon be outside now."

The rest certainly was easy enough. The soil was shovelled away, and when the aperture was deemed large enough Gordon Gay crawled through, heedless of dirt and damage to his clothes.

A moment later he had scrambled out into the daylight beyond, and after him came his chums, breathless and panting.

"Done it!" gasped Frank Monk, looking himself over with a shudder. "My hat, what scarecrows we are!"

Gay looked at his watch and groaned.

"Too late," he said. "Why the thunder didn't we think of that before? The game will be over before we get there, I'm afraid. Anyway, come on!"

He was about to start off when a cry from Monk brought him up short.

"Look at this!" he cried, his eyes gleaming.

He handed the handkerchief he had picked up just before the door to his chum, and pointed at the initials in marking-ink on the corner.

"T. M.—Tom Merry!" breathed Gordon Gay, and his face went hard.

"And look at this!" exclaimed Wootton minor.

He picked up the pocket-knife that the mayor's son had dropped there. Scratched on the haft was Tom Merry's name, and at sight of this last piece of evidence all doubts left the minds of the chums from the Grammar School.

Gordon Gay's eyes glittered, and he fairly shook with rage, as he took the articles and placed them in his pocket.

"Come on!" he said hoarsely. "We'll be too late for the match, but, by George, we'll not be too late to get a settlement with those St. Jim's cads! The dirty schemers!"

His chums nodded without speaking, and followed their leader as he started off across the clearing at a run, not even stopping to dust himself down. It seemed to be only too well established as to the identity of their kidnappers—and their reason for kidnapping them.

Through the woods they went, crashing headlong through the undergrowth, and emerging at length on to open ground they cut straight across country for the buildings of their school, visible some distance away.

Panting and exhausted they reached the last dividing hedge at last, and scrambled through on to the ground. And almost the first person to sight them was Delamere.

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He stared dumbfounded at the dirty, dishevelled figures of Gordon Gay & Co.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "Where on earth have you kids been? You little fools, you've—"

"Never mind us now," muttered Gay, his breath coming in gasps. "How's the game going?"

"It's going to pot as far as we're concerned, my lad," said Delamere grimly. "We're on the wrong side of four—nothing—"

"Wha-at? Oh, great pip!"

Gordon Gay groaned aloud, and he was still doing that when a terrific roar went up, and Delamere turned.

"That's another, I fancy," he said, glancing at the field. "My hat! It is!"

It was—another goal for St. Jim's, and scored from an almost impossible angle by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It had come so unexpectedly that it left the spectators gasping for a moment, and then the roar became a yell.

"Goal!"

"Good old Gussy!"

The single blast of the whistle announcing the goal was followed almost instantly by a longer blast—the end of the match.

Time!

"Five goals to none!"

"St. Jim's wins!"

"Hurrah!"

A perfect hurricane of cheers swept round the ground as the players came trooping off the field, heated, and muddy, and breathless.

And the cheers were for the vanquished as well as the victors. The Grammarians had put up a stout fight, and they had nothing to reproach themselves with.

In a laughing group Tom Merry & Co. made for their dressing-room surrounded by a swarm of excited and cheering Saints.

But they never reached it then. Leaving Delamere, Gordon Gay & Co. made a rush for the noisy procession of St. Jim's juniors. Gordon Gay's face was pale and hard, and his eyes glinted dangerously.

He forced his way through the crush, and with his chums at his back, confronted the laughing Tom Merry.

"A minute, Merry!" he cried sharply.

The procession stopped, and the juniors who were carrying Tom Merry, almost dropped him at sight of the disreputable figures of Gordon Gay & Co.

Tom Merry slid to the ground, and fairly blinked at the four Grammarians.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "So you've turned up, then? Where the thump—"

"Never mind us, Merry," snapped Gay, in a voice trembling with rage. "You—you've won the match, then—you've won the cup?"

"Looks like it, what?" grinned Tom. "But I don't quite catch on to this, Gay, old top. It was kind of you to keep away, and let us romp home, of course. But—but—"

Tom paused, and his grin faded. He became suddenly aware that something was wrong—seriously wrong—as he met Gay's look; it startled him.

"What's the matter, Gay—what's wrong?" he said quickly.

"I think you know what's wrong, Tom Merry," said Gordon Gay, steeling his voice to calmness. "Anyway, I'll tell you, and these fellows shall hear, and judge for themselves."

He paused, and his eyes glittered as he glanced about him.

"At noon to-day," he said clearly, "I got a note from you, Tom Merry—it bore your signature, anyway. It asked myself and my chums here to meet you at the old hut in Rylcombe Woods before the match. We went—like the fools we were. It was a trick. We were tricked into entering the hut, and we were trapped there. We've just managed to get here—too late!"

Tom Merry said nothing—he couldn't; he was too astounded. There was a buzz of amazement, mingled with a few angry growls from Grammarians standing near. All eyes turned upon Tom Merry.

"That's why we didn't turn up," resumed Gordon Gay, through his teeth. "And that's why you've won the cup, and we've lost it. It was won through foul play. Tom Merry. You've won it, but you're not going to keep it."

"Phew!"

"Great pip!"

"Oh, bal Jove!"

CHAPTER 9. Another Shock!

GORDON GAY'S astounding charge caused a sensation. The laughing faces of the St. Jim's juniors changed, and the Grammarians found themselves surrounded by angry and threatening glares.

"You—you dare to claim a thing like that?" gasped Tom Merry. "You—you say we kept you away from the match?"

"I do—and can prove it!"

"P-prove it?" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Yes. Do you deny the whole thing, Merry?"

"Deny it?" shouted Tom Merry, with sudden exasperation.

"Of course I do, you ass! You're mad, Gay!"

"Pottay, bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus, shaking his head.

Gay's face darkened, and his calmness deserted him. He whipped two articles from his pocket and shoved them under Tom's nose.

Tom Merry blinked at them, and recognised his own knife and handkerchief.

"Look at them!" shouted Gordon Gay. "Do you deny that those belong to you, Merry? They both bear your initials—look at them. I found them just outside the hut, on the ground. They'd been accidentally dropped by you. Deny that, you cad!"

Tom Merry's face flushed red with anger, and he eyed Gay scornfully.

"Well, you cad, Gay!" he breathed. "I don't pretend to understand your game, but I can see this is a put-up job. Those are my things right enough. But you and your pals took them from me in Rylcombe Lane last night, you howling rotter!"

"Wha-at?"

Gordon Gay's features flushed with passion at that. He naturally believed that Tom Merry intended to deny it all—to bluff away the evidence of the handkerchief and knife with a lying counter-charge.

"You—you still deny it, then?" he choked.

"Of course—absolutely!"

"You mean to stick to the cup—you refuse to play the match again?"

"Naturally. We've won it fairly, and we're going to stick to it," said Tom promptly. "Your yarns won't wash, Gay. It's ours, and we're sticking to it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

"You crawling worm, Merry!" hissed Gay.

He glared at his rival, trembling with rage—only for a moment though. Then his self-control gave way, and with a howl of fury he flung himself at Tom Merry, and in a flash the two were fighting, hammer and tongs.

But that was not all. Tempers were on edge on both sides now, and Gay's action was the match needed to start the conflagration. The loss of the cup had been a bitter blow to the Grammarians, and their leader's charge had been accepted by them without question.

There arose a yell.

"Go for 'em! Sling the swindling cads off the ground!"

"Back up, Grammar School!" yelled Harry Wootton.

He singled out Jack Blake, and struck out at him. Blake struck back, and on the instant the crowd pressed in, and a dozen fights were in progress. The air was filled with a medley of yells.

"Go it, School! Smash the cads!"

"Back up, St. Jim's!"

From every part of the ground fellows came rushing, and the fight became general, and waxed hot and furious.

Very few knew what the trouble really was about, nor did they trouble to ask questions. They just waded into the conflict vigorously. It was Grammar School against St. Jim's, and that was enough for them.

Very soon the ground resembled a battlefield, and the uproar was terrific.

On the steps of the little pavilion the amazed and horrified officials and masters stared towards the scene of the disturbance in consternation.

"G-good gracious!" stuttered Dr. Monk. "Whatever is happening, Mr. Adams? This is terrible—deplorable! Mr. Railton—Mr. Adams—I beseech you to put a stop to this disgraceful riot! Good gracious!"

But the two masters had not waited for instructions; they were already hastening hot-foot towards the centre of the tumult. They found Delamere, Kildare, and several other seniors of both schools striving, with little success, to create order.

But the arrival of the two masters turned the scale, and after a time the last struggling couple had been parted, and hostilities ceased.

The rival combatants drifted apart to form two separate camps, dismally mopping their injuries, and recovering lost caps and portions of their attire, and glaring hatred at their enemies.

Mr. Railton hastened back to Dr. Monk, his brow grim. "I think, sir," he exclaimed gravely, "that it would be advisable to postpone the presentation of the cup under the circumstances. I fear it will only cause a fresh outbreak. With your approval, Dr. Monk, I will order my boys back to St. Jim's."

The headmaster of the Grammar School was obviously much distressed, but he would not hear of it.

"Mr. Bagley has already gone to bring the cup, Mr. Railton," he said, "and I do not see the necessity for

that. I agree, however, that it will be risking further unpleasantness if the Grammar School boys are at the presentation. Mr. Adams—"

He called to the Grammar School master, and a moment later was giving his instructions—instructions that were evidently of a drastic nature, for within five minutes of Mr. Adams having hurried away there wasn't a Grammarian to be seen upon the field.

In the meantime, Tom Merry & Co. had repaired to the changing-room, and were discussing the astounding climax to the match excitedly. All of them showed numerous signs of that brief but terrific fight.

"The whole thing beats me hollow," admitted George Figgins, shaking his head. "It's pretty clear that somebody kept those rotters away from the match, though. Unless the whole thing's a trick—"

"There's trickery somewhere," said Tom Merry quietly. "I expect you fellows are wondering about that knife and handkerchief matter? I'd better explain."

And he told his listeners what had happened under the trees in Rylcombe Lane the previous evening. The story made the rest stare.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Levison. "So—so that's it. It makes the affair more mysterious than ever, you fellows."

"Oh, blow the rotters!" grunted Blake, stroking a red and swollen nose ruefully. "Let them go to hang! We've won the cup, and we're thundering well going to stick to it, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry's face was troubled.

