

"THE CROSS-WORD CRAZE AT ST JIM'S!" (An Amusing School Story Inside.)

The GEM

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

No. 890.
Vol. XXVII
Feb. 28th,
1925.

LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

THE HEAD'S CROSS-WORD PUZZLE



CAN YOU SOLVE IT?



THE CROSS-WORD CRAZY GOALIE!

Smitten with the popular hobby of the moment, Fatty Wynn allows an easy goal to be registered against his team. (An unusual incident from the grand school story of St. Jim's in this issue.)



The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringham, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

CHUMS.—Some worth very special. When, for instance, there, tremendously infallible per- of St. Jim's, lends his there must be some- about it. Dr. Holmes es, but he does not it. And there is no The worthy doctor age to a Cross Word on this same page puzzle. It is a first- your attention, and My advice to all y and solve it. The Jim's Cross Word Problem is the best specimen yet.

"THE SCHOOLBOY REFUGEE!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's yarn is pitched in a striking and highly original key. We do not hear much about reformatories at St. Jim's. But it is just as well to remember that in such establishments regions of fellows have worked through all their many troubles, and romped in at the end as splendid winners. We can let it go at that.

A MYSTERY YARN!

But about Mr. Martin Clifford's new tale for our next issue there is this to be

said. It shows you life as it is—life with its grey patches as well as its bright, and it brings right on to the scene at St. Jim's a character who is bound to win the suffrages of all Gemites. The newcomer is a tramp. Who he is I do not mind telling here and now. That won't give away the intense interest of a record plot. The stranger who turns up at the school is the brother of Alan Lorne. In a sense he is expected by Dr. Holmes and the staff, and they take him for what he appears to be—namely, the genuine Simon. His name is not Simon, but you will understand all about it next week.

A SPECIAL EXTRA-LONG STORY!

Don't forget! This 25,000-word tale of the boy who has been on jolly hard times, and who finds a sanctuary at St. Jim's, will cause a stir. It is brilliant in the extreme. A whole train-load of strange circumstances help the refugee in his search for safety. What's the odds if he is not precisely the individual whose advent was looked for? It's a notably good yarn. Just mention it to your friends. Tell that chum who is thinking of joining the GEM circle that now's the time! Tell him not to stand upon the order of becoming a doughty Gemite, but to get busy right away, and order next week's superb number from his newsagent. He will

thank you as soon as Wednesday comes round.

THE TUCK HAMPER!

Just a note about this splendid feature. I want to give a special word of advice to all competitors. They should send in their jokes written on postcards. There need not be the slightest trouble about the Tuck Hamper Coupon. It can be stuck at the bottom of the card at the end of the chirpy yarnlet. Send your storyettes to the Editor, the GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. Each one is carefully considered. I want everybody to have a try; but remember that the postcard saves postage, and a lot of trouble to all concerned.

"FOOTBALL CHUMS!"

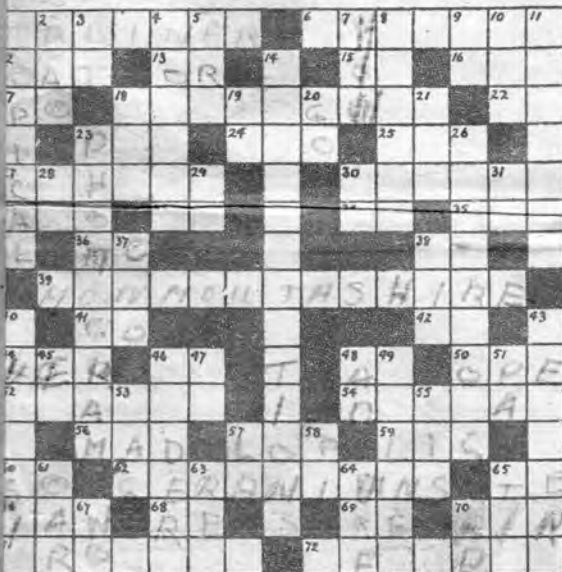
By Arthur S. Hardy.

If Hal Chester can stay the course, so to speak, everybody will raise a cheer. In next week's grand instalment there are certain extremely sensational happenings. It is one of those air-tight, true-to-life tales in which you can see something of what that "if" means. Young Chester has been handicapped from the outset. He has been fighting against tremendous odds like Horatio Coles, who kept the bridge in the old days. But we can let the antique by-gone speak for itself. There are just as severe struggles for mind and body these days as ever there were in the past. The only thing is we don't make a song about them. Hal's stepfather must be thinking pretty hard that if the old curmudgeon really can think at all! The reflection of what he has made his young relative suffer might well be calculated to keep him awake at nights.

Your Editor.

DR. HOLMES' CROSS WORD PUZZLE.

CAN YOU SOLVE IT, CHUMS?



DOWN.

- Of local interest.
- A New House junior.
- Preposition.
- Officer who certifies deeds.
- Before.
- Pronoun.
- Performs.
- Note in musical scale.
- The conscious "I."
- Ridden at the seaside
- Speeches.
- Observe.
- With reference to.
- Proceed.
- A thick, piquant sauce.
- A character used to represent a sound.
- Orders preventing arrival or departure of ships.
- A force acting on the nervous system.
- Scottish form of "eye."
- Thus.
- Exclamation of joy.
- A manufacturer of salts.
- A Japanese ounce.
- A genus of Mediterranean plants.
- Shopkeepers.
- Expression of hesitation.
- Trees of the birch variety.
- Note in musical scale.
- Prefix meaning "into."
- One who makes films.
- Father.
- A receptacle.
- A hobgoblin.
- Note in musical scale.
- A confused mass of types.
- Used in boat race.
- Tipsy.
- Contains ashes.
- Worn round the neck.
- Negative.
- Prefix meaning "to" or "at."

ACROSS.

- One who prepares athletes.
- Bombarded with shells.
- A grassy plant.
- Alternative.
- Within.
- Past.
- Italian river.
- Stalks.
- Upon.
- A vegetable.
- Within.
- Leicestershire cricketer.
- To stick together.
- A golfing term.
- Fuss.
- Yourselves.
- A bone.
- A lad.
- Not.
- Artistic distinction.
- A county in thirteen letters.
- Be off!
- The King of Bashan.
- Pronoun.
- Preposition.
- Perhaps.
- Open (poetic form).
- Fit for cultivation.
- Belonging to a line.
- Insane.
- To cut off.
- Litigation.
- Like this.
- Flowers.
- Note in musical scale.
- A boy's name.
- A branch of the Service.
- Regarding.
- What we breathe.
- Awakened.
- Infuriates.

There are some lively times at St. Jim's in connection with the popular hobby of the moment. The august Head, Dr. Holmes, hands out a record puzzle for solution, and the consequent happenings are startling in the extreme!



THE CROSSWORD CRAZE AT ST. JIM'S!

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

By
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

The Head's Puzzle!

"I WANT a bone—" murmured Figgins.
"Eh?"
"A which?"
"I want a bone—"

Kerr and Fatty Wynn stared at their chum in amazement. George Figgins, the leader of the New House juniors at St. Jim's, was seated at the table in his study. His brow was wrinkled in thought. Figgy had, in fact, been thinking deeply for some moments, and his chums had scarcely dared to interrupt him. They stood by the window and looked out across the sunny quadrangle. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the pleasant thudding of footballs could be heard, both from the quad and from the distant playing-fields. But when Figgins made his extraordinary remark, Kerr and Fatty Wynn ceased to stare out of the window. They stared at Figgins instead.

"You—you want a bone?" gasped Kerr.

Figgins nodded.

"Feeling as hungry as all that, Figgy?" asked Fatty Wynn. "I've often felt pretty ravenous myself, but it's never been so bad that I wanted a bone!"

"In any case, we can't oblige you," said Kerr. "We're not in the habit of going about with bones in our pockets."

"Ass!" snorted Figgins. "Can't you understand? I want a bone, in two letters—"

"Oh!"

Kerr and Fatty Wynn promptly tumbled to the situation. Figgins was engaged in solving—or, rather, trying to solve—a Cross Word puzzle. Hence his wrinkled brow, which was sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. Hence, also, the pile of dictionaries and reference books which stood at his elbow.

"Working on the Head's puzzle?" asked Kerr.

"Of course! What do you suppose I've been doing all this time? Counting the flies on the ceiling?"

"You ought to have solved the blessed thing by now, if you've been at it ever since dinner!" said Fatty Wynn.

"What!" shouted Figgins. "I'd like to see anybody solve this puzzle in twenty minutes—or twenty hours, if it comes to that!"

"But the Head says it's easy—" began Kerr.

Figgins gave a snort.

"It might be easy to a highbrow like the Head, but it's not easy to me. I've only found half a dozen words, so far. Why don't you help a fellow out, instead of standing there like a couple of graven images?"

"We'll help you, with pleasure," said Kerr. "What is it you want?"

"A bone!" snapped Figgins. "A bone in two letters. I've told you so about half a dozen times!"

Evidently the Head's Cross Word puzzle had frayed the edges of Figgy's temper. His hair was ruffled, and in his eyes was the wild look of the Cross Word fanatic.

Figgy had been very badly bitten by the new craze. Cross Word puzzles had cast their magic spell over him, and for days past he had done nothing but unravel problems. Even footer had been neglected for the sake of the new pastime.

Up till now the problems which Figgins had tackled had been of a fairly simple nature. He had not been baffled by any of them. Sometimes he had been able to solve them without the aid of a dictionary.

But this latest puzzle, specially designed by the headmaster of St. Jim's for the delectation of his pupils, was, in schoolboy parlance, "a regular corker!"

The Head was offering a prize of a ten-pound note for a correct solution. In the event of more than one fellow sending in a correct solution, the award was to be divided.

Figgins of the New House was very keen on winning the coveted "tenner," but he realised that it was not to be won without a hard mental struggle.

The Head had called the puzzle an easy one. Easy it might have been, to those gentlemen who spend their time browsing in libraries. But to George Figgins, who did not claim to be a great scholar, the Head's puzzle seemed to resemble those that were set by that monster of Greek mythology, the Sphinx.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn were keen on Cross Word problems; but their enthusiasm for filling in the little white squares had not carried them away, as in Figgy's case. They still remembered that there was a game called football, and they still played chess in the Common-room of an evening.

As a matter of fact, Figgy's chums would have preferred to be with Tom Merry & Co. on the footer field, rather than frothing in a stuffy study, as Kerr put it. But their loyalty to Figgins had caused them to stay with him; and they now came forward to help.

"A bone in two letters," said Kerr musingly. "That's a bit of a teaser, isn't it?"

"It's beaten me," said Figgins.

"But it won't beat old Kerr," said Fatty Wynn, with a note of admiration in his voice. "He's a giddy genius for ferreting things out. I wonder he hasn't got the Cross Word craze as badly as you, Figgy."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 890.

"Dry up, Fatty! I'm trying to think."

"That's about as far as you'll get!" said Fatty, with a grin.

Silence descended upon the study for a short space. Then Kerr clapped his hands triumphantly.

"Got it!" he ejaculated.

"You've got a bone, in two letters?" demanded Figgins eagerly.

"Yes. It's the Latin word for bone—'Os.'"

"Oh, my hat!"

"It's hardly cricket, for the Head to drag Latin words into his puzzles," said Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, I don't know," said Kerr. "We're supposed to be familiar with Latin, you know."

Figgins jotted down the newly-found word with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Thanks, Kerr!" he said. "I shouldn't have thought of that in a month of Sundays!"

"That's all right," said Kerr. "Any more teasers?"

"Yes. You fellows might as well sit down, and put your thinking-caps on."

"But, I say—there's the footer—" began Fatty Wynn.

"Blow footer!"

"We're expected to turn out to practice. Have you forgotten that we're playing Abbotsford on Saturday, and the Cup Final with Greyfriars the Saturday after?"

"Blow Abbotsford! And blow Greyfriars!"

"Blow them both to smithereens, if you like. But Tom Merry will be awfully ratty—"

Figgins consigned Tom Merry, and football, and Greyfriars, and Abbotsford, to a town of seven letters, beginning with "J" and ending with "o." Then he turned again to the Cross Word puzzle.

"I want a New House junior—" he said.

"Well, there's two here," said Fatty Wynn. "Pay your money and take your choice."

"You won't do, Fatty," said Figgins. "Neither will you, Kerr. You've both got four letters in your names. I want a New House chap in three letters."

"Rao," said Kerr promptly. "Koumi Rao."

"Good man!" said Figgins. "That's another word found. I mean to solve this beastly puzzle, or perish in the attempt!"

"Strikes me it's Kerr who's doing the solving!" chuckled Fatty Wynn.

"Why not solve it between us, and share the spoils?" suggested Kerr.

"That's a good wheeze," said Figgins. "Two heads are better than one, and three are better than two. We'll

split up the tenner when it comes, and take three pounds six-and-eightpence each."

"You're an optimist!" said Kerr, with a smile. "Other people are after that tenner, besides ourselves. Some of the fellows in the Sixth are having a shot at it, to say nothing of all the swots in the lower Forms. If you ask me, our chances of winning that tenner are jolly slender."

"Rats!" said Figgins. "Faint heart ne'er won Cross Word prize, or anything else, for that matter. Wish you wouldn't talk like that, Kerr. If we tackle this puzzle in the proper spirit—determination and hopefulness, you know—we're pretty certain to pull it off."

"Brave words!" said Fatty Wynn approvingly. "We will now get on with the washing. What's the next thing you want to know, Figg?"

"A county, in thirteen letters."

"Ah! That's where I come in. You want a fellow from the Land of the Leek to put you wise on these matters. A county in thirteen letters? That's—er—Monmouthshire."

"Good for you, Fatty!"

Figgins began to look more like his old cheery self, now that some headway was being made with the solving of the puzzle.

"Next, please!" said Kerr.

"I want a word meaning 'speeches,' in thirteen letters," said Figgins.

"Phew!"

"Ass! There's only four letters in 'Phew!'"

Kerr smiled.

"I wasn't advancing that as a solution," he said. "It was simply an exclamation of dismay."

"Well, we don't want any exclamations of dismay, in this study!" said Figgins warmly. "As I said just now, this thing's got to be tackled in a hopeful spirit. Now, then! A word meaning 'speeches,' in thirteen letters. It links up with 'Monmouthshire,' so the middle letter will be 'T.'"

Both Kerr and Fatty Wynn wrestled with the problem; and so did Figgins. They racked their brains, and they waded through dictionaries, in order to discover the elusive word.

By this time football was forgotten. Figgins had forgotten it long ago, and now it no longer entered the minds of his chums. Figg's chums were now almost as keen as Figg himself on solving the Head's puzzle. Their enthusiasm, lukewarm at first, was now red-hot.

"Perorations!" said Kerr suddenly. "Nunno! That won't do. It's only got eleven letters. But it's a word something like that. I shall get it in a minute. It begins with 'D.' I think. Deliberations—no! I've got it! Dissertations!"

"Never heard of the word," confessed Figgins. "Ours is a nice language, ours is! Why can't they call a spade a spade, and a speech a speech, not a blessed dissertation! And the Head calls this an easy puzzle! Well, I shouldn't like him to set a hard one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Down went the word "dissertations," and the chums of the New House returned to the attack, as it were. Three heads were bent over three dictionaries, and three separate and indistinct mumbings came from three pairs of lips.

From the distant playing-fields came the sound of the football as it thudded to and fro. But for once in a way that sound passed unheeded. Figgins & Co. of the New House turned deaf ears to it, and threw themselves heart and soul into the task of unravelling the Head's Cross Word puzzle.

CHAPTER 2.

Trimble, the Oracle!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Scat!"

"Vamoosé!"

"Skedaddle!"

Baggy Trimble neither "scattered," nor vamoosed, nor skedaddled. The fat junior had come over from the School House to interview Figgins & Co., and he was determined to have an audience with them.

Even the brainless Baggy had caught the Cross Word craze, for he had the Head's puzzle in his hand, and a dictionary under his arm. Baggy blinked at the New House trio.

"I say, you fellows, I've solved it!"

"Eh?"

"Solved what?"

"The Head's puzzle, of course!"

Figgins & Co. stared. Like the prophet of old, they were amazed with a great amazement. They had never suspected Baggy Trimble of possessing brains, and plenty of "grey matter" was necessary in order to solve the Head's puzzle. The New House chums had been working on it for some time now, but they had not succeeded in solving one half of it. And to think that Baggy Trimble, whose head was alleged to contain sawdust in lieu of brains, had mastered the

BOOKS OF SPORT, SCHOOL, AND ADVENTURE.

It's Well Worth Your While—to Give Them a Trial.

Price Fourpence Each!

THE BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY.

No. 749.—CORINTH FOR THE CUP!

A Splendid Footer Yarn of League Fights and Cup-ties. By JOHN W. WHEWY.

No. 750.—LUCKY DENNISON.

A Grand Circus Yarn, packed with Excitement and all the Fun of the Fair. By WALTER EDWARDS.

No. 751.—THE WRECK OF THE "BOMBAY CASTLE."

A Thrilling Story of Schoolboy Fun and Adventure on Sea and Land. By LUNCAN STORM.

No. 752.—THE SIXTH FORM AT HAYGARTH.

A Topping New and Original Story of the Four Macs and their Chums at Haygarth School. Specially written by JACK NORTH.

THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY.

No. 367.—THE CASE OF THE RED CREMONAS.

A Tale of Baffling Mystery and Clever Detective Work, featuring the Popular Characters. GILBERT and EILEEN HALE.

No. 368.—THE SECRET OF THE MANSIONS.

A Romance of Strong Detective Work and Thrilling Adventure. By the Author of "Flat No. 4," etc., etc.

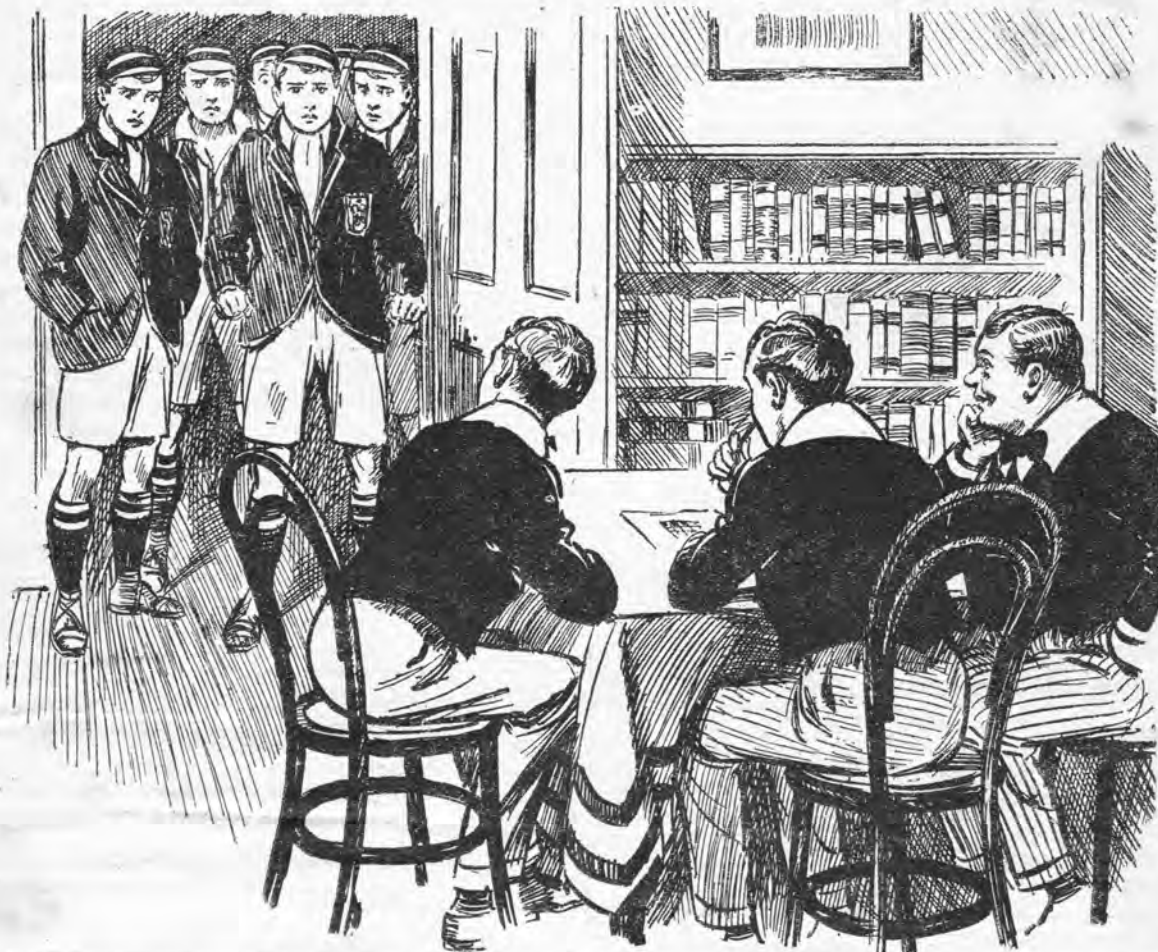
No. 369.—MISSING IN MEXICO; or, The Case of the Living Dead.

A Story of SEXTON BLAKE IN MEXICO AND TEXAS.

No. 370.—THE AMAZING AFFAIR OF THE RENEGADE PRINCE.

A Tale of ZENITH THE ALBINO.

NOW ON SALE! GET YOUR COPIES TO-DAY!



The door of Figgins & Co.'s study was thrown open without ceremony, and Tom Merry marched in, with a crowd of School House fellows at his heels. They were in footer garb, and most of them were looking very annoyed. Tom Merry glared first at the New House trio and then at the Cross Word puzzle which lay before them. "Too busy to think of footer practice, I suppose?" he said sarcastically. (See page 6.)

Head's problem! Baggy's triumphant announcement knocked Figgins & Co. all of a heap.

"You—you've solved it?" gasped Figgins, in a faint voice. Trimble nodded.

"I see you fellows are working on it," he said. "It seems to be tying you up in knots, too, judging by your worried looks. I dare say the puzzle seems pretty difficult to a fellow without brains—"

"What?"

"But to a brainy chap like me it was mere child's play!"

"My hat!"

"I solved the puzzle in about half an hour," said Trimble. "I shall win the Head's tenner, of course. Ten quids for half an hour's work is pretty good pay—what? Almost as good as a film star's salary!"

"Do you seriously mean to say that you've solved the puzzle, Baggy?" gasped Kerr.

"Yes."

"What did you make the county in thirteen letters?" asked Fatty Wynn.

Baggy Trimble smiled in a superior fashion.

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you?" he said. "But I'm not giving it away. You're not going to benefit by my brains!"

