

The GEM 2!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

LIBRARY

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WON ON THE POST!

(A thrilling incident in this week's grand story of schoolboy fun and adventure.)

A SPLENDID EXTRA-LONG SCHOOL STORY FEATURING—

The SPOOF

by Martin
Clifford



He couldn't run a mile without getting the stitch! He couldn't sprint to save his life! And yet this weedy slacker suddenly blossoms out as a winner of a cross-country race over a trying distance of seven miles! How does Aubrey Racke, the slacker in question, manage it?

CHAPTER 1. Broke!

"NOTHING doing, Crooke!"

It was Aubrey Racke of the Shell Form of St. Jim's who made the remark.

He made it the moment he had pushed open the door of the study he shared with Gerald Crooke, and it cannot be said that his voice had a cheery ring.

In fact, there was nothing at all cheery about the remark or the voice of Aubrey Racke himself that afternoon.

"Nothing doing whatever," he repeated, throwing an opened letter on the table. "I've heard from my uncle,

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and it seems we wasted a stamp writing to him. He won't send me a penny, he says."

Gerald Crooke turned from the window and shrugged his shoulders. He, too, was not feeling very merry and bright that afternoon; but Gerald Crooke always liked to hide his feelings when he could.

"Then that leaves us where we were this morning, and yesterday morning, and all the week—almost stony broke," he said. "A bit awkward, isn't it, Racke?"

"It's more than awkward."

"Yes, I'm inclined to agree," nodded Crooke. "Considerably more than awkward, in fact. In other words,

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—TOM MERRY & CO., THE CHEERY CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!

CHAMPION!



old man, what in the world are we to do if we can't raise some cash?"

Instead of answering, Aubrey Racke bit his lip and frowned, and went a trifle white. Gerald Crooke continued talking.

"I mean to say, we really do owe a lot of money to various tradesmen this time," he said. "Not piffling little sums, but whacking large amounts, and a good many of the tradesmen say they must be paid at once. That tobacconist who has been supplying you with smokes on tick for months, for instance—"

"Or Banks, the bookie, you've been backing losers with," snapped Racke.

"Oh, yes, I'm in the same boat," nodded Crooke. "I admit that. We're up to our eyes in debt; and the rules at St. Jim's about Shell juniors getting into financial difficulties are a bit strict, old man. The Head won't be pleased when he gets to know, Aubrey."

"Well, it's no good trying to be funny about it," snapped Racke again.

"My dear man, I'm not trying to be funny," protested Crooke. "I'm just putting the matter into a nutshell. We owe an awful lot of cash, and we are practically stony broke. That means certain tradesmen will pay a visit to Mr. Linton, and soon afterwards we shall have to pay a visit to the Head. It really is very awkward, Racke."

Racke shuddered.

"We—we can't let that happen!" he said. "If once the Head got to hear we'd been buying things on tick we might even get the sack. We probably should, in fact. We just can't let it happen, Crooke!"

"But the only way to prevent it happening is to raise the cash," answered Crooke. "I await suggestions with great eagerness, old top!"

But Aubrey Racke had none to make.

He knew, of course, that Crooke was just as scared about

things as he was, only it pleased Gerald Crooke to pretend otherwise. Racke knew, too, that his pal had been racking his brains for days in order to think of some scheme whereby coin of the realm could be raised. They had both been racking their brains.

Their efforts, however, had left them exactly where they had started—stony broke. The great brain-wave which was to have lifted the financial cloud had refused to materialise. All that Aubrey Racke and Gerald Crooke had obtained from their hard thinking were slight headaches and stacks of impots for being inattentive in class.

Even Racke's eleventh hour S.O.S. appeal to a wealthy uncle had failed to produce the desired result. His request for cash had been rather badly turned down. According to Aubrey Racke's own words, there had been nothing doing where nunky was concerned.

"The mean old stick!" said Racke suddenly, meaning that uncle. "He's rolling in money, Crooke."

"Yes, only he doesn't intend to roll any of it our way," answered the other Shell junior. "What exactly does he say, Aubrey?"

"Oh, read the letter for yourself."

Crooke stretched out a hand for the letter lying on the table. It still appealed to him to pretend to face this crisis with studied calm. Not so long ago Gerald Crooke bade fair to become a reformed character, but the memory of the lesson he had received in connection with Talbot had become fainter, and his constant association with Racke had practically restored matters to their old footing.

"Your uncle writes a nice, firm hand, Racke," he said, taking the letter from the envelope. "The sort of fist a strong character man might possess. I should say your uncle, once having made up his mind, wouldn't change it easily."

"Oh, don't talk rot!"

"My dear man, I'm not!" drawled Crooke. "I'm just commenting upon facts as they appear to me. Kindly refrain from interrupting me while I peruse uncle's heartless epistle."

He commenced to read, murmuring the written words aloud.

"My dear nephew," he read, "I do not feel inclined to send you the money you ask for, because I cannot say I am pleased with your record at St. Jim's. You do not appear to have done anything at all in the world of sport, and I must say this has been a decided disappointment to me."

"Think over what I have said, and write to me again, but only when you have done something worth while on your school playing fields, or in the realms of athletics, then you will find that my reply to your request will be far more generous."

That was as far as Gerald Crooke got with the letter, for he tossed it back on the table, at the same time he burst into a roar of laughter.

He even pretended to congratulate Racke by banging him on the shoulder.

"My dear man, what more can you want than that offer?" he cried. "Your uncle practically promises you the cash you ask for the moment you shine in the St. Jim's world of sport. Go and do it, Aubrey, and save us both from an awful row!"

"Look here, Crooke, I don't want any of your rotten sneers!"

"No sneers at all," continued Crooke, pointing to the letter. "There's your chance to save us both, and you've only to take it. Why, man, there's the Shell v. Fourth footer match down for Saturday. Just pull up your socks and get a place in the Shell eleven, and score three or four goals with solo runs, and the trick's done!"

"Drop that rot, Crooke!" snapped Racke hotly.

"Oh, well, if you don't feel up to ousting Tom Merry or Manners or Lowther from the footer team, why not make history in the cross-country run to-morrow?" went on Crooke. "Enter your name at once, go into special training for the rest of the evening, and to-morrow literally run away from the rest of the St. Jim's juniors in the race!"

Angrier than ever, Aubrey Racke jumped to his feet and swung towards the door. He was heartily sick of listening to Gerald Crooke in his present mood. He caught at the door knob, meaning to leave Crooke and his sneers behind him.

But Gerald Crooke had also risen to his feet, and he had stopped pretending to laugh. Instead, he became excited looking, and he picked up the letter again. He whistled aloud, as if his thoughts had slipped into a startling groove.

Then he looked up at Racke once more.

"My hat! I suppose there's no chance of your winning to-morrow's race, old man?" he said.

"Of course there isn't—"

"Oh, I know you don't stand much chance of beating Figgins, and Tom Merry, and Jack Blake, and the rest of the chaps who train all their spare time," continued Crooke. "No one but an ass would think you had. But—but could you wangle a win, Racke?"

"How do you mean?"

"I—I don't quite know, of course," replied Crooke, lowering his voice a little. "It just occurred to me that, early on in the race, the course cuts through a corner of Rylcombe Wood, at the end of Rylcombe Lane."

"Yes; that's so—"

"Then the runners have to follow the road right the way round the woods," went on Crooke, openly excited now. "I suppose you could run with the rest of the chaps from the school to the end of Rylcombe Lane, Racke?"

"Yes; of course I could—"

"But could you do the distance in a sprint?" asked Crooke. "A fast enough sprint, I mean, to out-distance Figgins and all the other cracks? Properly out-distance them, mind, so that you would be the first to reach the woods by a good few seconds?"

Aubrey Racke looked doubtful for a moment. He was no great runner, and had never pretended he was. Still, he nodded in the end.

"Yes, I dare say I could," he answered. "It's a seven-mile run, remember, and Tom Merry and all the others will start off at a slow and steady pace. There won't be any sprinting at the commencement, of course."

"That's what I was thinking."

"Yes, I dare say I could reach the woods quite a long time before the others," Racke continued more certainly. "What would be the good, though? You jolly well know there will be seniors acting as 'checks' at different points of the race to see that no one cuts off corners. I don't

see what I should gain by reaching the woods first, Crooke."

"But suppose you just ran like mad into the woods, only instead of coming out of them again after a few hundred yards at the right spot, you walked right through the woods to the other side?" exclaimed Crooke. "You would save four miles of the seven if you did that, and you could join in the race almost at the finish again. You would be fresh and all the others would be spent and nearly whacked. You would stand an awfully fine chance of finishing first, Racke."

Aubrey Racke stared at his crony in bewilderment. On the face of it it almost looked as if Crooke had taken leave of his senses. Racke as good as pointed that out.

"What—what utter rot!" he cried. "Didn't I tell you there would be 'checks' along the proper course? And there'll be juniors all the way along, too. You must be dotty, Crooke!"

"Not so dotty as you think!" flashed the other Shell junior. "Oh, I haven't thought out all the details yet, but I've a glimmering of a notion how we could wangle the thing. That is if you are game, old man."

"I'm game, yes; but—"

"Ssh!" breathed Crooke; and both juniors glanced uneasily towards the door. Someone was tapping politely on the panel.

A moment later the door opened, and Tom Merry stepped into the room. The cheery, fit-looking junior captain of St. Jim's had a notebook and a pencil in his hand.

He looked doubtfully from Aubrey Racke to Gerald Crooke as he came into the room.

CHAPTER 2.

A Surprise for Tom Merry!