"I suppose we're right in refusing to play the match again," he said quietly. "But—but it's rough luck on them if it's true—if it's true that they were kidnapped. If they could prove it I'd be willing enough to play it again, anyway."

But Tom's change of sentiment was not shared by many—quite the reverse. They felt they had won the cup fairly—as they, indeed, had—and they had no intention of allowing the Grammarians' troubles to interfere with their intention of enjoying the fruits of victory to the full.

They changed at top speed, and as they rushed outside the Mayor of Wayland's glittering car drew up near the pavilion.

There was a cheer, and a rush was made towards the pavilion.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, as they ran up. "Where's the thumping cup?"

Many more were asking that question also, as they saw Mr. Bagley leave his car and hurry, empty-handed, towards the pavilion.

The mayor appeared to be greatly excited and not a little agitated. He scarcely waited until he reached the pavilion steps.

"Gentlemen," he called out excitedly, "I have alarming news for you. The cup has gone—vanished!"

"Good gracious!"

"Vanished?" ejaculated Mr. Railton in astonishment. "What do you mean, Mr. Bagley, pray?"

"It's gone—stolen!" gabbled Mr. Bagley, his flabby features ablaze with excitement. "It's been stolen from my shop-window within the last hour!"

"Great pip!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

A thunderbolt dropping could scarcely have created such alarm and consternation. Practically everyone present had heard the mayor's announcement, and after those first few ejaculations a deep silence of dismay settled upon the waiting crowd.

"You—you mean that the presentation cup has been stolen, Mr. Bagley?" ejaculated Dr. Monk. "Good gracious!"

"It was there an hour ago—in the window," said Mr. Bagley. "It looks to me like a well-planned theft, gentlemen. They must have known my manager was alone in the shop. They rang him up on the 'phone, which is in a room at the back, and the cup had gone from the window when he went back—clean gone. The message on the 'phone was just a trick, of course. It kept my man engaged while the scoundrel stole the cup."

"How exceedingly unfortunate," said Dr. Monk. "Then—then—"

"The presentation's off!" exclaimed Mr. Bagley, with obvious regret. "It's hard lines on the boys, but it can't be helped. I've informed the police, of course, and it may turn up yet."

"Well, my only hat!" groaned Blake, in utter disgust. "If this isn't the last straw!"

"The giddy outside edge!" agreed Figgins. "It's beastly."

The news was greeted on all sides with hollow groans.

After a few moments further conversation, Mr. Railton turned to the waiting crowd and explained matters for the benefit of those who had not heard the mayor's words. Then he dismissed the crowd, ordering them to return to St. Jim's.

There was nothing else, indeed, to be done but that. The cup had vanished, and there was nothing further to wait for.

The crowd broke up into excited and dismayed groups, and started back for St. Jim's, gloomily discussing the amazing affair.

The footballers themselves were almost sick with disappointment. They had won the match, certainly, but it looked like being a hollow victory. Not only were they charged with having won by foul means, but in the hour of their triumph the fruits of victory had been torn from their grasp.

The juniors had intended to celebrate their victory by a bumper celebration and feed. But they dropped the idea by common consent now. None of them felt like celebrating, and there was, in fact, little to celebrate now.

As they tramped into the School House Blake, who had been grimly silent most of the way, turned a grave face to Tom Merry.

"It's just struck me, Tommy," he said quietly, "that it may not have been a thief who took the cup. It—it may have been the Grammarians."

"I've thought of that," said Tom, nodding his head grimly. "But—"

"You remember what Gay said about not allowing us to keep the cup," went on Blake breathlessly. "Don't you see—"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Yes, but—but it would be burglary almost—"

"They wouldn't look at it in that light," said Blake.

"They'd only think about doing us."

"But they've scarcely had time to get there since the scrap—"

"I know. But supposing they did it before they landed here—Gay and his pals, I mean," said Blake. "They must have known they hadn't a ghost of a chance of winning then."

Tom Merry shook his head, his face troubled and uneasy. "It's possible," he said. "But it isn't likely, Blake. The rotters would draw the line at that. And yet I don't see how a thief would dare to pinch the thing in broad daylight. Anyway, it's no good guessing. We can only hope that it will turn up. It may do yet—to-night even."

Tom Merry spoke hopefully; but he felt far from hopeful. Nor were his hopes realised—that evening, at all events. No news came concerning the cup, and the juniors went to bed that evening in a state of exasperation and gloom. Nor had any news arrived when morning dawned.

The thirty-guinea cup had apparently vanished into thin air.

CHAPTER 10.

War to the Knife!

"WELL do it, you chaps!"

Tom Merry made that announcement to his chums, Monty Lowther and Manners.

It was the following evening, just after tea in Study No. 10, and the chums were discussing the one absorbing topic at St. Jim's, which was still the strange kidnapping of Gordon Gay & Co. and the still stranger disappearance of the thirty-guinea silver cup.

Matters were much the same. The whole affair was still a baffling mystery, and the police were at a loss in regard to the missing cup. It was gone, and it was generally supposed that it had gone for ever.

It had been expected, generally, that serious trouble would follow that riot on the Grammar School ground. But nothing of the sort happened—to the juniors' relief. It was known that Dr. Holmes had been in communication with Dr. Monk, on the 'phone, and it leaked out that, rather than cause increased bitterness between the rival schools by wholesale punishments, the two Heads had decided to let the matter drop.

But during the day Tom Merry, at all events, had done a great deal of thinking over matters, and he was now propounding his views to his chums in Study No. 10.

The more Tom reflected over the matter the more certain did he become that Gordon Gay was guiltless of that queer attack upon him in Rylcombe Lane, and that the whole wretched business was the work of some outsider desirous of causing mischief between the two schools. The matter of the missing cup he simply could not understand at all, however.

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But the other he could—or felt certain he could. And he felt that the only possible way of getting at the truth was by putting his suspicions before Gordon Gay & Co. and hearing their views.

But, naturally, his own chums were far from keen to take that course under the circumstances. Tom, however, was determined to do so.

"We'll do it, you chaps," he repeated. "We'll go over and see Gay and his pals to-night."

"But, you ass," ejaculated Lowther, in great alarm, "we'll get scalped and slaughtered! It'll be worse than entering the den of a lion. It's madness!"

"We'll risk trouble," said Tom. "The cup's gone; that can't be helped; and I'm certain now that they know nothing about it. But I don't like there being bad blood between us. It's rotten!"

"Well, that's so. But—"

"There's no 'buts' about it!" snapped Tom, jumping up determinedly. "We're going. I've got that note we thought Gay had sent, and they've got the note they think I sent, I expect. They're both forgeries, and I fancy Gay will be willing enough to listen to us when he's seen mine. Come on!"

"Oh, all right!" groaned Lowther. "Let's say good-bye to our friends before going, though. Into the jaws of death—"

"Ass! Come on! We'll call and persuade Blake and his lot to come."

The Terrible Three got their caps and hurried along to Study No. 6. They found only Digby at home, and he was nursing the toothache. Blake and the others had gone to the village.

"Hard lines!" growled Tom. "But even four more wouldn't be of much help if the beggars did turn rusty. We'll have to go alone, anyway."

"Oh, help!"

Lowther and Manners were clearly not keen on Tom's intention, but Tom was determined for once. And they started out for the Grammar School.

But they never reached there that night.

At the cross-roads in Rylcombe Lane they met Baggy Trimble. The fat junior had been running, and he was gasping and panting like a broken-winded cab-horse.

"Quick! They've got them! Quick!"

"What the thump—"

"Who's got 'em, you ass?" demanded Tom.

"They—the Grammarians!" babbled Trimble. "The awful cads chased me—"

"Oh, blow you!" snorted Manners. "Who've they got, you idiot?"

"Blake and D'Arcy and Herries!" gasped Baggy. "Five of 'em—"

"Oh!"

"It was that beast Lacy started it," groaned Baggy. "He was kicking me in market square, and Blake stopped him. Then Gay and his pals came up and collared them. I—I only just got away—"

"You fat funk—"

"I—I was coming for help—"

"Oh, rats! Come on, you fellows!" snapped Tom, and he led the way at top speed for the village.

All ideas of a peaceful visit to the enemy's camp under a flag of truce left them now. It was a case of to the rescue!

It was only a matter of minutes to the village, and, remembering Trimble's words, Tom made straight for the little market square. As they rushed over the cobbles, they soon became aware that something unusual was afoot.

Outside the ancient Hare and Hounds Inn a crowd was gathered, and they were roaring with laughter. The juniors caught a glimpse of Grammar School caps among the crowd of villagers, and it was enough for them.

"Come on!" hissed Tom.

The Terrible Three rushed to the rescue without hesitation—or thought! They arrived on the fringe of the laughing crowd, and then they stopped and almost fell down at the sight which met their gaze.

It was Gordon Gay & Co. right enough, and they had Blake & Co. prisoners. And three most dismal and hapless prisoners they looked.

Their caps, their jackets, and their waistcoats were turned inside out, and their faces were daubed with circles of tar—or something suspiciously like tar. Had not the Terrible Three known who they were they could never have recognised them. They looked ludicrous sights.

But that was not all. For, in addition to having their hands tied behind them, Blake and D'Arcy were seated in the ancient village stocks, while Herries was jammed in between them, and tied to the bench of the stocks.

"M-mum-my hat!" stuttered Tom Merry. "They're in the stocks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

The laughter of the villagers mingled with the laughter of



A groan of disappointment came from the St. Jim's followers as the Grammarians' goalie, by an almost miraculous leap, reached the ball and fisted it out. But even as the groan arose Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sped like lightning to the rescue, and his aristocratic head met the ball with a dull plop. "Goal!" It was! The swift action of D'Arcy had the goalie hopelessly beaten. (See page 28.)

the gleeful Grammarians, who had apparently just finished putting their prisoners in the stocks—though where they had got the key from was a mystery.

But there was something unusually hard and vengeful behind the Grammarians' laughter, and Tom Merry's face set hard, and he choked back an almost involuntary laugh. He realised that Gordon Gay & Co., for once were in a bitter mood.

And at that moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy caught sight of the caps of the Terrible Three, and he gave a desperate, almost tearful, wail.

"Wescue, St. Jim's! Oh deah! Wescue, deah boys—wescue!"

"Come on!" gritted Tom Merry.

It was a forlorn hope—almost madness to attempt a rescue with the odds at five to three. For with Gordon Gay were the two Woottons, Monk, and Carboy. And, of course, Blake & Co. were unable to aid in any way.