"Why, you—you—" spluttered Fatty Wynn, jumping to his feet. "We wouldn't dream of benefiting by your brains, you prize dummy! You haven't any!"

"Oh, really, Wynn—"

Kerr gave a chuckle.

"Well, you might as well tell us what some of the shorter words are, Baggy," he said. "That won't be giving much away. What did you make a bone, in two letters?"

"Bo, of course!"

"What?"

"Bo," repeated Trimble, with a smirk of satisfaction. "Not many fellows would think of that, would they?"

"No, they wouldn't," agreed Kerr. "Bo is what they say to a goose, isn't it? The word has no relation to a bone that I can see."

"How on earth do you arrive at 'Bo,' Baggy?" asked Figgins, in perplexity.

"Well, it's short for bone, isn't it? It's what they call an abbreviation."

Kerr smiled.

"It's not a legitimate abbreviation," he said. "You don't talk about giving a dog a bo."

"Might as well call a doughnut a dough!" said Fatty Wynn. "Afraid you've gone right off the rails there, Baggy."

"Oh, you fellows are ignorant!" said Trimble, with a sigh. "It really distresses me to see fellows wallowing in ignorance. If bo isn't short for bone, I'll never pick another!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What did you make of a New House junior, in three letters?" inquired Figgins.

Baggy Trimble stared.

"Do you mean to say you didn't find that out?"

"Yes, we found it all serene; but we're curious to know what you made it."

"Wynn, of course!"

"What!" shouted the trio, in chorus.

"W-I-N spells Wynn, doesn't it?" said Trimble.

"It spells 'WIN' all right, but it doesn't spell my name," said Fatty Wynn. "There are four letters in my name, you—you frabjous duffer!"

"Don't talk rot!"

"It's you that's talking rot, Baggy," said Kerr. "From what I can see of it, you've made a ghastly mess of the Head's puzzle."

"Oh, really—"

"I should advise you to scrap the whole thing, and start again," said Figgins. "Better still, I should advise you to give up Cross Word puzzles, Baggy. They never were intended for brainless dolts."

Baggy Trimble bestowed the glare of a basilisk upon Figgins.

"You cheeky rotter!" he roared. "You're only jealous to think that I've solved the Head's puzzle, while you're still struggling with it. And it makes you mad to know that I shall win the tenner. When I do win it—"

"When!" murmured Figgins.

"I shall stand a handsome spread at the tuckshop," continued Trimble. "And I can tell you the names of three fellows who won't be invited. I scorn the whole lot of you! Ignorant beasts, that's what you are! You'll never solve that puzzle, not if you stick at it till you're bearded old jossers with the gout! I scorn you! D'you hear?"

Figgins & Co. merely grinned. Instead of writhing under the lash of Baggy Trimble's scorn, they remained cool and serene. At the same time, there was something ominous about their coolness. Had Trimble been a wise youth, he would have made himself scarce, realising that the New House juniors preferred his room to his company. But Baggy, instead of beating a retreat, continued to pour out the vials of his wrath.

"If you fellows had behaved decently, I might have given you a helping hand with the puzzle," he said. "But you're as rude as you are ignorant. When a fellow of superior intelligence comes along, you ought to treat him with respect. Instead of which—"

"I say, Baggy," said Figgins, interrupting. "Do you know the name of a creature—half hog, half fish—in eight letters?"

"Hippopotamus?" suggested Trimble.

"No, porpoise. There's a porpoise in this study at the present moment, and it's going to be ejected—see!"

"Oh, really, Figgins! If you're referring to me—"

"I know another word of eight letters, which means to go out on your neck," said Kerr. "It's 'expelled.' Out with him, you chaps!"

Before Baggy Trimble could realise what was happening, there was a rush of feet, and three solid, well-soled shoes clumped together on the rear of Baggy's fat person. With a wild yell of anguish, the fat junior fled through the doorway, dropping the Head's puzzle and the dictionary in his precipitate flight.

"Ow-ow-ow!" roared Baggy, as he ran.

Slam!

The study door closed behind Trimble, and Figgins & Co. grinned as they listened to his rapidly retreating footsteps.

"The half hog, half fish, in eight letters, has been kicked out on his neck, in eight letters!" chuckled Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Baggy and his puzzle solutions!" said Kerr. "If he gets a single word right in the Head's puzzle, it will be a howling fluke. As for the tenner, that's coming to this study!"

"Good!" said Figgins, thumping his chum on the back. "You're a Dismal Jimmie no longer. You've made up your mind to win, and so have I, and so has Fatty, and everything in the garden will be lovely! On with the merry game!"

And the New House trio returned to their Cross Word puzzling.

CHAPTER 3. Not Football!

"BUNKERED again!" said Figgins. "Who on earth is a biblical king, in two letters?"

"Ask me another!" said Kerr. Even the astute Scottish junior was baffled for once.

Fatty Wynn knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"I don't know any biblical kings, except David and Solomon," he said.

"There was Nebuchadnezzar," said Figgins.

"Fathead!" growled Kerr. "What we want is a King's name in two letters, not twenty-two!"

"They might have called him 'Ne,' for short," suggested Figgins.

"They might have done, but they didn't. Stop jawing, Figgy, and let a fellow think."

Silence prevailed in the study for a spell. But only for a short spell. The silence was rudely shattered by a tramping of feet in the passage. Then the door was thrown open without ceremony, and Tom Merry marched in, with a crowd of fellows at his heels. They were in footer garb, and most of them were looking very annoyed.

Tom Merry glared at the New House trio.

"Too busy to think of footer practice, I suppose?" he said sarcastically.

"Much too busy!" answered Figgins, quite seriously.

"We've been waiting half an hour for you!" said the captain of the Shell, with some heat.

"Well, you needn't have waited. You could have carried on without us."

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"We've picked sides for the practice-match, and you

three fellows were picked, as a matter of course," he said. "We've been waiting for you to turn up. And you've been here all the time, with your noses buried in a Cross Word puzzle, by the look of it."

"That's so," said Figgins calmly. "It's a brute of a puzzle, too. Do any of you fellows know the name of a biblical king in two letters?"

"Weally, Figgy," protested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy from the doorway. "this is not the time for solvin' Cwoss Word puzzles! We've got to get into twainin' for the Cup Final with Gweyfwiahs on Saturday week."

"And there's a match with Abbotsford this Saturday," said Manners.

"It's really too bad of you fellows to cut practice like this!" said Talbot. "Tom Merry's lost his wool, and you can hardly blame him."

"Tommy's our skipper, and he's responsible for keeping the eleven up to the scratch," said Monty Lowther. "Cross Word puzzles oughtn't to be allowed to interfere with footer. I'm jolly keen on solving the Head's puzzle myself, but I shall leave it till this evening."

"So would any fellow who had the interests of the footer eleven at heart," said Tom Merry, with an angry glance at Figgins, who was idly turning over the pages of a dictionary. We shall never beat Abbotsford, let alone Greyfriars, if you fellows are out of form through dodging practice. Come along! We've wasted quite enough time as it is!"

"Oh, all right!" said Figgins, rising reluctantly to his feet. "Don't let the sun go down upon your giddy wrath! We're coming! But I wish I knew who that biblical king was! Any idea, Merry?"

"No!" snapped Tom.

Figgins turned to D'Arcy.

"Can you help us, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"I'll help you out to the footah g'round, with pleasuah!" he said. "But I'm not goin' to bothah my head with biblical kings in two lettahs until this evenin'. There's a time for footah, an' there's a time for Cross Word puzzles. It's footah-time now!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners. "Are you coming quietly, Figgy, or must we use force?"

"We're coming!" grunted Figgins. "But give us five minutes to change into our footer togs."

"If you're any longer than that we'll give the three of you a jolly good bumping!" said Tom Merry darkly.

And the footballers withdrew, while Figgins & Co. ran up to the dormitory to change.

For once in a way the famous New House trio had no keenness for footer practice. They were keen on beating Abbotsford, naturally; and they were keener still on beating Greyfriars in the Cup Final. The Cup was put up for competition by D'Arcy's pater, Lord Eastwood, and after a series of dour struggles St. Jim's and Greyfriars had succeeded in reaching the Final.

Figgins & Co. would not have missed playing in the Cup Final for worlds. It was the practice-match on this particular afternoon that they were not keen about. Fatty Wynn and Kerr had been keen enough at first, but Figgins had infected them with the Cross Word fever, and they were not at all pleased at having been interrupted in their task by Tom Merry & Co.

Even as they hurried down to the ground the thoughts of Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were not centred upon football. Each of them was trying his hardest to think of a biblical king in two letters.

"It's a poser, and no mistake!" said Figgins. "I can't think of the merchant at all. But I dare say one of us will get an inspiration during the game."

Kerr nodded.

"I'll do my best to think of the johnnie," he said.

"Same here," said Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry beckoned to the trio as they sprinted on to the field. He was looking less angry now. The absentees had turned up, and everything augured well for a good, hard game.

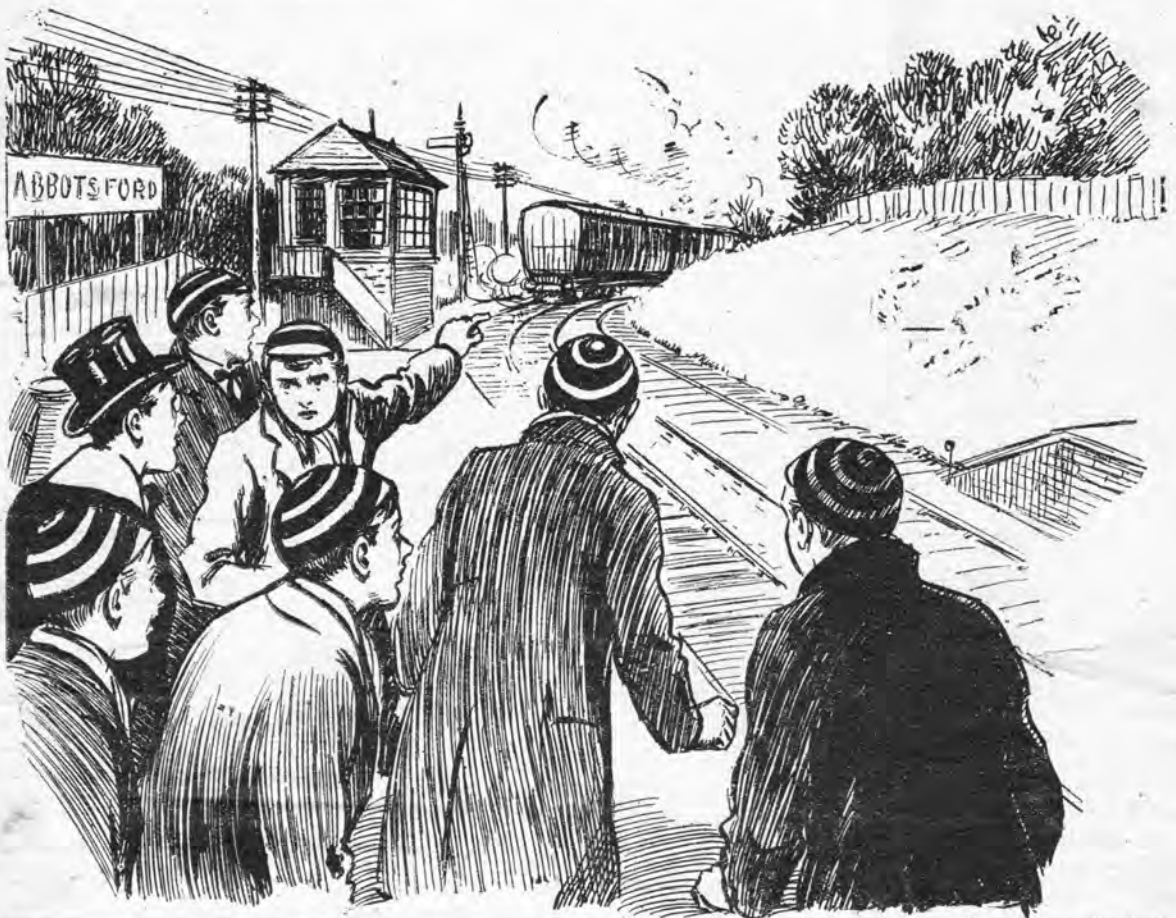
"You fellows are on my side," said Tom Merry. "Fatty Wynn in goal, and Figgy and Kerr full-backs. Play up!"

The teams lined up, and the practice-match started. Tom Merry captained one of the sides, and Jack Blake the other.

Instead of throwing themselves heart and soul into the game, Figgins & Co. were still concerned with the biblical monarch whose name consisted of two letters. Their football suffered in consequence.

Fatty Wynn was usually active and alert in goal, but on this occasion he appeared to be half asleep. In reality, he was deep in thought.

Jack Blake fired in a shot which might easily have been saved, but Fatty Wynn blinked at the incoming sphere with an abstracted air, and watched it sail past him into the net. "Goal!"



Tom Merry made a rapid calculation of his team, and then started violently for three of his men were missing. "Figgins & Co.!" he ejaculated. "The—the awful asses! They must still be in the train! It's that Cross Word Puzzle again!" The juniors rushed back on to the platform. But they were too late, for the train was now disappearing round a distant curve. (See page 8.)

Tom Merry came striding up. He was angry again now, righteously angry, in the circumstances.

"Don't stand there day-dreaming!" he shouted to Fatty Wynn. "Why didn't you stop that shot?"

"Sorry!" said Fatty. "It's that blessed biblical king, you know. I've got him on the brain!"

Tom Merry frowned.

"You're here to keep goal, not to worry your head about kings, biblical or otherwise!" he snapped. "Play up, and let's have no more of this nonsense!"

"Right-ho!" said Fatty Wynn.

But, try as he would, the fat junior could not keep his thoughts from straying to the Head's Cross Word puzzle. He managed to stop a few shots, but he did so mechanically. His thoughts, like those of Eugene Aram in the poem, were "other where."

So were the thoughts of Figgins and Kerr. As a rule they were a sound pair of backs, sure in their tackling and powerful in their punting. But on this occasion they gave a wretched display. The fleet-footed forwards on Jack Blake's side fairly made rings round them.

Tom Merry grew more and more angry. He called upon the New House trio to "buck up." To do them justice, they made every effort to concentrate upon the game, but their thoughts persisted in playing truant.

The practice match was over at last. It ended in an easy victory for Jack Blake's eleven by five goals to one.

When the players came off Tom Merry said a few words to Figgins & Co. They were very blunt words—straight from the shoulder.

"You're a set of lazy slackers!" said the captain of the Shell. "If you play like that against Greyfriars it's goodbye to the Cup!"

"Don't get huffy," said Figgins. "There's no harm done. It was only a practice game."

"That's all very well," said Tom Merry. "But supposing you start thinking about biblical kings during the Cup Final?"

"Don't you worry," said Kerr, with a laugh. "We shall

have solved the Head's puzzle long before the Cup Final comes along."

"I wish the Head had never invented the beastly thing, if it's going to interfere with the footer," said Tom Merry. "You fellows ought to be ashamed of the way you played this afternoon. On that form, you deserve to be dropped from the team."

"You're in a sweet temper this afternoon, Merry, I must say," said Figgins. "Who's been missing his Kruschen?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry looked grim.

"It's nothing to cackle about," he said. "We're playing Abbotstford on Saturday, and if you fellows don't improve on this afternoon's form there will be ructions!"

So saying, Tom Merry turned on his heel and strode away.

Suddenly Kerr gave a shout. His eyes danced with excitement, and he thumped Fatty Wynn on the back.

"Og!" he exclaimed.

Fatty Wynn bristled up at once. "Who are you calling a hog?" he demanded. "I'm surprised at you, Kerr! I enjoy a good feed as much as anybody, but I won't be called a hog, even by my pals!"

"Simmer down, old fat man!" said Kerr. "I didn't say 'hog'; I said 'Og.'"

"What's an Og, I should like to know?"

"The biblical king!" shouted Kerr. "It's dawned on me at last! I could kick myself for not having thought of it before!"

Figgins looked incredulous.

"Never heard of a king of that name," he said.

"Why, you've sung about him heaps of times on Sundays," said Kerr. "He comes in the Psalms. There's Sehon, King of the Amorites, and Og, the King of Bashan."

"That's so," said Fatty Wynn. "Well done, Kerr! We're getting along famously! Let's buck up and change our togs and get back to work. Of course, we'll have tea first."

Even the lure of the Cross Word puzzle could not make Fatty Wynn forget such an important function as tea. But, as he pointed out to his chums, there was no reason why tea and Cross Words should not go together. What could be more jolly than to munch jam-tarts and think out problems at the same time?

Figgins and Kerr heartily concurred. And anybody looking into Figgy's study ten minutes later would have seen three very thoughtful-looking youths seated at tea, absently stirring their tea with their knives, and endeavouring to think of a Leicestershire cricketer in three letters!

CHAPTER 4.

Figgins & Co. Go Too Far!

SATURDAY dawned in due course—the day of the match with Abbotsford.

It was an away match, and, as Tom Merry said, it would be a sort of full-dress rehearsal for the Cup Final with Greyfriars, which was to be played on the following Saturday.

Tom Merry was very anxious to see how his team shaped against Abbotsford. He knew that he would have to field his very strongest side against Greyfriars, for the Friars were a formidable combination, stronger than ever this season. If there was one weak link in the St. Jim's armour it would be good-bye to the Eastwood Cup.

The match with Abbotsford would serve as a sort of pointer to the prospects of St. Jim's in the Cup Final. Tom Merry hoped to find that his men were fighting fit, and that the team was sound in every department. He was worried about Figgins & Co., who were still trying to fathom the Head's Cross Word puzzle. But Figgins assured him that there was no need to worry.

"We don't play the giddy ox this afternoon, Merry," he said. "When we take the field against Abbotsford we'll banish Cross Word puzzles from our minds."

"I hope you will," said Tom Merry fervently. "For goodness' sake don't start thinking about biblical kings when the Abbotsford forwards are swooping down like wolves on the giddy fold!"

Figgins laughed.

"We've found the biblical king," he said.

"You have? I'm jolly glad to hear it!" said Tom Merry in tones of relief. "Who was the merchant?"

"Og, the king of Bashan. We're after another word now—a hobgoblin, in three letters."

Tom Merry groaned.

"I was hoping you'd finished solving the Head's puzzle," he said. "Anyway, you must get it out of your mind to-day, or we shall never beat Abbotsford."

"But I simply must find out what this hobgoblin is, in three letters," said Figgins.

"An elf, I expect," said Tom Merry.

"No, it isn't. I tried elf, and it didn't fit in with the other words of the puzzle."

"Try imp, then."

"I have."

"And doesn't it fit?"

"No."

"Well, it might possibly be fay," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "A fay's a fairy, you know, and hobgoblins are fairies—wicked fairies, I believe."

Figgins shook his head.

"Fay doesn't fit, either," he said.

"Then I'm afraid I can't help you."

"That's all right," said Figgins cheerfully. "It takes New House brains to puzzle out these problems. School House brains are no use. They're too stodgy."

"You cheeky ass!"

"We shall find out what the merry hobgoblin is sooner or later," said Figgins.

"Well, don't worry about it to-day. Focus your mind on footer. Our train leaves Wayland Junction at two-fifteen. Mind you turn up in good time. If you were to miss that train I'd never forgive you."

"We shall catch it all right," said Figgins.

"You'll catch it if you don't!" was Tom Merry's rejoinder.

Figgins kept his word. He and his chums were at Wayland Junction at the appointed time. They had walked over from St. Jim's, but the rest of the fellows had come by the local train at Rycombe.

The bags which Figgins & Co. carried were rather bulky—a fact which Tom Merry & Co. failed to notice. Those bags contained not only jerseys, and shorts, and footer boots, but dictionaries. It was rather a long run to Abbotsford, and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn intended to improve the shining hour by burrowing into the dictionaries during the journey, in the hope of finding a hobgoblin in three letters. They had racked their brains without result, so the only thing to be done was to ransack the dictionaries until the elusive word was discovered.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 890.

Tom Merry would have been very annoyed had he known that dictionaries formed a part of Figgins & Co.'s equipment. He had urged Figgins to banish Cross Word puzzles from his mind, and to concentrate on footer. But this was easier to preach than to practise. When once the "Cross Word habit" got a fellow in its grip, it did not easily relax its hold. And by this time Figgins, and Kerr, and Wynn had the Cross Word mania very badly indeed.

The three New House fellows secured a carriage to themselves. And as soon as the train started they opened their bags and brought forth their dictionaries.

"The hunt for the hobgoblin will now commence," said Kerr. "If we don't find it by the time we get to Abbotsford I shall be jolly disappointed."

"Same here!" said Fatty Wynn. "The beastly hobgoblin is giving us a lot of trouble. We soon found out who the Leicestershire cricketer, in three letters, was. I knew it was Coe almost at once. But this hobgoblin is the limit. It isn't elf, and it isn't fay, and it isn't imp. What in thunder can it be?"

"It would almost seem as if the Head had made a bloomer," said Figgins.

"That's not likely," said Kerr. "He would make certain that the puzzle was correct in every detail before he distributed the copies. There's a word of three letters somewhere which means hobgoblin, and we've got to find it. Let's go ahead!"

After that no word was spoken.

From the next compartment came the sound of merry voices. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was holding forth on some topic or other, and Gussy's views generally caused a great deal of merriment, though the Swell of St. Jim's could never understand why.

Figgins and his chums became more and more deeply laughter. Their heads were bent over the dictionaries which rested on their knees. For the time being everything was banished from their minds with the exception of the hobgoblin in three letters. Even the fact that they were travelling to a football match was temporarily forgotten.

The train thundered on through the green countryside. It was a non-stop from Wayland to Abbotsford; and from Abbotsford it was a non-stop to London.

Figgins and his chums became more and more deeply engrossed in their dictionaries as the time—and the train—sped on.

At length there was a jarring of brakes, and the train slowed up. A porter shuffled along the platform, bawling: "Abbotsford! Next stop, Victoria!" Figgins & Co., still deep in their dictionaries, neither saw nor heard the porter. They were only sub-consciously aware that the train had come to a standstill. If they thought about the matter at all, they supposed that the train had stopped at some intermediate station on the line. The time had passed so swiftly that it did not seem possible they could be at Abbotsford already.

Tom Merry & Co. jumped out of their compartment and hurried towards the exit. They naturally thought that Figgins & Co. were following. It did not occur to them for one moment that the New House trio were absorbed in Cross Word puzzles at such an important time.

It was not until they were outside the station that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ran his eye over the footballers.

"Are we all heah, deah boys?" he asked.

Tom Merry made a rapid calculation. Then he started violently.