"ARE you two chaps running in to-morrow's cross-country race for Lord Eastwood's Cup, Racke?"

Tom Merry asked the question without any great hope of a favourable reply.

As junior captain of the school, it was his duty to go round and take the names of the entrants. Already he had several pages of his notebook filled; but he scarcely expected to be able to add the names of Racke and Crooke to the list. Racke and Crooke were not exactly the type of juniors likely to want to run seven miles.

So Tom Merry merely asked the question as a matter of form, just as he had asked Herbert Skimpole and Baggy Trimble, and other vastly unlikely long-distance men. He waited patiently for Racke to reply.

But it was Gerald Crooke who answered the question.

"No, don't put my name down, Merry," he drawled. "If I want to cover seven miles round Rylcombe Woods I'll take a bus. You said something about entering, though, Racke."

"Eh?"

"I would if I were you," went on Crooke, appearing to speak quite carelessly. "You've been doing some topping times in your training runs. I certainly should have a go if I were you, Racke."

Racke did not answer at once. He looked uneasily at Crooke; but Crooke did not meet his eyes. Instead, he picked up the letter from Racke's uncle and slipped it into his pocket.

All the time Tom Merry was looking puzzled and yet hopeful. It would be rather a feather in his cap if he could put Racke's name down as an entrant for the junior cross-country event. Tom even attempted a little persuasion of his own.

"Yes, why not have a cut at it, Racke?" he said.

"Oh, I don't know—"

"Might as well," urged Tom Merry. "Crooke says you've been training on the quiet, so you'll be the dark horse in the race. Dark horses do remarkably well at times, too. Only too pleased to put your name down, you know."

Aubrey Racke still hesitated.

He knew, of course, that Crooke's scheme, whatever it was, must have elaborated itself in his mind. If it had not, then Crooke wouldn't be urging him to enter for the race now. Racke dwelt on that point, but he still hesitated.

Then Gerald Crooke chipped in again.

"Oh, put his name down, Merry!" he exclaimed. "He can easily scratch if he doesn't want to run at the last moment."

"Yes, I can do that!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Shall I, Racke?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Good man!" cried the captain of the Shell, scribbling away in his notebook. "Start at the school gateway at two-thirty prompt to-morrow, mind. The going ought to be topping!"

"Yes, the going should be good," nodded Racke.

"Rather!" agreed Crooke. "And look here, Merry, don't you be surprised if Racke shows up well at the finish. You can take it from me he's done some real good runs lately."

"Glad to hear it," replied Tom Merry heartily enough. "Can I persuade you to have a shot in the race as well, Crooke?"

"No fear."

"Sure?"

"Absolutely!" declared Gerald Crooke. "I haven't been training secretly like Racke. You be content with having got the name of one of us from this study, Merry."

And Tom was content—more than content. In fact, he departed thoroughly pleased with the latest entry to his list of runners. He hurried as quickly as he could to his own study to tell Manners and Monty Lowther the puzzling but decidedly satisfactory news that Aubrey Racke was going to do something in sport at last.

And Manners and Lowther were equally delighted to hear

"Find a chair, Blake!" said Tom Merry. "Gussy will have to sit on the floor, I expect, but he won't mind that."

"Weally, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, the carpet won't spoil your bags!" grinned Tom. "It was swept at the beginning of the term. Or what about the coal-scuttle, Gussy? There's only a little slack in it."

"Wats!" answered the swell of the Fourth, adjusting his celebrated monocle and backing towards the table. "I wefuse to sit on the floah! I still more firmly wefuse to sit in the coal-scuttle, but I don't mind westin' on the cornah of the table, bai Jove!"

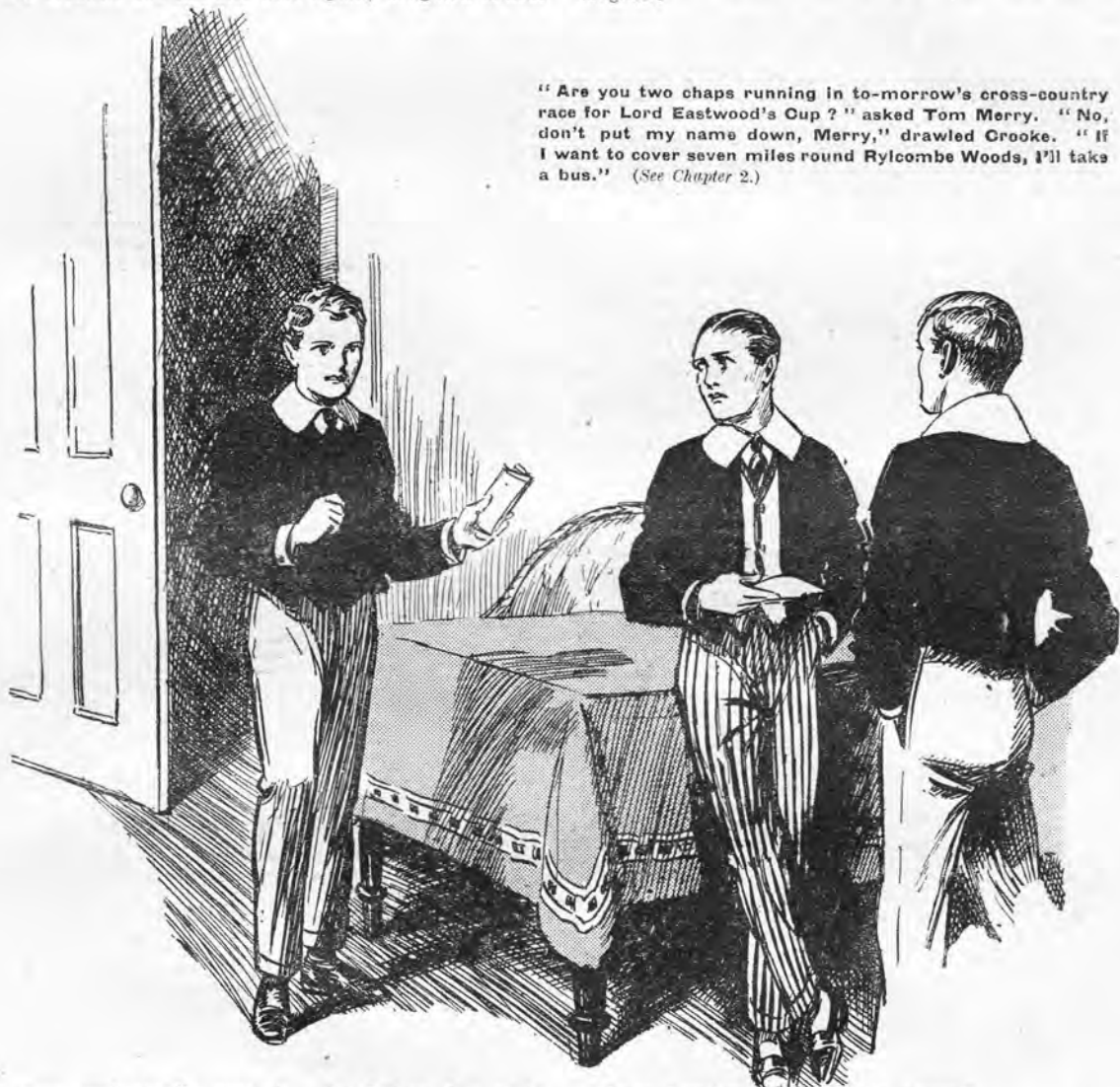
"No, you ass!" shouted Manners.

"But why not, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, sitting gracefully on the table. "I won't lean all my weight on it."

"Gussy, you ass! Oh, my hat!"

And, to the amazement of Arthur Augustus, the Terrible Three of the Shell suddenly went off into roars of laughter.

"Are you two chaps running in to-morrow's cross-country race for Lord Eastwood's Cup?" asked Tom Merry. "No, don't put my name down, Merry," drawled Crooke. "If I want to cover seven miles round Rylcombe Woods, I'll take a bus." (See Chapter 2.)



the news, and equally puzzled. But before they could comment much upon the latest entry for the race, the study door was pushed open and Jack Blake's cheery face appeared in the doorway.

"Hallo, you Shellfish!" he said. "Can we come in, or are you busy?"

"No; come in by all means!"

"Wight, deah boy!" chipped in the unmistakable voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy from behind Jack Blake. "We are wathah a cwowd, but it is a vevy select cwowd, as we all come from the Fourth Form. Pway come in, Digbay and Hewwies!"

And Jack Blake & Co. from Study No. 6 swarmed into the room.

As Arthur Augustus had said, they were rather a crowd, being four in number, but the Terrible Three of the Shell seemed eager enough to welcome them.

Monty Lowther was especially amused.

"Good old Gussy!" he chuckled. "Always ready to do other chaps a good turn. Always anxious to lend a helping hand."

"I twust so, Lowthah; but—"

"Jolly decent of you, old top!" chortled on Lowther.

"Manners was looking for a duster just now, and couldn't find one. Thanks awfully, Gussy!"

"But—but—"

"Oh, don't be ashamed of a kindly act!" went on Lowther. "Hiding one's light under a bushel is all right, of course, only you don't want to do too much of it. Just sit where you are on the table, old scout, and be content that you are doing us a real good turn."

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and stared.

"I altogethah fail to see how my sittin' on a table could

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do anybody a good turn," he answered, extremely puzzled. "In fact, I can only regard your remarks as of a jesting nature—"

"Not at all," chortled Manners. "Thanks awfully, Gussy!"