But the sight of his schoolfellows in such a humiliating and hapless position raised Tom's ire, and he didn't stop to count the odds.

There was a yell of alarm as the Grammarians sighted the rescuers—a yell that, in Gordon Gay's case, was ended abruptly as Tom Merry charged through the crush and hurled himself upon the Grammarian leader.

A wild and whirling struggle ensued before the crowd of delighted villagers and the helpless juniors in the stocks.

But it did not last long. Against the five Grammarians the Terrible Three stood little chance, though they fought like furies.

Almost frantic with helpless wrath, Blake & Co. watched with glaring eyes as they were overpowered one by one, and the victorious Grammarians pinned them down to the cobbles.

The grinning yokels and villagers greeted the victory with cheers and hoarse guffaws.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

And at that moment another Grammar School junior came racing up, breathless and panting. It was Mont Blanc, the French junior, and he carried a pocket-camera in his hand.

"Oh, bai Jove!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

Blake & Co. knew what the camera was for, if the Terrible Three didn't.

"Oh, good egg!" grinned Gordon Gay, without rising from Tom Merry's chest. "You've got it, then? Just lend a hand, old top, and we'll soon have a nice group to take as a memento."

"Ha, ha! Yes."

Mont Blanc handed the camera to an obliging yokel to hold, and came to his accomplices' help. It was now two to one, and in a very few seconds the wrists of the Terrible Three had been tied behind them.

This done, Gordon Gay completed the arranging of his "group" by planting the fuming Tom Merry in the centre at the foot of the stocks, and Lowther and Manners at either side of D'Arcy and Blake.

"Now for the cup!" remarked Gay, looking round him. "They've won a cup, and we must complete the picture by supplying one. Here we are!"

He picked up a rusty, much-battered iron bucket that happened to be lying near, and he placed that on the ground before Tom Merry.

Next he produced a sheet of cardboard, and printed upon it in blue pencil:

THE CUP-WINNERS!

With their cup. The only cup they are ever likely to win

BY FAIR MEANS,

And which they have won by

KIDNAPPING THEIR OPPONENTS!

"Haw, haw, haw!"

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 870.

After gazing at this remarkable notice in puzzled wonder for a few moments, the audience roared with laughter. They did not quite grasp the point, but they were highly entertained, nevertheless.

But the hapless prisoners did, and they gritted their teeth with helpless rage at the insult.

But Gordon Gay had not finished yet.

He quickly turned the jackets of the Terrible Three down over their arms, and after turning their caps inside-out, he dipped his finger in mud, and drew artistic circles round each of their eyes and mouths.

When he had finished this the Terrible Three looked ludicrous sights, and Gay was satisfied apparently, and he proceeded to take their photographs.

"Not much light," he said apologetically to the almost frantic St. Jim's juniors. "But I'll do my best to make a good picture."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Amidst roars of laughter from the crowd, Gordon Gay proceeded to take snapshots of the freakish group from various positions. This done, he slipped the camera into his pocket and faced Tom Merry.

His grin was quite unlike his usual cheery grin, and his eyes were glittering.

"That's a start, Merry," he said grimly. "You played a dirty trick on us yesterday, and we won't forget it in a hurry. It's war to the knife from now on!"

"You—you rotters!" hissed Tom Merry. "You—Here, you can't leave us like this. Let us loose, you cads!"

But Gordon Gay & Co. had no intention of doing that, obviously. Heedless of the frantic yells of the St. Jim's juniors, they took their departure, leaving the hapless victims to the mercy of the village urchins.

It was war to the knife with a vengeance. And Tom Merry realised then that the time for peace parleys was not yet. The Grammarians were not ripe for a truce, it was only too clear.

CHAPTER 11. The Ambush!

WHIZ! Thud!
"Yaroooh!"

Biff! Smack!

"Yooop! Stoppit, you little fiends!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The departure of Gordon Gay & Co. was the signal for the village urchins to take charge of matters.

The worst was yet to come for Tom Merry & Co.

On the whole, the fellows from St. Jim's were very popular with the inhabitants of Rylcombe village. But the youngsters were only human, or rather inhuman. As onlookers, they had quite enjoyed the entertainment, but they could improve on the entertainment now.

With such a group of helpless "guys" at their mercy, it was only natural that they should feel an overmastering desire to throw things at them.

And they did.

Within two seconds of the Grammarians' departure a perfect fusillade of articles were whirling about the hapless persons of Tom Merry & Co.

"Three shies a penny, lads!"

"Let 'em 'ave it!"

Biff!

Thud!

"Yaroooh! Oh deah! Yooop!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

The fun grew fast and furious, and the village urchins were having the time of their lives.

So were Tom Merry & Co., but from a different point of view. Turf, balls of soaked paper, mud, and garbage whizzed and rattled round the heads of the luckless prisoners.

Their frantic antics and contortions, as they wriggled and dodged to avoid the missiles, sent the onlookers into fits of laughter.

"Oh, great Scott!" panted Tom Merry, dodging an overripe tomato that squelched against the wall behind him. "This is frightful, you chaps! Oh, won't we just—Yaroooh!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Oh deah! This is tewwible, bai Jove! Yooop!"

But it was too hot to last. The ammunition soon began to run short for one thing, and, for another, many of the loungers came to the conclusion that things had gone far enough, and they scattered the yelling urchins with hefty cuffs.

And then P.-c. Crump, the Rylcombe policeman, arrived on the scene.

With portly and pompous tread he stamped up, and he almost fell down as he saw the unfortunate juniors round the stocks.

"My heye!" he ejaculated. "My heye!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 870.

"Don't stand staring there, you old fool!" howled Blake. "Let us loose, you idiot!"

"My heye!" gasped the portly constable. "Ere, this won't do, my lads. What you doin' in them there stocks?"

"Will you let us loose, you idiot!" almost shrieked Tom Merry. "Get us out of this. Think we stuck ourselves here on purpose, you ass!"

It was hardly the way to address an official of the police force, but P.-c. Crump was too astonished at the sight to make a dignified remonstrance. He simply scratched his chin and glowered at the juniors.

But a combined shriek of fury from Tom Merry & Co. awoke him to the real state of affairs, and he lumbered forward and started to release them.

Luckily, Gordon Gay had stopped short of locking the rusty old padlock again, and as the fat policeman cut their bonds, Blake and D'Arcy lifted their aching and sore legs from the circular holes of the stocks.

"Which this 'ere is a joke, I suppose?" grunted P.-c. Crump.

Words failed the juniors. They glowered at their portly and leisurely rescuer, and began to restore their clothing to something like order.

"Oh, bai Jove!" wailed Arthur Augustus, his face—or what could be seen of it—pink with shame. "My clobber is utterly ruined. Oh, the fearful wuffians! We cannot possibly return to St. Jim's in this howlid state, deah boys. Oh deah!"

Tom Merry rubbed frantically at his weirdly decorated features with a handkerchief—with small success.

"Chaps!" he hissed. "We're not going back to St. Jim's before we've collared that dashed camera, if we have to burgle the confounded Grammar School!"

"But weally—"

"Don't you see?" snarled Tom Merry, his face now crimson and smudgy. "They've got our photos in that awful position, and we'll never be able to hold our heads up once they've got some printed."

"Oh crumbs!" faltered Blake.

"Never mind our looks now!" snapped Tom Merry fiercely. "That doesn't matter a scrap. We've simply got to get that film at all costs."

"But how can we? It's getting close on lock-up now—must be."

"Hang lock-up—blow lock-up!" was the furious reply. "I'd rather be flogged than be made the laughing-stock of the Grammar School and St. Jim's. That's what will happen once Gay gets those films printed."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Great pip! You're right, Tommy!"

"Of course, I'm right!" snapped Tom Merry. "Come on—quick! We're six now, and we'll thundering well follow the cads into the Grammar School if necessary."

"Yes, rather!"

And hastily rubbing their faces with handkerchiefs—and even jacket-sleeves—the juniors followed Tom as he raced pell-mell from the spot—greatly to the amazement and wrath of P.-c. Crump and the hilarity of the yokels.

But Tom Merry & Co. had no thoughts for them now. Nor did they trouble much about their dishevelled and mottled appearance. Their thoughts were on the photographs Gay had taken, and the horrid prospect of what the printing and distributing of them would mean.

At all costs they had to be captured.

As they emerged into the High Street from the little alley leading from the square they almost charged into three juniors who were hurrying past at the moment.

Tom Merry called a halt as he recognised Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, of the New House.

"Figgys," he gasped eagerly, "are you game for a scrap with the Grammarians?"

Figgins & Co. simply blinked at Tom Merry & Co.; and with their smudgy, furious faces and rumpled, muddy clothes, they certainly looked a disreputable gang.

"What the thump's happened, Merry?" he ejaculated. "The—the Grammarians? Yes, of course! Why—"

"We'll tell you afterwards!" gasped Tom Merry. "But we've got to get hold of Gordon Gay somehow! He's gone home, I expect, by this; but—"

"No, he hasn't," grinned Figgys. "He's in Mother Murphy's shop now. Five of them—no, six! We just looked in, and the cads chased us out. They're on the war-path!"

"Don't we know it!" groaned Blake. "But—but, by jingo, now's our chance! We're nine to six, and now it's our turn."

Tom shook his head. His eyes were gleaming.

"I've got a better plan than nabbing them there," he said grimly. "We can't kick up a row in the old dame's shop for one thing—hardly fair! We want to nab 'em outside the village."

He whispered his plan to the other eight juniors, and evidently it met with their approval, for a moment later

they were following Tom as he led the way along the village street out into Rylcombe Lane.

As they went Tom Merry & Co. told their miserable story to Figgins & Co. Those juniors roared with laughter; but they were none the less sympathetic for all that.

Though at constant war with the School House juniors at St. Jim's they were always as one when face to face with the common foe—the Grammarians. And Figgins & Co. were only too eager to help now.

At the cross-roads the juniors branched off into a narrow, winding lane that led to the Grammar School. They halted at last in a narrow cutting where the lane ran between high banks topped by fields on one side and Rylcombe Woods on the other.

"Here we are," said Tom. "Just the very place for an ambush, you chaps. Now hide—Half a minute!"

Tom left his chums and ran across to a miller's cart which was just passing. The tailboard was down, and Tom had caught a glimpse of empty flour-sacks.

In astonishment his chums watched him approach the driver of the cart, and after talking a moment Tom handed the man some money, and the man grinned and handed him over a pile of flour-sacks.