There should have been thirteen fellows present—the actual eleven and the two reserves, Hammond and Reilly. But Tom Merry only counted ten.

"Figgins & Co.!" he ejaculated. "The—the awful asses! They must still be in the train!"

The juniors rushed back on to the platform. But they were too late. The train had stopped only for a brief moment at Abbotsford. It was now disappearing round a distant curve, bound for London. And Figgins & Co. were on board!

"Well, I'm dashed!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If this isn't the absolute, utter limit! Those howling lunatics have missed the match! They're still in the train—and it's a non-stop to London!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors exchanged glances of blank dismay.

Tom Merry clenched his hands savagely.

"I know what it is," he said. "They're still working on the Head's Cross Word puzzle! They've forgotten the match, and the train, and everything else! What idiots we were to let them have a carriage to themselves. We might have known this would happen. We ought to have kept an eye on them."

"Well, the mischief's done now, Tommy," said Monty Lowther. "We shall have to play the two reserves—"

"But that will still make as a man short."

"Can't be helped."

Tom Merry frowned angrily. "Figgins shall hear about this this evening!" he said fiercely. "And if we lose the match—"

Tom Merry left the sentence unfinished. But he looked very grim, and very gloomy into the bargain, as he accompanied the rest of the St. Jim's footballers to the Abbotsford ground.

CHAPTER 5.

A Battle Against Odds!

IT was a gloomy procession that accompanied Tom Merry down the cobbled High Street at Abbotsford.

The St. Jim's fellows had been very keen on winning the match; but a win seemed out of the question now, owing to the conduct of Figgins & Co.

"I should neva have believed," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "that fellows could get so badly bitten by the Cwoss Word ewaze. I vegard the conduct of Figgins & Co. as outwageous! If the duffahs have got any sense, they'll pull the communication-cord an' stop the twain, an' huwvy back to Abbotsford!"

"They're not likely to do that!" growled Jack Blake. "I don't suppose they know that they've overshot their station. They're too deep in the Head's Cross Word puzzle!"

"They'll come to their sober senses when they get to London and find the train goes no farther!" said Manners. "The frantic idiots! Fancy letting us down like this!"

Tom Merry said nothing. He could scarcely trust himself to speak. His feelings towards Figgins & Co. at that moment were decidedly hostile—almost homicidal.

Once again Cross Word puzzles had been allowed to interfere with football. And the chances of beating Abbotsford with only ten men—two of whom were mere substitutes—were slender indeed.

"The Head's really to blame for this," said Monty Lowther. "He ought not to have invented his blessed puzzle until after the Cup Final!"

"I quite agwee," said Arthur Augustus. "Cwoss Word puzzles are all wight in their pwopah place, but when they interfere with footah, it's altogethah too thick! If we get licked this aftahnoon I shall wepwimand Figgins & Co. severely! I'm not suah that I sha'n't administah a feahful thwashin'!"

Jack Blake squared his shoulders and gripped his bag more tightly.

"We won't be licked if we can help it," he said. "But we shall have only four forwards," said Manners. "That's the trouble. I'm afraid Abbotsford will be too strong for us."

Manners' fears were well founded.

St. Jim's, with their depleted team, fought an uphill battle with great pluck and resolution. They were hard pressed all through the first half, but they managed to keep the nippy Abbotsford forwards at bay.

Hammond of the Fourth, playing in place of Fatty Wynn, kept goal grandly. But he was beaten at last, late in the second half, by a hard drive from the Abbotsford centre-forward.

Fatty Wynn might have stopped the shot, for Fatty was a goalkeeping genius. But Hammond was beaten all ends up, and the St. Jim's fellows groaned.

"It's all over, bar shouting!" panted Lowther.

Nevertheless, Tom Merry & Co. did not submit tamely to the situation. They attacked with the energy of despair, and strove hard for the equalising goal.



Percy Carrington, M.A.

Master of the Second Form at St. Jim's and mathematical master. Greatly respected by Tom Merry & Co. and all the decent fellows at the school, but is hated like poison by Crooke, whom he once "bowled out" in some shady undertaking, and who only just missed expulsion by the skin of his teeth. Has no interest in sports, but at maths he is "all there."

But it never came.

With only four forwards, the St. Jim's front line was disorganised.

Talbot did manage to hit the cross-bar just before the finish, and when the ball rebounded, Tom Merry made a valiant effort to head it into the net. But the Abbotsford goalie brought off a great save under the bar, and the match ended in a win for the home side by the only goal scored.

"Licked!" said Tom Merry bitterly. "And all because of those Cross Word maniacs!"

The Abbotsford skipper clapped Tom Merry on the back as the teams came off.

"Tough luck!" he said. "You fellows put up a great show. Pity your eleventh man didn't turn up. What happened to him?"

"There were three of our regular players away," said Tom Merry. "We played two reserves."

"My hat! Then you did awfully well to run us to a goal. What happened to your three regulars? Are they on the sick list?"

"No. They prefer solving Cross Word puzzles to playing footer," was Tom Merry's bitter reply.

And with a brief nod to the Abbotsford skipper he passed on to the visitors' dressing-room.

There were no cheery faces in that apartment. The St. Jim's juniors felt their defeat keenly. They had kept as brave a face as possible before the Abbotsford fellows, but now they were in their own dressing-room they gave their feelings full vent.

"If we had been at full strength we should have licked Abbotsford with ease," said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll make it warm for Figgins & Co. when we get back to St. Jim's!" said Blake angrily.

"How do you propose to punish them, Tom?" asked Talbot of his skipper.

"I suggest something lingering, with boiling oil in it," said Lowther.

Tom Merry looked grim.

"The punishment's going to be jolly drastic," he said.

All eyes were turned curiously towards the speaker.

"What are you goin' to do, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Drop Figgins and Kerr and Wynn from the eleven!" said Tom Merry.

There was a buzz of amazement in the dressing-room.

"Oh, I say!" protested Dick Redfern. "You can't do that, old man!"

"Why can't I?"

"Because of the Cup Final with Greyfriars. It comes off next Saturday. You can't leave out three of our best men."

Tom Merry frowned.

"As skipper, I can make any team changes that I think fit," he said. "I've made up my mind to drop Figgins & Co., and nothing will make me alter my decision."

"But that is a vewy dwastic punishment, Tom Mewwy—" began Arthur Augustus.

"Whether it's drastic or not, Gussy, it's just. It isn't as if Figgins & Co. haven't been warned. They've cut footer practice several times, and I've cautioned them about it. The time has come when cautions are no use. Drastic action is necessary, and I'm going to take it."

There was consternation amongst the St. Jim's footballers.

Badly as Figgins & Co. had behaved, the fellows could not help thinking that Tom Merry was carrying disciplinary action a little too far. It was not as if Figgins & Co. had

wilfully "cut" the Abbotsford match. It was sheer absent-mindedness on their part. They had been too preoccupied with the Head's puzzle to alight from the train at Abbotsford Station.

On the way back to St. Jim's, Tom Merry's chums urged him to reconsider his decision to drop Figgins & Co. from the eleven. They suggested other and less drastic punishments, such as a good bumping all round or a Form licking.

But these appeals were wasted on the desert air, so to speak. Tom Merry had made up his mind on the matter, and wild horses would not have dragged him from his purpose. He considered that Figgins & Co. had gone altogether too far, and that their behaviour was inexcusable.

"Well, it's a hopeful outlook for the Cup Final, I must say!" growled Jack Blake. "With Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn out of the team, we shall be simply swamped!"

"That's their fault, not mine!" said Tom Merry.

"It's the Head's fault!" said Monty Lowther. "Confound the old buffer and his Cross Word puzzles!"

"Whom do you propose to play in Fatty Wynn's place, Tom?" asked Talbot.

"Hammond. He keeps a good goal."

"But he's not up to Wynn's form."

"What would be the use of playing Wynn?" said Tom Merry, with a touch of irritation. "He'd be working out Cross Word puzzles on the goal-posts instead of paying attention to the game!"

"What about the backs?"

"I shall play Reilly and Glyn in place of Figgins and Kerr."

"Is that your final decision, deah boy, or is it a wash impulse, made in the heat of the moment?" inquired Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"It's my final decision," said Tom Merry deliberately. "And there's nothing more to be said."

It was a gloomy party of footballers that trooped in at the gates of St. Jim's that evening. The downcast faces told a tale of defeat.

CHAPTER 6. The Bombshell!

"GOT it!" said Fatty Wynn dramatically. Figgins and Kerr looked up from their dictionaries.

The train was thundering on its way, but the New House trio scarcely realised that they were in a railway-carriage. They had been buried alive, as it were, in their dictionaries.

The hunt for the hobgoblin, in three letters, had been a laborious business. But Fatty Wynn's shout of exultation suggested that the elusive hobgoblin had been run to earth at last.

"Well?" said Figgins breathlessly.

"Give it a name!" said Kerr.

"Certainly!" said Fatty Wynn. "A hobgoblin, in three letters, is a Nis."

"A what?"

"A Nis. It's a word of German origin, meaning a hobgoblin or a water-sprite. It's also called Nix and Nixie."

"My dictionary doesn't give it," said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn smiled.

"What you want is a dictionary—not an apology for one," he said. "Mine's an up-to-date, twentieth century dictionary. Yours, judging by the look of it, was used by Noah in the Ark!"

"Don't be rude, Fatty!" said Kerr. "The fact that you happened to find the right word, by a fluke, doesn't entitle you to defame my dictionary. Does your dictionary give Nis, Figg?"

Figgins turned over the pages, and nodded.

"Here we are," he said. "Nis—a malignant water-sprite. Hurrah! That's another word found. It's taken us the dickens of a time, too!"

Figgins closed his dictionary and glanced, for the first time, out of the carriage window.

"We ought to be getting near Abbotsford by now," he remarked.

Kerr nodded and glanced out of the opposite window.

"Country seems strange to me," he said, with a puzzled look. "What's that big hill over there? There's no hill of that size on the way to Abbotsford."

The three chums began to look alarmed and uneasy. There was a shriek from the engine-whistle, and the train dashed through a station. Figgins caught a glimpse of the name as the train thundered through.

"Dorking!" he gasped. "Oh, my giddy aunt! That must be Leith Hill that you pointed out just now, Kerr!"

"What's happened?" asked Fatty Wynn in perplexity.

"Are we in the wrong train?"

"No; we're in the right train, all serene," said Kerr,

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 890.

"but we've gone too far in it. We've left Abbotsford miles behind, and the beastly train's a non-stop to London!"

"Great Scott!"

The trio exchanged glances of utter dismay. So absorbed had they been in their word-hunting that they had forgotten where they were and whither they were going. Now that the word had been found they came back to earth with a start, to discover that they had left Abbotsford far behind and were in a non-stop to London!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "We've fairly done it now!"

"We have indeed!" said Kerr. "I don't remember the train stopping at Abbotsford."

"It did stop—once," said Figgins. "But I'd no idea it was Abbotsford. Why didn't Tom Merry and the others give us a shout?"

"I expect they took it for granted that we'd get out," said Kerr.

Figgins looked quite distressed.

"I wouldn't have had this happen for worlds," he said.

"Tom Merry will think that we deliberately dodged the match!"

"Oh, no, he won't think that! He knows we've got the Cross Word puzzle craze rather badly, and he'll guess that we were so deep in the Head's puzzle that we overshot our station."

"But that won't make him very sweet-tempered," said Figgins. "He specially asked me, before we started, to leave the puzzle alone this afternoon. I promised I would. And I honestly meant to give Cross Words a miss until after the Abbotsford match. But that hobgoblin in three letters has—"

"We simply had to find it!" said Kerr. "But what's to be done now?"

Figgins looked at his watch.

"We couldn't possibly get back to Abbotsford in time, not even if we ran the risk of pulling the communication-cord and stopping the train!" he said. "There's nothing for it but to sit tight till we get to London, and then take a train back to St. Jim's."

There was, indeed, no alternative. To attempt to get back to Abbotsford in time for the match was worse than useless, for the time of the kick-off had already arrived.

"Tom Merry will be furious!" said Fatty Wynn. "And if our fellows lose the match he'll feel like scalping us!"

"Well, we can't blame him," said Kerr. "We're in the wrong absolutely, and it's up to us to apologise as soon as we get back to St. Jim's."

Figgins nodded.

"The Head has got a lot to answer for," he said, glancing at the Cross Word puzzle which rested on his knees. "Wonder what he would say if he knew that his puzzle had caused three fellows to miss a footer match, and to go to London when they ought to have got out at Abbotsford?"

It was a comical situation, but the comic side of it did not appeal to the New House trio just then. They were annoyed with themselves for having been carried away so completely by the Cross Word craze. And they had an uneasy feeling, which rapidly grew into a conviction, that St. Jim's would lose the match at Abbotsford. Tom Merry would be angry; and, like the prophet of old, he would do well to be angry. A footer captain could hardly be expected to wink his eye at this sort of thing.

Figgins & Co. felt far from happy as the train rushed on towards the metropolis. The fact that they had to pay excess fare when they arrived at Victoria did not brighten their spirits.

Fatty Wynn suggested a feed at the refreshment buffet, and this put the chums in better heart for the return journey to St. Jim's.

They expected a warm reception on their arrival at the school. And their expectations were realised.

Tom Merry was waiting for them in the school gateway. He had been waiting there for nearly an hour, in the dusk and drizzle, and his temper was not improved either by the wait or by the weather conditions.

"That you, Merry?" inquired Figgins, peering through the gloom.

"Yes!"

"I say, we—we're awfully sorry this has happened! It wasn't until we got to Dorking that we discovered that we'd passed our station. And there was no time to get back to Abbotsford, so all we could do was to sit tight and go on to London. How did you get on without us? I hope you managed to lick Abbotsford!"

"We didn't, then," said Tom Merry curtly. "You might have guessed that. We were licked."

"I'm sorry!" muttered Figgins penitently.

"Same here," said Kerr.

"We're really, truly sorry!" said Fatty Wynn. "We assure you, Merry, it won't happen again!"

Tom Merry frowned at the delinquents through the gloom.

"There will be no chance of it happening again," he said.

"I'll see to that. As you seem to think more of Cross Word



Taggles, having seized the broomstick, now grasped the opportunity of poking and prodding the struggling mass of humanity in the doorway. There was a chorus of yells from Figgins & Co. "Ow!" "Yow!" "Yaroooooh!" Taggles continued to poke and prod, and Figgins & Co. continued to struggle, but Fatty Wynn's ample form proved a great obstruction. (See page 12.)

puzzles than footer, you can go your own sweet way in future. I've struck your names off the list, and you're expelled from the eleven—all three of you!"

Had Tom Merry suddenly exploded a bombshell the effect could not have been more staggering. Figgins & Co. were utterly taken aback. They had expected Tom Merry to be angry, they had expected some sort of punishment for their misdemeanour, but they had not expected this!

The trio stood in stunned silence for a moment. Then Figgins found his voice.

"You—you can't mean that, Merry?"

"I do mean it!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Dash it all, you didn't expect me to treat this affair lightly, as if it was a priceless joke?"

"Nunno," said Figgins. "We expected some sort of punishment—a bumping, or possibly a Form licking! But to be dropped from the eleven—"

"And the Cup Final coming off next Saturday!" said Kerr.

"Why, the punishment's out of all proportion to the offence," said Fatty Wynn. "And no offence was intended, really. We didn't cut the Abbottsford match on purpose—"

"There's no excuse," said Tom Merry. "I've warned you often enough, goodness knows, about letting Cross Word puzzles interfere with footer. Well, you're quite free now to go ahead and win the Head's tenner. I sha'n't require your services in the footer eleven until further notice."

Figgins clenched his hands. He was beginning to feel almost as angry as Tom Merry. He had apologised, and his chums had apologised, for missing the Abbottsford match, and Figgins considered that the apologies should have been accepted. But they had been ignored, and Tom Merry had come down heavily—very heavily!

"This is carrying discipline too far, Merry," said Figgins. "You've no right to throw us out of the eleven for such a trivial thing!"

"It may be trivial in your opinion, but it isn't in mine,"

was the rejoinder. "You've asked for trouble, and now you've got it. I've nothing more to say."

And Tom Merry strode away towards the school building.

Figgins & Co. followed like fellows in a dream. They were utterly flabbergasted by Tom Merry's action. And they wondered painfully what would be the fate of St. Jim's in the Cup Final, with three of their best men absent. Certainly the outlook was anything but rosy. And there was great consternation in the St. Jim's camp that evening as a result of Tom Merry's drastic decision to drop Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn from the eleven.

CHAPTER 7.

Cross Words from Taggles!

SUNDAY was a quiet day at St. Jim's. There were two services in the school chapel, attendance at which was compulsory. There was an afternoon walk, which was optional.

This particular Sunday was no day for rambling through the Sussex countryside. It rained incessantly from dawn till dusk. Weeping skies and muddy lanes attracted very few of the St. Jim's fellows out-of-doors. The majority stayed in their studies, engaged in trying to solve the Head's Cross Word puzzle.

A good many fellows were complaining of headaches before the day was over. The Head's problem fairly baffled them, and the more they wrestled with it the more perplexing it seemed to become.

Even Kildare of the Sixth, who was an able scholar as well as a great sportsman, confessed that the Head's puzzle had him beaten. He invited Darrell and Rushden to assist him in solving the problem; but very little headway was made. Most of the easy words were found readily enough, but the hard ones seemed to defy solution.

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth declared that he had solved the problem long ago. Baggy had, in fact, already decided

how he was going to spend the Head's "tenner." It was going to be expended at the tuckshop when it arrived—with the emphasis on the "when"!

Nobody took Trimble seriously. It was not likely that the empty-headed Baggy had solved a puzzle which baffled the brains of fellows like Kildare.

Figgins & Co. of the New House had made more progress with the puzzle than anyone else, simply because they had given it their undivided attention.

The three chums were bitterly disappointed at having been dropped from the football eleven; but even this crushing calamity in no way damped their keenness to solve the puzzle and win the prize. In fact, they tackled the task more keenly than ever—possibly in order to try and forget their disappointment.

A cheerful fire crackled and blazed in Figgy's study, and the New House trio spent the whole of Sunday afternoon poring over their dictionaries.

Two important discoveries were made. Kerr managed to unearth the name of "a genus of Mediterranean plants," in seven letters. The word was "Thapsia." It was a word which had baffled lots of people, even such a learned person as Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the Housemaster, who was solving the puzzle for his own amusement.

It was Kerr, again, who discovered that another name for stalks was "Sterignas."

This was another word which had not yet been discovered by anyone else, and Figgins & Co. felt very pleased with themselves.

"We're getting along famously!" said Figgins. "But I don't know where we should be if it wasn't for your brains, Kerr. You're finding out all the teasers. If they were to have such a thing as a Cross Word Championship at St. Jim's, I'd back you to win it."

"Spare my blushes!" said Kerr, with a smile. "How many more words have we got to find, Figgy?" inquired Fatty Wynn.

"Only two," was the reply.

"What are they?"

"That's just what we've got to find out, fathead!"

"I mean, what are the definitions?"

"One is a word of two letters, meaning a force that acts on the nervous system. The other's a word of three letters, meaning 'tipsy.'"

"Oh!"

Fatty Wynn's countenance assumed an expression of owl-like wisdom.

"A force that acts on the nervous system!" he murmured.

"What about the Head's cane? That always upsets my nervous system."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cane" won't fill the bill," said Kerr. "It's a word of two letters we want."

"A.P.—short for ashplant," suggested Figgins.

"Wouldn't do," said Kerr.

"Then what in thunder can it be?"

"Can't think, at the moment. But I don't believe it has anything to do with canes, or instruments of torture. I've got an idea that it's something to do with electricity."

"Well, we shall have to leave that word for a bit," said Figgins. "What's another term for tipsy, in three letters?"

.....

"Intoxicated," suggested Fatty Wynn.

"Three letters, you ass!"

"Give it up," said Fatty, after a pause.

"But you haven't thought about it yet!"

"If I thought about it till the crack o' doom, I should never discover a word meaning tipsy, in three letters," growled Fatty Wynn.

"How can a school-boy be expected to know a thing like that?"

Kerr had a sudden inspiration.

"Tell you what," he said. "Let's ask Taggles!"

"Good wheeze!" said Figgins. "Come on!"

It was quite on the cards that Taggles, the porter, would

be able to come to the rescue of the puzzle-solvers. A school-boy could not be expected to know of a suitable synonym for tipsy. But Taggles, who sometimes partook of strong waters, ought to be well-versed on the subject.

Figgins & Co. went down into the quad, turned up their coat-collars, and sprinted through the driving rain towards the porter's lodge.

Taggles was at home. He was in his parlour, taking his Sunday afternoon siesta. His head was thrown back, his eyes were closed, and his mouth was open. A trumpet-like snore greeted the ears of the juniors as they approached.

"Asleep!" said Figgins. "Of all the born-tired slackers! Taggy! Wake up! You're wanted!"

Snore!

Figgins stepped towards the slumbering porter, and roused him by the simple expedient of giving him a poke in the ribs.

Taggles started up with a yell.

"Hellup! Wharrer marrer?"

"We've come to consult you, Taggy," explained Figgins, relaxing his grip.

Taggles glowered at the juniors. He was not at all pleased at having his slumbers disturbed. Taggles had been dreaming blissful dreams—dreams of some delightful paradise where schoolboys ceased from troubling, and porters were at rest. Those dreams were rudely shattered now, and the glare which Taggles bestowed upon Figgins & Co. was the reverse of amiable.

"Come to hinsult me, 'ave yer?" he cried angrily.

"Nunno," said Figgins hastily. "I didn't say 'insult,' I said 'consult.' I say, Taggy, what's another word for tipsy, in three letters?"

"Ow should I know?" demanded Taggles wrathfully.

"Me, a sober an' respectable man, wot never takes no strong liquors, hexcept hunder doctor's borders! You—you himperent young rips! Get hout of my lodge this hinstant!"

"No offence, Taggy," said Kerr hastily. "We thought you might be able to help us out—"

"I'll 'elp you out with a broomstick, if you don't 'op it!" said Taggles aggressively. "Such hinsults fairly makes me sit up. I ain't goin' to take 'em lyin' down. I'll stand up an' chase you, if you don't clear off this werry hinstant!"

"But we're doing Cross Words, Taggy!" protested Fatty Wynn. "And we want your help."

Taggles gave a snort.

"Drat the Cross Words!" he growled. "Which I don't 'old with these 'ere puzzles. I've been worried to death ever since the craze started. All day long the young rips 'ave been pesterin' me, arskin' for my advice. First Master Lowther comes along an' wants to know wot a genius of Mediterranean plants is, in seven letters. An' then Master Blake turns up an' wants to know the name of a force actin' on the nervous system."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothin' to larf at," said Taggles warmly. "It's a pesterin' noosance, that's wot it is! I chased Master Lowther away, an' then Master Blake, an' I settled down in me armchair to take forty winks. Jest as I was a-dozin' off, in comes Master Trimble, wantin' to know wot a nobgoblin is, in three letters."