"Weally—"

"Yes, really," agreed Manners. "If you hadn't come along and we hadn't been able to find a duster, I expect we should have had to use up all our spare blotting paper."

"Blottin' papah!"

"Yes, the stuff you blot up ink with!" roared Lowther. "No need for an extravagance like that now, though. It's quite all right, thanks to you."

"And it isn't as if it was red ink I upset on the table," said Manners. "It's only blue-black, but I must admit it's rather a pity your bags are light grey, Gussy. Still, I don't suppose it will show much, especially if you walk backwards when you meet anybody."

"Gweat—gweat Scott!"

"And there isn't much ink you're sitting in," said Monty Lowther encouragingly. "Not more than about a quarter of a pint, I mean."

"Wow!" yelled Arthur Augustus, leaving the table as if he had been shot. "My twousahs! Oh gad, I'm covahed with ink!"

An agonised expression swept across the aristocratic features of the one and only Gussy. Fearing the worst, he put his hand behind him and withdrew it again. The palm was now quite a dark blue-black shade and wet.

"My twousahs!" roared Gussy. "One of the best cut pairs I've evah had. Mannahs, you uttah wuffian!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah, you wottah!"

"We tried to warn you not to sit on the table!" roared Lowther. "If only you'd take the advice of your elders, Gussy, these sort of things wouldn't happen to you. Not that you need worry much, old chap. The ink will soon dry as it's the quick-drying sort."

"I wufuse to let it dry!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I'm w'ingin' wet, and I must wush away and change my twousahs instantly. Pway get away fwom the door, Digby!"

Digby jumped away from the door, and Arthur Augustus fled. As he vanished along the corridor Tom Merry stopped laughing.

"I say, Manners, it was rough luck on him!" he exclaimed. "Couldn't you have warned him about the ink sooner?"

"No, I'd completely forgotten it."

"Well, it can't be helped, then."

"No, of course it can't!" chuckled Jack Blake. "Besides, Gussy's used to having his 'clobbah' spoilt by now, I should think."

"That's so!" chuckled Herries. "But we didn't come here to talk about Gussy's bags. They're loud enough to speak for themselves, anyway. What we want to know is—would you Shell kids like us to send a petition to Kildare asking for to-morrow's cross-country race to be postponed?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"For a week, say," added Jack Blake. "Because of Manners' sprained ankle, we mean, and because you ran up against a few bruises in the last footer match."

"Pretty bad bruises, weren't they, Merry?" said Digby. "Say the word, old top, and we'll persuade Kildare to postpone the event."

"Rather!"

"All the Fourth are ready to sign a petition," went on Jack Blake. "What do you think, Merry? It's hard luck on the Shell, you know, if you aren't up to form and Manners' ankle is too badly sprained for him to run at all."

And the chums of Study No. 2 waited eagerly for Tom Merry's reply. They had not to wait long. Tom Merry saw to that.

"Thanks awfully, Blake!" he said quietly. "It's a sport-offer, but there's nothing doing!"

"But—"

"You see, if we postpone the race until Manners' ankle's better and my bruises have gone we may find that you chaps have run up against bruises and sprained ankles," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, that isn't likely—"

"No; but it might happen," declared Tom. "We might go on postponing all the time if we once start."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Monty Lowther.

"So there's nothing doing," added Manners.

"You are quite sure?"

"Absolutely!" nodded Tom Merry. "Many thanks, though."

"Right!" answered Jack Blake. "We'll say no more about it; only I thought we'd put it to you. Oh, and what's this rot Crooke's spreading about—something about Racke having entered for the race?"

"Yes, he has."

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"What?"

"Aubrey Racke entered for a seven-mile cross-country race?" cried Herries. "Why, he couldn't run three miles without bellows to mend!"

"Not one mile, you mean!" cried Digby. "Not half a mile!"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"That was my own impression," he said. "All the same, Racke has entered, and I suppose he will run. That's all I know, chaps."

"Phew!"

The juniors from Study No. 6 whistled in chorus. They were all extremely puzzled by Tom Merry's news. In fact, it was news of the type it was not easy to credit.

But they all had Tom Merry's word for it that it was true—Aubrey Racke of the Shell had entered for the St. Jim's junior cross-country race! Jack Blake, for one, was quite staggered.

Then Blake frowned a little because unwelcome thoughts were flashing across his mind—suspicious thoughts. He even found himself asking why Racke had entered this race? What was his game?

But they were unspoken questions. Not for worlds would Jack Blake have put them into words, only he could not help thinking them. Why had Aubrey Racke put his name down as one of the entrants for what was undoubtedly the most trying junior race St. Jim's had on their athletic fixtures?

Not that Jack Blake was naturally suspicious. Far from it; but the junior from the broad acres was very wide awake, and he knew Racke pretty well. He remembered the matter of the inventions prize. He knew, too, all about the many shady things the Shell outsider had been guilty of in the past.

And so for a moment Blake was conscious of vague suspicions that there was something "fishy" afoot. But those suspicions were gone in a flash, and he thumped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Good man!" he said. "If you've persuaded Racke into taking up athletics we shall expect you to have Mr. Linton skipping and hopping in training for footer next."

"And then you can come along to the Fourth and take Baggy Trimble in hand," grinned Herries. "After making Racke go in for the cross-country, I shouldn't be surprised at anything you could do."

"Oh, I had nothing to do with it—"

"Rats!" laughed Jack Blake, as the Fourth-Formers filed from the study. "Of course, you must have done. Jolly good news, anyhow!"

And Jack Blake & Co. departed and promptly forgot all about Aubrey Racke and his sudden if belated desire to shine in the world of athletics.

CHAPTER 3.

They're Off!

AS a matter of fact, very few of the St. Jim's juniors gave Aubrey Racke another thought that evening. They were all much too busy with far more important matters than Racke of the Shell, for there was any amount of work to be got through by those who had entered for the race.

Running-shoes had to be attended to, shorts and vests unearthed from boxes and mended where they had come to grief in previous cross-country events, and the various numbers would have to be allotted to the competitors.

Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, saw to the delivering of the numbers. He came personally to the various Shell and Fourth Form studies, quite a bundle of white linen squares with black numbers on them under his arm, and a list of the entrants in his hand. His arrival at Study No. 6 was greeted by a cheer.

"Good old Kildare!"

"No. 6 for me, deah boy—same numbah as our studay."

"Hand them round, Kildare."

Each of the four juniors received a linen number from the school captain, and there was a cheer when it was seen that Jack Blake was to wear No. 6. It looked like an omen to the chums of Study No. 6—that the Eastwood Cup was coming to that famous study this year.

"And it jolly well is, don't you forget it!" declared Herries. "I'm number ten, eh? We've got to sew the numbers on our vests as usual, Kildare?"

The school captain nodded.

"Yes, on the chest," he said. "Mind you sew them on strongly, too. We don't want any numbers to come off."

"Oh, we'll see to that."

"Wathah, deah boy!"

"Leave it to us, Kildare."

Everything in the way of preparations was completed long before the dormitory bell rang, and there were many eager glances up at the sky as the various juniors took a

breath of fresh air at their open windows before turning in for the night.

The weather prospects appeared excellent. The stars were out and there were no clouds. There was every promise of a fine day for the race. The St. Jim's juniors went to bed anxious for the morning to come.

And when the morning did come there was nothing at all the matter with it.

"A perfectly toppin' mornin', deah boys," was Arthur Augustus' verdict. "Weally, it couldn't have been better."

"Hurrah!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it is a distinct occasion for wousin' cheers, myself," agreed Arthur Augustus. "Weally I feel in wemarkably good form, bai Jove!"

But then so did the rest of the Fourth Form juniors feel in good trim. In fact, they had never felt better, which was their reward for their hard training. Beyond any doubt, the champions of the Fourth would go to the starting-point of the race fit and ready for anything.

And when morning school was over and dinner—a very light dinner indeed—had been taken, there was a regular stampede for the school gates.

Jack Blake & Co. were amongst the first to arrive, but as other juniors came hurrying up, wearing rainproofs or sweaters or blazers, it was clear that the Fourth Form of the School House did not hold a monopoly in physical fitness.

George Figgins of the New House, for instance. It is doubtful if Figgy had ever looked fitter in his life than he did as he joined the crowd at the quadrangle gateway.

And Kerr, strong and down-looking, appeared in the pink of condition, and if Fatty Wynn still carried a shade—rather a substantial shade—more than his share of weight, he looked hardy and determined. Without doubt Figgins & Co of the New House meant to put up a stern fight to wrest the famous Eastwood Cup from their rivals.

Then along came Tom Merry and Lowther, with Manners wheeling his bicycle and limping a little. Most of the juniors had a word to say to Harry Manners about that limp.

"Hard luck, Manners!" called out Figgins.

"Yes, rotten!" chipped in Jack Blake. "Ankle any better?"

Manners laughed easily.

"Yes, heaps, old son, but it wouldn't be if I tried to run seven miles on it," the Shell junior said. "But don't trouble about me. I shall be all right snapping you fellows."

And he tapped the fine new reflex camera which was his latest purchase. Harry Manners could always be depended upon to spend a happy afternoon if he had a camera and plenty of plates or films with him.

Next came Kildare, and at once rainproofs and blazers were slipped off. But it still wanted a few minutes to half-past two, and Kildare was a great stickler for punctuality. The race was timed to start at two-thirty, and at two-thirty it would start, not a minute before or afterwards.

But all the juniors seemed to be lined up now, with those like Baggy Trimble and Skimpole and others, who were not exactly running men, looking on, some enviously, others the reverse.