He hurried back with them to his surprised chums. "Just the things we wanted," he grinned. "We'll shove the beggars in these sacks, and make 'em wander home inside 'em."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea tickled the fancy of Tom's chums, and a moment later with the half a dozen white flour-sacks, they were crouching down among the thickets bordering the lane at the foot of the banks.

Dusk was already beginning to fall, and very few people passed, going to the Grammar School. It was close on locking-up time, and most of the Grammarians were in the school at this time.

Evidently Gordon Gay & Co. were cutting it fine, however. Quite possibly they were celebrating their victory in Mother Murphy's shop still.

The thought brought back to Tom Merry & Co. the memory of their humiliation in the stocks, and they gritted their teeth as they waited for the vengeance they felt was at hand.

It came at last. Round the corner in the lane appeared five figures—they were Gordon Gay, the two Woottons, and Frank Monk and Carboy. All were laughing almost hysterically as they trotted along.

"Mont Blanc not with 'em?" breathed Tom. "Well, that'll make it easier, anyway. Get ready!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Gordon Gay & Co. came opposite the ambush, but they got no farther.

There was a sudden rush of feet, and they were surrounded in a flash.

"Look out!" yelled Gordon Gay.

That was all any of the Grammarians got the chance of saying. They fairly hurtled to earth with the avengers swarming over them. It was a surprise attack—utter and complete.

The very sight of Tom Merry & Co.—whom they imagined were still in the stocks—left them helpless to defend themselves almost.

Against the nine determined St. Jim's juniors their struggles were almost pathetically futile, and in the twinkling of an eye four of them were hors de combat, flat on their backs, with knees and hands pinning them down.

Tom had purchased thick string from the miller's man in addition to sacks, and the hands of the Wootton brothers, Frank Monk, and Carboy were soon trussed behind them.

But Gordon Gay had not caved in so easily. Tom Merry and Blake had tackled him, and they had more than their hands full.

The Grammarian leader knew what they were after; he also knew that he could expect no mercy at their hands after what had happened. He was determined not to be made a prisoner, and he was still more determined not to lose the precious films.

Once over the first shock of surprise he began to hit out right and left. But together Tom and Blake made a rush and brought him down.

A wild and whirling conflict then took place on the roadway, and suddenly a lucky blow sent Tom Merry rolling over, and in a flash the slippery Grammarian was on his feet again.

He gave one glance around, and seeing that his chums were already beyond aid, he neatly dodged Blake's rush, and dashed up the steep bank.

"After him!" yelled Tom Merry. "My hat! He'll do us yet! After him, Blake! You fellows stop with the others!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

With a rush Tom Merry and Jack Blake scrambled up

the steep bank after Gordon Gay. They reached the top, and vanished amid the thick trees.

"He's got that camera!" gasped Manners. "Hadh't we better—"

"No; leave the cad to them," said Lowther quickly. "Somebody may come along any sec. Quick, let's get these merchants fixed up."

"Quite wight, bai Jove!"

It did not take long to do, and was easily done. One by one the fuming, but helpless, Grammarians were stuffed, legs foremost, into the flour-sacks until their heads only were visible, and then the tops of the sacks were tied round their necks with string. Even as they were they looked ludicrous sights, but when their features had been decorated with mud from the nearest ditch they were sights for gods and men and little fishes.

"You—you awful cads!" gasped Frank Monk in horror. "You don't say you're going to send us back to school like this? You can't, you howling cads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's juniors roared as the Grammarians hobbled about dismally in the flour sacks as their triumphant enemies poked them with sticks.

"Bai Jove, don't they look sights!" chortled Arthur Augustus gleefully. "What price the stocks now, deah boys?"

"Rotters! Oh dear! Gooogh!"

Frank Monk almost choked with flour that began to rise as the imprisoned juniors struggled frantically to free themselves.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Roaring with laughter, the St. Jim's juniors started the captured Grammarians off on the trail to the Grammar School, poking them with sticks when they showed signs of stopping.

The St. Jim's juniors felt that they were getting their own back now with a vengeance. For fifty yards they poked and encouraged the Grammarians in their compulsory sack-race, and then Lowther called a halt.

"What about letting them go the rest of the way on their lonesome, Figgy?" he suggested. "I vote we cut off after Gay now. If he gets away with that blessed camera he'll—"

"My hat, yes!"

"Yaas, wathah, Lowthah!"

And with final pokes at the hapless and almost frantic Grammarians with their sticks, the triumphant St. Jim's juniors left them to wend their weary and painful way homewards without their aid. That Gay's luckless followers were likely to be asked some questions at turning up at the gates of the Grammar School in such a garb did not worry them. The Grammarians had left them in the stocks to take pot-luck, and their rivals hardened their hearts now, and left them in turn to take pot-luck. And with final jeers and cat-calls, they left them in their misery and flour-sacks, and climbing the steep bank, they swarmed into the wood on the track of Gordon Gay.

CHAPTER 12.

What Gay Saw and Heard!

"OH crumbs! Phew!"

Gasping and panting painfully, Gordon Gay flung himself down amid the undergrowth. He was done to the world.

Knowing he stood little chance of shaking off his pursuers by taking to the lane, he had made a dive for the woods, hoping thus to give his rivals the slip without much trouble.

But he had not counted upon the determination of Tom Merry and Blake not to allow him to give them the slip.

He had known he could do little good by staying to help his chums—indeed, he had seen that they were already overpowered, and his one thought at that moment was to prevent the precious camera from falling into the hands of the enemy.

But his intention of making for the Grammar School by taking a detour through the woods was very quickly nipped in the bud by Tom Merry.

That junior had guessed his intention, and by diving into the wood at a spot lower down he almost ran plump into the Grammarian leader.

On the instant Gordon Gay had wheeled and charged away in the opposite direction, with the yelling Merry and Blake on his heels.

It was dusky under the trees, and running was by no means an easy matter, and more than once the Grammarian came a cropper over trailing creepers and ferns. But the same things had happened to his pursuers, and after a wild five minutes of headlong running Gordon Gay had heard the sounds of pursuit gradually die away, and now he flung himself down to rest, spent and utterly exhausted.

"Phew!" he repeated, gasping for breath. "That was a THE GEM LIBRARY.—No 870.

close call! I've done 'em, though. Once I've got prints taken of those giddy snaps, I'll make those cads wish they'd never been born."

The Grammarian leader patted his pocket, with a chuckle. But he did not attempt to move yet. He knew that Tom Merry & Co. would move heaven and earth to obtain possession of the films.

The thought of being late for lock-up scarcely troubled him any more than it did Tom Merry & Co. The only thought which did trouble him then was the fact that his chums were in the enemies' hands. He had not failed to note the pile of flour-sacks, and he guessed what they were for.

"Can't be helped," he mused, smiling ruefully. "It's the fortunes of war, after all, and—Hullo!"

He broke off sharply, and crouched lower in the shelter of the sparse undergrowth.

A sound had reached his ears—the soft breaking of twigs underfoot. It came nearer, and Gordon Gay scarcely dared to breathe. He naturally supposed it was Blake and Merry scouting on his tracks.

But the next moment he glimpsed the newcomer, and he gave a start as he recognised the swagger, dandified figure of Cyril Bagley, the son of the Mayor of Wayland.

He came through the woods, treading almost stealthily, and there was something sinister and suspicious in his manner, Gordon Gay thought.

"Rummy!" he breathed. "Now, what the thump does dear Cyril want here at this time of the day? This requires looking into, Gordon Gay, my lad!"

Why he felt suspicious Gordon Gay could not have told himself. But he was; and he lay flat, quiet as a mouse, his eyes fixed upon the mayor's son. He passed within a couple of yards of the watching junior, and then he vanished through the trees, and a sound of feet against stone reached Gordon Gay's ears.

Until then Gordon Gay had not troubled to wonder where he was or take his bearings. But as he crept forward and parted the sparse foliage now he realised where he was.

Before him was a clearing in the woods—an open space, dotted with broken stones and masonry. In the centre, overgrown with creepers, was a ruin, a moss-grown ruin, whose shattered walls and roofless frame rose up from a floor of flagstones.

It was the old monk's cell—or what remained of it—a relic of the time when St. Jim's itself was a monastery.

And standing, idly tapping his glossy shoes with a slim walking-cane near the broken arched doorway of the monk's cell was Cyril Bagley, obviously waiting for someone.

"Now, what's this game?" murmured Gordon Gay. "Is he spoons on some girl, and meeting her here, or—Oh, I see!"

Quite suddenly Gordon Gay thought he understood, as a well-known form detached itself from the shadowy, dusky trees, and ambled over to Cyril Bagley.

It was a gentleman dressed in loud, sportive checks, and with a fat, purple face, and a heavy, walrus-like moustache. He was a very racy-looking gentleman indeed.

It was Mr. Joseph Banks, the bookmaker and card-sharper, who lived at the Green Man Inn just outside Rylcombe.

That Mr. Joseph Banks and Master Cyril Bagley were acquainted did not surprise Gordon Gay in the least. Knowing the character of the grocer's son, he would have been surprised had it been otherwise.

But it struck Gordon Gay as extremely "fishy" that they should arrange to meet in such a lonely out-of-the-way spot as the deserted ruin in the depths of Rylcombe Woods. Had Cyril been a schoolboy now—

Yes, it certainly was queer!

But Gordon Gay was not left puzzled for long on that score.

"Well, I'm 'ere, Master Bagley," exclaimed Mr. Banks, with a sharp glance at the dandy. "Though I'm 'anged if I can guess what you've dragged me to this 'ole for."

"I'll soon tell you that, Banks," said Cyril Bagley, eyeing the bookmaker narrowly. "The fact is, I've got a good thing for you, Banks—that's if you're game?"

"If it's anything to do with gee-gees, you can leave the good things to me to find, Master Bagley," said Mr. Banks, with a grim chuckle. "That's my job."

"It's nothing to do with gee-gees!" snapped the dandy impatiently. "Look here, Banks, it's—it's—" He paused again, as if he scarcely dared say what he wished to say.

Gordon Gay pricked up his ears. The fact that he was eavesdropping did not trouble the cheery Grammarian. He felt that both Banks and Bagley were outside the pale as regards ordinary treatment, and—and he felt instinctively that he was about to hear something interesting.

And he was!

"Well, Master Bagley," encouraged Mr. Banks. "What's this 'ere good thing?"