"But I thought Trimble had solved the Head's puzzle long ago," said Figgins.

"This clearly shows that he hasn't," said Kerr with a grin. "You ought to feel quite flattered, Taggy, at being consulted by all these fellows. You're regarded as quite a giddy oracle, you know."

Taggles gave another snort.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he growled. "Cross Word puzzles oughter be regarded as a criminal offence, and anybody wot draws 'em up, or attempts to solve 'em, oughter be imprisoned!"

"In that case, the Head would get six months' hard!" chuckled Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway," said Taggles, "I'm fed-up with the dratted things, an' I'm fed-up with these hinterruptions! Hout you go!"

"But can't you tell us a word of three letters, meaning tipsy?" pleaded Figgins.

Taggles rose wrathfully to his feet and grabbed a broomstick which stood in the corner of the lodge. It had been a complete broom once, but it had become accidentally beheaded during the ejection of Monty Lowther and Jack Blake. Its head lay on the floor; and Taggles, who didn't believe in Sunday work—or weekday work, for that matter—did not intend to repair the broom until that vague and indefinite period known as "one of these days."

The chums of the New House saw that Taggles was in deadly earnest. There was a stampede to the door, and Figgins & Co. became wedged in the doorway. Fatty Wynn's ample form proved a great obstruction, and prevented his chums from getting through.

Taggles, having seized the broomstick, now seized the opportunity of poking and prodding the struggling mass

CHAMPION
The Tip-Top Story Weekly

Great News!

**5 STUNNING
FREE GIFTS**

**POCKET CINEMA
FREE** with To-day's CHAMPION



of humanity in the doorway. There was a chorus of yells from Figgins & Co.

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"Yarooooooh!"

Taggles continued to poke and prod, and Figgins & Co. continued to struggle. They extricated themselves at length, and fairly shot through the doorway, and alighted sprawling on the doorstep. There was mud on the doorstep, and it did not improve the appearance of Figgy & Co.'s "Sunday best."

The unhappy trio picked themselves up, and limped back to their own quarters.

The word in three letters meaning tipsy was still undiscovered, and Kerr's inspiration to seek the advice of Taggles, the porter, on the subject had resulted in dire disaster.

CHAPTER 8.

Sticking to His Guns!

TOM MERRY will come round before Saturday."

George Figgins spoke hopefully.

Kerr, however, shook his head. He was not so sanguine as his leader.

"Merry can be pretty obstinate when he chooses," he said. "He seems to have quite made up his mind to drop us from the eleven."

"Of course, he was awfully waxy with us for missing the Abbotsford match," said Fatty Wynn. "But that was last Saturday, and to-day's Wednesday. He's had plenty of time to simmer down. I vote we go and ask him, very nicely and civilly, to change his decision about dropping us from the team."

Figgins frowned.

"I don't see why we should eat humble pie to Tom Merry," he said.

"Oh, rats! We must put our pride in our pocket for once, and go and see him. Don't you agree, Kerr?"

"Well, there's no harm in trying it," said the Scottish junior. "But I'm afraid there will be nothing doing."

"Let's go and beard the giddy lion in his den," said Fatty Wynn.

And the three chums set out on their mission to the School House. They were crossing the quadrangle when Dick Redfern hailed them.

"Whither bound, you fellows?"

"We're going to see Tom Merry," said Figgins. "We're going to ask him—on bended knees, if necessary—to forget the Abbotsford affair, and bring us back into the team."

"Good!" said Redfern. "I'll come along and back you up. It's too bad of Merry to nurse a grievance all this time. He ought to have come round long ago. He knows perfectly well that we shall never lick Greyfriars if you fellows are left out."

The New House quartette made their way to Tom Merry's study.

The Terrible Three of the Shell were at home. They had come in from footer practice, and "tubbed," and now they were taking their ease in Study No. 10, waiting for the kettle to boil.

Manners had a copy of the Head's Cross Word puzzle, and his chums were helping him to fill the blanks.

Tom Merry & Co. had no reason to bless the Head's puzzle. It had been the means of causing an upheaval in the football eleven. But it was a fascinating puzzle, and the Terrible Three could not leave it alone. But they did not allow themselves to be carried away by it, as Figgins & Co. had done.

There was a tramping of feet in the passage, and the footsteps halted outside the door of Study No. 10. There was a murmur of voices, followed by a respectful tap on the panels.

"Come in!" said Tom Merry.

Figgins stepped into the study, followed by the other members of the deputation.

Tom Merry frowned, and his jaw was firmly set. Perhaps he guessed why the four New House fellows had called, and his frown was not encouraging.

Fatty Wynn gave Figgins a nudge.

"Go ahead, Figgy!" he murmured.

Figgins cleared his throat.

"Ahem!" he began.

"Got a cough?" inquired Monty Lowther. "If so, don't bring the germ to this study. We don't want to be infected with New House ailments."

"Ahem!"

"If you're wanting to say something, Figgins," said Tom Merry, "buck up and get it off your chest!"

Figgins took the plunge.

"It's about the Cup Final and Greyfriars," he said. "We're not conceited, Merry, but we know perfectly well that you'll never beat Greyfriars without us."

"That remains to be seen. We'll do our best, anyway."

"You're still huffy about what happened the other day?" asked Figgins.

"I don't know that I'm still huffy about it. I want to forget it. I've dropped you and Kerr and Wynn from the eleven, and there's an end of it. If you had any sense you wouldn't come here and rake the matter up again."

Figgins frowned.

"So you're still sticking to your guns, Merry?"

"Yes."

"You're not putting our names down for the Cup Final?"

"No."

"Then I think it's a rotten shame!" said Figgins hotly, quite forgetting that he had arranged with his chums to speak the soft word that turneth away wrath. "You're deliberately throwing away the school's chances of winning the Cup! You know jolly well that you don't have a dog's chance of whacking Greyfriars with three reserves in the team."

"Four," interjected Dick Redfern.

"Four!" said Tom Merry, glancing at Redfern, in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"I'll trouble you to put somebody in my place, Merry. I refuse to play in the Cup Final unless Figgy and Kerr and Wynn are reinstated."

"My hat!" gasped Manners.

The situation had become more serious now.

Dick Redfern was the centre-half of the team, and in that position he proved a tower of strength. Both in attack and defence, Reddy was a most reliable man, cool and resourceful even in an exciting Cup-tie. There was no reserve player who could fill Redfern's shoes with distinction. If Reddy dropped out, in addition to Figgins & Co., the St. Jim's eleven would be but a shadow of itself. It would be a mere travesty of a team. Certainly it would stand no earthly chance of beating Greyfriars.

Tom Merry's face was clouded over.

"Do you mean that, Redfern?" he asked quietly.

"Every bit. I'll only play in the Cup Final on condition that you reinstate these fellows."

Figgins & Co. looked more hopeful now. Tom Merry's hand was being forced, as it were, by Redfern. Surely the captain of the Shell would not allow Reddy to stand down, thus making the team weaker than ever! Even Tom Merry's chums expected him to give in, now that pressure was being put upon him in this way.

But Tom Merry, in spite of Redfern's threat, remained firm. Some would have called it obstinate.

"Very well, Redfern," he said, "I'll take your name off the list, and put Herries in."

Redfern shrugged his shoulders.

"All serene!" he said. "But you'll be sorry for this later, when Greyfriars wipe up the ground with you. The fellows will be clamouring for a new footer captain. You're behaving like an obstinate mule. As Figgy says, you're deliberately throwing away the Cup."

"That's enough!" said Tom Merry sharply. "You can clear out, all of you!"

The New House fellows hesitated a moment, as if debating whether to commit assault and battery upon the Terrible Three. But they decided that nothing was to be gained by violence. They had appealed to Tom Merry to reconsider his decision, and he had refused. There was only one more thing to be said, and Figgins said it.

"You'll be licked to a frazzle on Saturday! You've got eleven School House fellows in the team, and not a single New House chap. You can't expect the New House to take this lying down. If you get licked—and it's a dead cert that you will—there will be ructions later on. Don't say we didn't warn you!"

And, with this Parthian shot, George Figgins moved to the door.

The members of the deputation went disconsolately back to their own quarters. Their mission had failed, and the outlook for St. Jim's in the Cup Final was more gloomy than ever.

Whatever slender chance St. Jim's might have had, with Figgins & Co. out of the team, was gone now. With Dick Redfern out also, defeat stared the "Saints" in the face.

Tom Merry had lots of visitors that evening. They urged him to climb down from his high horse, and to restore Figgins & Co. to their places in the eleven, which meant that Dick Redfern would automatically return to the team.

But Tom Merry had one answer for all, and that answer was a curt negative.

On the eve of the Cup Final the names of the St. Jim's players were posted on the notice-board. And four familiar names were conspicuous by their absence.

The eleven chosen ones who were to do battle with Greyfriars were as follows:

Goal, Hammond; backs, Reilly and Glyn; half-backs, Manners, Herries, and Lowther; forwards, Levison, Talbot, Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy.

There was nothing wrong with the forward line. But

there were weaknesses in the defence which the thrustful Greyfriars forwards would quickly "spot," and of which they would be swift to take advantage.

The prevailing opinion at St. Jim's was that Greyfriars would come, and see, and conquer, and carry off Lord Eastwood's trophy in triumph to their own school.

As a rule there was boundless optimism in the St. Jim's camp on the eve of a Cup Final. But there was no optimism now. There were long faces, and gloomy forebodings as to the fate of St. Jim's on the morrow.

CHAPTER 9.

A Staggering Surprise!

"**M**ORE wain!" Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was the morning of the Cup Final—a melancholy morning indeed. Rain was falling, not in a gentle drizzle, but by the bucketful, as Jack Blake expressed it.

"Looks as if we shall be swamped out this afternoon!" grunted Herries. "Why don't they make it a water-polo match, instead of footer?"

"I hate playin' on a muddy g'round!" said Arthur Augustus. "It ruins a fellow's footah togs!"

Even when playing football, Arthur Augustus always liked to appear spic and span. Mud-stained jerseys and shorts were an abomination to the Swell of St. Jim's. But if Gussy expected to keep an immaculate appearance on such a day, with the ground a quagmire, he was doomed to disappointment.

The dismal weather was in harmony with the thoughts of the St. Jim's juniors. Defeat seemed to be in the very atmosphere. The members of the eleven meant to play the game of their lives, of course; but they could not help reflecting what a vast difference the absence of Figgins & Co. and Dick Redfern would make.

"It's wotten!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. And he voiced the opinion of his chums. "To make mattahs worse, my patah an' Cousin Ethel are comin' ovah to see the match. My patah will present the cup as soon as the game is ovah."

"Well, he won't present it to us—unless a miracle happens," said Jack Blake lugubriously. "That cup will find a resting-place in Wharton's study at Greyfriars."

"Afraid so," said Herries, with a sigh. "Still, we mustn't be faint-hearted."

"Who's being faint-hearted?" demanded Blake warmly. "We shall do our best, of course, but our best won't be good enough to beat Greyfriars."

Temper was on edge that morning. The relentless rain, which pelted down incessantly from a leaden sky, was sufficient in itself to ruffle anybody's temper. What with the weather, and the gloomy prospects of St. Jim's in the Cup Final, it was not surprising that lots of fellows, besides Blake, were snappy and irritable.

Over School House and New House alike hung a mantle of gloom.

Figgins & Co. felt their exclusion from the team very keenly. After breakfast, they went over to the School House, and hung about listlessly, possibly hoping that Tom Merry would change his mind at the last moment and ask them to play. The captain of the Shell actually passed them while they stood chatting in a gloomy group; but Tom Merry did not speak to them. He merely gave them a curt nod, and passed on.

As the morning advanced the weather grew worse and worse. Pools of water lay in the quadrangle. The football ground was in a shocking state.

But there was no question of postponing the match. It was one of the rules governing the competition that the matches were to be played at the specified times.

Lord Eastwood arrived at lunch-time in his car. Cousin Ethel came with him. They looked as cheerful as it was possible to look, after their long drive in the rain.

It did not take Lord Eastwood long to discover that "something was rotten in the state of Denmark"—or, rather, in the state of the St. Jim's junior eleven. There was trouble of some kind. That was obvious from the gloomy faces of Arthur Augustus and his chums. But Lord Eastwood was too tactful to inquire into the why and wherefore of the situation. He greeted Arthur Augustus and the others quite cordially, and he expressed the hope that St. Jim's would win the cup. A forlorn hope, indeed!

After lunch Tom Merry & Co. squelched their way down to the gates to greet the Greyfriars eleven. The Friars had travelled by train to Wayland, and from Wayland they had taken taxis to St. Jim's.

As a rule, Harry Wharton and his merry men were bubbling over with health and good spirits when they came over to St. Jim's to play a match. But on this occasion

they brought with them long faces and glum expressions. They looked as miserable and "fed-up" as the St. Jim's fellows—if that were possible!

Harry Wharton and his bosom chums—Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh—alighted from the first taxi. They tried to smile as Tom Merry & Co. came forward to greet them; but it was a pathetic effort.

Seldom had a visiting team looked so forlorn and cheerless as Harry Wharton & Co. looked then. Tom Merry supposed, at first, that the weather was responsible for their gloomy faces. But no; it could not be that. The Greyfriars footballers never allowed the weather to damp their spirits. On the previous occasions when the two teams had met, there had been a blizzard; and Bob Cherry had amused everybody by chanting:

"Whether the weather is cold,
Whether the weather is hot,
We must weather whatever the weather,
Whether we like it or not!"

It was not until the second taxi disgorged its passengers that Tom Merry realised that there was something radically wrong.

There were four unfamiliar faces in the Greyfriars eleven. And there were four familiar faces missing.

Peter Todd, Mark Linley, Tom Brown, and Dick Penfold were all absent. In their places were four fellows who were comparative strangers to the St. Jim's juniors.

Tom Merry looked puzzled as he shook hands with the rival skipper.

"You don't look very cheery," he observed.
"Neither do you, for that matter," said Harry Wharton.
"Well, we've got cause to be a bit down in the mouth."
"So have we."

"Tell me your troubles," said Tom Merry, "and then I'll tell you mine. There are four new faces in your team, I notice."

Wharton nodded grimly.
"I've had to stand four of our regular players down," he said.

"My hat! That's jolly funny! So have I!"
The rival skippers grinned for the first time.

Here was a comical situation. Each skipper, unknown to the other, had dropped four fellows from his team!

"Might a fellow inquire why you've had to drop four of your players?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "To be quite accurate, I only dropped three. The other stood down in sympathy. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn are the offenders. Instead of turning up regularly to footer practice and getting themselves fit for the Cup Final, they've been carried off their feet by the new craze—the Cross Word craze, you know. I warned them several times, but it wasn't any use. So there was nothing for it but to drop them from the team."

Harry Wharton gave a gasp.
"My only aunt!" he ejaculated. "I dropped the four fellows from my eleven for precisely the same reason!"

There was a buzz of amazement from the fellows who were standing around.

The recent events at St. Jim's had been duplicated at Greyfriars! There were Cross Word fanatics, it seemed, in each school.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "How vewy extraordinary! This is the most amazin' coincidence I've evah stwuck!"

"It's not really amazing, when you come to think of it," said Monty Lowther. "Why should St. Jim's be the only school with Cross Word maniacs in it? We haven't got the monopoly of maniacs. I expect every school in the country has got its Cross Word fanatics, if the truth were known."

"That's so," agreed Jack Blake. "Anyway, the teams are evenly matched now. Four of our best men have been dropped, and Greyfriars are in the same boat."

"Pwecisely, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "We can now entah the fway with a good heart. Our chances of baggin' the cup have become quite wosy again."

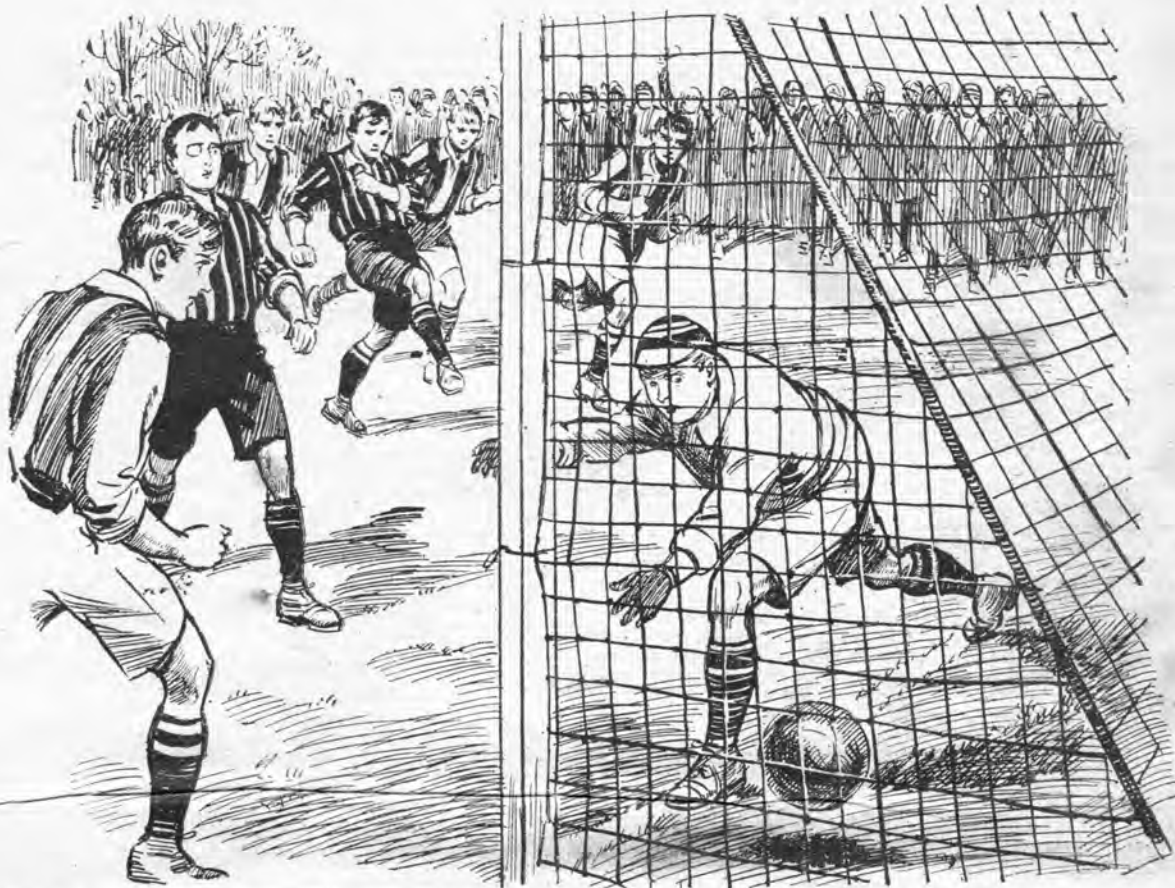
"Yes, rather."
The St. Jim's fellows brightened up immediately. So did the Greyfriars fellows.

The only thing that did not brighten up was the weather. The rain was falling in sheets, and the party of footballers in the school gateway was soaked.

"Let's take to the boats," said Monty Lowther. "Heave-ho, me hearties! Drop anchor at the footer-ground!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Can you fellows lend us some bathing-costumes and water-wings?" asked Bob Cherry of Greyfriars. "We left ours behind."

And there was another burst of merriment.
Both sets of footballers were in good heart now for the coming tussle. The teams were equally matched, and everything pointed to a close and thrilling game.



"Play up, St. Jim's!" panted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Nevah mind the weathah, deah boys!" Tom Merry sent in a shot from a long way out. There was no sting in the shot, and the ball trickled gently towards the Greyfriars goal. The goalkeeper was waiting, but he fumbled the greasy ball, and it rolled into the net. "Goal!" shouted the St. Jim's supporters. (See this page.)

In spite of the appalling conditions a goodly crowd turned out to witness the Cup Final.

Lord Eastwood stood on the touchline, holding an umbrella over the slim form of Cousin Ethel. The Head turned out, and several of the masters, while the fellows were present in full muster.

Mr. Railton was the referee. Although soaked to the skin already, the Housemaster was smiling as he lined up the teams for the encounter.

The next moment the whistle shrilled out and Tom Merry kicked off for St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 10. Twenty-Two Heroes!

"PLAY up!"
"On the greasy, muddy ball!"
"Groo!"

Friars and Saints slipped and slithered in the drenching downpour.

Scientific football was almost out of the question. The going was heavy, and the players churned up mud at every step.

But in spite of the wet and the slush some very clever things were done.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy caused an early thrill by racing down the touchline with the ball at his toes. A Greyfriars back rushed up to tackle him, and Gussy promptly swung the ball across to Tom Merry in the centre.

The captain of the Shell stood within shooting distance, but he missed his kick, owing to the muddy ground, and went sprawling. Bulstrode, the Greyfriars' goalie, ran out and punted the ball well up the field before Tom Merry could recover.

There were groans of disappointment from the St. Jim's spectators. But they did not blame Tom Merry for his failure to convert Gussy's pass. On such a ground accurate football was impossible.

"Play up, St. Jim's!" roared Figgins of the Fourth.

Figgy's stentorian shout caused several glances to be turned in his direction. Figgins was standing behind the

Greyfriars' goal with Kerr and Fatty Wynn, and their presence at the match caused a certain amount of wonder. Evidently the fellows had expected Figgins to sit sulking in his study, like Achilles in his tent. But that was not Figgy's way. He had been dropped from the team, but he was sportsman enough to want to see the Saints win. And so were his chums.

Every time Levison or D'Arcy, the St. Jim's wingers, got away with the ball Figgins & Co. gave them an encouraging shout.

The twenty-two players were soaked to the skin. Gore of the Shell remarked that they looked like a lot of half-drowned rats, and that it was "potty" to play footer under such vile conditions. But nobody heeded Gore.

When the game had been in progress twenty minutes it was difficult to recognise some of the players owing to their muddy state.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been given a mud-bath by one of the Greyfriars backs, who bowled him over without ceremony. And Gussy gazed ruefully at his discoloured jersey and shorts as he staggered to his feet.

"My footah togs are wuined!" he panted. "Still, it was only to be expected. Play up! Nevah mind the weathah!"

St. Jim's drew first blood.

Tom Merry sent in a shot from a long way out. There was no sting in the shot, and the ball trickled gently towards the Greyfriars goal. But Bulstrode fumbled the greasy ball, and it rolled between his legs into the net.