As was to be expected, Baggy Trimble was not one of the envious ones.

In fact, it puzzled the fat junior very considerably that so many juniors could, of their own free will, enter for a seven-mile race.

"It isn't as if it's for a feed, even," he said to Mellish. "I could understand chaps running if the prize was a good

square meal, but what's the good of a 'cup, I should like to know? Oh, crikey, Kildare's coming this way!"

In alarm Baggy dodged behind Mellish. He had no desire at all to meet Kildare face to face, for the St. Jim's skipper was inclined to speak very plainly to juniors who did not enter for the junior races.

But Baggy need not have troubled. Kildare was not thinking of him. Instead the skipper was looking from the school clock to the school doorway, as if waiting for someone.

And suddenly someone came hurrying down the steps—a Shell Form junior already stripped for the race. Instantly there was a buzz of whispers.

"Aubwey Wacke, bai Jove!"

"My hat, yes!"

"He really does mean to run, then," muttered Jack Blake, looking curiously at the approaching Shell junior.

"I thought it was all spoof."

"So did I," nodded Digby.

Others had thought the same thing, of course, but they were all proved wrong. No doubt of that, because there was Racke taking his place in the line of waiting juniors. All eyes were turned his way, but Racke did not appear to notice.

He just stood there, the No. 13 sewn to the breast of his running vest—a brand new vest of a rather distinctive sort of greyish white. He seemed very eager for the start.

Then Kildare's voice rapped out:

"Are you ready?"

Kildare's finger closed down on the trigger of the starting-pistol.

Crack!

"They're off!"

The race had started.

CHAPTER 4.

Racke Leads!

AWAY dashed the juniors. Behind them pelted most of those who were not in the race, anxious to see as much of the start as possible before cutting across the fields and glimpsing the runners later on in the race. And already there was plenty of advice being shouted.

"Go it, Merry!"

"Keep going, Gussy, and never mind your monoco!"

"Steady does the trick, Merry!" shouted Manners, riding a very zigzag course amongst the spectators on his bicycle. "Wear them down! Oh, my hat! Look at Racke!"

And Aubrey Racke was worth looking at at that moment, for he was in front of everybody.

To the utter astonishment of Manners and everyone else Racke had gone off at a sprint. There he was, forging ahead, just as if he were taking part in a quarter-mile event. Even Baggy Trimble was astonished.

"Ha, ha, ha! The silly ass!" he chuckled. "Fancy sprinting at the start! Oh crumbs, isn't he putting it on?"

"Duffer!"

"He's doing it for a jape, of course!" panted Manners, still wobbling on his bicycle. "He'll be found asleep in a ditch later on."

"Of course he will."

But Racke's curious manoeuvres were not without an effect on the rest of the runners. That was seen when Arthur Augustus and one or two more sprinted after him, but voices from the crowd brought them to their senses.

"Don't be an ass, Gussy!"

"Let him go, Wynn!"

"He's only spoofing!" yelled Manners. "Don't take any notice of the duffer!"

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And those who had been startled into sprinting by Racke's dashing start slowed down again. It was the proper thing to do, of course, because no one could expect to keep up the pace Racke had set.

But Racke took no notice of the laughs and shouts which must have been clearly audible to him. He merely sprinted on, widening the gap between himself and the crowd of juniors behind him, and making straight for Rylcombe Lane.

At the top of the lane there was a break up of the running spectators behind, because it was no good following the runners any farther. As soon as they were clear of the lane they would have to cut across a corner of the woods, and then they would take to the main road. To watch the race properly the wisest course for the spectators was to sprint across the field, and so gain the main road by means of a short cut.

Manners, at any rate, meant to do that, and he didn't mind cycling over the pasture land a bit. In fact, he fairly soared.

Running behind him were a whole crowd of other juniors, but Baggy Trimble was not one of the crowd. With a cunning grin on his fat face, Baggy dodged behind the hedge and looked cautiously about him to make sure that neither Kildare nor Darrell, nor any of the other prefects were about.

They were not, so Baggy chuckled again and trotted slowly across another field, quite a small one, and slipped into the woods.

Not that Baggy had gone to the woods in the hope of seeing Tom Merry and all the others run through a corner of it. As a matter of fact, Baggy had finished altogether with the race and didn't care a very great deal who won or what happened to the runners. The fat junior had a far more important business to attend to that afternoon than cross-country racing. He proposed to pay a visit to a certain orchard.

It was a large orchard, and boasted some of the finest walnut-trees for miles around.

For several days Baggy had his eyes on those walnuts, but always there had been the owner or some of his men working amongst the trees, so Baggy had to leave them untouched.

This afternoon, though, matters would be different. It was practically certain that the owner and his assistants would snatch time off from their work in order to watch the cross-country race, so it was quite on the cards the orchard would be deserted.

At any rate, Baggy sincerely hoped it would, so he actually sprinted across the field. He was still sprinting as he reached the woods. Then, very abruptly, the fat Fourth-Former pulled up dead. There was someone in front of him.

Nothing very curious in that perhaps, because the woods were open to the public, but this particular someone was behaving in a decidedly curious manner. He was crouching amongst the undergrowth, apparently under the impression that he was completely concealed.

But his back was clearly visible, and the fat junior noticed, with amazement, that it was a junior he was looking at—a St. Jim's junior, Baggy supposed.

The half-concealed junior was wearing running shorts and a running vest of a curious greyish-white tint, and Baggy Trimble's eyes goggled with astonishment.

If the junior were in running things he must be one of the runners in the race. But it was quite impossible that any of the runners could have reached the woods yet.

True, Aubrey Racke had gone off at a terrific sprint, but he could never have gained this spot in the few seconds which had elapsed since the start. He could scarcely have done it on a motor-bike, let alone on his feet, because Baggy Trimble had come to the woods by a very short cut.

In consequence, Baggy just couldn't understand the situation.

Probably, if he had been any other junior from St. Jim's he would have solved the puzzle in the obvious manner. He would have gone straight up to that self-concealed schoolboy to ask him what it all meant. But Baggy Trimble was not likely to do that.

Naturally secretive himself, he was liable to have his suspicions about others easily roused. They were roused now, very decidedly so, and Baggy did the thing that came most natural to him. He remained hidden behind a tree, watching eagerly without in the least knowing what he was looking for.

The minutes dragged slowly by. At least three of them must have gone when there came a sound in the woods, the sound of someone panting as if badly out of breath, and pushing his way excitedly through the undergrowth.

Baggy watched with greater eagerness than ever. He could see the undergrowth moving just in front of the half-concealed junior, but there was no wind to cause the

movement. Someone was breasting his way through the heavy scrubs, of course.

Baggy had just become certain of that when the bushes parted and a junior in running shorts and greyish vest came bursting out. On the junior's chest was the large black number 13.

It was Aubrey Racke!

Quickly Racke looked about him. He saw neither the half-concealed junior nor Baggy Trimble, and he called out in a low voice:

"Crooke, are you there?"

Instantly the other junior in the shrubbery jumped to his feet and came springing out into the open. He was Gerald Crooke beyond any possible doubt, but the thing that amazed Trimble most was that Crooke also had the number 13 on his running vest.

And yet Crooke had not entered for the race. Baggy knew that, and simply could not begin to understand matters. He could only stand there behind the tree, open-mouthed with astonishment.

By then Racke had caught at Crooke's arm.

"You'll have to slip along as fast as you can run if it's to be any good, old man!"

"Yes, I'm off now!" flashed Crooke. "Don't forget—we meet again by the tree which was struck by lightning."

"Yes—yes—"

"Well, take care no one sees you!" snapped Crooke; and off he dashed the way Racke had come.

Crooke was making for the main road. And as he disappeared, Racke flung himself down under the bushes to get his wind back.

But even then Trimble failed to understand what it all meant. He realised, of course, that Racke and Crooke had some scheme on, but Baggy was not a specially bright junior. Still, he had more than his share of cunning, so he remained there at the tree, waiting for Racke to get up again.

Baggy hadn't to wait long. In a matter of a very few seconds, Racke was upon his feet, and without any more wasted time struck off through the heart of the woods at a swinging pace.

Thrilling with excitement, Baggy Trimble followed him.

His fat face still showed nothing but astonishment, for he was clear on one point only. He was not going to lose sight of Aubrey Racke if he could possibly help it.

And, with determination written on his podgy face, he crept on through the woods after the cad of the Shell, like a very stout and somewhat clumsy sleuth.

CHAPTER 5.

Gerald Crooke's Turn!

CRAMMING on every bit of pace he was capable of, Gerald Crooke breasted his way through the undergrowth. He gained the track-like pathway which cut through that corner of the woods—the pathway along which the St. Jim's juniors would come racing at any moment, and he gulped with relief.

He was well on time. He even stopped to listen for any sound of running footsteps; but he could hear none. Crooke grinned. Tom Merry and all the other cracks of St. Jim's had not even reached the woods yet, then!

"My hat! Racke must have crammed on the pace!" flashed through Crooke's mind. "I've got a rattling fine start!"

Then off Crooke went, keeping carefully to the course laid down for the race, and so coming out of the woods on to the main road.

As he vaulted the stile a shout went up in a veritable roar:

"Here comes one of them—"

"My aunt, it's Racke! Well run, Racke!"

"Stick it, the Shell!"

Just for a moment Crooke was badly startled. He half thought that the little crowd of juniors shouting out Racke's name must be on the road, but it was not as bad as that. They were still some considerable distance up the slope of a ploughed field.