"I'll tell you," said the other hesitatingly. "The fact is,

Banks, I've got something I want to get rid of—something of value. I daren't keep the thing, and I want to make a bit out of it, too."

"Oh!" said Mr. Banks, giving him a very curious look. "My heye!"

"I know you sail pretty closely to the wind sometimes," went on Bagley junior. "And I fancy you're just the chap who could do the trick for me."

"Well, I don't know about that," grunted Mr. Banks. "Anyways," he went on cautiously, "what is it, and what's it worth?"

"It's a silver cup, and it's worth thirty guineas," was the reply.

The sheer coolness with which the youth made the statement almost made Gordon Gay gasp aloud. And Mr. Banks was equally staggered. He fairly blinked at the grinning Cyril.

"My heye!" he ejaculated. "You mean you got that there missing cup, Master Bagley—the one your father give?"

Cyril Bagley nodded calmly.

"I've got it hidden not a dozen yards from here," he said, with a chuckle. "But you've no need to look scared, Banks. There isn't a soul knows I've got it, and nobody's likely to dream I've got it."

"Well, I'm 'anged!" exclaimed Mr. Banks. "This 'ere beats me! Your father gives a cup—and you pinches it! My heye! And why—Oh, I see!"

Light seemed to break in on Mr. Joseph Banks, and he chuckled.

"I 'eard all about that there trick they played on you at the match last Saturday," he grinned. "I s'pose this 'ere is gettin' a bit of your own back?"

Cyril Bagley flushed, and his eyes glittered vengefully.

"Yes, it is, Banks!" he hissed. "And what's more, it isn't all, either. You've heard what happened at Wednesday's match? That was my doing, too! It was I, with the help of two pals, who kidnapped those beastly Grammarians, and we worked it so that those St. Jim's cads got the blame. We caused that rumpus, and we'll do more before we've finished, I might tell you."

The dandy spoke boastfully, and Mr. Banks eyed him admiringly.

"My here!" he said. "You're a goer, you are, Mister Bagley! And this 'ere cup—"

"I mucked up the Grammar School chance," said Cyril Bagley. "But I wasn't going to let those dashed Saints get the cup, either. If the pater's fool enough, I'm not!"

"Not likely!" agreed Mr. Banks, with a nod.

"Anyway, we can't stand gassing here all night, Banks. The point is—I've got the dashed cup, and I want to get rid of it. I know you're not particular about jobs like this—"

"Ere, half a minute, Mister Bagley," said Banks, in a changed tone. "Don't you be in such a 'urry! You thinks I'd buy that there cup from you—"

"Of course! I fancy you'll know how to dispose of it—with a thumping profit, too," grinned Bagley.

"Oh, you do!" said Mr. Banks grimly. "Well, there's nothing doin', my lad!"

"Eh? You don't mean—"

"I ain't touching it," said Mr. Banks firmly. "I wouldn't touch it with a barge-pole, Mister Bagley. That there cup's stolen property, and I'm not 'aving no police after me. That's flat!"

Bagley junior looked at him.

"You silly fool!" he snapped. "There's not an atom of risk. Who'd suspect me, eh? And even if the pater did ever know, he wouldn't prosecute for my sake. He'd hush it up. I tell you it's as safe as houses!"

Mr. Banks shook his head gravely. He appeared to reflect deeply, and then he looked up.

"Ere, let's have a look at this cup," he said slowly. "Arter all, I might do something; I don't say as I will, but I might. Where is it?"

"Right!" said Cyril Bagley.

He stepped through the broken archway of the monk's cell, and Mr. Banks followed, his small eyes gleaming curiously.

"Well, my only hat!" breathed Gordon Gay. "So—so that's it!"

Trembling with excitement, the Grammarian leader watched with staring eyes as Cyril Bagley stepped to the centre of the stone-flagged cell, and, stooping, began to raise one of the stone flags.

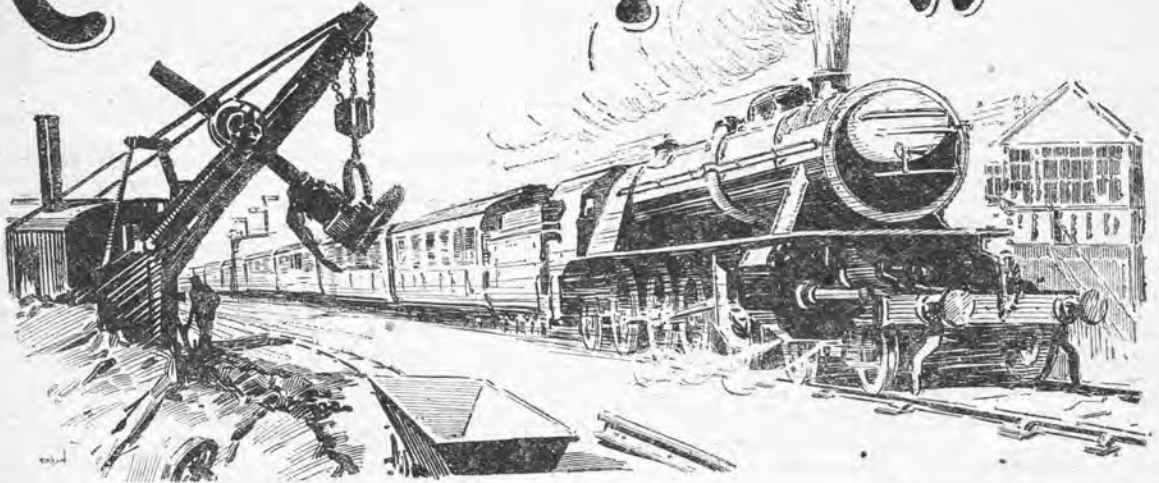
But Gordon Gay was not surprised at this—he had expected it. He heard the flag fall back with a dull thud, and he watched as first Cyril Bagley and then Mr. Banks vanished from sight through the yawning aperture it had left.

It was the entrance to the secret passage that led underground to the ruins of Wayland Castle on the moor, and

(Continued on page 27.)

It was a lucky day for Jimmy Speed, the newsboy, when he rescued Sir Richard Grant, the great railway magnate from a terrible death. It gave him that great chance he had been waiting for—a job amongst the giant locomotives of the Great Scottish and Central Railway!

CHUMS OF THE IRON WAY!



A Thrilling Yarn of Exciting Adventure on the Railroad.
By **ROLAND SPENCER** and **FRANCIS WARWICK.**

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

JIMMY SPEED, a plucky and cheery young newsboy of Blackhampton.

SIR RICHARD GRANT, chief director of the Great Scottish and Central Railway, who has in his employ nearly all the male population of Blackhampton.

JOHN LANGRISH—whose heavy and determined features, square-set jaw, and steely eyes earn for him the name of "Granite" Langrish—chief director of the Great Electric Northern, and a rival of Sir Richard Grant.

HAROLD SOPER, a foreman shunter on the G.S.C. and an unscrupulous rascal, working in the pay of John Langrish, and

SAM BLUNDELL, a foreman of the G.S.C., and as true as steel.

(Now read on.)

It was a lucky day for the cheery young newsboy, Jimmy Speed, when, at great risk to himself, he rescued Sir Richard Grant from being crushed beneath the wheels of a monster goods-train engine, for it meant the realisation of his long-cherished ambition—to get a job in the great workshops of the G.S.C. To hear the clanging and the shouting, and to see the great steel locomotives towering around him, sent a thrill through Jimmy Speed.

His anxiety to learn brings him up against Soper, who, in the pay of Granite Langrish, is trying to breed discontent among the workers of the G.S.C. He overhears a dastardly plot to bring about a great railway disaster by manipulating the signals, and at once confides in Sam Blundell.

The two hasten to the scene of operations—the main junction signal-box—and, after a fierce fight against great odds, Jim grasps the signal-lever, his heart quaking with fear, lest he should be too late to avert disaster!

The Fight in the Signal Cabin!

A MAN'S hands gripped savagely at Jim's throat and jerked cruelly. The youngster, half-choked, in terrible pain, held on gamely to the lever. For through his swimming senses one thought hammered desperately in his brain—the life of scores of human beings hung in the balance now.

The roar of the lighted train was deafening as it thundered past the cabin. He felt that he could never alter the points in time, and a wave of horror swept over him. His assailant was dragging at him, striving to tear him from the shining lever that, as it now stood, spelt ghastly disaster for the great express. But still Jim held on, and it was probably the villains themselves who saved the express that night.

For the lever, with the full weight of Jim and his heavy assailant upon it, came back with a clash, and the roar of the train went on outside the signal cabin, in place of the terrible crash, the hissing of escaping steam, the cries and groans that Jim Speed had half expected to hear.

The points were over, and the leading wheels of the great express were kept on the straight. The fiendish scheme to turn the train aside on to the branch-line curve—a curve sharp enough to have spelt inevitable disaster to the express if taken at that flying speed—had failed!

Jim felt a wild surge of joy as he twisted round in his assailant's grasp to grapple with the man. He had won!

For a minute the two staggered and reeled together. Then Jim fought free. His right fist flashed as he sent the ruffian spinning backwards, to crash against the rear wall of the signal-box, a gasping heap.

But he was up in a moment. With a snarl, his bloodshot

eyes gleaming with an ugly light, the man leapt at the youngster again, and the two fell heavily in a panting heap. The muffled that concealed the lower part of his assailant's face came away as Jimmy tore at it, revealing a thick-lipped but lean face below the furious eyes that glared into his.

But Jim was still dazed from that terrible throttling, and a moment later he was on his back with the other's fingers again digging into his throat.

A mist swam in his brain, but the murderous squeeze on his windpipe was not relaxed. Then a sudden heavy hand fell on the man's shoulder, and he was jerked off.

As if in a dream, Jim felt the pressure on his throat released. He heard a voice—a muffled voice, as if from afar.

"Come off it, y' fool! Ye'll kill him! We've got to cut an' run for this cursed night's work—"

Jim felt the night wind blow in from the open door of the signal cabin, heard the door bang shut again when the train wreckers were through. Then he seemed to dream away pleasantly, now that he could breathe again.

It was the signalman who brought Jim and Sam Blundell round from their stupor. Before long they were sensible of their surroundings. They heard the ting-ting-ting of a signal from the next block down the line, and saw the signalman, slow and shaky in his movements, attending to his instruments and levers.