"Goal!"
"Hurrah!"

It had been a "soft" goal, but Tom Merry was to be congratulated on seizing his opportunity. His policy was to shoot as often as possible, because, with the ground in such a muddy state, the goalkeeper had great difficulty in fielding the ball. He was liable to be beaten by even the softest of shots, as Tom Merry had already proved.

Greyfriars lined up with grim faces. They were a goal down, but they did not intend to remain in that unsatisfactory position for long.

Harry Wharton led a dashing attack on the St. Jim's

goal, and Hammond of the Fourth had to have his wits about him. He turned a hard drive from Wharton round the post, and from the corner-kick which followed he cleared with great daring from a crowd of players.

"Well played, Hammond!" shouted Figgins. "Keep it up, old scout!"

But the Greyfriars forwards were not to be denied. They came again, battling their way through the mud and slush.

The St. Jim's backs, Reilly and Glyn, did their best to stem the tide, but they were frequently beaten for pace. Their play was not of the high standard of the fellows whose places they were taking—Figgins and Kerr.

The ball was bobbing about dangerously in front of the St. Jim's goal. Presently Frank Nugent got his head to it, and it whizzed into the net over Hammond's shoulder, the goalie being unsighted.

"Goal!"

"Level!" said Figgins. "It's going to be a jolly close thing!"

"The team with the most stamina will pull it off," said Kerr. "Some of the fellows will be having bellows to mend in the second half, I'm thinking!"

Fatty Wynn nodded.

"It must take it out of them, playing on a mud-heap," he said. "But Hammond's doing awfully well in goal. If he can only keep it up—"

Harry Hammond carried a great responsibility on his shoulders, and nobody envied him his task of saving shots in the slippery goal-mouth.

But the Cockney junior played like a fellow inspired. He was hard-pressed during the remainder of the half, but he managed to keep the Greyfriars forwards at bay until the interval.

Glad enough were the mud-bespattered players to seek temporary shelter in the dressing-rooms, where they were given a brisk rub-down. Some of them changed their togs. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy insisted on a complete change of outfit.

"I wefuse to go on playin' in my pwesent condish," he said. "I look like a human mud-heap, bai Jove!"

"And you'll be a human mud-heap again before the second half is five minutes' old," said Jack Blake. "Where's the sense in changing your togs, Gussy?"

But Arthur Augustus insisted on the change, and he was spick and span in his appearance when the teams came out after the interval. But before the game had been resumed many minutes Blake's prophecy was fulfilled. A few tumbles in the mud, and Arthur Augustus was scarcely recognisable.

It was a ding-dong struggle in the second half. The game was fought at a gruelling pace, and the players lasted out remarkably well. If some of them were feeling whacked and leg-weary they showed no outward and visible sign of it. They played up like heroes.

St. Jim's had most of the play, but they were out of luck.

Talbot caused a sensation by beating four men in succession and then firing in a terrific shot.

The goalie was beaten, but the ball crashed against the cross-bar; and when it rebounded into play a Greyfriars back, in his desperate anxiety to clear, kicked it into the crowd. The muddy ball went within an ace of knocking off the Head's mortar-board.

St. Jim's came again, and Tom Merry actually netted the ball, but he was ruled offside by Mr. Railton.

Then, after Tom Merry & Co. had made a series of determined onslaughts upon the Greyfriars goal, the game took a sudden turn.

Vernon-Smith raced away for Greyfriars, showing an amazing turn of speed. He was challenged by Lowther and Glyn, but they could not rob him of the ball. First Lowther and then Glyn went sprawling in the mud, and Vernon-Smith raced on, while the crowd watched breathlessly.

Harry Wharton clapped his hands sharply together. Vernon-Smith knew the signal, and he whipped the ball across. Wharton took it in his stride, and his shot was one of the finest ever seen on the St. Jim's ground—a winner all the way!

The ball crashed into the net, Hammond being powerless to save.

"Goal!"

There were glum faces along the touchline. And the rain pelted down harder than ever, as if to swamp the hopes of St. Jim's.

With only a few minutes to go the plight of Tom Merry & Co. was precarious. Their chances of winning the match had evaporated. The most they could hope for was to save the game.

The ball was kicked off from the centre, and Jack Blake gained possession. The ball was like a lump of lead, and had to be kicked with terrific force to make it travel any distance. Blake's boot met it fairly and squarely, and it went out to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on-the-wing.

"Now, Gussy!"

All eyes were on Arthur Augustus as he spurted down the field.

Lord Eastwood was watching keenly. Cousin Ethel was clenching her hands with the tension of the moment.

Everybody felt that this was the last chance St. Jim's would get of saving the game.

With mud clinging to his face, his hair, and his garments, Arthur Augustus ran on. He only paused once, and then only for a fraction of a second—to see how his comrades were positioned. Talbot alone had kept pace with him, and was waiting for a pass. Gussy judged the distance with splendid accuracy, and Talbot, taking the ball in his stride, scored just such a goal as Harry Wharton had scored for Greyfriars—a real beauty—a perfect peach of a goal, as Figgins ecstatically remarked.

There was a roar from three hundred throats.

"Goal!"

"Oh, well played!"

"Bravo, Talbot!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"They've saved the game!"

The whistle shrilled out a moment later, and the Cup Final had ended "all square"—two goals apiece.

It had been a magnificent battle under deplorable conditions. And both Friars and Saints had played so grandly that neither team had deserved to lose. Honours were even, and a second meeting would be necessary to decide the destination of Lord Eastwood's cup.

The twenty-two players staggered off the field, and the ovation they received might have been heard a mile away.

"Oh, what a game!" panted Tom Merry.

"Thank goodness it's over!" gasped Monty Lowther. "I haven't another kick left in me."

And still the cheering rang out over the rain-soaked fields as the twenty-two heroes disappeared into the dressing-rooms.

CHAPTER 11.

Cousin Ethel Intervenes!

"PHE in, deah boys—an' gal!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was acting as host in Study No. 6. That famous apartment presented a very cheery and cosy appearance—in marked contrast to the cheerless conditions which prevailed out of doors.

Arthur Augustus was doing the honours. He had invited the rival captains—Tom Merry and Harry Wharton—to a handsome spread after the match. Cousin Ethel had also been invited; and Blake, Herries, and Digby were present, as a matter of course.

Lord Eastwood was not there. He was taking tea with Mr. Railton in the Housemaster's study. The "deah boys" needed no second bidding to pile in. With the exception of Digby they had all taken part in the strenuous Cup Final on Little Side, and their ordeal in the rain had given a keen edge to their appetites.

"Jam this way!" said Blake.

"Pass the toast!" said Digby.

"After you with the sardines, Merry!" said Herries.

There was a passing and repassing of plates and dishes and cups and saucers, and the hungry footballers settled down to a hearty meal.

Cousin Ethel was the only guest who failed to do justice to the good things on the table. She nibbled nonchalantly at a piece of toast, and there was a thoughtful expression on her pretty face.

Obviously, Cousin Ethel was not thinking of tea just then.

The girl was thinking, in fact, of Figgins and his chums. She had been wondering all the afternoon why they had taken no part in the Cup Final. They were regular members of the eleven, she knew, and they were not crooked, or on the sick list, for she had seen them standing on the touchline. They had danced with delight when Talbot scored the equalising goal for St. Jim's; and they could certainly not have danced had they been cripples.

Cousin Ethel was rather perturbed about the matter. She had a warm corner in her heart for George Figgins, and she had been looking forward to seeing him play. Her disappointment on finding that Figgy was a mere looker-on was very great.

Why had Figgins been absent from the team? Why had Kerr, and Fatty Wynn, and Dick Redfern been absent also?

It occurred to Cousin Ethel that there was "trouble in the family." She noticed that Tom Merry was not quite his old cheery self. There was something wrong somewhere, that was certain.

Cousin Ethel, who was a very observant young lady, had also noticed that Greyfriars had not been at full strength. Familiar faces had been missing. Peter Todd, Mark Linley, Tom Brown, and Dick Penfold—all of whom the girl knew well—had been absentees.

Cousin Ethel pondered the matter in her mind. And

Arthur Augustus, glancing up from his plate, noted her pre-occupied look.

"Penny for 'em, deah gal!" he said.

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"I was thinking, Arthur—" she began.

"Yaas, deah gal?"

"The fact is, I was wondering why Figgins and his chums were not playing this afternoon. I hope there has not been trouble?"

Gussy's face clouded a little.

"Tom Mewwy will explain why Figgins & Co. weren't playin'," he said.

Cousin Ethel turned inquiringly to the captain of the Shell. Tom Merry coloured under her gaze, and looked confused.

"I've no wish to be inquisitive," said Cousin Ethel hastily.

"You need not tell me what has happened if you don't wish to."

"That's all right, Miss Cleveland," said Tom Merry.

"There's no reason why I shouldn't explain. The fact is, I dropped Figgins, and Kerr, and Wynn from the team, and Redfern stood down in sympathy. The Head's Cross Word puzzle was the cause of all the trouble. Figgins & Co. went potty over it, and neglected footer practice. I warned them, but it was no use. And things got so bad that I was obliged to drop them from the eleven. Redfern thought it wasn't just, so he dropped out, too."

"I see," said Cousin Ethel.

"Funnily enough, the same thing happened at Greyfriars," said Harry Wharton. "Four of our fellows lost their heads over Cross Word puzzles. So I dropped them from the team and put in four substitutes."

Cousin Ethel was silent for a moment. And the rival football captains felt a little uneasy. They had an idea that the girl was mentally reproaching them.

"Is it such a dreadful crime, to develop the Cross Word craze?" she asked, after a pause.

"Nunno; it's not a crime," said Tom Merry. "But when Cross Word puzzles are allowed to interfere with footer—"

"It is almost sacrilege!" suggested Cousin Ethel.

"N-n-not exactly that," stammered Tom Merry, who was beginning to feel more and more uncomfortable under the girl's gaze. "But when there's a Cup Final coming off a fellow's got no right to give all his time to Cross Word puzzles, when he ought to be getting himself fit for the fray."

"That's so, deah gal," chimed in Arthur Augustus, who felt that he ought to support his skipper. "Figgay & Co. were awful duffahs to let the new cwaze get such a hold on them."

"Do you think so, Arthur?" said Cousin Ethel.

"Yaas, of course. Don't you, deah gal?"

"I think there is every excuse for Figgins and his chums," said Cousin Ethel slowly. "Cross Word Puzzles have a tremendous fascination for some people. I haven't caught the craze myself, but a friend of mine had it badly for a whole fortnight. She could give her mind to nothing else. She tried to pull herself together and leave the puzzles alone, but it was no use. Once you fall under their spell all other things are forgotten. And those of us who haven't fallen victims to the craze have no right to sit in judgment on those who have."

Tom Merry and Harry Wharton coloured up. Cousin Ethel's words made them feel that they had been too heavy-handed in their punishment of the Cross Word fanatics. Had they been guilty of carrying discipline to excess? Cousin Ethel appeared to think so; and there were others, both at St. Jim's and Greyfriars, who were of the same way of thinking.

"Then you think I've been too severe, Miss Cleveland?" muttered Tom Merry.

"Frankly, I do."

"That means that you think the same about me?" said Harry Wharton.

Cousin Ethel nodded.

"Of course, I've no right to interfere in football matters," she said. "At the same time—"

"You are angry with us?" murmured Tom Merry.

"Not at all! But if you would like to do me a great favour—"

"With pleasure!"

"Then you will forgive the Cross Word offenders, and reinstate them in the elevens?"

Tom Merry hesitated, but only for a brief moment. He realised that Figgins & Co. had already been punished enough, if not more than enough. They had been barred from the match that afternoon; yet they had been good enough sportsmen to turn out and cheer their school. And now that the Cup Final was to be replayed, there was no reason why Figgins & Co. should not be restored to the team. Cousin Ethel was not asking a great deal.

"You will grant me this favour?" said the girl eagerly.

THE SOLUTION OF THE HEAD'S PUZZLE.

T	R	A	I	N	E	R	S	H	E	L	L	E	D
O	A	T		O	R	D		I	N		A	G	O
P	O		S	T	E	R	I	G	M	A	S		O
I		P	E	A		E	S	O		C	O	E	K
C	O	H	E	R	E		S		S	T	Y	M	I
A	D	O		Y	E			E	O	S		B	O
L		N	E				R				R	A	S
	M	O	N	M	O	U	T	H	S	H	I	R	E
T		G	O				A			O	G		S
H	E	R		A	T		T		I	F		O	P
A	R	A	B	L	E			I		L	I	N	E
P		M	A	D		L	O	P		L	I	S	L
S	O		G	E	R	A	N	I	U	M	S		T
I	A	N		R	E		S		R	E		A	I
A	R	O	U	S	E	D		E	N	R	A	G	E

"I shall only be too pleased!" said Tom Merry.

And Harry Wharton gave a similar undertaking that he would reinstate the four Greyfriars fellows.

"Thank you ever so much!" said Cousin Ethel, her eyes shining with gratitude. "I feel sure you will have no cause to regret this."

Now that the matter was settled, the meal proceeded merrily. Cousin Ethel was no longer worried and thoughtful, but gay and animated. And it was a merry party indeed that sat round the festive board in Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 12.

A Double Triumph!

"A T last!"

Figgins of the New House jumped to his feet with a cry of exultation. And Kerr and Fatty Wynn jumped up, too, and started to waltz round the study.

At last—at long last, the Head's Cross Word puzzle was solved!

For some days past the solvers had been baffled by two words—the word of two letters, meaning a force which acted on the nervous system; and the word of three letters meaning tipsy.

After much burrowing through dictionaries and ponderous tomes, Kerr had unearthed the first word, which was "Od."

Figgins himself had found the other word. It was "Ree."

The Head's puzzle, which had baffled the best brains in the school, had been solved by the enterprising firm of Figgins, Kerr & Wynn. There were others at St. Jim's who had nearly solved it, but not quite.

Figgins & Co. were the only fellows who had solved the puzzle in its entirety. They, therefore, qualified to receive the Head's award of ten pounds.

The solution was placed in an envelope, which was sealed, and taken by the trio to the Head's study. All three of the chums had signed their names at the foot of the solution; and they now had to possess their souls in patience until the result was announced.

On their way back from the Head's study Figgins & Co. encountered Tom Merry.

"I've good news for you fellows," said the captain of the Shell.

And the faces of George Figgins, George Francis Kerr, and David Llewellyn Wynn became illumined with smiles. They waited eagerly for Tom Merry to proceed.

"The Cup Final is to be replayed on Wednesday," said Tom. "and you fellows are back in the eleven."

"Hurrah!"

"Thanks awfully, Merry!" said Figgins.

"Don't thank me; thank Cousin Ethel. She pleaded your cause for you; and, to tell the truth, she made me feel rather ashamed of myself for having dropped you from the team. I've promised her you shall have your places back,"

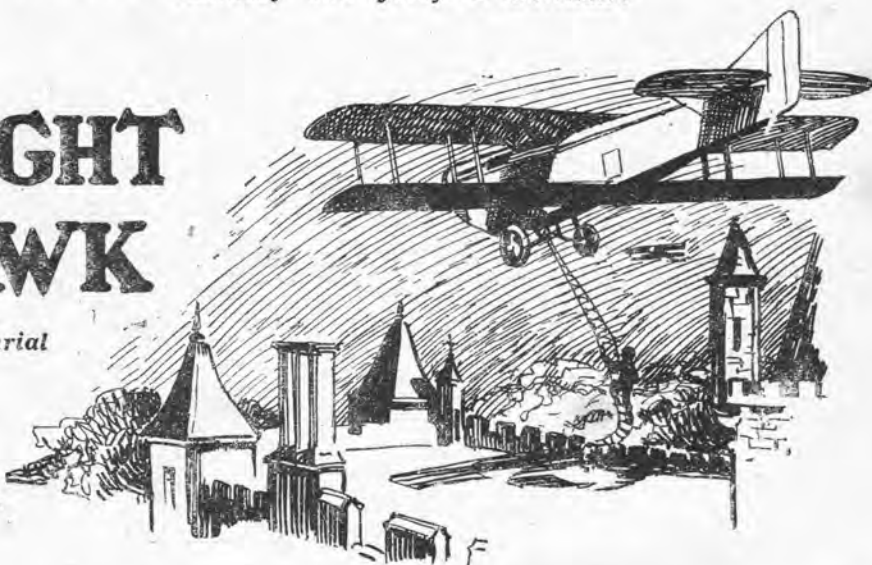
(Continued on page 27.)

HERE THEY ARE AGAIN: Those Bright Young Aero Detectives, "Live-wire" Lindsay and Jerry O'Gorman!

THE NIGHT HAWK

A Thrilling Yarn of Aerial Adventure.

By
LESTER BIDSTON.



CHAPTER 1.

The Roodee Racers!

"SLEEPY owl, here's a membership card for the Roodee Racers—and may it never bring you a broken neck."

Lyle Lindsay tossed a white-and-gold pasteboard across to Jerry O'Gorman, and grinned at his pal's amazed expression.

"The Roodee Racers?" Jerry demanded. "An' phwat may the Roodee Racers be whin they're out?"

"When they're out—which isn't very often—they're the cream of England's amateur aero artists," Lyle chuckled. "They're the first unofficial flying club in the world, and they are holding their first public stunt show this Pip Emma."

Now, modesty was Jerry's long suit. The fact that his name had been coupled with Lyle's in endless columns of newspaper stuff had never afforded him satisfaction. In truth, the fulsome praise of their astounding duel with the notorious Ultima had made Jerry vow to "leave police jobs to th' potbooks who were paid for it"—a sentiment that Lyle fully endorsed, and one that had caused them to adopt other names and a new address until the fickle minds of hero-worshippers found other prey.

And now, when they were comfortably housed near Shotwick aerodrome, having a busman's holiday by studying R.A.F. methods, Lyle must go and join a footling amateur flying society.

Jerry was annoyed, and never tried to hide the fact.

"Shure now, of all th' burblin' block-heads, you're the inimitable IT!" he glowered. "Here's me after fallin' in wid those Raf ruffians, lettin' on I know a bit about busses, an' now ye go an' land me into a stunt show—the koinid av footlin' they're always sarky about." He jumped to his feet and thumped an inoffensive table as though it had offended him. "Faith, is it me own 'Lindman Linnet,' the chield av me own brain, as ye expect me to be exhibitin' afore a crowd av gawkin' gossoons?"

Lyle's grin broadened. Before attempting to answer his pal's question he dropped into the chair Jerry had vacated and picked up the newspaper the other had cast aside.

"Old dear, you were mightily absorbed

in this rag when I intruded," he drawled. "I'll chance a guess in one that you were readin' some fancy fluff about the mysterious jewel lifting that is puzzling everybody."

"I was an' all," Jerry admitted. "Iv'rybody in England's readin' the same thing, though phwat that has to do with joining this Roodee Racin' Club bates me."

"Only, Jay, that I've an idea this invisible jewel crook shelters behind the innocence of the Roodee Racers," Lyle answered, now without a vestige of a smile on his face.

Well might Jerry gasp and stare. He'd had examples in plenty of his pal's uncanny shrewdness, he knew that Lyle's brilliant reasoning alone had brought Ultima's astounding schemes to nought; yet he could hardly credit that Lyle had so swiftly solved a mystery that bewildered the whole country.

"But, Lylesey," he expostulated, "ye've a dozen different burglaries to account for, an' niver a trace or a ghost av a clue left behind. An' now, says you, you've found th' Bill Sikes who did it all?"

Lyle shook his head and hooked a chair forward with his boot.

"Sit down and listen," he said crisply. "If you've followed the business closely, you will recall that a dozen different county mansions have been relieved of much valuable property. Perhaps you have also noticed that, in every case, a posh family's jewel-case has alone vanished, and that each house has been a place utterly secluded in the privacy of its own grounds?"

Jerry nodded.

"I've also noticed that niver a door or window's been forced," he replied; "an' that all the evidence points to someone in the house doin' the lifting."

"So the police thought—at first," Lyle answered. "Now, as these clueless crimes continue, they are beginning to admit that a phenomenally clever crook is loose, and very much on the job."

"But there's niver a trace to show how the gentleman got into or out of the houses," Jerry argued.

"That's exactly our reason for joining the Roodee Club," Lyle replied calmly. Then, as the owlish look remained on Jerry's face, he amplified his remark. "Jay, old dear, as the premier flying

man of this country, I need not tell you that an aeroplane—the right sort of plane—affords unique opportunities of entering a house via a skylight or upper window."

"Faith, yes," Jerry admitted, his freckled face puckering to laughter. "Yes—that is, bedad, if ye can find an airplane that hovers like a helicopter, an' one that won't waken iv'ry soul within a mile of it."

"One, in fact, like our own Lindman Linnet?" Lyle suggested quietly.

Jerry sat bolt upright.

"Ghosts o' Galway!" he mumbled. "Shure, Lylesey, our Linnet could do all that—an' more. D'ye mane some smart alek's loanin' himself our bus without th' asking av it?"

"No, Jay," Lyle answered. "But I think somebody's lifted the Linnet's plans and copied the old dear." He jumped to his feet and indicated the door. "Anyway, we're taking part in this afternoon's race, though not in the Lindman Linnet."

CHAPTER 2.

"Sulky Sam" Wallows Home!

A DENSE throng lined the rails of the old Chester racecourse—a crowd keyed to a pitch of exceptional excitement.

Many a battle of equine warriors had been fought to a finish on this green sward, for once in every year the Roodee becomes the Mecca of a vast sporting crowd. But never in its long existence had the old "soup-plate" staged a race wherein metal monsters took the place of thoroughbreds, and never had interest run so high as on this February afternoon when nine two-seater planes waited the "off."

It still wanted ten minutes to starting time, and, though few of the sight-seers realised the fact, the club still wanted a tenth plane to make its numbers complete.

Pilots, observers, and club officials were already hovering round the machines, making a last swift examination of struts and stays, racing an engine to test for sound flaw, or simply "standing by" with such patience as they could muster.

"That new fellow's rattled," one leather-clad pilot grumbled. "Time we were drawing for starting turn, isn't it, Billings?"

Harry Billings—a well-known Croydon-Paris pilot who had consented to act as starter, timekeeper, and judge—hesitated.

"We can afford him another three minutes, Mr. Bellman," he said at last. "We don't want the risk of a collision if he should turn up at the last moment. Besides, we promised—Hark! I believe that's No. 10 now!"

Billings' trained ear had located the distant roar of a racing engine a second before it was picked up by the assembled thousands.

"Confounded nuisance!" Bellman muttered to his observer, a dapper little fellow whose thin body and peaked face gave him a remarkable resemblance to a lean, lithe ferret. "Y'know, Joe, I've no time for newcomers in this club. The other fellows we can pretty well weigh up. This new chap might prove a most abominable nuisance."