But the big "No. 13" on Crooke's vest had been seen. Crooke realised that, and he grinned again. Then he raced on, his face averted from the little crowd pelting down the field.

"Well run, old top!"

The voices died away into the distance as Crooke raced on at a sprinting pace. He was grinning once more, for he had nothing further to worry about for a mile or two.

True, there would be a prefect acting as a "check" at the cross-roads—Monteith of the New House, very likely. But Monteith would probably be seated comfortably on the stile, and the stile was some little distance from the road. If Crooke kept well to the left of the road, with his face averted, it ought to be all right.

But, all the same for that, the cad of the Shell was not

at his ease as he neared the cross-roads. On the contrary, he was very ill at ease indeed, and he was conscious of distinct alarm as he glimpsed Monteith there on the stile.

Almost desperately, Crooke spurted. He got level with Monteith, who had a slip of paper and a pencil in his hand; and the junior's nerve cracked. He flung up his arm to shield his face.

But Gerald Crooke need not have been so scared, for the number on his running vest was all that Monteith troubled about. He scarcely looked at Crooke at all.

"Well run, kid!" he shouted as Crooke raced past; and Gerald Crooke had never felt greater relief in his life.

For there was nothing to fear now. He was quite sure of that—quite sure that none of the spectators on foot could be anywhere along the remainder of the course round the woods until the opposite side was reached.

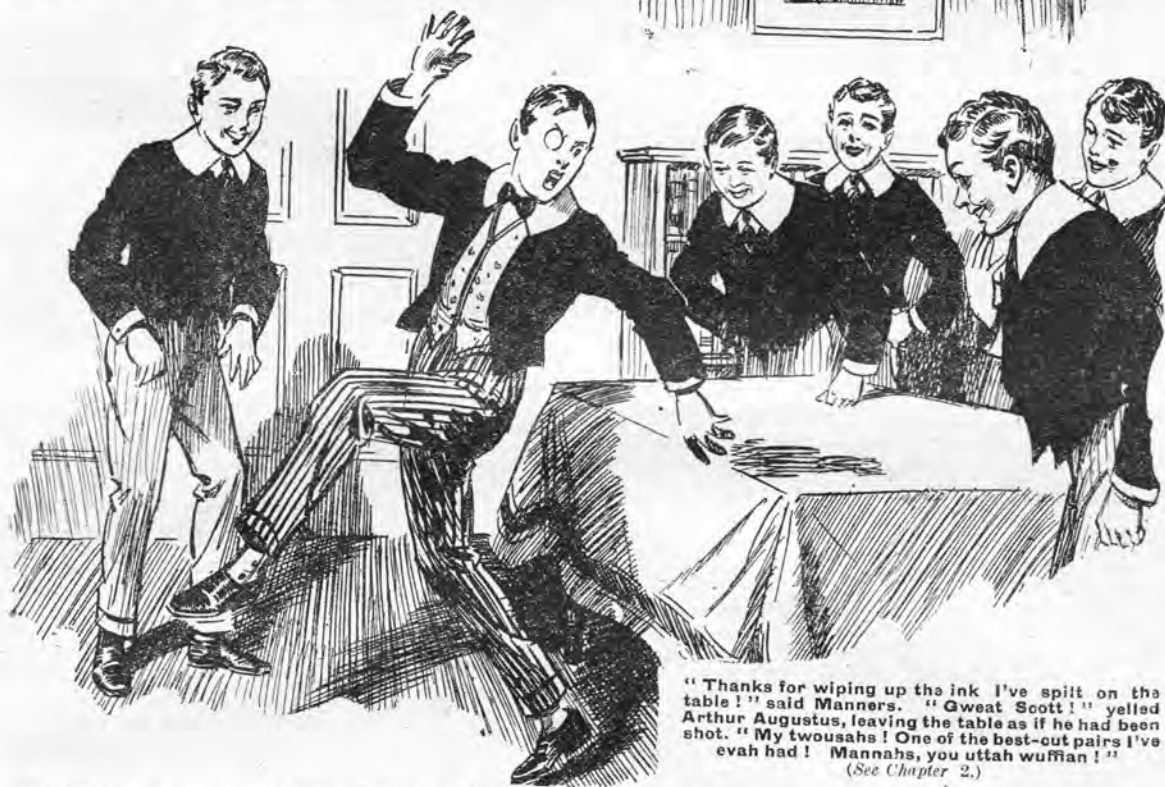
And it wouldn't matter a bit how many were there to see the race. The more the better, in fact; and so all that Gerald Crooke had to do now was to sprint up just as hard as he could.

He knew he was no great runner, of course. Already it was a case of bellows to mend with him, but he kept going as well as he could. There were those debts he owed to the local tradespeople to urge him on.

Quite sure on that point, Crooke dashed on. He had only another half-mile to run, but that half-mile must be covered at his very best possible speed. If not, then the "race" might be lost for Aubrey Racke, after all; for Manners would be sure to tell Tom Merry and all the others how much start Racke had, which would bring forth big efforts from all of them. Realising that, Crooke strained every nerve to keep up the pace.

Then his share in the plot was over, for he had reached that tree which had been recently struck by lightning—the tree he had spoken to Racke about—and Crooke did not waste a moment. He swung off the road into the woods again.

"Racke, you'll have to sprint up like mad!" he panted.



"Thanks for wiping up the ink I've spilt on the table!" said Manners. "Gweat Scott!" yelled Arthur Augustus, leaving the table as if he had been shot. "My twousahs! One of the best-cut pairs I've evah had! Mannahs, you uttah wuffian!"

(See Chapter 2.)

And for him he ran surprisingly well; he had no fear at all now. The cleverly-worked-out scheme must succeed now, Crooke thought.

Suddenly an excited cry rang from the hedge.

"Oh, my hat! Well run, Racke! You're in front of everybody!"

A gasp broke from Crooke's lips. He could not see the speaker, and he had turned his head towards the right-hand hedge before he quite realised what he was doing.

Then he saw who it was who had called out—Manners of the Shell!

Quite distinctly Crooke saw the junior, saw the push-bicycle which accounted for Manners being so far along the course; and for the moment Gerald Crooke thought the game was up.

But Harry Manners was not looking at him. The amateur photographer of St. Jim's had his eyes glued to the focusing apparatus of his new reflex camera.

Again Crooke gasped with relief. He heard a slight click as Manners did something to his camera; but Crooke took no notice of that. He flung his arms up to shield his face as he had done when passing Monteith, and, as on that occasion, the trick seemed to work.

Anyway, there was no shout of astonishment from Manners. Like Monteith, the Shell junior had recognised "Racke" by the number on his vest. He hadn't troubled to look at the runner's face.

"I don't know how near the others are—the road winds so I couldn't tell!"

"But—but you weren't recognised?" flashed Racke, springing from some undergrowth.

"No!"

"You're sure?"

"Yes!" gasped Crooke. "Don't waste time talking, man! Sprint up for all you are worth, and that tip from your uncle is ours for the asking."

Aubrey Racke dashed on to the road and streaked in a dead-straight line for St. Jim's. He was as fresh as he had been at the very start of the race and he had, at least, a quarter of a mile lead from any of the other runners.

As Gerald Crooke had said, it certainly did look as if Aubrey Racke had the St. Jim's junior cross-country race as good as won.

CHAPTER 6.

The New Champion!

"HERE they come, chaps!"

It was Harry Manners who gave vent to that shout. He and all the rest of the spectators who had watched as much of the race as possible were now back at the school gates, anxious to see the most important part of the event—the finish.

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And Manners was quite right in saying the runners were in sight.

But only just in sight, pelting along the road towards the school for all they were worth. It was quite impossible as yet to see what was happening beyond the bare fact that quite a lot of juniors were far down the road running as hard as they could.

"Someone seems to be well in front, though," said Kildare, his keen eyes fixed on the runners. "Figgins of your House, I expect, Monteith."

"Or Merry of yours," answered the New House prefect. "Merry was running remarkably well when I checked his number at the cross-roads! Jove! Whoever he is, he has the race in his pocket!"

"My hat, yes!" cried Manners. "Here, let me get to the front, chaps. I must have a snap of the finish! Oh crumbs! The leader hasn't half got a lead!"

"Yes! But who is it?"

"Looks like Tom Merry—"

"Much more like Figgins!"

"No; I believe it's Blake!"

The big crowd of juniors were all talking at once, all straining their eyes. But they were only guessing. No one could at all be sure who it was who had drawn so comfortably ahead of his competitors, until Skimpole, probably the shortest sighted of them all, put some field-glasses to his eyes.

"Dear me! I can't see the leader's face properly, but he is No. 13!" said Skimpole.

"What?"

"No. 13?" gasped Manners. "Did you say No. 13?"

In his excitement Manners nearly dropped his prized camera, while Kildare snatched the field-glasses from Skimpole. A moment later the St. Jim's skipper was handing back the glasses.

"By Jove, you're right!" he said in amazement. "It is No. 13 who is leading!"

"Racke!" gasped Manners.

"Yes, Racke of the Shell!"

"Oh, my hat!"

In utter amazement, juniors and seniors alike stared down the road, for glasses were now no longer needed to see the leading runners.

And the leader of them all was Aubrey Racke. There could be no doubt about that. There he was pelting along at a great pace, with Figgins and Tom Merry and Jack Blake thirty yards behind him.

Behind Blake was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Kerr, running dead level, and behind them a whole crowd of juniors, constantly changing places as one or another forged to the front.

But no one was looking at the back-markers. It was Racke who claimed all attention—Racke, the slacker, the "snooky cad," who preferred cheap cigarettes and frowning in front of a study fire to games of any sort. Yet here he was, showing all the crack junior runners of St. Jim's "the way home."