The alarm bell denoting that the down signal lamp was out was still buzzing angrily, and as soon as the signalman had accepted the up train, and had signalled to the next block in regard to it, he turned to the young fireman and Jim.

"Ye've saved me from summat this night!" he said thickly, gratitude in his voice. "But I wasn't drunk, mates—straight, I wasn't!"

"I know," said Blundell, rising unsteadily to his feet. "I can hear that it's all right. But how—"

"This plucked 'un, 'ere! By gum, ye can see what's in that boy by 'is freckled face. Hang me if he hasn't saved me from some trouble this night. One o' the wasters gripped his throat and nigh strangled 'im. I saw it, but couldn't help, the dope still in me brain. But he got them points over, and there's many to thank 'im for it. I tell ye. And now the blackguards 'ave gone! They sprang in, overcame me w' somethin' sweet-smellin', then forced whisky down me throat. I'm tectotal meself, bein' a signalman, an' that swig knocked me clean over. But I saw them arrange that there evidence on the table—the bottle an' the glass. Blazes, but I'm not out o' the wood yet. Who'll believe that yarn?"

"We will," said Jim. "We know more than you think. We heard of the plot, an' that's what brought us here."

"And thank 'Eaven for it!" muttered the signalman.

"How are you, Jim?" asked Blundell, swaying slightly as he stood, hitching up the belt of his trousers.

"All kiff!" replied Jim, with a shaky laugh. "Able to sit up and take a little notice now. But you? You got a decent cosh with that chair, I saw."

"I'm as right as a trivet. Look here, we've got to look slipper, boy. It's your duty to report this at once, of course?"

"That it is, instanter," replied the signalman.

"Well, don't," said Blundell. "We'll be off to see Sir Richard Grant. There's more at the back of this than you think. Wait till you hear from him before you do anything. If those curs have left our motor-bike all right we'll have your instructions direct from the chief director of the G.S.C. in twenty minutes. You'll do that?"

"I dunno, mate—" began the signalman; but Blundell would brook no other course. At last the signalman gave in with the ungracious remark that it would be as well to be hung for a sheep as a lamb, anyway.

So off the young fireman and Jim set, the motor-bicycle, luckily, having escaped the notice of the villains.

For the second time that night, Sam Blundell rode recklessly with Jim hanging on for dear life behind him. They arrived at Carrington Hall, it seemed to Jim, almost as soon as they had started, and the pair ran up to the house and rattled a wild tattoo on the front door of the mansion.

The door was opened by a manservant, who tried to bar their entrance.

"Urgent, man!" cried Blundell. "Tell Sir Richard we have something urgent to report about the railway—"

"Is it an accident?"

The voice broke in suddenly—a quiet voice, but strained and anxious. Sam Blundell and Jim Speed turned swiftly and saw Sir Richard, in evening-dress, a cigar between his fingers, standing at the doorway of the library, where Jim had before had an interview with the great railway magnate.

"No, sir, but nearly," replied Sam promptly. "May we talk to you in private, sir?"

"Yes, yes! Come in! What is it? Not—not—"

The library door was shut, and Sam Blundell at once started his narrative. Sir Richard stood as if petrified.

"Impossible!" he cried. "John Langrish doing that! You must be mistaken—you exaggerate—"

"No, no, sir!" whipped out Sam. "It's exactly as I've said, except details in regard to Speed, who is the one who really saved the train. The signalman will confirm—"

Sir Richard sank wearily down into a leather-covered arm-chair, motioning to the comrades to be seated also. Then followed some rapid talk, and Sam pointed out the urgency of letting the signalman have a message—a personal letter. Sir Richard wrote one instantly, summoned a chauffeur, and sent him off with it to Blackhampton Long Tunnel North box, telling the man to get it there within ten minutes.

"This is far worse than I expected," said Sir Richard, putting his hand to his head, utter weariness in his voice. "It is infamous, almost unbelievable!"

"You will charge Langrish, sir, and so put a stop to it?"

Sam Blundell, anxiety in his look, asked the question hesitatingly.

"Charge him! Let me think. It is a terrible state of affairs—and so soon. Witnesses? You two and the signalman. Yes, we could make a case—but against Langrish? No, we could never do that. I must talk freely with you youngsters. You have been plucky, and have done me a great service—you, Speed, a double service of late. Langrish is too clever. You recognised no one. Your story would not be entirely believed. They would say you have faked up the preposterous tale, because of your hatred of the electric concerns at Carnborough. That man you saw with Langrish, the man who speaks in the park, Soper—probably the police will suspect him for the attempt. I have had my attention called to that man's activities. There is a letter at his house now, discharging him. Done at once, since he is a traitor to

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 870.

his railway, and it has been proved that he has not done his duty. A sacked man talking to a crowd is not nearly so strong a person as one still working. The superintendent gave him every chance. However, the law will suspect men such as he, who have recently been discharged from the G.S.C."

Sam Blundell nodded, and Jim spoke.

"I'm afraid that's all too likely, sir," said the youngster. "But the signalman—and us? There'll be trouble of some sort, of course—"

"On the contrary, Speed, no more will be heard of the matter. The public will never know. I have ordered the signalman to clear away all evidence, and continue with his work as if nothing had happened. And now, what can I do for you two very good friends in our struggle to keep the G.S.C. the leading railway of Great Britain?"

Fellow Lodgers!

JIM looked at Sam, and Sam looked at Jim. Each was waiting for the other to give a lead in making a reply. At last Jimmy spoke.

"For me, sir," he said, "you've done heaps enough already. There'll be plenty of like jobs later, as far as I can see. I'd like, sir—I'd like just to earn your trust. You gave me a start in the shops as apprentice with a special private wage to add to my workshop wage, so's I can stick it. That'll take some repaying!"

Sir Richard smiled at Jim's halting remarks, delivered with some confusion. He looked well pleased with the lad's words, and some of the weariness went out of his eyes. He turned to the young fireman, whose coating of grime hid the flush on his face. Sam swung his greasy cap to and fro, awkwardly.

"I'd like to say I'd be glad to carry on and accept nothing, sir," said Blundell. "But—but I can't miss the opportunity. I'm a fireman, as you can see—hadn't time to wash or change. Well, sir, I'm a bit of an inventor, too. I—I've worked out some good gadgets—I mean special designs for steam locos. The ideas are good, I know, but my workings-out are crude, sir. I need training—training of the right sort, so that I can work out my ideas like a real locomotive designer. I— If it's not too much, sir, would you—that is, I need training, sir."

Sam began to blunder in his speech, grew very confused, and jibbed like a locomotive with a choked steam-pipe. Sir Richard looked at the young fireman keenly. If he had seemed amused, Sam would have felt like nothing on earth. But he didn't. Sir Richard Grant was a gentleman.

"Locomotive designing is a very high form of art, Blundell," he said, "and perhaps your ideas are not so practicable as you think them—"

"It's the firebox, sir," broke in Sam. "I claim to know as much about the firebox as any man living. The shape isn't right yet! There's the first draught receives a check on account of the slope of the bottom, where the firebars are. I've got a good idea about that—"

"Ah, your own trade, eh?" broke in the director, immediately looking keen and interested. "That's very interesting. A crude idea by a fireman may revolutionise firebox design. You shall have what you desire, young man, and it is little enough you ask. Do you know Mr. Steel?"

"The chief of the drawing offices, sir? Rather, sir! I've often seen him."

"Well, you shall have a letter from me to him, and you can rely on him to give you every chance of learning. Also, you can confidently let him have your ideas, without fear that they will be used and the credit taken by someone else. But you'll have to study hard, Blundell—geometry, algebra—"

"Though I don't look it, sir, I know a good bit in that line. And I've kept my brain up to scratch since I left school. Usual thing, glamour of the railway, sir, desire to drive an express, and so on."

"Ah, then it sounds promising. I'll write the letter now. No time like the present, though it is getting late. And let me help you in any other way I can. You, too, Speed."

"Thank you, sir," said Jim and Sam.

Sir Richard Grant sat down and wrote for several minutes. He sealed the letter, and handed it to Sam.

"And now, my lads," he said, "my best thanks. I need hardly repeat that I want no breath of to-night's happenings to get into the papers. You will keep quite silent as to what you have seen and heard to-night. Mr. Brooke will call on you, and you must, of course, speak freely with him, since he is the chief of our detective staff. But to no one else, you understand, or you will play into the hands of—well, to put it bluntly, the enemy."

The baronet then shook hands, laughing at Sam's rueful glance at his own black palm before he allowed the director

to take it. Then the pair were shown out, and they walked down to where they had left the motor-cycle alongside the drive just below the house.

They walked the machine down the drive, past the lodge where the lodge-keeper, who had been made to admit them by threats from Sam, grunted out a surly good-night, and so on to the wide main road. They did not speak till Sam paused and leaned over the saddle of the machine. The young fireman held out a grimy paw, which Jim seized enthusiastically.

"We're chums, mate," said Sam. "I'd like us to stick together. Where do you lodge?"

Jim told him, and Sam Blundell looked sympathetic.

"That's a long way! Best come home with me to-night, and after that I'd like you to fix up lodging with me for good. What do you say?"

"By jingo, you're a sport, Sam!" Jimmy grinned. "You bet I will! Don't mind my calling you Sam?"

"Rather not, chum, and you'll never call in vain. Well, here's for home, or we sha'n't be able to do our work to-morrow—or, rather, I sha'n't be able to do mine. You start on Monday, but you can keep house for me till then—eh? Then we'll keep house together. Here she goes—r-r-r-rup! Starts up first kick. Nip up behind, Jimmy, and we'll soon be home!"

That night, after a good meal, a wash down, and a good hard rub with rough towels, in Sam's little attic, Jim turned in with Sam and lay on a softer bed than he had known for a long while, though the young fireman's bed wasn't soft by any stretch of the imagination.

Before dawn, after a short but sound sleep, Jim was awakened by a demoralising din beside his ear. He leapt up like a cannon-shot, grabbing at Sam's big, strong shoulder, slipped on the side of the bed and rolled on to the floor with a yell.

The young fireman's hearty laughter, a click, and the cessation of the frantic buzzing, now quietened Jim. A match scraped, and the dull light from the oil-lamp gleamed out, showing the low slanting ceiling of the attic, the primus stove under the window, and the plain deal table with the wreck of the previous night's supper still on it.

Jim gasped.

"Sorry!" he said. "Jingo, I was dreaming about that scrap in the signal cabin, and the blare of that blessed alarm clock put the tin hat on it. Sorry I yelled like a mad idiot."