Joe Hallett's shrewd glance was focused on a black speck high up in the blue. His ear was marking the rhythm of a running engine, and quite suddenly an unsightly grin crossed his lean features.

"No need to fear his bus, anyway," he chuckled. "Listen to his engine, George! It's coughing like an asthmatical old woman! If it isn't a pre-War product I'll go in for baby nursing!"

"I'll nurse him if he comes nosing round us!" Bellman grunted.

By now the solitary flier was almost overhead and filling the air with raucous sound. Then, as ten thousand eyes stared straight upward, the machine ringed as a preliminary to descent, abruptly side-slipped, plunged a full thousand feet at dizzying speed, and finally fluttered to earth like a wind-blown leaf.

It touched, lifted twice in huge, ungainly strides, taxied unevenly a score or more yards, and came slowly to rest. From the cockpit two lithe figures dropped to the turf and approached the marvelling members of the Roodee Racing Club.

"Sorry we're late, gentlemen! The dear old scrap-heap kicked against starting. But she's running fine now, and we're ready to break away."

Lyle uttered the words cheerfully. He appeared innocently unaware of the shocked faces that surrounded him. As for Jerry, his cue was to say as little as possible at the moment. And he could be a regular oyster when he chose.

A burly figure, helmeted and goggled, held out a hand.

"Glad to greet you, youngsters!" he boomed. "It's more than I expected to do a moment ago. D'you really intend to risk your bones again in that thing this afternoon?"

"That's our reason for tooting over,"

Lyle grinned. "She's not a bad old camel—not when the mood's on her. In fact, it wouldn't surprise me if she opened out and lifted the pot you're offering for the race."

"Um! More likely to open out and drop you through her carriage!" the other grumbled. "I don't know that we ought to countenance bare-faced harridars of this species."

Then Bellman stepped forward, a scowl on his heavy features.

"Look here, Agminster, if these fools wish to break their necks, that's their funeral!" he snapped. "We're late already. Let us get on with the job or clear off home."

Argument quickly developed, in which most of the members joined. But the crowd, growing restive under the unaccountable delay, took to ironical cat-calling and settled the issue in the chums' favour.

The preliminaries were soon adjusted. Jerry entered the machine as a Levensi Model 1913—a witty club member christened it "Sulky Sam"—and the chums were informed that they were No. 3 on the starting-card.

"No handicap, but a minute interval between the rise of each machine," Billings explained quickly. "You know the course. Down the Dee to Hilbre, skirt the coast to Crosby, then cross country to home. A rough triangle of sixty miles. And remember, gentlemen, no crowding! That means disaster. Now, seats and straps, if you please."

Soon the mechanics were standing by, dwarfed by the huge propellers that towered over their heads. With a roar of cheering from the surrounding spectators, Nos. 1 and 2 rose gracefully into the blue. Then came Sulky Sam's turn. "Switch off!" the mechanic yelled.

"Switch off!" Jerry answered.

"Contact!" "dungarees" cried, waited Jerry's shouted agreement, then bumped the propeller over on compression.

Immediately the engine roared, racketed, and threatened to shake the pre-historic model to scrap. But Jerry, giving the mechanic a second to spring

clear, moved the stick steadily forward, taxied over twenty yards of smooth turf, and felt the machine lift sluggishly and jerkily into the air.

He wanted to say things—harsh, bitter things—to Lyle for the public exhibition he was making of himself. But the obstinate camel he had to humour needed all his attention.

Not until they had lifted to two thousand did he dare pull the control back and give vent to his feelings.

"Shure, I understand now why they call a cluster of aero machines a circus," he yelled into the tube. "Faith, it's a circus all right, this is, an' we're the clowns ov it, mounted on a bone-shakin' jibbin', cantankerous mule! Which abandoned museum did ye dig the thing out from?"

Lyle laughed, but ignored the question.

"See anything peculiar about any of the other machines?" he demanded.

Jerry nodded.

"Bedad, yes!" he cried. "I'd me eye on the Duke of Agminster's Wee Bee, a dinkum little runabout as dainty as a bird, and one that made me ache to get behind the nose av her."

"Anything else?" Lyle asked.

"Yes again," Jerry replied. "If Bellman's Eastern Enterprise isn't a bad copy of the Linnet, then it's dhramin' I am."

"And if Bellman isn't an ex-mechanic from the Adda Company's shop, where our Linnet was built, may I 'dhrame' with you," Lyle answered.

Behind his goggles Jerry's eyes opened wide. But just then his engine set up a rattling discord that could only be likened to the clang of cracked hammers. He discreetly shut off and allowed her to droop slowly earthward.

In the comparative silence that ensued Lyle quickly dropped words of wisdom.

"Jay, we're not out pot-huntin' today," he began.

"Lucky us!" Jerry grimaced satirically.

"Shurrup!" Lyle yelled. "Listen, lad! We're going to climb to seven



Glaring until his eyes stood out like those of a stranded fish, Bellman lashed out at Jerry's face without the slightest warning. But Lyle, watching the pair closely, deflected the cowardly blow with up-flung arm and landed a hard fist on Bellman's jaw that sent him to earth like a shot rabbit.

thousand, if this thing's capable of it, then we're watching out for Bellman's Enterprise. I've a Grade A pair of field-glasses here, and I'll promise you that Mr. Bellman's going to be under the microscope once I focus on him."

"But phwat's the idea?" Jerry questioned. "He's merely out racin', like the rest of us."

"Perhaps," Lyle answered. "I only know that friend Bellman doesn't appeal to me. Now, Jay, if you think the engine's come back to sweet reason, just touch her up a bit."

Very carefully Jerry edged the stick backwards. The machine, as though ashamed of her mulish display, broke out into a smooth crescendo of sound and began to lift as swiftly and lightly as a swallow.

Only when the bitter chill commenced to bite through the chums' lined leather clothes, and the altimeter hovered on seven thousand, did Jerry flatten out and begin to ring in enormous circles.

By then Lyle had discarded goggles and substituted field-glasses to his eyes. Now and again the icy wind brought unwanted tears that blurred vision and threatened to reduce him to temporary blindness. But it would have taken more than mere discomfort to make Lyle abandon his job, and with an impatient hand he flicked the moisture from his peepers and watched several machines streak past far beneath their lofty eyrie.

"Four, five, six—next one's Bellman's bus, if they keep in order," he cried. "On your toes now, Jay! Be ready to follow him."

"Faith, an' he can wing two miles to our one," Jerry grumbled.

"We're thousands of feet above him, and can sight twenty miles in any direction," Lyle retorted. "Here he comes, Jay; and—good—he's down to about fifteen hundred."

Now, by all the rules of the race, Bellman should have been hugging the banks of the Dee, as the other pilots had done.

Instead, he was gradually edging inland, deliberately abandoning the set course, as though showing open contempt for the instructions he had received.

"Bedad, that's strange now," Jerry cried. "If the Enterprise has anything like the speed of our Linnet, the race must be a gift for Bellman. Yet he's certain sure to be disqualified f' cuttin' a corner off, the road he's making for."

"I expect he cares as little for the Roodee pot as we do," Lyle answered. "Let him get well ahead, then whip her up, old lad!"

"Shure, he's about five miles now—an' goin' some," Jerry murmured.

"Then carry on," Lyle ordered. "Keep well this side of him, so that my view won't be obstructed, Jay."

In the beginning, Bellman must have been blissfully unaware that keen eyes watched his every move. He could hardly fail to notice the tiny midge poised like a lonely hawk high overhead, but that was a common enough sight in a district where R.A.F. machines practised daily, and one that called for no special precaution.

So Bellman undoubtedly reasoned, else he would not have cut away from the agreed track so openly. As it was, he swept swiftly inland, coursed swallow smooth over half-lonely Wirral, then suddenly and unexpectedly dropped almost to ground level near Hawarden.

"Something doing, Jay," Lyle yelled, through the tube. "Plane slowly down—not too far, nor too fast, boy."

Bellman's machine was invisible to Jerry, of course; but, for his benefit,

Lyle kept up a running comment on the events of the strange hunt.

"Queer, Jay, but he's skimming barely a hundred feet above ground," he said. "He's flying over a wood, looks as if he's coming down on the lawn fronting a big, twin-towered house."

A moment of silence followed, during which Lyle's glasses focused steadily on the scene below.

"No, by jingo!" Lyle cried suddenly. "He's swerved—he's ringing the house, and again—now he's flying straight over the roof!"

Abruptly, Lyle dropped the binoculars and resumed his goggles.

"Swing round and start her up again, son," he said hurriedly. "The beggar's spotted us. I think he's coming up to investigate!"

Jerry instantly grasped the situation. Turning, they had five miles lead of Bellman, and several thousand feet advantage in height. That, of course, would go far to neutralise the immensely superior speed of his machine, but his advantage lay in the fact that he was invisible to those above, nor could they foresee what action he might take if ever he won to close quarters.

"Whip her up, Jay!" Lyle urged. "Straight back to the 'soup plate' as hard as you can pelt, old dear."

"That's only about fifty per," Jerry grumbled. "This bean't as useful in an aero race as a cabhorse with the staggers."

Still, over that short course, its speed sufficed.

Before long, Lyle announced that Chester was in sight and, soon, the "soup plate" was picked out on the far fringe of the city wall.

Tilting the machine, Jerry raced her all out—a daring move that sent the old bus rushing earthwards at a dizzying speed, and one that made Lyle think of weak wings or the danger of touching Bellman's Enterprise, if that heavy bus had approached anywhere near.

But the wings held and the Enterprise suddenly swept ahead from directly under Sulky's nose—an escape that must have scared Bellman sick, judging by his erratic swerves as he cut away from Jerry's path.

"You burblin' ass!" Lyle gasped, swallowing hard, as though his heart had really jumped into his throat.

But Jerry only grinned, flattened out, and eased speed.

With the comforting knowledge that many thousands of eyes were on them he felt safe from interference. In graceful spirals, he drove Sulky lower and lower, and finally touched down as gently as a tired lark.

Ten seconds later, the Enterprise taxied to a standstill within fifty yards of Sulky. The two crews, and a crowd of club officials, met midway between the machines.

"You fellows have never had time to do the course," Billings shouted, as he approached. "What's the matter—why have you returned?"

"I missed the way," Bellman snapped, then turned a scowling face on the chums. "And now, my fine gentlemen, I'll be glad to know why you followed me and why you tried to drive your rotten machine down on us?"

Jerry jumped in before Lyle could frame a reply. His face was the picture of injured innocence, though the twinkle in his eyes doubled Bellman's rage on the instant.

"Shure, bhoy, you ain't the only ass who could mistake the road," he said. "Faith, it hasn't got any signposts up, and when we saw you cutting away from the river we thowt it was all in the programme."

"That doesn't account for you trying

to ram us—you insane idiot!" Hallett flamed.

"Bedad, it doesn't!" Jerry answered hotly. "Anyway, Mister Man, if ye knew anything about the rules av th' aero road ye'd know it's bastely bad manners to come up behind and beneath another fellow's tail—where he can't see you."

To have his attack countered, to be put on the defensive so quickly, drove Bellman's vicious temper to something approaching madness.

Glaring until his eyes stood out like those of a stranded fish, he lashed out at Jerry's face without the slightest warning. But Lyle, watching the pair closely, deflected the cowardly blow with upflung arm and landed a hard fist on Bellman's jaw that sent him to earth like a shot rabbit!

Jerry wasn't grateful.

"Robbin' on Oirishman av a fight—bad cess to ye!" he glowered on Lyle, as he bent over the fallen airman. "Get up, ducky, get up and be lettin' me put ye down agin. Do now!"

But Bellman wasn't accepting the invitation. He lay stretched out, groaning and moaning as though Lyle had broken every bone in his body. Nor did his friend Hallett venture to do aught beyond scowling on the pugnacious pair, and a group of scandalised officials quickly put an end to the scene by crushing between the hostile parties.

CHAPTER 3.

Kicked Out!

AGMINSTER was furious. In common with the other members of the Roodee Club, he had expected much publicity from the first purely amateur race, and as one who really believed that England's future lay in the air, he had hoped that the Roodee example would encourage the formation of similar clubs all over the country.

Instead, the newspapers devoted half a dozen lines to the actual race, and about two and a half columns to the unfortunate quarrel that had occurred between Bellman and the chums.

At seven o'clock the following evening most of the members had assembled in the clubhouse in readiness for the special meeting that had been called to sift the evidence and pass sentence on the culprits.

Whilst awaiting the last belated arrivals, those already in the room stood about awkward and silent, and obviously disliking the unpleasant task that had been forced on them. Agminster was there, talking in low tones to several fellows; Bellman and Hallett stood cynically unconcerned near the fireplace, and Lyle was coolly reading a newspaper account of his own hefty knock-out.

Casually turning a page, he suddenly sat bolt upright, and addressed his chum in a voice loud enough to carry to every corner of the room.

"I say, Jay," he cried, "here's another of those strange clueless burglaries reported. Just listen to this. It's headed: 'Historic Jewels Stolen from Hillcrest Towers.' It goes on: 'For the tenth time within two months a famous country residence has been despoiled. As in previous cases, the family jewel casket has obviously been the objective, on this occasion stones to the value of £5,000 being taken. Details are lacking, but such scanty reports as are to hand indicate the same uncanny individuals who have so far successfully defied the police, and who must by now have grown passing rich.

Needless to relate, not a ghost of a clue has been left behind, not even a trace of how the clever thieves gained admittance to the house."

For many seconds after Lyle had finished reading not a word was spoken in the clubhouse. But he appeared happily ignorant of the interest he had created, and Jerry played up to him nobly.

"Hillcrest Towers," he said. "I seem to have heard the name before. Down in Oxford somewhere, isn't it?"

Lyle shook his head, yawned, and tossed the paper aside, as though the affair now bored him. It was the Duke of Agminster who answered Jerry's question.

"Hillcrest lies on the borders of Hawarden, not twenty miles from here," he said, adding irritably: "I cannot understand how the fellow gets clean away every time. The authorities must be asleep, else the jewel thief would be fingering oakum instead of diamonds by now."

A young fellow near Agminster laughed joyously.

"Getting near home, eh, Aggy?" he chuckled. "Th' beggar always goes for country houses, I believe. He'd have a rich haul if he touched your place to-night."

"He would. Rich enough to retire on," Agminster smiled. "But he'll get all he deserves and much more than he wants if he visits Cheyne Abbey."

From the laughing comments that followed the chums gathered that Agminster was entertaining the very exclusive Society people who camp in Cheshire and Shropshire during what they term the "off" season the following night, and that the famous Agminster diamonds had been brought specially from a London safe deposit in readiness to adorn her Grace.

The last club members now arriving in a bunch, Agminster at once took his place at the head of a long baize-covered table, and invited his "jury" and "prisoners" to be seated.

"Gentlemen, we're here to-night on a singularly unpleasant business," he began crisply. "The notoriety we gained in this morning's Press is likely to do infinite harm to our club. The ridicule poured upon us will take long to live down." He paused, and his glance roved over the four culprits who faced him across the table. "Mr. Bellman, as the aggressor, I think that your reasons had better be heard first."

"Do you?" Bellman snapped. "I've not come here to give reasons, Agminster. I've come here to resign from this tame cat club and to tell these fool cubs that I haven't finished with them yet, not by a long way." He glared venomously from Agminster to Lyle. "I'll get 'em! I'll crush them—like that!"

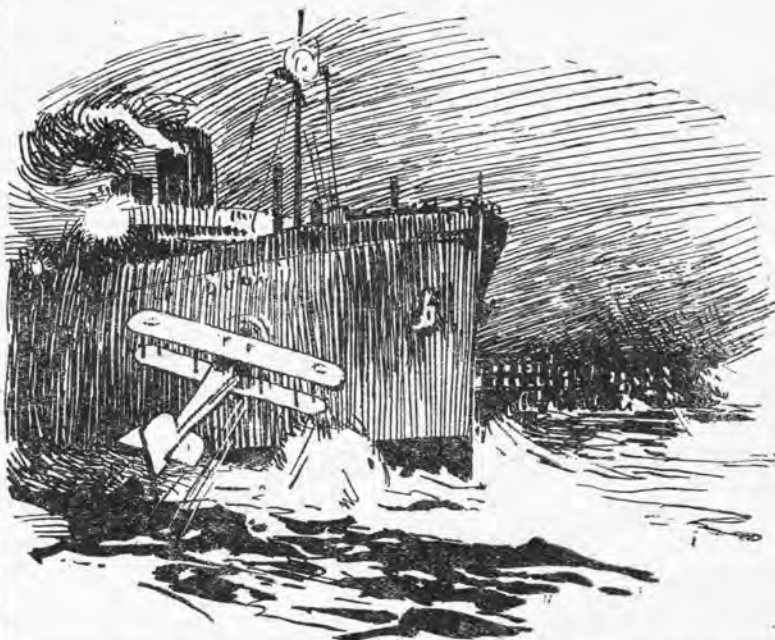
"That" was his heavy fist pounding on the table, an exhibition of rage that brought a snigger to Jerry's lips and a bright nod from Lyle.

"Very interestin'!" the latter murmured. "Might I suggest, old dear, that if you do us no more harm than you've done this table we'll come up smilin'?"

Agminster held up a hand for silence. "That is enough from both of you!" he said coldly. "You wish to resign. Your resignation is gladly accepted, Bellman!"

Bellman's face flushed as Agminster's icy contempt cut like a lash. Scowling vindictive, he jumped to his feet, flung two strips of pasteboard on the table, and kicked his chair aside.

"There's my card and Hallett's!" he snarled. "Come, Joe, we'll get the machine out and forget about the fool



"Ware steamer!" shouted Lyle, as a huge liner suddenly appeared in the plane's course. Jerry, in a panic that they might touch mast or rigging, pulled the joystick sharply into his chest and literally jumped the ponderous mass.

blunder we made in ever joining this asinine gang!"

Even in face of this Agminster kept his temper admirably.

"There's no need to risk a night flight, Bellman," he said quietly. "Your machine can be left here until to-morrow."

"I'm not a take-care-of-myself dandy like you!" Bellman sneered coarsely. "We're running the bus away now, and I'll thank you to mind your own business, Agminster. Come along, Joe!"

Until the raging pilot and his submissive friend had noisily vacated the room not another word was spoken. Then the duke turned to the chums.

"Perhaps your explanation will be a little more illuminating," he suggested.

"I'm afraid it won't, sir," Lyle answered regretfully. "We had very good reasons for acting as we did, but at the moment we are not at liberty to broadcast those reasons."

"You are determined to be as secretive as Bellman?" Agminster said ominously.

"Bedad, don't compare us to that sweep!" Jerry grinned. "But Lyle's always right, sir. We have nothing to explain if he says we haven't."

"Then I must ask you to leave the club," Agminster sighed. "I think the meeting is with me in giving that decision."

Nods of approval came from every member, though several looked thoroughly uncomfortable during the process.

"Very well, sir," Lyle answered quietly. "We regret the trouble we have caused you, and will follow Bellman's lead by taking our bus away."

"You cannot fly that ancient machine in the dark," Agminster protested.

But Lyle had a very definite reason for wanting to reach home quickly. A wink to Jerry was enough. Jerry supported him in his obstinacy, and not all the arguments of the club members could turn them from their foolhardy resolve.

"You'll at least wait until Bellman has cleared away," Agminster said at last. "The man's temper proves that he is hardly sane, so you'll give him a quarter of an hour's start before leaving this room."

To that Lyle and Jerry reluctantly agreed. Soon the roar of Bellman's engine receded in the distance, and twenty minutes later Sulky Sam rattled and spluttered into the black sky.

How Bellman would have smiled if he'd been watching that eventful fight! The engine misfired repeatedly. A broken petrol pipe was sketchily repaired with a foot of rubber tubing, and somehow the adventurous pair struggled from Chester to the Mersey.

Very gently, nursing the scrap-heap as only he could have done, Jerry dropped to within fifty feet of the water and skimmed down the course of the swift-rushing river.

"Ware steamer!" Lyle called, as a huge liner suddenly appeared in their course.

And Jerry, in a panic that they might touch mast or rigging, pulled the stick sharply into his chest and literally jumped the ponderous mass. He was congratulating himself on a hair-raising escape when disaster was on them like a lightning-flash.

An ominous crack to right was followed by a louder one to left. Even as Jerry abruptly deadened the engine, the wings seemed to tilt into the air of their own accord, and the machine's weighty body plunged straight into the black, heaving waters!

CHAPTER 4.

A Fight in the Air!

ALTHOUGH the disaster had been brought about by Jerry's abrupt wrench, the wings luckily tore away before the machine had lifted a score of feet, else that had been the end of its crew's adventurous career.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 890.

As it was, they won a bath colder than they ever wish to repeat. Unstrapped though they were, several agonising moments were experienced before they kicked clear of the clogging hulk, and only when lungs were bursting and a horrible drumming was in their ears did they shoot upward to air and life.

Happily also, the noise of the oncoming engine had attracted the attention of the ship's people, and the disaster was witnessed by a hundred alert men. The alarm was given the second they touched water, the ship's siren and wireless sending a panic appeal up and down the river.

"Keep together, Jay," Lyle spluttered. "Here, a hand on my shoulder, old dear. No good trying to swim against the current; we'll drift and yell."

Eerily their cries floated across the heaving waste; a sensation unforgettable in its grim remoteness from the lights that lined either distant shore.

"Praise be!" Jerry gasped, five minutes later. "They're getting searchlights out, and there'll be boats out after us. Bedad, if I had Bellman here, I'd—shure, I'd ram the whole Mersey down his throat!"

"You'd better ram it down mine," Lyle grunted, in self-condemnation, "for not keeping a better look-out."

But Jerry was having none of that. In between yells for help he quickly proved that he had no illusions regarding the "accident."

"Faith, you're an ass—but not this particular moke, Lylesey," he spluttered, ejecting a mouthful of salt water. "The double crack meant that Sulky's stays had been tampered with—sawn nearly through, and the holes filled in with beeswax. 'Ouch! But it's cowl!'"

"Buck up—here's help!" Lyle answered; then gave a weak cheer as a beam found and nearly blinded them, and a swift patrol of the river police swept into the circle of light.

That little adventure ought to have sufficed for the night. To most it would have done, but Lyle and Jerry had a way of sticking it when things went wrong—sticking it until they cleared the side-track, so to speak.

They willingly endured a hot tub and coffee treatment in the ever-ready dock-side police-station, and gladly accepted the sketchy attire that was loaned them. Then, their rescuers never dreaming that they were other than ordinary luckless pilots, they taxied out to lonely Ainsdale, where the famous Lindman Linnet was housed.