And he was showing it in no uncertain manner, too!

Elbows well up, head back, he came along in a manner which suggested perfect training, considering that this was the conclusion of a seven-mile cross-country race.

Figgins and Tom Merry were straining every nerve to overtake the leader, and they were creeping up foot by foot. The thirty yard gap was dwindling away. But was there time left in the race to make it possible for Racke to be overhauled? Kildare did not think so.

Neither did Harry Manners really; but he shouted excited encouragement, nevertheless.

"Come on, Tommy! You'll just do it!"

"Buck up, Blake!" yelled the Fourth Form partisans. "Sprint, man! My hat! Just look at Figgins!"

For Figgins had crammed on an amazing spurt. He was in front of Blake again, he was forging ahead of Tom Merry, and he was going hard after Aubrey Racke. There did seem to be just a chance that the New House junior would win on the post, after all.

Even Kildare changed his mind and thought so. He was almost certain of it when Figgins spurted again and Racke made no response. The gap between them was a very short one at that moment. But it all depended upon whether Racke had a finishing spurt left in him.

In tense excitement the crowd at the school gates watched. Was Racke showing any signs of serious distress? Were his elbows dropping and his stride shortening? No one could be sure.

But they were all sure that Figgins of the New House had shot his bolt. He could cram on no more pace. He could only run as he was running, well and pluckily, with his only hope that Aubrey Racke would falter and crack.

He got to within a few yards of Racke. All the juniors at the gateway saw that and cheered. And then the cheers died completely out, because an amazing thing was

happening. Aubrey Racke was spurring almost as if he were running a hundred-yard sprint!

On he came.

He was running away from Figgins. Just as he had started that race by dashing ahead of everybody, so he was finishing it.

In utter amazement Manners and all the others at the gateway stared.

They saw Racke dash through the gateway. They glimpsed Kildare and Darrell, the two judges, throwing up their hands to signal that the race was won, and they saw Racke pull up easily.

He was puffing and blowing, of course, but he was not whacked. He stood there with everybody staring at him in blank astonishment. Racke, the dark horse of the race, had beaten everybody.

The cad of the Shell was not down and out. He did not seem seriously distressed, whereas Figgins, when he ran across the finishing line, was beaten to the world, collapsing in a heap on the grass at the side of the gateway.

It was the same with Tom Merry, or very nearly the same, for Tom was whacked. He did not topple over as Figgins had; but he clutched at Skimpole's arm for support.

And Jack Blake and Kerr and Arthur Augustus were in a similar condition, run completely out. Everybody saw that, and everybody saw Aubrey Racke standing there, just breathing heavily. It was such a big sensation that no one even thought of cheering the "winner."

Then Arthur Augustus grasped the situation.

"Bai Jove, thwee chéahs for the winnah, deah boys!"

"My hat, yes!" panted Tom Merry. "Three of the best!"

Spontaneously the juniors cheered. They did not like Racke very much. In fact, he was rather a difficult junior to like, but he had "run" magnificently that afternoon. On the face of it there could be no doubt about that.

Racke had made history in the sporting world of St. Jim's at last, and he was cheered to the echo.

"Good old Racke!"

"Well run, old top!"

"Yaas, bai Jove, a weally startlin' wan," shouted Arthur Augustus. "Pway forgive me for bein' surprisid, deah boy, and accept my congwattars."

"Yes, congrats, Racke, old man!"

The juniors were crowding round the "successful" Shell junior. Maybe some of them were feeling uncomfortable because they had not spontaneously cheered him as he crossed the line. If that were so they were all making amends now. Aubrey Racke was the hero of the hour for the first time that any junior could remember.

But it was not left to the juniors only to congratulate the new junior cross-country champion. Kildare, for instance, was quite lavish with his praise.

"A very fine performance, Racke," said Kildare warmly. "You must have trained very hard to achieve such a result."

"Yes, I trained hard—"

"And so you have gained your reward," said Kildare. "We—we're all very surprised, Racke, but we are all very glad, of course!"

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

"Three more of the best, chaps!" cried Tom Merry, and as the cheering broke out afresh someone noticed another junior racing up the road.

But this newcomer on the scene was not stripped for running, and no one took much notice of him. He was only Baggy Trimble.

But Baggy was hopelessly excited.

At the very fastest pace he could manage he came ambling into the quadrangle, gasping and puffing like a grampus.

"Oh crumbs, who won, Gussy? Blake, old top, did Racke win—"

"Yes, easily!"

"Oh crikey!" panted Baggy. "Ha, ha, ha! Oh dear! You mean Racke is to have the Eastwood Cup? Oh, my hat!"

But no one was taking much notice of Baggy Trimble, so his excited remarks more or less fell on deaf ears. Indeed only Jack Blake heard the fat chuckles that were escaping from him, and he glanced rather curiously at the fat Baggy.

"What's the matter, Trimble?"

"Oh crikey!" panted Baggy. "Oh, my hat! Aubrey Racke junior cross-country champion of St. Jim's! Oh crumbs!"

More fat chuckles followed, but by then Kildare was pointing to the school buildings.

"Into the school and bath-rooms!" he shouted to the runners. "No one is to stay out here and catch a chill. Racke, I suppose you know the cup is not to be presented until Lord Eastwood pays St. Jim's a visit next week?"

"Yes, I know."

"That's all right, then," answered Kildare. "Congratulations again, youngster!"

Racke turned on his heel and hurried away, and Baggy Trimble started elbowing a passage through the crowd. The fat junior was still looking very excited and still giving vent to fat chuckles.

Also he seemed to be following in Aubrey Racke's footsteps, but he did not speak to the new cross-country "champion." He watched him make for a bath-room in the Shell corridor, then Baggy hurried off. He was making for the study Racke shared with Gerald Crooke.

Cautiously Baggy opened the door a few inches, and poked a fat nose into the room. It was empty.

Baggy went in and closed the door. He selected an easy-chair and sat in it, and his greedy little eyes noticed a dish of fruit on the table.

Quickly he selected an apple, the largest, of course, and started on it, and just to show how much he was at home in the study he put his feet up on the mantelshelf.

Beyond all doubt Baggy Trimble was in a very gleeful and happy mood that afternoon.

CHAPTER 7.

An Unwelcome Visitor!

"CROOKE, is that you?" Aubrey Racke asked the question in a somewhat lowered voice, and peered through the gathering dusk which was creeping across the countryside.

Nearly an hour had elapsed since the finish of the cross-country race, and Racke was dressed in his ordinary clothes again. He had gone out into the quadrangle, and then on to the road, eagerly waiting for Gerald Crooke's return to St. Jim's.

Gerald Crooke was returning all right, swinging along at a steady pace. He broke into a run as he glimpsed his study companion.

"Hallo, Racke!" he whispered. "You couldn't help bringing it off, I suppose?"

"Oh, I—I won all right, old man—"

"With a little outside assistance!" grinned Crooke. "But we won't talk about that. The big thing is that you won, and now that wealthy uncle of yours will just have to stump up the cash we need. No one showed any suspicions, I hope?"

"None at all!"

"Good!" said Crooke.

"Directly after you left me in the wood I buried my vest and running-shorts, and changed into my ordinary clothes, which I had hidden under some bushes, so there can never be any evidence against us."

"That's so."

"All the same, we'd better forget the whole thing," continued Crooke. "Not even talk about it amongst ourselves, I mean. Just put it out of our minds."

"Yes; I was going to suggest that."

"Right! We'll start at once, then!" said Crooke. "I bought some tuck on tick coming along, and we'll have a celebration feed in the study. It will look funny if we don't. And not another word, mind!"

Aubrey Racke nodded, and the two cronies sauntered across the quadrangle together.

They mounted the steps and reached the Shell Form corridor without meeting anybody at all. At the passage corner, close to Tom Merry's study, though, someone came along, limping slightly. It was Harry Manners.

"Cheerio, Racke! I was looking for you!"

"Oh!" answered Racke. "What for?"

"To tell you I expect to have a topping snapshot of you,

old man," said Manners. "I got you splendidly with my new reflex during the race this afternoon. It ought to be an absolutely tip-top snap!"

Racke pulled up dead.

"You—you mean the finish of the race?" he asked.

"Oh, I got that, too; but the light wasn't so good," explained Manners. "I mean that snap much earlier on in the race, just after you must have passed Monteith at the cross-roads 'check.' You saw me in the hedge, didn't you?"

"Y-yes!" muttered Racke.

"And you noticed I had my camera, of course?"

"I didn't notice the camera," replied Racke; and it was quite a truthful answer seeing he was in the middle of the woods at the time. "Oh—do you think you really snapped me decently?"

Manners nodded enthusiastically.

"I'm almost sure of it," he replied. "But I shall know for certain if I can get my prep done in time to spend half an hour developing the roll of films in the dark-room before bed-time."

"I—I see!"

"And I'll show you the negative directly it's developed and fixed," said Manners. "I'll come along to your study specially with it."

"Thanks, awfully!"

Manners limped away, and Racke turned uneasily towards Crooke. His face had gone unusually white, but he was no whiter than Crooke. In fact, Gerald Crooke looked hopelessly scared.

And when he spoke his voice was by no means steady.

"My hat! That's a snag, Racke!" he ground out. "Of course it was me Manners snapped, not you!"

"Yes, I know!"

"And I was so startled at spotting him in the hedge that I looked straight at him," went on Crooke. "He was looking down at his camera at the time so didn't see my face properly. All the same, he—he may have snapped me just as I was looking his way!"