Sam hadn't stopped laughing.

"Sall right," he said at last, calming down. "Bur-r-r! Isn't it raw? Sometimes I wish I wasn't a blessed fireman. Four-thirty a.m., and got to get up, tub, and go to work! Bur-r-r-r!"

"Well, I'll get brekker," said Jim. "Can I have a sluice in that wash-basin?"

"Carry on, chum. Sausages in the cupboard. I'll get the primus going. Tricky things to handle till you're used to 'em. By the way, Jim, you might run over to Carn-borough to-day and tell Tim Parks his motor-bike is all right and was most useful, and that I'll deliver it back to him this evening. Give it a clean, old son, will you? Water in the yard, but pull it out of the shed before you splash about with the water, or we'll have our good landlady saying things."

Jim grinned, and towelled his head. Then he got busy with the kettle and frying-pan on the stove Sam had already lit, and which was roaring merrily. Sam tubbed, dressed, and fed, put a mixture of tea and sugar into his tea-can, and left the house, reminding Jim to lock the door and take the key with him whenever leaving the room. For it was not a house in which only angels dwelt—that tenement within hearing of the shunting and locomotive shrieks of the Black-hampton junction of the Great Scottish and Central Railway.

The next few days did not drag as Jim had expected. He had found a chum, a thoroughly good-natured, clever, strong fellow, full of life and ambition. And he had work to do. Sam's untidy little room became neat and comfortable, and Sam often said he'd be sorry when Jim started work.

Sam Blundell went to see Mr. Robert Steel, by invitation, one evening. The young fireman was to call at the house of the chief of the drawing-offices on the outskirts of the town. Jimmy waited impatiently for his chum to come back. At last Sam's footsteps were heard.

"Any luck?" cried Jimmy eagerly.

Sam laughed.

"Not so bad," he said, sitting down to the supper Jimmy had already prepared. "Of course, my drawings are so rough that I dare say a chap like Steel, always used to swagger drawings, with red ink and flourishes and what-not, didn't quite see all my ideas properly. He 'humped' a good bit at 'em, anyway; but he'd got Sir Richard's letter, and so couldn't turn me down. In fact, he admitted afterwards that there might be something in my new firebox, though he didn't seem very keen on my idea for a new type of super-heater. Still, I couldn't expect him to call the fire-engines out over my schemes as soon as he clapped eyes on 'em,



"I have something to report—about the railway—" cried Blundell, pushing his way past the man-servant. His words trailed off as he came face to face with Sir Richard Grant. "Is it an accident?" asked the great railway director, in a quiet but strained and anxious voice.

could I? But the great thing is that I've got facilities now. He says I can have any drawings and tracings I want done by his confidential draughtsmen, and that when I've worked my wheezes out fully, he'll see that my designs are placed before the board and given every chance."

But, nevertheless, in his heart, Sam was a little disappointed that Mr. Robert Steel had not been a little more enthusiastic. Jimmy could see it, too.

"Don't you worry, Sam!" he cried cheerily. "You've got faith in 'em yourself; you know your ideas are good! I'll bet my Sunday dinner you'll be a made man when you've finished working those ideas of yours out! There'll be bands playing and fireworks fizzing for Sam Blundell some day. I mean it! You'll be a made man!"

He slapped his chum lustily on the shoulder-blade, making Sam splutter and spill his tea all over the cloth.

"And you'll be made mincemeat, young shaver, if you don't watch out!" laughed Sam, after he had regained his breath and had mopped his shirtfront dry. "Look here, Jim, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll have a jaunt to-night to celebrate your coming on the railway. It's Saturday, so let's have a stroll round old Blackhampton, and nip into a music-hall for the second house. What say?"

"I'm on!" grinned Jim. "Put the cost down in your book, and hang the expense!"

Sam kept a small notebook, entering what Jim owed him, less a consideration for his "housemaid" duties, with a great flourish on every occasion, and erasing on the sly later on. That book was an important thing in Jim's eyes, but a huge joke in Sam's.

So the pair dressed in their best—not a very good best for Jim—and sallied forth. They entered the park on their way to the brightly lit streets near Prince's Square, and there they lingered for a while, their faces a little worried. For a great crowd had gathered, and the groups of men they passed were talking of nothing but Carnborough and the Great Electric Northern. Many a man crashed his fist into his palm and swore by fire and steam and steel that he'd "go electric," and leave Blackhampton to stew in its own juice.

Men there were who had just knocked off work, black and greasy from their various jobs. And the crowd was thickest round a man who stood on some sort of platform, waving his arms, clenching his fist, and shouting at the top of his voice.

Sam Blundell stopped dead and gripped Jim's arm.

"See who that is, Jim?" he said swiftly. "That fat waster on the box?"

Jim turned quickly and looked in the direction of Sam's nod.

"Jingo!" muttered Jim. "Soper!"

"Ay, Soper, poisoning the minds of the men! Come on, Jimmy! Let's push close up! Hang it, things are too grim in Blackhampton for us to go fooling about at music-halls! See if we can't get near!"

The two chums shouldered their way, with tight lips, to where Harold Soper, the arch-traitor to the Great Scottish and Central, was again busy on Langrish's dirty work—striving to make trouble in Blackhampton.

Blundell v. Soper!

SAM was noted for the breadth of his shoulders, the bigness of his bones, and the brawniness of his limbs, and Jim was as strong and wiry as a young horse, so before very long the two had managed to force their way through the close-packed men to where Harold Soper stood upon his platform.

Soper was very heated and excited and oily as he gesticulated wildly, booming out his words from an abysmal mouth, haranguing the men for their "stupid obstinacy," as he called it, in sticking to steam while there was more money to be picked up in the electric shops and sheds at Carnborough.

"Where's the sense of it?" boomed Soper, shooting out a white, puffy forefinger. "D'you know what you'll be? A crowd o' stick-in-the-muds paradin' outside the Labour Exchange every mornin' and drawin' the dole weekly! I tell you you're sticking to a sinkin' ship, mates, that's what you're doin'! What's the sense in it? Steam's done for. The Electric Northern'll smash steam railways like a steam-roller'd smash a cracked bottle! Steam's done for; electricity's the thing nowadays. Record runs has already been made by the electric long-distance expresses of the G. E. N. Electricity! That's the thing! And the shops are at Carnborough! Carnborough, what'll ruin Blackhampton, and a good job, too!"

Soper paused, breathless, and "Hear, hear!" came from a good many of his listeners, and many a growled, "He's right!" from those around Jim and Sam. One or two men began to shout and wave their fists, and some to harangue the men immediately round them.

The two chums, burning with indignation, could feel a dangerous "something" in the air. The dull foreboding that had reigned in Blackhampton had given place to hectic excitement, and the very atmosphere of the great railway town seemed changed.

Soper began again. He was hot and oily and eloquent. The man was worked up into a wild state of excitement now, and Jim and Sam Blundell had to admit that he had power—power to grip his hearers, to convince waverers, and talk round men of opposite ideas to his own.

"Ay, steam's no good!" howled Soper excitedly. "Any man that stands by it now is a fool—"

But he did not finish his sentence. A broad-shouldered figure had come leaping suddenly up on to the platform beside him, and Soper was too taken aback to carry on for the moment.

"See here, Soper!" cried Sam, loud enough for the crowd to hear. "I'm standing by steam! But I'll let no man of your kidney call me a fool, an' I'll ask you to take that back!"

The crowd surged forward, every man striving to draw nearer, to miss nothing of what followed. Shouts rose on all sides, some backing up Sam, others yelling to him to stand down. Jim, who had followed Sam to the edge of the platform, felt a little apprehensive for his big chum. It looked as though ugly trouble might break out at any moment. The police on the outskirts of the crowd had begun to look expectant.

Soper choked.

"Get down off this platform!" he snarled. "I repeat my words—steam's dead as a nail, and any man that stands by it is a dashed fool!"

Sam's lips compressed. His temper was up, and he did not pause to consider consequences. He clenched his hand and drew it back, as though to drive the insulting words back between Soper's teeth. But at that moment he felt his wrist caught.

Jimmy Speed was hanging on to it determinedly.

"Don't hit him, you ass, for Heaven's sake!" he muttered to Sam. "If you do, there'll be no end of trouble!"

Sam unclenched his hand as Jimmy let go his grasp. An angry light still gleamed in the young fireman's eyes, but he saw that Jimmy was right. For the moment he had for-

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 870.

gotten himself, and he saw, thanks to Jimmy, that he had been saved from making a bad mistake.

Soper had started back, pale-faced. Now he licked his dry lips and gave an uneasy laugh.

There came some derisive shouts from the crowd, and angry shouts of defiance. A scrap was already beginning in one corner of the crowd, but the police soon stopped it. Soper turned to his listeners again, ignoring Sam and Jimmy.

"That's where the pay is—over at Carnborough—" he began.

But Sam interrupted.

"Men, are you going to listen to this soft-handed orange-box spouter?" he cried. "I'm one of you! I'm a worker for the G.S.C., taking G.S.C. money, and sticking by steam! Is he? He says steam's done for! Is it? Don't you believe it! What's been proved? Nothing!"

Soper gripped the handrail in front of him and shook it in a paroxysm of fury. His voice boomed out: "What with those great yellow locos on the—" But Sam did not stop. The young fireman filled his great lungs, and the crowd was held spellbound as the two men roared out their words. Sam's was the voice most listened to—not on account of the strength of his lungs, it was the strength of his delivery; and the men strove to catch his words, ignoring Soper.

"Ay, what's been proved?" roared Sam Blundell. "The Electric's made a record run, but no more'n a shade better than our latest Pacific expresses. And they're not asleep in our drawing-offices—they're mighty alive! You've seen the papers—'Steam Going by the Board!' 'The Yellow Peril!' But don't you believe all the papers say! Can you imagine the workshops o' Blackhampton silenced? Can you imagine the grating roar o' yellow monsters past your windows—and all made at Carnborough? The very rails rolled out at the rival town, and Blackhampton a city of the dead! Never, I tell you, if you'll stick to the G.S.C.! Wait for what's to come—you've already been promised it—the new Wolf express, for instance, a new 4-8-2, with driving-wheels as big as your house! We'll see what the yellow ones'll do against her! Steam's not done yet, mates, not by long chalks. You want the weight o' the water and the engines on the line, not a whirring, yellow-cased thing on a chassis loaded down with junk to make the miserable little wheels grip! Trust Sir Richard Grant to bring forward the latest an' best possible for steam, and if that fails, desert to Carnborough, if you like!"