But, with all the will in the world, they had wasted hours of precious time, and it was striking two o'clock when they took their seats in the well of the plane.

"Now, Jay, think you can find the place in the dark?" Lyle asked doubtfully.

"Faith, I could, but here's the owl moon leddy kindly peeping out," Jerry answered.

Dual controlled, its engine made almost noiseless by a wonderful sound-absorber Jerry had perfected, this aero monarch was as much above old Sulky Sam as the eagle is above the vulture. Conversation was easy as in a smooth-running train, one hundred and ten per was a normal speed, and its dull grey colouring made it nearly invisible even on a moonlit night.

Only when Liverpool and its wide river lay behind, did Jerry find time for questioning Lyle's programme.

"Maybe you're right," he said doubtfully. "It's reckonin' ye are that Bellman and his pal are the jewel-thieves, and that they intend 'running the rule' over Dook of Agminster's place to-night. But what makes ye so cocksure now?"

"For one thing, I've quietly verified my first suspicion that nearly all the spoil has been lifted from houses with one or more skylights," Lyle explained.

"Secondly, Bellman deliberately entered in yesterday's race so that he could prospect a house that was robbed of five thousand pounds' worth within a few hours. Finally, when Agminster boasted that the thieves would be well looked after if they visited his place, I noticed a glint of amusement flash from Bellman to Hallett."

"Bedad, if your reasoning's right, it might aisy be over by this hour—bad cess to it!" Jerry grumbled, mourning the probability of a beloved scrap.

"That's my one fear—that we might arrive too late," Lyle answered. "Still, these big houses seldom settle down until well after midnight, so I've hopes, old bean."

"Shure, they'll soon be tested," Jerry said, "for Cheyne Abbey will be liftin' any minute now."

The words had hardly left his lips than Lyle pointed straight ahead.

"We're on time, Jay!" he cried. "That black-painted bus can only be Bellman's, and there's the Abbey a mile ahead!"

Graceful as a swan, Bellman's machine came round in a half-circle, slowly cruising the moonlit blue.

Then things happened. The Enterprise suddenly swooped on the house like a hunting hawk that sites its prey, and the flat roof connecting Cheyne's spires showed a dark, fore-shortened figure running, turning and firing a vicious gun at other pigmies that swiftly emerged to view.

"At 'em, Jay!" Lyle yelled. "Bellman's in the bus, that's Hallett running—perhaps with the Agminster diamonds in his pocket. Ah!"

Well might Lyle gasp and Jerry echo the sound. Even as they streaked towards the roof they saw the black Enterprise hover ten feet above Hallett, and drop a tope-ladder into his upflung arms. Then, whilst still a quarter of a mile separated the machines, they watched Bellman's bus pickup speed, the ladder stiffen to snake-like parabola, and the agile thief climb it hand-over-hand.

"The plucky sweep!" Lyle yelled, forced to grudging praise of Hallett's splendid nerve.

But Jerry had no time for admiration. Bellman, innocently unaware of the grey streak that was flashing towards him, suddenly swept round, lifted, and saw his nose pointing straight at death.

Instantly, he zoomed; and Jerry, equally surprised, but equally alert, dropped in a clean dive!

His eyes were on the house that seemed to be racing up to hit and smash them. But Lyle's glance was on Hallett—amazingly resting with one leg inboard, coolly emptying his automatic as they dived beneath the pirate bus!

Lyle heard the ping of speeding bullets singing past, and was actually congratulating himself on the double escape as Jerry cleverly turned their dive to a loop within thirty feet of the roof, when he heard a deep groan and turned to see his pal sagging heavily in his chair.

"Take over, son!" Jerry cried weakly. "I'm hit—left shoulder!"

Instantly, Lyle's hand was on the stick that fronted him, and he cautiously began to flatten the machine as the loop neared completion. For a moment he was torn between doubt and anger—trying to decide whether he should land for Jerry's sake, or pursue the murderous ruffians who were chuckling over their amazing exploit.

Jerry settled the question in no uncertain terms.

"Waken up, burbler!" he yelled. "It's not lettin' 'em go free ye are?"

"What about you?" Lyle queried anxiously.

"Right as rain," Jerry snapped, between locked teeth. "Get after 'em and don't be weepin' over a crooked flipper!"

That was enough for Lyle. Pulling the stick into his chest, he rushed the Linnet into top gear in the wink of an eye and was after the Enterprise like an avenging spirit.

In five minutes he had eaten up the gap that Bellman had won, and in one more the issue was settled.

Sitting on the tail of the Enterprise, despite all Bellman's twisting and stunting, blinding gunman Hallett with the length of his own machine, Lyle steadied the joystick with his chin and with his hands turned the famous Lindman beam loose on Bellman's racing engine.

It was invisible, but it was dynamic in effect. Ten seconds—then the crook pilot abruptly smothered his engine and began to plane gently earthward!

Jerry, conscious still, chuckled grimly. "Goo' old beam!" he yelled. "Shure, Bellman's blessing his ill-luck, blessing the bus that's failed him, niver guessin' it's the 'beam' that's split his magneto and landed him where he'll be quiet the rest of his lifetime!"

"Landed him!" It's more likely drowned him!" Lyle cried, as, with a shock, he realised that they hovered over the sea.

For a moment his sympathy went out to those he had apparently doomed to the very fate they had escaped a scant four hours ago. Then, abruptly, sympathy vanished, and laughter boomed from his lips until even the wounded Jerry sat up and took notice.

"Moonlight turned you loopy, Lyle?" he asked anxiously.

"Nunno!" Lyle spluttered. "We're off Hilbre Island, tide's up, the ignoble Enterprise has touched down into about eight feet of water and the aero pirates are scrambling to the upper planes in a panic!"

Generously unwilling to deprive his pal of so gorgeous a sight, he slowly circled the wreckage. Then Jerry's laughter rivalled his, to see the thwarted crooks standing on the fragile wings, impotently shaking grim fists and doubtless mouthing anything but compliments at those who had so swiftly smashed their get-rich-quick plan to smithereens.

For an appreciable time the radio partners circled the vindictive pair. Then Lyle put a limit to the crooks' liberty by starting up the Linnet's wireless and issuing a call to the Mersey Dock Board.

"Hallo, dock office?" he said, as his challenge was answered. "Lindman Linnet calling, off Hilbre Island. Ah, you know us—good. You'll oblige by rousin' up police headquarters at Dale Street and telling 'em that two jewel thieves—late of Cheyne Abbey and a dozen other 'posh' houses—are standing on top of a bus in eight feet of water."

He listened for a moment; then turned purple with wrath.

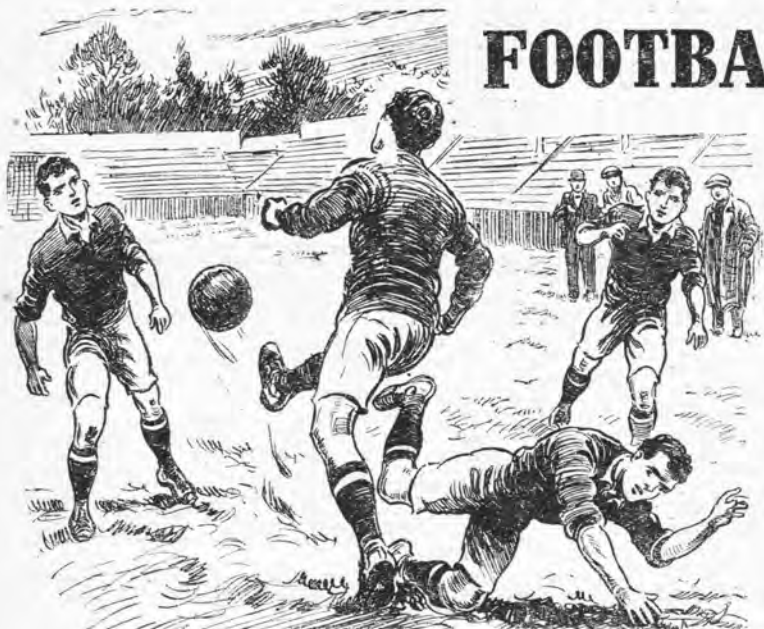
"You burblin' ass!" he yelled. "No, it isn't an omnibus or a motor-bus—it's an aero-bus, a flyin' camel, fathead. An' tell the bobbies to bustle, old bean!"

"And that," he smiled, as he discarded head-phones, "is the swan song of Messrs. Bellman and Hallett."

THE END.

(There will be another grand yarn of the Two Aero Adventurers soon, but meanwhile make sure you read next week's great 25,000-word story of Tom Merry & Co., by ordering next Wednesday's GEM from your newsagent to-day!)

Hal Chester's prospects are rosy, but failure is falling upon the shoulders of the one who turned him from home and happiness—his stepfather!



FOOTBALL CHUMS!

By A. S. HARDY.

(The Most Popular Football
Writer of the Day.)

A thrilling yarn, telling of
young Hal Chester's bid
for fame on the footer field.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

HAROLD CHESTER, a well-knit youngster in his teens, and a member of the Kingsdown Football Club. His love for football earns for him the disapproval of

JAMES HENSON, his stepfather, a Nottingham grocer, in whose employ Hal Chester is. Like the rest of the employees at Henson's, Harold finds his stepfather a very hard taskmaster. First of all, his stepfather dislikes him; secondly, James Henson hates football; and, thirdly, he believes that he—Harold—is an idler.

An important match is down for decision on Saturday for which Hal had already been granted permission to assist his team. But when the great day comes Mr. Henson cancels his promise. Hal has pledged himself to play for his team. He was considered one of the best players in the club, and could not very well let his side down.

Suffering from a sense of injustice, Hal is determined to turn out for his team, come what may.

But luck is against the lad, for in the match he is badly hurt

by one of the opposing backs. It is late when he returns home, weary and in great pain, and he finds the door locked against him. He meets an old friend, however, in Tommy Bell, who is well in with the management of the Nottingham Town Football Club. Hal is given a trial with the professionals, but the older players, envious of his play, starve the lad, and he is turned down.

Still convinced of his chum's prowess, Tommy Bell interviews the manager of the Nottingham United, and Hal is given a chance with them. Hal shows brilliant form, and there is an immediate cry for his signature. Hal, anxious to be with his chums, signs on for the Town.

Having realized his ambition, Hal pays a visit to his sick mother, who gives him a very warm welcome. He is leaving the shop again when the maid stops him, and tells him that his stepfather expresses a wish to see him.

Hal laughed drily.

"You go and tell him I've gone home," he says, "and if he wants to see me he can come and see me there!"
(Now read on.)

A Bombshell!

"I COULDN'T give him that message—I dare not!" gasped the frightened maid. "You had better see him, Master Harold."

"Well, I am not going. But perhaps you had better not give him the message. Mother will tell him!"

So saying, Hal brushed past the girl, wished her good-morning, opened the street door, and stepped into the sunshine.

He swung away with head thrown back and shoulders squared. He did not so much as glance at the shop. Had he done so, he might have noticed that his movements were being watched.

A grey-haired and bent man past middle age, who wore an apron—his name was Sellars, and he was in a sense manager of the stores without any of the responsibilities appertaining to that position, a tame but useful assistant without ambition—stepped on to the pavement and called out to him.

"Harold—Mr. Chester!"

Hal stopped frowning as he nodded a greeting at the man.

"Mr. Henson wishes to see you. He asked me to make sure that you did not go away without seeing him. It is important."

Hal was not rude enough to ignore such a message. He at once swung through the door of the stores.

"All right!" he said.

He found his stepfather waiting for him framed in the doorway of the little screened-off private office in which James Henson always worked.

The boy could observe no change in his stepfather's severity of look or manner. Nothing ever seemed able to move him. The forbidding, repelling frown still marred the smoothness of his forehead. As Hal came towards him he swung upon

his heels and entered the private room without greeting, leaving Hal to follow.

The boy entered and shut the door. Oddly enough, he was conscious of the old uneasiness, second cousin of fear, that had always gripped him when alone with Mr. Henson. He marvelled at it now, for he was free—as free as the very air. Nothing that his stepfather could say or do had the power to hurt him now—save only where it concerned his mother.

For his part, James Henson studied the boy critically, and smiled a ghostly smile.

"Why," he declared, in that rasping voice that always jarred upon Hal's nerves, "it would almost seem as if it does you good to be out of work and without a home, Harold. You look quite well!" It was almost as if he would have added: "And I am very sorry to see it!"

"I am quite well, thank you, sir!" answered Harold, stiffly enough.

His stepfather did not invite him to sit down.

"You have been to see your mother? I wrote to you and asked you to come and see me. Why did you not come and see me first?"

He spoke with a note of challenge.

"The explanation is simple enough, sir," answered Hal. "I had no intention of seeing you at all!"

For the first time since they had known each other, Hal felt that he had struck a blow that hurt. His stepfather sat up and gasped in sheer amazement.

"You dare say that to me?"

"I don't see why I should not say it, since I mean it!"

They looked into each other's eyes. For the first time Hal did not glance away. And, as if by magic, his fear of this man, who had always overawed him, vanished. He could have laughed because of it.

James Henson began to drum his fingers on his desk, and glared at Hal.

"Ah!" he remarked, with grim emphasis. "Being away from our home has not improved your manners, or your respect, I see!"

"I have no respect for you, Mr. Henson. If I am blunt it is because I realise that we had better understand each other thoroughly."

The man laughed. It was a dry, forced laugh.

"Very well," he said. "Then I will speak as plainly as you have done. If it had rested with me I would never have written that letter I sent you this morning. We have never got along well together. It would have been better that we should have remained apart. But there is your mother. I have to consider her. She does not look upon you through my eyes, which is a pity. You have always proved yourself to be a feather-brained boy, unwilling to learn, too fond of your wretched football, and of idling, inattentive in business, and forgetful when trusted with even the small responsibility of having properly to deliver orders." He paused as if expecting comment.

Harold faced him unflinchingly. He went on:

"Now, your mother worships you," went on James Henson. "I cannot break her of the habit. Ever since you left home—ahem!—she has been pining, and she has worried herself into a state of nerves that has become—er—dangerous."

"It is not only because I have left home, Mr. Henson. It is the drudgery of the housework, the never-ending labours of the home, the cooking, the washing, the cleaning, the bed-making, and all the rest of it, that is wearing her to a shadow. One small girl is not enough service for this big house. And then you always expect everything just so. I wonder how you would like to try it instead of sitting here in your office and writing letters, for you do nothing else that's important, that I can see, or ever did!" snapped Hal, in a low voice that made the words more telling.

"Ah!" James Henson's teeth were bared in a wolfish smile. "I have the worries of my business, the planning and the scheming, the ordering, the organisation, and it is all work!"

"Yes, I know! You believe you are the only man in the world who does work!" countered Hal, bridling up.

James Henson's astonishment increased. He could not believe his ears or his eyes. These words surely were not uttered by the stepson whom he had always cowed, whom he truly believed was a ne'er-do-well; nor could this lad with a personality be the meek-and-mild boy whom had used to run errands?

"Let us leave out personalities," he went on, with a wave of his hand. "The fact is, your mother is worrying herself into a decline because she wants you back home again. The doctor assures me it is serious. Also, I find that I cannot get a boy to fill your shoes. None of the many I have seen consider that the post gives them sufficient opportunities. In the circumstances, then, I have made up my mind, Harold, to forget the past, and to take you back again. Your old bed-room is ready for your occupation. You can start work in my stores to-morrow. At first you will do just as you used to do, but in order to make up for any feeling you may have that I have treated you harshly, I have decided to raise your weekly wages to one pound, and how soon you will be in a position to earn an increase—er—depends entirely upon you!"

He bent over his desk as if he considered the matter settled.

"You know my requirements perfectly," he murmured. "And I must say that the boy I have had these last few weeks, and whom I was obliged to dismiss at a moment's notice on Saturday, has so muddled his deliveries, that I have lost many valuable customers through it. I find my takings have steadily declined. You will report here in the morning at half-past eight, and help to open the shop. When the day's work is done, you can take one of the trucks and bring your luggage back from your lodgings."

Still Hal did not answer, and, realising that there must be a reason for this, James Henson swung round to see Hal smiling broadly.

Instantly his face was flushed with anger.

"Don't smile!" he said gruffly. "I expect you to voice your gratitude."

It was then that Hal spoke.

"Mr. Henson," he declared, "if the job you now offer me were the only one on offer through the length and breadth of the land, and every other man and boy among the many millions in England were out of employment and available for the position, and if the money you offered me were ten times as much, I would sooner emigrate than take it!"

"Er—what?"

"I don't want your job! You can keep it! Find some other boy to do the work. There is only one thing I shall ask of you, and that is permission to call and see my mother as long as she is ill. When she is well enough to get about again, she will come and see me!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 390.

"You refuse work and a regular wage!" James Henson's face was livid now.

"Yes, I have found other work to do. I have signed on as a professional footballer for Nettingham Town. I played for the team at Bangley on Saturday, and scored three goals. My old school chums, Tommy Bell and Dicky Double, are in the team with me. I am as happy as the day is long, and I am making money. I mean to make more, too, in the future!"

Hal could not help boasting. He had never been in a position to hit back before.

The proprietor of the stores sat as if thunderstruck.

"You, a paid footballer! A boy like you, going straight to perdition!" James Henson murmured. "You—hired like a gladiator, to play that horrible game! I am glad you have told me this. Now, hear me. After what you have done, I would never have you in my employment in any circumstances. As to whether I allow you to come and see your mother, that depends entirely upon what the doctor says. I am against it. I don't want you here. Still, I will not put obstacles in your way if your presence is vitally needed. Now go—leave my shop!"

His voice was raised to the old dominating and thunderous roar.

Hal did not utter another word, but, turning the handle, pulled the door open and went out. As he did so, a man brushed past him, thrusting his foot in the way to prevent the door from swinging to again.

"Ah, I am glad I have found you in, Mr. Henson!" he said. "I have called from Hedges & Saunders. We really must press for a settlement of that long-outstanding account. We cannot allow such a large amount to remain at credit on our books any longer."

Hal, turning his head and glancing at his stepfather, saw that his face was worried, seamed, and lined, as if he had suddenly grown old.

The Accident!

ON Tuesday, when Hal went to see his mother again, she was very much better in health as well as in spirits. She welcomed him with a bright smile, and was sufficiently alert to ask him many questions about his football. He told her all that had happened to him in greater detail than before, and as he spoke with boyish enthusiasm of the Town team, and his future prospects, his mother smiled brightly.

"Your stepfather told me that you were not coming back into the shop," she said. "But he did not tell me why. He seemed disappointed in you. But as long as you are doing well, and are happy, Hal, I shall be content. And you really do like your new life?"

The boy laughed. His radiant face, and bright, gleaming eyes, the depth of colour that dyed his cheeks, and his ease and confidence, were sufficient reply without any words.

"I love it, mother! I have only one regret, that I am not at home with you; but as long as we can see each other I sha'n't mind! It is splendid that I am able to remain in Nettingham. And it is grand to be with Tommy Bell and Dick again. You remember Dick Double, don't you?"

"The jolly fat boy who was always getting into such terrible trouble at school? Of course I do!" Mrs. Henson broke off with a sigh. "Hal, my boy," she continued, after a pause, "I had always hoped that you and your stepfather would some day get along well together, but I see it is impossible now. You know how he hates football. I could tell when he came to wish me good-night yesterday, that you had quarrelled again, though he did not say so. That he should not object to your coming to see me, is the most generous thing he has ever done, I believe. You must give him credit for that!"

As Hal bent forward to say good-bye his mother faced him with a sad smile.

"Harold, there is one thing I wish to say," she said softly. "Your stepfather is much worried over business. He feels the competition of the bigger stores. We are not doing as well as we used to."

"I'm sorry to hear that, mother," returned the boy, "for it will make things so much harder for you."

From the stores Hal hurried home. Late in the afternoon he went with Tommy Bell to the City ground for practice, and found many of the other players there. Ben Robinson welcomed him with a smile.

"You're just the lad I wanted!" the trainer remarked. "Chester, will you and the other forwards practise passing against Bell and our League halves? Gerald Marsh is anxious to try combination with you and Seymour on left and right of him. He reckons he'll get better support from you two than he used to do."

Hearing which, Atkins, whom Hal had displaced at Bangley on Saturday, scowled. He was to play for the reserves on Saturday when Bury came to the City ground for the League match, and he did not like it. It was hard lines being stood down from the League team to make way for a boy.

Hal and Tommy changed into football things and went out on to the field. It had rained hard overnight, and the heavy weather of the week-end had turned the playing pitch into a mud patch, in spite of its being well drained.

Footthold was none too good, but it was the sort of slippery surface they would have to play upon when Bury came on Saturday, and Harold hailed the opportunity of getting used to it.

The others were as keen as mustard.

They had no goalkeeper, Dicky Double wearing overcoat and cap, taking a rest. He came out to look on.

Low and Smart, the League team's best backs, however, were there to stop a rush when the forwards slipped Warren, Bell, and Thomas, the three halves.

Starting from well behind the half-way line, with two other players to bar the way before they got to the halves, the forwards, passing the ball neatly while running at top speed, came through in first-class fashion, swept down upon the waiting halves, and at the right and precise moment Hal, who had taken a neat pass from Small, the outside-left, ran near to Tommy and tricked him as cleverly as could be. The bouncing ball passed the fine centre-half, and Marsh, taking it on the run, dashed goalwards, slipped past the backs, and sent it flying into the undefended goal with a great raking shot.

Ben Robinson chuckled as the ball went home. He thought it great to watch. Gerald Marsh was a centre-forward who had come to the Town from a junior club. He was a player of more than ordinary promise. But to date that promise remained unfulfilled. During his earlier games he had played with a recklessness and dash that had resulted in a crop of minor injuries. For a season and a half he had been in and out of the League team in consequence as regularly as clockwork.

Gradually he had lost his confidence, and although he was still the best centre the Town had, he scored very few goals.

How the trainer rejoiced at what looked like a return to his real form can be imagined.

"Gerald, lad," chortled Ben Robinson, as the players came back for another practice run, "that's the stuff! Gad, Chester practiced that pass beautifully. He even had Tommy guessing. If you can do that sort of thing when Bury come on Saturday we shall gain another victory, and we want points badly enough, goodness knows!"

Marsh laughed gaily.

Praise from Ben was praise indeed, and it was with a determination to surpass the previous effort that Marsh came tearing down the field with the others in support, slanted the ball wide out to the right-wing, and then, as Kirton centred after cleverly taking the ball near to the corner flag, Gerald rushed in recklessly to get it.

Smart, the left-back, smiling grimly, dashed to tackle. They reached the ball simultaneously, and Smart brought his foot down on it.