"Phew!"

"He probably did, in fact," ground out Crooke. "I—I never thought of that until now. Jove, Racke, we've got to do something about that photograph!"

Aubrey Racke nodded and bit his lip again.

"Yes; we shall have to do something," he said. "It isn't as if Manners is a dud at photography. His snaps are always as clear as anything. If—if he did take you when you were looking at him, Crooke, you'll be recognised

by everybody! What do you suggest doing?"

"I know!"

"So—so we shall have to do something and at once," urged Racke. "Let's go and talk it over, Crooke. It—it looks funny standing here!"

They walked on, automatically making for their study, but they did not talk. Both looked very worried, even if Gerald Crooke was trying hard to conceal the fact. Indeed, he looked the more worried of the two as he pushed open the study door.

Then he started back in blank amazement. There was a visitor in the study.

A very stout visitor, too, lying back in the best easy-chair, with his heels on the mantelshelf. What is more, that visitor had a banana in one hand and an apple in the other, and a big dish which had been well filled with fruit when Racke and Crooke had last seen it, now contained nothing but apple-cores and banana-skins, and grape-pips. Gerald Crooke gasped aloud as he looked, but his stout visitor

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HERE'S A NOVEL PUZZLE, BOYS!

HIDDEN NAMES!



This week we are testing the ingenuity of our readers by giving them a more difficult puzzle to solve.

Each of the following sentences, when the letters are correctly transposed, will be found to form the name of a well-known character at St. Jim's.

The following classic example will show you exactly what an anagram is:

Florence Nightingale—"Flit on, cheering angel."

Now set your wits to work, and see how many names you can discover. The correct solutions will be published in next week's issue.

1. Try big gamble.
2. Noble lad at grit.
3. Never slit nose.
4. Red car liker.
5. A dusty car hurt us. A rug!
6. Go, Roger! Gee!
7. I can't fondle.
8. No, I see well.
9. O, the low argument!

more lowther

seemed remarkably at his ease. He even waved the apple in his right hand at the study owners.

"Come in, old tops!"

"Trimble, you fat cad!" shouted Crooke. "My hat, we'll give you beans! You—you greedy, spoofing rotter!"

And Gerald Crooke rushed wildly at Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 8.

Baggy is Unlucky!

CROOKE'S rush was so very wild and sudden, in fact, that Baggy Trimble had no time to remove his heels from the mantelshelf even. He could merely raise an alarmed protest.

"It's quite all right, Crooke, old chap. We're all friends here—Yoooop!"

Baggy's remark terminated in a desperate yell, for Gerald Crooke had clutched him round his fat, podgy legs just below the knees. Then Crooke yanked hard.

"Wow! Oh dear! Yah!" yelled Baggy, as he was wrenched out of the chair. "It's quite all right! Wow!"

"All right, is it?" shouted Crooke. "Good!"

"Ow! Stoppit! Groooh!"

Baggy's startled yells ended in a terrific thump. He had landed on the floor with Crooke still gripping his legs, and most of the breath was thumped out of the fat junior.

Not that Gerald Crooke cared, though. He was worried over that snapshot of Manners', and his nerves were on edge. It was very easy indeed for Crooke to lose his temper in such circumstances. He certainly had lost it at that moment.

"Give me that fives bat, Racke!" he shouted. "I'll half flay the fat little rotter—"

"Wow!" yelled Baggy in wild alarm. "Lemme gerrup! Ow! Stoppit! Yaroooh!"

Racke had flung the fives bat across to his study-mate, and Crooke was getting very busy. So was Baggy Trimble, for he squirmed and yelled and struggled.

But the fat Fourth-Former was helpless in Crooke's hands, and when Racke joined in, the unfortunate Baggy was in sore straits.

Baggy had provided them with an opportunity for working off their bad temper, and they made the most of it.

Whack! Wallop! Biff!

Again and again the fives bat descended upon the podgy form of Baggy, and time after time the fat junior answered the thuds with yells. Such loud yells, in fact, that Racke became alarmed.

"Gag the little beast, Crooke!" he panted. "We shall have a prefect or a master coming along. Put your hand over his mouth!"

Without thinking, Crooke did so. He placed his hand roughly over Baggy's capacious mouth, but Crooke didn't keep it there for long. The next moment he whipped his hand away just about as quickly as he had ever moved in his life.

"Yaroooh! The little beast has bitten me!"

"My hat! Take it out of his fat hide, then!" snapped Racke.

"Help!" screamed Baggy. "Oh dear, I shall go straight to Kildare—I'll tell the Head himself—I'll—"

"You fat toad!" panted Crooke, slapping away with the fives' bat. "Another three hundred ought to be enough for him!"

"Oh, crickey!" hooted Baggy, squirming more violently than ever. "Oh, crumbs! You'll both get expelled and serve you jolly well right. I'll go straight to the Head—Wow! Stoppit, Crooke, you cad! Oh, you beast, Racke, a cheating beast who couldn't run seven miles to save his life—Yaroooh!"

Aubrey Racke was not really listening to Baggy's loud and violent protests, but he heard something about "running seven miles." So did Crooke, and the biff he was in the act of landing on Baggy lessened in vigour.

As quickly as he could, Baggy took advantage of the lull in the storm, as it were.

"So I will tell the Head," he wailed. "My spine's dislocated in nine places. I'll get both you rotters expelled, you see if I don't! Oh, wow!"

The storm, as far as assault and battery on Baggy Trimble's person, had completely died away by now. Neither Racke nor Crooke made any attempt to touch him again. They even let the porpoise of the Fourth scramble to his feet.

But another sort of storm was breaking out, and that was a storm of wrathful indignation in Baggy's breast.

"You—you beasts!" he choked. "I came here as a friend ready to do my best to prevent you getting expelled for cheating in to-day's race—"

"Trimble!"

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"So I did, Crooke," almost wept Baggy. "I came into this study with nothing but friendly intentions and—and you've pretty nearly broken my back as a reward. But I don't care. I'll get you both sacked from St. Jim's, you see if I don't—"

Gerald Crooke shrugged his shoulders. As always, he was putting on an appearance of calm indifference.

"Don't take any notice of the fat spoofing, Racke," he said. "He's dotty!"

"Oh, I'm dotty, am I?" cried Baggy. "We'll see whether I'm dotty or not when I've told Kildare what I saw in the woods this afternoon—"

"What?"

"Yes, that's making you sit up, isn't it?" stormed the fat junior, his little eyes gleaming wrathfully. "Don't feel so much like going for me now, do you? Sort of calming down, eh, Crooke?"

"I don't know what you are cackling about, you fat fool!"

"Don't you?" cried Baggy. "You weren't in the woods this afternoon at all, I suppose? You didn't dress up in shorts and a running vest just like Racke's, and you didn't take Racke's place in the race when Racke had only run a mile or so—"

"Trimble, if you say another word—"

"Oh, I'm not going to say anything—to you," went on Baggy. "I know what my duty is after the way you've knocked me about. I'm going to talk to Kildare or the Head, not you or Racke, the new cross-country champion! Yah!"

But they did not hold their sides just now. The cads of the Shell turned a deadly white, and Crooke streaked out his arm. He grabbed Baggy by the shoulder with a rough grip.

"What are you burbling about, you—you duffer?" he ground out.

"Oh, I'm burbling now, am I?" answered Baggy. "Let go my arm, Crooke, so that I can go and burble elsewhere—in the Head's study or Kildare's, for instance."

"Tr-Trimble, don't be an idiot—"

Racke was scared and openly so, and Baggy Trimble saw it. He turned quickly to the fake cross-country champion.

But before Baggy could think of a suitable rejoinder the study door was pushed open and Tom Merry poked his head in the room. There was a grin on Tom's cheery face.

"I say, you chaps, Kildare has sent along to say there's too much row going on in this study," he exclaimed.

"Sorry to have to butt in, but as captain of the lower school—"

"Oh, that's—that's all right, Merry," muttered Crooke.

"Quite," added Racke. "There—there's been a bit of a misunderstanding about—about Baggy being in here—"

Racke's words trailed away into silence, and Baggy Trimble's little eyes gleamed again. He had had a bad time with the fives' bat, but it was his turn now.

"Oh, there's been a misunderstanding, has there, Racke?" he said. "Well, there has, in a way—a very big misunderstanding, now I come to think of it. You see, Merry, I was in Rylcombe Woods this afternoon—"

"Trimble, you fool!" flashed Crooke, his face going ashy and white.

"As I said, I was in the woods this afternoon," continued Baggy. "Just walking through them as I often do, Merry!"

"Yes," grinned the junior captain. "Going to have a feed all to yourself, I suppose!"

"Not at all," answered Baggy indignantly. "I never saw anything to eat the whole afternoon until I came into this study. I saw other things, though—"

"Trees, perhaps?" suggested Tom Merry. "They often grow in woods, don't they, Racke?"

Aubrey Racke did not answer. He did nothing at all but stare at Baggy Trimble, dreading the fat junior's next words.

And Crooke was equally afraid, even if he did not show it to the same extent. The hand he laid on Baggy's shoulder was none too steady.

"It's quite all right, Merry," he said. "The—the row was caused through us going for Baggy for wolfing our fruit. We—we had forgotten we'd invited him here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was Baggy who laughed, and it was an unusual laugh for him. It quite startled Tom Merry. The junior captain looked from the fat junior to Racke.

"Isn't he well?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm quite well, thanks, Merry," replied Baggy Trimble for himself, a sarcastic grin on his face. "It's just as Crooke said. They invited me here, and then forgot about the invitation. He, he, he!"