Cheer after cheer broke out as Sam paused. Soper was still bellowing like a bull, but no sound could be heard in the shouting of the multitude. His mouth, opening and shutting, his fat hands waving, brought a delighted grin to Jimmy's lips.

But the crowd was divided, and blows were exchanged by some. Others shook their fists at Sam, or jeered at Soper. The mounted police outside the gates began to move forward in readiness. A group of men surged forward, and tried to drag Sam down from the platform, and it looked as though the young fireman was in for some rough handling. Jim began to hit out; but a group of cheering railway-men pressed forward, clutching and pushing and hitting, and they were soon round Sam, slapping him on the back.

A moment later they had chaired him, and ringing cheers rose on all sides as Sam was seen swaying on their shoulders.

"Our champion!" bawled a middle-aged man, who looked like a driver. "Just what we want—someone to spout for us! Good old steam! Long live steam! Down wi' the Yellow Peril!"

Excitement ran high in Blackhampton that Saturday night. But the parading and shouting crowds were fairly orderly, and the majority were for steam, and meant to stick by it to the end.

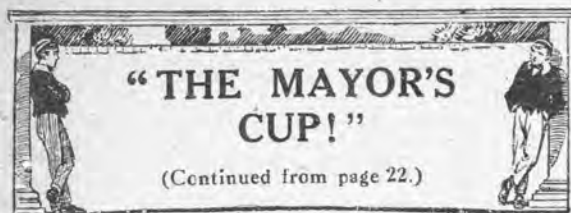
The glaring lights of the city flickered on the swaying seas of heads till near midnight. The newspaper offices were blazing with light. The "Blackhampton Star" printing works clashed and roared incessantly.

"Gee, if I hadn't struck lucky the other day I'd have been nipping about near the West Central Station to-morrow, shouting the news of to-night's park meeting!" said Jim, as the pair, tired and a trifle battered, wended their way home. "Steam v. Electricity! That'll be the headlines of to-morrow's special Sunday edition. Jove, but you're a great man, Sam! The way you swayed that crowd! Crumbs, it was better than the Hippodrome!"

Sam laughed grimly.

"What wouldn't I give to be able to look into the future!" he muttered. "To know how it'll all end!"

(If the two chums had but known, there were some very exciting times ahead! Be sure you read next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful serial, chums.)



Gordon Gay had already guessed that that was where the cup was hidden.

In a flash the Grammarian had slipped off his shoes, and, carrying them in his hands, he ran lightly across the boulder-strewn grass.

He reached the ruins, and, stepping cautiously to the yawning cavity, he took a swift peep over. One look was enough.

Below him, at the foot of the broken stone steps, were standing Mr. Banks and Cyril Bagley. In the glaring white light from an electric torch he saw their faces clearly—Bagley's eager and vicious; Banks' crafty and avaricious.

And in the hands of the mayor's son was a shining silver cup—the thirty-guinea challenge cup!

As he withdrew his head, Gordon Gay's mind worked at lightning speed. And quick as a flash he grasped the loose flag-stone, and fairly hurled it into position.

It fell with a heavy thud over the cavity, and as it did so a muffled, terrified cry came from below.

But Gordon Gay ignored it. His eyes were gleaming, as, jumping to a heap of broken stones, he began with feverish haste to pile them on top of the flag-stone. He was taking no chances.

He had just finished to his satisfaction when he himself got a shock—an unpleasant shock. There sounded a sudden rush of feet on the flags, and next instant two forms fell upon the Grammarian leader, and bore him to the stone flags with a thud.

"Got him!" came a triumphant voice.

It was Tom Merry's voice, but instead of being alarmed, Gordon Gay felt a thrill of joy. Tom Merry was the one fellow he wanted to see just then.

"Hold on, Merry!" he gasped. "I've got something—"

"You have—something we mean to have, my pippin!" snapped Tom. "Hold him, Blake!"

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Blake.

He clung to Gordon Gay, and in a flash Tom had snatched something from Gay's outside pocket—a pocket camera.

In the twinkling of an eye he had the back of the camera open, and had torn out the roll of films. A moment later they were being crushed to pulp beneath the heels of Tom's boots.

"And that's that!" grinned Tom. "Now, my lad—"

Tom Merry broke off, and almost jumped as he became suddenly aware of a queer commotion going on beneath the

flagstones. His startled eyes stared at the heap of stones piled on the trapdoor.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "Who the thump— Who's down there, Gay?"

Gay grinned.

"It's only our mutual friend, Cyril Bagley, and a pal," he chuckled. "They've got the thirty-guinea challenge cup down there—"

"Wha-a-at?"

Gay nodded, hugely enjoying the sensation his words aroused. A moment later, while the St. Jim's juniors eyed him in growing amazement, he was telling all he had seen and heard.

"Well, my only Sunday topper!" ejaculated Tom at last. "So—so that's the explanation of it all? It was Bagley who collared me the other night, stole my knife and handkerchief so that he could shove the blame for the kidnapping on to us? Phew!"

"That's pretty clear now," said Gay, flushing. "I—I say, Merry, I'm beastly sorry for having charged you. I ought to have known—"

"That's all right," grinned Tom cheerily. "It looks like being all serene now, and I vote we make it pax this very minute, old man. After all, it did look as if we had done it."

He held out his hand frankly, and Gay was only too glad to grasp it and shake it. Then he shook hands with Blake, and peace having thus been declared they began to discuss the situation, oblivious of the yells of the imprisoned Mr. Banks and Bagley junior.

"It's thundering awkward!" said Tom. "We've got these beauties fixed up, and the cup's there. But—but we can't get the police on the job for the giddy mayor's sake."

"He deserves it, though, the wastrel!" snapped Gordon Gay. "What can we do, though? I'm stumped! We don't want to have the responsibility of raising a frightful scandal."

"That's just it," agreed Tom. "I'll tell you what. Supposing we just leave 'em in there, and tell the yarn to our respective Heads? Let them decide what's to be done."

"Oh, good!"

"Good wheeze, Tommy," said Blake.

"Right!" exclaimed Tom, with relief. "We'll do it. An hour or so in there won't do the rotters any harm, and they're not the sort to risk losing their lives by trying to get out through that labyrinth of tunnels to Wayland Castle."

"Not them."

"So let's be off," went on Tom, grinning at Gordon Gay. "I fancy we'll soon be meeting you Grammarians for that giddy cup again."

"You—you mean you're willing to play it over again?" gasped Gordon Gay, his eyes gleaming.

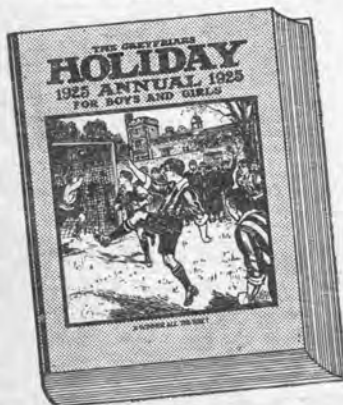
"I fancy I can promise you that," said Tom, laughing. "That is, of course, if the mayor proves to be a sportsman, and I think he is a sportsman, whatever his other failings are."

"Oh, good!" gasped Gordon Gay.

And his face was bright as he accompanied the St. Jim's

(Continued on the next page.)

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juniors away from the spot where Mr. Joseph Banks and Master Cyril Bagley were imprisoned in a state of bewilderment and terror that was too deep for words.

And Tom Merry proved to be right on both counts. The Mayor of Wayland, whatever his faults and failings, which were numerous enough, proved to be a sportsman.

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton heard the story in astonishment and alarm, and immediately, Mr. Railton got on the phone to Mr. Tobias Bagley. But that gentleman had already heard the story from Dr. Monk, and had gone to release his hopeful son and heir when Mr. Railton rang up.

What exactly took place between the mayor, his son, and Mr. Joseph Banks never became public property. But Tom Merry & Co. heard enough to fill them with unholy glee. For, apart from "backing up" his son, as the juniors had expected, Mr. Tobias Bagley gave that young rascal a terrific thrashing, and announced his intention of packing him off without delay to a school he knew of where slackers and "gay blades" were taken in hand and licked into shape.

And with regard to the thirty-guinea cup, Tom Merry also proved to be right, for the rest of the St. Jim's team were only too glad to play the match again when they heard the real facts.

It took place on the St. Jim's ground on the following Saturday afternoon, and a terrific struggle it proved to be.

Both teams were now fairly evenly matched, and it was a ding-dong fight from the first pheeep of the whistle to the last.

Up to half-time no score had been recorded, and faces were looking a trifle anxious when time crept on and full time approached without a goal being shot.

It had been a gruelling game, and play had been fast and furious, when, just as both teams were showing signs of being played out, Tom Merry got a chance—the only chance of the match.

The ball came sweetly across the sward from Talbot on the right wing, and, suddenly realising he had an open goal before him, Tom took the chance of slamming the ball goalwards.

It was a hasty shot, but his aim was true, and there arose a groan of disappointment as the Grammarian goalie, by an almost miraculous leap, reached the ball and fisted it out. But even as the groan arose a slim junior, with a monocle in his eye, sped like lightning to the rescue, and his aristocratic head met the ball with a dull plop.

Goal!

It was. The swift action of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had the goalie hopelessly beat, and a moment later he was fishing the ball from the net behind him amid a perfect hurricane of cheering.

It was one "up" for St. Jim's, and they kept it "up." For the rest of the play the Grammarians attacked again and again with the fury of desperation, but in goal Fatty Wynn was playing the game of his life, and they could not get past him. And the whistle pheeeped for time at last, and the score still stood at one to none in favour of St. Jim's.

St. Jim's had won the cup fairly and squarely, and Gordon Gay made no bones about admitting the fact this time. And when the Mayor of Wayland presented it to Tom Merry & Co. after the match nobody cheered louder or more sincerely than Gordon Gay & Co. And at the bumper celebration that took place at Mother Murphy's that evening the Grammarians mingled with the Saints in joyous comradeship—a comradeship which had been cemented firmer still by the queer affair of The Mayor's Cup!

THE END.

(No "Gemite" should miss next week's grand yarn of St. Jim's, entitled "D'ARCY'S ADOPTED!" This is Martin Clifford's most screamingly funny story.)

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