At almost the same instant Gerald Marsh jammed his foot against the leather case. It was a reckless movement, for instantly he tumbled head over heels, going down with his left leg bent under him, whilst Smart booted the ball down the field with a hefty volley.

The back was not to blame. Marsh's own impetuosity was the cause of the accident. As he tumbled down, his body bending awkwardly, there was an ominous crack, and Gerald sprawled upon the turf writhing in agony, uttering a cry of pain.

Hal and the others, stopping exchanged glances of dismay.

Then Tommy Bell ran forward.

"Poor old Gerald! His leg is broken!" he moaned. "Quick! One of you boys run to the office and telephone for the doctor!"

Dicky Double had walked on to the field during the run.

"I'll do it!" he shouted. "Ben'll look after poor Gerald. Whatever you do, none of you move him, or it may result in a compound fracture! Poor old chap!" And he started for the stand at a run.

Suspended for Life!

POOOR Gerald Marsh! Hal Chester felt his heart swell as he bent over the fallen player. Marsh's boyish face was distorted in frightful agony.

His eyes were half-closed, and every vestige of colour had fled from his cheeks. As he twisted and turned spasmodic gasps showed how much he was suffering.

Hal choked even as he rested the poor fellow's head upon his arm.

"Keep quiet, Gerald, old man," he pleaded. "Keep quiet. Dick's gone for a doctor."

Ben Robinson was now on the scene. The other players gathered round.

"Poor old fellow," murmured Tommy Bell. "That's rotten hard luck!"

"It was my fault!" groaned Smart, looking scared. "Why didn't I stand out of the way and let him go through? It wasn't a real game—it was only a bit of practice."

Gerald's lips flickered in the ghost of a smile.

"You couldn't help it, Smart," he shot back. "Don't blame yourself, old chap. I just slipped and came down awkwardly—that was all—"

After what appeared to be an age, but the time was really short, Dicky Double came running back on to the field.

"The doctor's coming. He's arranged for the ambulance to fetch poor Gerald," he announced. "Poor old Gerald! It's rotten hard luck!"

Gerald was looking faint now. He lay extended, his eyes closed, his lips parted, breathing in an agonised way. The players waited by him for what seemed an age of time before the doctor appeared upon the scene, carrying a bag.

Swiftly he worked, issuing directions as he protected the broken limb.



"I have called from Hedges and Saunders. We really must press for a settlement of that outstanding account." Hal, hearing those words, turned his head and saw his stepfather's face change.

Splints were improvised and then the ambulance men came, bearing with them a stretcher.

Upon this the unlucky player was laid, and gently, with broken steps, they carried him from the field, the players following disconsolately.

Marsh had his faults, for he was hot-tempered and impulsive, and a reckless player who thought he knew the game so well that he would never listen to anyone's advice concerning it. But he was as plucky as could be.

He even smiled as he was put very gently and carefully into the ambulance.

"I'll soon be better, boys," he declared. "And when I come back into the team I'll play better than I've ever played, for I shall have a long time to think about the scientific side of football."

The doctor climbed into the ambulance, administering a sedative to ease the pain which poor Gerald Marsh was beginning to suffer more acutely, and the motor sped away.

There was no more practice at the City ground that day. Returning to their dressing-room utterly depressed by the accident, the players took off their football things, had a bath and a rub-down, and then hurried home.

Gerald was in no danger they knew, but they had no heart for games in the club-house after what had happened.

The three chums strolled slowly on to Mrs. Sandys' together, discussing the unfortunate incident as they went, and talking about their prospects of winning the League game with Bury on Saturday.

"With all respect for poor Marsh," said Tommy Bell, addressing Hal, "and I like the chap outside football, he was not a heaven-born centre. I suppose they'll put Geoffrey Dawson in to fill his place, and I'm not at all sure that Dawson isn't as good, or even better than Gerald. Ben Robinson always preferred Marsh, but George Bliss has an open mind about the two players. At any rate you'll be at inside-left for a certainty, and I'm not sure but that you wouldn't do better at centre than either Marsh or Dawson."

"I'm not big enough, Tom," answered Hal quickly.

"You're certainly not a mountain of a man like Dicky here," Tommy Bell agreed, with a smile, "but then, there never was such an overwhelming lot of you. Little and good is our motto, Hal boy. You can sling the ball about, and that's what we want!"

The three chums were strolling along the main street, and the people jostled them as they walked along. In the road a mass of traffic streamed by both ways. The bright and splendidly dressed windows of the shops winked at them. The noise and bustle here was indicative of the town's prosperity. Trade was thriving in Nettingham after a period of dullness, and the spirits of Nettingham people were soaring high.

Suddenly, above the din of traffic and the ring of voices came the cry:

"Paper! Racing results! Test match story! Bangley footballer suspended! Paper!"

A man came running towards them, stopping twice to sell papers, and Tommy Bell beckoned to him. A penny passed.

Tommy spread open the news-sheet.

"I think that must refer to our friend Bill Stevens, Hal," he remarked. "I wondered why we didn't see something of his suspension this morning. There had been a meeting of the Association, you know. If it is about Stevens, then the referee evidently did not think it necessary to call for evidence in support of his case. Now, where is it? Ah, here we are! 'Severe sentence on Bangley footballer. Stevens, the full-back who was recently signed on by the Bangley Football Club, has been suspended for life.'

"His offence was foul play, coupled with abuse of the referee. An old offender, Stevens was guilty of making a savage attack upon Mr. Hargreaves after the League match between Bangley and Nettingham Town at Prettywell on Saturday. The sentence is severe, but it is just as well that conduct of this kind should be met with severe punishment. If football is to retain a firm hold upon the affections of the public it must be kept clean and ruled with power."

"Phew!" said Tommy Bell, turning to Hal, his eyes

twinkling. "What do you think of that, Hal? It's exit Bill Stevens with a vengeance. You've got your own back on him now, haven't you?"

Hal Chester shrugged his shoulders, looking somewhat long-faced as he answered:

"I can't help feeling sorry for him, Tom," he said. "I know he fouled me. I know he's a brute. But it means that he's lost his means of livelihood now, and I can't shout hurray over that. Perhaps he's married and has children, and—"

"You shouldn't worry over that," returned Tommy. "I say, serve the brute right. He's out of football for good, and we don't want that sort of chap in it!"

"And I can put your mind at rest about his family affairs, if that's all you're going to worry about, Hal," put in Dicky Double. "Bill Stevens isn't married, he hasn't got any kiddies, and he's a genuine waster all said and done. Serve him right, I say!"

"Yes," Hal agreed. "And he has only himself to blame! I don't suppose the Bangley Football Club will like it. They must have given something to secure Stevens' transfer. It means a dead loss to them, and a blot on their reputation besides."

"Well, they ought to have known better than sign on a back who was practically kicked out of League football, after being suspended again and again. I must say I haven't got any sympathy for them."

Straight to Mrs. Sandys' rooms Dicky went with his chums, and there they spent the rest of the afternoon.

In the evening a visit to the hospital elicited the information that Gerald Marsh was now sleeping quietly. His condition was as good as could be expected.

Before Saturday came, the weather underwent a change, the wet, windy weather which had prevailed for so long changing into that bitter cold variety which sets the blood running more freely through the veins, and the spirits soaring high—if one is young enough.

With the closing in of day the sweep of the bitter blast from the north cleared the streets. People were only too glad to get within the warm, if somewhat stuffy interior of the picture theatres, or amusement places, or else go home. Morning found the ground covered white with frost, and a fog hung about.

Later the ground fog lifted, and the sun shone gloriously. It was really fine weather, but Hal set his lips ruefully on Friday night when he took a last peep out of doors, for he did not fancy playing football at top speed over a surface that resembled a hard, frozen meadow.

There would be real danger in tacking and swerving upon the City ground's playing pitch to-morrow.

But with morning came an amazing change. The wind had swung south-west again, and the temperature had risen many degrees. In place of hoar-frost there was an uncomfortable stickiness of atmosphere. The ice on the ponds was melting fast.

When Hal Chester arrived at the City ground for the game and walked out on to the pitch and tested its surface with his foot, he found the soil in a tacky state.

"Dawson's going to play at centre, Hal," announced Tommy Bell, who'd been having a word with Ben Robinson the trainer. "You'd better go and have a chat with him, seeing that you'll have to support him this afternoon."

Hal made straight for the dressing-room.

Geoffrey Dawson was a big, finely-built, and good-looking young fellow. He would have been really handsome had his mouth not been small and meanly shaped, and his eyes been more open and winning.

As it was, a craftiness of expression spoilt him. He was a close pal of Marsh's, and was also very friendly with Atkins, who was still sulking because Hal had taken his place in the Town team.

Dawson had hitherto taken only the slightest notice of Hal, and whenever the two had spoken a meanness and smallness of attitude had warned Hal that Dawson did not like him.

"I'm so glad you've been given the place at centre-forward to-day, Dawson," Hal began, by way of smoothing things out a bit. "It's hard luck for poor Marsh being laid up, and all that, but I don't think they could have done better than put you in at centre."

Dawson's eyebrows came together.

"You're sort of condescending, aren't you?" he sneered.

"I suppose George Bliss always consults you before he selects the team?"

(It was pretty obvious that Geoffrey Dawson was rattled. He had resented Hal's friendly advance towards him. Be sure you read next week's instalment of this powerful serial, chums.)

ANSWERS

EVERY MONDAY.....PRICE 2:

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 890.

Printed and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription rates: Inland and Abroad, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd. Sole agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.; and for Canada, The Imperial News Co., Ltd. (Canada).—Saturday, February 23rd, 1925.

DN

"THE CROSS WORD CRAZE AT ST. JIM'S!"

(Continued from page 17.)

and Wharton has promised to reinstate the four Greyfriars fellows. So both teams will be at full strength."

"Oh, good!"

"You might pass on the news to Redfern, and I've no doubt he'll be willing to play now that you're back in the team."

"Not the slightest doubt of that!" said Figgins. "This is jolly good news, and no mistake! I wasn't expecting it."

"Neither was I," said Kerr. "But good news generally comes when you least expect it."

"We must celebrate this at the tuckshop," said Fatty Wynn. "Of course, we'll thank Cousin Ethel first."

"Yes, rather!"

The New House trio lost no time in seeking out their benefactress and expressing their gratitude. Then they sought out Dick Redfern, and told him the good news; and Reddy's face beamed. The quartette then strolled off arm-in-arm to the tuckshop, where the red wine flowed freely—or, to be more correct, the ginger-pop. And great was the joy in School House and New House when it became known that St. Jim's would field their strongest and most redoubtable eleven in the replayed Cup Final.

Wednesday afternoon was bright and sunny, and the freshness of spring was in the air. A very different day, indeed, from the previous Saturday, when the Friars and Saints had floundered in a quagmire.

The St. Jim's fellows turned out in force to witness the replayed Final. And a thrilling game it was, from the kick-off till the final tootle of the referee's whistle.

Play was fast and exciting, and there was not a pin to choose between the two teams in the first half.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn proved a great stumbling-block to the Greyfriars forwards. No liberties could be taken with the St. Jim's defences now that "the old brigade" was back in the team.

No goals were taken before the interval, but the second half produced quite a glut of goals.

Tom Merry got through for St. Jim's, but a moment later Harry Wharton put the Friars on terms.

Then Talbot netted for the home side, but the lead was short-lived, for Vernon-Smith levelled the scores again.

In a great rally, the Saints added two more goals, through Merry and Blake; and the game seemed as good as won.

But the gallant Friars were not to be defeated without a struggle. They played up like Trojans, and Frank Nugent put the ball in.

Four goals to three in favour of St. Jim's! And five minutes to go!

The excitement was at fever-pitch. Would Greyfriars succeed in their desperate efforts to save the game?

Harry Wharton & Co. attacked hotly in the closing stages. But Fatty Wynn, in goal, gave a masterly display. Thrice in succession he brought off thrilling saves when the downfall of his goal seemed inevitable.

Great was the anxiety of the spectators. But at last the final whistle brought relief, and St. Jim's had won a capital game by the narrowest possible margin. Everybody agreed that they had the sterling work of Figgins & Co. to thank for the victory.

There were two presentations that evening in Big Hall.

Tom Merry was called upon to accept the Eastwood Cup at the hands of its donor; and the old rafters rang again and again with cheering.

When the applause had died away, the Head announced that his Cross Word prize had been jointly won by Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, and the Head smilingly shook hands with the trio, and congratulated them upon their skill and perseverance in solving his puzzle.

It was a memorable evening at St. Jim's. There was a bumper celebration to round off the proceedings; and it was observed that Figgins and Tom Merry sat next to each other and were the best of friends again.

All was merry and bright once more at the old school; or, to put it in the language of Lowther, everything in the garden was lovely!

THE END.

(Look out for a special treat next week, chums—a magnificent 25,000-word story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "THE SCHOOLBOY REFUGEE!" By Martin Clifford. Don't miss it, whatever you do!)



Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: **The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.**

GOOD OLD YORKSHIRE! AHT FOR NOWT!

A farmer had persuaded one of his town friends to accompany him in his dogcart on a jaunt into the country. The horse seemed to resent having the stranger aboard, and, taking the bit between his teeth, bolted. "I say, Bill," said the townsman, "I'd give a quid to be out of this." "Doan't thee be so handy wi' thi brass," replied his friend. "Tha'll be aht for nowt in a minute!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to R. Pickles, 24, Brunswick Road, Pudsey, Yorkshire.

THE BEST PART!

"Bobby," said mother, "why don't you let your little friend have your sleigh part of the time?" "I do, mother," replied Bobby. "I love it going down the hill, and he has it coming up!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Ian Night, 11, Inchaffray Street, Perth, N.B.

A GOOD HINT!

Mr. Slowpay: "I shall bring you back those dark trousers to be rescaled. Mr. Snip. You know I sit a good deal." Mr. Snip: "All right, and if you bring the bill I sent you six months ago, I shall be pleased to receipt that also. You know I've stood a good deal!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Shaw, 61, Pontypridd Road, Porth, Rhondda, Glam.

HE COULDN'T HEAR!

While his mother was entertaining visitors, little Johnny found his way into the bath-room, and to amuse himself he turned on the water. Mrs. Brown, upon hearing the noise, went upstairs, and when she appeared at the room in question found the bath overflowing. "Johnny," she said, "didn't a little voice within you tell you that you were doing wrong?" "Yes, mother," replied Johnny, "but the water made so much noise I couldn't hear it!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss C. Williamson, Walmoor College, Chester, Cheshire.

PLAIN SPOKEN!

Pat was a gardener, and his employer at last got tired of his constant mutterings, and one day said to him: "Pat, doesn't it ever occur to you that your constant mutterings and talking to yourself are a great annoyance to other people? Why do you talk to yourself?" "Sure, sir, I've two reasons. One of them is that Oi loike to talk to a sensible man, and the other Oi loike to hear a sensible man talk!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Duncan Carmichael, 217, New City Road, Glasgow.

THOUGHT OF HOME!

"Shut that door!" yelled the rough man. "Where were you brought up—in a barn?" The man addressed complied, but the speaker, looking at him a moment later, observed that he was in tears. Going over to his victim, he apologised. "Oh, come," he said soothingly, "you shouldn't take it to heart because I asked if you were brought up in a barn." "That's it," sobbed the other man. "I was brought up in a barn, and it makes meshomesick every time I hear a donkey bray!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. F. Turner, 209, Northwold Road, Clapton, E. 5.

THE GEM LIBRARY, No. 290.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

(Continued from page 27.)

HE SPOKE TOO SOON!

Patient: "I consulted the chemist, and he advised me—"
Doctor: "My dear sir, chemists always give foolish advice."
Patient: "To come to you!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Parton, 18, Hamilton Crescent, Palmer's Green, London, N. 13.

READY AT HAND!

"Dad," said the country youth who had just left school, "I have long cherished a desire to go on the stage, and so, with your permission—" "My boy," interrupted the old man, "all the world is a stage! You hitch the horse to the big red plough, and take the outfit to the field behind the barn, where you can act the star role in that beautiful drama, 'Down on the Farm!'"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. H. Hobson, 21, Harrington Road, Heeley, Sheffield.

TRAIN THAT RAN AWAY!

Pat had never travelled in a railway-train in his life, and great was his excitement when about to make his first journey. Dressed in his best, he arrived in the station just in time to see the train leave the platform. Pat dashed after it some distance till it disappeared into a tunnel, whereupon he stopped, nonplussed, and slowly retraced his steps to the station. "Hallo!" exclaimed the stationmaster, as Pat clambered up the platform. "Didn't you catch it, then?" "Nay," replied Pat. "But, bedad, I run 'im up a 'ole!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Michael F. Brosnan, 5, Sion Row, Ferrybank, Waterford, Ireland.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.

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

JOIN THE ROYAL NAVY AND SEE THE WORLD.

THE FINEST CAREER FOR BRITISH BOYS.

Boys are wanted for the Seaman Class (from which selections are made for the Wireless Telegraphy and Signalling Branches). Ages 15½ to 16½ years.

Men also are required for

STOKERS Age 18 to 25
ROYAL MARINE FORCES " 17, " 23

GOOD PAY. ALL FOUND.
EXCELLENT CHANCES FOR PROMOTION.

Apply by letter to the Recruiting Staff Officer, R.N. & R.M., 5, Suffolk Street, Birmingham; 121, Victoria Street, Bristol; 55, Whitehall, London, S.W.1; 235, Deansgate, Manchester; 115, Rye Hill, Newcastle-on-Tyne, or 6, Washington Terrace, Queen's Park, Southampton.

YOURS for 6^d

18-ct. GOLD-CASED
KEYLESS LEVER WATCH

Gent's full-sized 18-ct. gold-cased keyless lever watch, carefully adjusted lever movement, clear bold dial, best crystal glass. Handsome watch, designed for hard wear and accurate timekeeping. Fully guaranteed 5 years.

FREE Handsome pocket-to-pocket Albert
FREE with every watch.

We send this watch post paid upon receipt of 6d. only. After receiving the watch, if satisfied, the balance is payable 2/- on receipt and 2/- monthly until 20/- is paid. Full cash with order (or balance within 7 days), 18/- only. Send 6d. to-day to—**SIMPSON'S, LTD.**

Dpt. 132,
55, Queen's Rd.,
BRIGHTON.



FREE GIFT

of OPERA GLASSES

to all Buying TWO PENS!

The "SILKRITE" Registered Self-filling Fountain Pen
Over 5,000 Testimonials received! Guaranteed 5 Years' Wear!

1/6



G. FRANCIS, Esq., writes: "25 Pens have I purchased, and all my friends are perfectly satisfied."
M. G. POWELL, Esq., writes: "Delighted with 'Silkrite' Pen. It equals any other make at 10/-."
FREE GIFT OF 10-PIECE TOOL SET IN WOOD CASE TO ALL sending P.O. 3/- for 2 'Silkrite' Pens, and 3d. for Postage 1/-. Write for 1935 Illustrated Catalogue, full of Bargains, Jewellery, Fancy Goods, Post Free!—**THE LEEDS BARGAIN CO. (U.J.), 31, KENDAL LANE, LEEDS.**

MY GREAT OFFER

I supply the finest Coventry built cycles, **ON 14 DAYS' APPROVAL, PACKED FREE AND CARRIAGE PAID** on receipt of a small deposit. Lowest cash prices, or easy payment terms. Write for Free Bargain Lists NOW.

O'Brien THE WORLD'S LARGEST CYCLE DEALER
DEP. 18 COVENTRY.

PR. METAL TWEEZERS THE "QUALITY" PACKET, 100 GUMMED TITLES OF COUNTRIES AND 50 DIFFERENT STAMPS. **FREE!**
Request Approvals.
LISBURN & TOWNSEND, London Road, Liverpool.

HEIGHT INCREASED 5/- IN 30 DAYS. Complete Course.
No Apparatus. No Drugs. No Dieting. The Melvin Strong System NEVER FAILS. Full particulars and Testimonials, Stamp.—**Melvin Strong, Ltd. (Dept. S), 10, Ludgate Hill, London, Eng.**

STOP STAMMERING! Cure yourself as I did. Particulars Free.—**FRANK B. HUGHES, 7, SOUTHAMPTON ROW, LONDON, W.C.1.**

FREE FUN!—Ventrolquist's Instruments given FREE to all sending 6d. P.O. for Sample Magic Trick and Illus. Catalogue. Large Parcel Magic Tricks, etc., 2/6, 5/-. Six Amusing Novelties, 1/6.—**P. PEARING, Travancore, Colwyn Bay.**

VEST POCKET FOLDER PACKET STAMP MOUNTS 50 DIFF. FINE STAMPS All free to genuine applicants for BLUE LABEL APPROVALS No. 6, sending postage.—**B. L. CORYN, 10, Wave Crest, Whitstable, Kent.**

HEIGHT INCREASED 3 to 5 ins. without appliances, drugs, or dieting. Complete Course, 5/-. The "Clive" System never fails.—**C. OLIVE, 8, Seaford Road, Colwyn Bay.** [Particulars, testimonials, stamp.]

WHEN ANSWERING ADVERTISEMENTS
PLEASE MENTION THIS PAPER.



HEIGHT COUNTS

in winning success. Let the Girvan System increase your height. Wonderful results. Send P.C. for particulars and our £100 guarantee to Enquiry Dept., A.M.P., 17, Stroud Green Road, London, N.4.

HAVE YOU A RED NOSE?

Send a stamp to pay postage, and you will learn how to rid yourself of such a terrible affliction free of charge. Enclose stamp.

Address in confidence: **T. J. TEMPLE, Specialist, "PALACE HOUSE," 128, SHAFTESBURY AVE., LONDON, W.1.**

SPLENDID CHANCES FOR BOYS

(ages 14 to 19)

CANADA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND Free Farm Training. Generous financial assistance towards passage and outfit, repayable by easy instalments when in work overseas.

APPLY: THE SALVATION ARMY EMIGRATION DEPT., Please quote this paper. **3, UPPER THAMES STREET, LONDON, E.C.4.**

CUT THIS OUT

"The Gem." **PEN COUPON.** Value 2d.
Send 7 of these coupons with only 2/9 direct to the Fleet Pen Co., 119, Fleet Street, E.C.4. You will receive by return a splendid Britannic 14ct. Gold-Nibbed Fleet Fountain Pen, value 10/6 (fine, medium, or for each extra coupon up to 6/- (Pocket Clip, Ad.). Satisfaction guaranteed on either pen for 1/- extra.
Lever Self-Filling Model with Safety Cap, 2/- extra. broad nib). If only one coupon is sent the price is 3/9, 2d. being allowed or cash returned. **Special New Offer—Your own name in gilt letters**