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "What are you laughing like that for?"

"At my own thoughts," said Baggy mysteriously.
 "Hopelessly potty, of course!" said Tom.
 "Not as potty as some people who think—"
 "Baggy, old man," said Racke, his nerve completely giving, "what—what's the matter with you?"
 Baggy shrugged his fat shoulders.
 "Nothing at all, I am thankful to say!" he exclaimed.
 "I was a little hurt because you forgot you'd invited me here for some fruit. You see, I'm afraid, Racke, that you and Crooke may also have forgotten about that half-a-crown each of you said you would lend me!"
 "Eh?" muttered Crooke.

"Two and a tanner, you know," said Baggy firmly—"each, of course. I'm just going, so if you could oblige me with the loan—"

In place of concluding the sentence he held out his hand, while Tom Merry watched with amusement. Knowing Baggy of old, and having suffered quite a lot from his propensity for borrowing, Tom thought he knew the sort of answer Racke and Crooke would make to this latest demand—they would kick the impecunious Baggy out of the study.

Tom Merry stood clear of the door. He did not want to impede Baggy's departure in any way. But the junior captain was in for a big surprise.

Racke and Crooke were not throwing Baggy out at all. Instead, they were feeling in their pockets, and presently

you'll see— Oh crumbs! What's this I've got in my hand?"

"My ear!" bleated Baggy. "Lemme loose, you rotter!"
 "An ear, is it?" chuckled Tom Merry. "I thought it was one of those new rubber doormats! Still, there you are, Baggy! I don't want your ear! Keep it for listening at study door keyholes!"

And Tom Merry departed, leaving Baggy Trimble rubbing his fat ear and Aubrey Racke and Gerald Crooke staring at the stout Fourth-Former.

CHAPTER 9.

Baggy's Little Mistake!

"GWEAT SCOTT!"
 It was about a couple of hours later that Arthur Augustus made that remark. It was not a specially original observation for him to make, but he made it with greater astonishment than usual.

Also he screwed his celebrated monocle into his eye, and through it stared down the well-lighted passage. The object which attracted his attention and astounded him was Baggy Trimble.

"Gweat Scott!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "What evah is the duffah doin'?"

It was difficult to say, for Baggy Trimble was behaving very strangely.

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Tom was openly startled to see them both proffering a half-crown to Baggy. The fat junior took them quite calmly.

"Thanks!" he said. "I won't forget about paying you back, you know. And I don't know that I'm going now, after all—that is, if you chaps are going to have tea!"

"Yes, we are!" muttered Crooke.

"Then I'll stay!" said Baggy, quite cheerful again. "You might shut the door as you go, Merry!"

Tom Merry snorted.

He was genuinely surprised at the ease with which Baggy had obtained five shillings from Racke and Crooke, but the lofty manner of the fat Fourth-Former blotted out that surprise for a moment. The junior captain strode into the study.

"Look here, you fat duffer—"

"I'm looking!" said Baggy cheekily. "I don't know that there's very much to see, though— Wow! My ear— Yoop!"

Tom Merry had caught Baggy Trimble's fat ear between finger and thumb, and he kept a mild pressure on it. Baggy howled just as if he were being really hurt. But Tom Merry took no notice.

"While I'm here, Racke, I may as well warn you to look out for a bit of a surprise," he said.

"Eh?"

"Rather a startling surprise," went on Tom Merry.

"What—what sort of a surprise?" ventured Racke.

"Oh, quite a pleasant one!" laughed the junior skipper.

"Just watch the school notice-board, sports section, and

He had just come from Aubrey Racke's study, and he was now making his way down the passage, at the end of which was the school photographic dark-room. In fact, the only room at the end of that passage was the dark-room, so Baggy Trimble must have been making for that.

But he was not making for it with his usual fat roll. Instead, he was slinking along in a manner very much like a sleuth with his nose down to the trail.

"Like a vewy fat Wed Indian about to scalp a wival!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "What evah can the duffah be up to?"

Arthur Augustus himself had been on his way to the dark-room to see if Manners was there. He had heard that the amateur photographer of the Shell meant to develop his cross-country snaps that evening after prep if he had time, and Gussy was very anxious to see if he appeared on any of the films.

But the swell of St. Jim's refrained from going to the dark-room now. He was quite content to stand and watch the curious antics of Baggy Trimble. Those antics became even more curious as the fat junior reached the dark-room door, for he stopped to listen at the keyhole.

"Bai Jove, what a wemarkably funnay thing to do!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I know Baggay is a wotah who listens at doors; but why listen at a dark-room door? It's onlay big enough for one fellow to be in at a time, and I twust there is no one in St. Jim's dottay enough to talk to himself, bai Jove!"

As a matter of fact, Gussy was talking to himself just

then, but he failed to notice that. He noticed nothing but Baggy Trimble listening at the dark-room door.

Then suddenly Baggy stood up to his full height. On his face there was an artful grin, and he stepped back a pace or two. Then, as if he were on the football field, he rushed forward and charged full at the dark-room door.

Thud!

Like a young elephant Baggy crashed into the woodwork, and it happened to be quite a flimsy door. The lock snapped, and the door crashed open. Unable to help himself, Baggy Trimble went crashing after it, and fairly sprawled into the dark-room.

"Oh crikey! I'm sorry, Manners!" he shouted. "My foot slipped! I'm awfully sorry if I've spoilt any of your films, Manners, through letting the light into the room—Wow! Yoop! Stoppit!"

For someone had wheeled round from the developing-sink and had clutched at Baggy. But it was not Harry Manners of the Shell who did the clutching. Instead, it was Mr. Selby, the Third Form master.

And Mr. Selby was not famous for his good temper. In fact, there were times when he was distinctly ratty, and this happened to be one of them. Baggy Trimble realised that by the way in which the Third Form master clutched him.

It was some minutes before Mr. Selby found his voice.

"How—how dare you, boy!" he thundered. "You have spoilt a valuable scientific negative I was developing! How dare you?"

"Please, sir— Oh, crumbs! Really, sir, I thought you were Manners— Ouch!"

Baggy's protests rose in volume. Maybe that was only natural, for Mr. Selby's temper was also rising, and Mr. Selby was getting very busy boxing Baggy's fat ears for him.

Smack!

"Wow! P-please, sir— Yoop!"

Smack, smack!

Baggy's protests rose to violent hoots, and he squirmed and struggled. But there was no squirming out of Mr. Selby's clutches when that gentleman was justly wrathful. Beyond any doubt he was justly wrathful just then.

"Stand still, boy!" he thundered. "Stand still!"

"But I haven't done anything, sir!" hooted Baggy. "My foot slipped, sir, and I fell against the door! I didn't know you were in here: I thought it was only Manners! Oh, stoppit, sir! I feel ill, sir—yoop!—and if I'm hit when I'm feeling ill— Wow!"

Baggy was hit all right, and he promptly lost his head. In fact, he did not care what he lost, so long as he could get clear of Mr. Selby's smiting hand. In consequence, the fat junior gasped out the first words that came to his tongue.

"If you knew what I know, sir— Honest Injun, sir, I thought it was Manners developing the snaps he took of the race, or I'd never have busted the door open— I mean—"

"What do you mean?" roared Mr. Selby.

"Nothing, sir, except that I know something no one else knows."

"Good gracious! What are you talking about, you ridiculous boy?" snapped the Third Form master, calming down a little, but keeping a firm grip on Baggy's fat shoulder. "Are you insane?"

"Oh, no, sir, not at all, sir!"

"Then, what did you mean by saying you thought Manners was in the dark-room or else you would not have broken open the door?" demanded Mr. Selby.

"No, sir, I didn't say that—"

"What?"

"I mean, I might have said it," floundered Baggy. "If I did, sir, it's only because I know a lot of things you don't, sir—"

"W-what!" thundered Mr. Selby again.

"No, sir, I don't mean that, either!" gasped Baggy. "At least—"

But Mr. Selby had heard enough, so he gave Baggy Trimble one parting slap over the head, and Baggy gave one final hoot. Then Mr. Selby snapped a remark at him:

"Take a hundred lines, Trimble!"

"Yes, sir!" gulped Baggy, twisting round. "Certainly, sir! Oh, my ear! Oh crumbs!"

He rolled away as fast as he could, and in his eagerness to leave Mr. Selby as far behind as he possibly could Baggy very nearly collided with Arthur Augustus at the end of the passage.

Arthur Augustus stared at him in blank astonishment.

"Gweat Scott! What evah made you do that, Baggy?" he gasped. "What evah did you want to spoil Mr. Selby's negative for and get a feahful thwashin' into the bargain?"

"I didn't want to—"

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Arthur Augustus nodded with understanding.

"I can quite undahstand that you didn't want a feahful thwashin'," he admitted. "Vewy few people do; but I'm perfectly suah you bwoke open that dark-woom door on purpose."

"Not at all."

"Well, it looked wemarkably like it fwom heah, deah boy."

"I can't help what it looked like!" snorted Baggy, holding first one ear, and then the other.

"Old Selby's a beast, and—and I'll make Crooke sit up for this!"

"Cwooke!" said Arthur Augustus. "What has Cwooke got to do with it!"

"Find out!" muttered Baggy, dodging round the swell of the School House. "You don't know everything, neither does Mr. Selby!"



From behind the tree Baggy Trimble saw the bushes part, and a junior with the number 13 on his chest came bursting out. It was Racke! He looked quickly round him and saw a junior, half concealed, lying in the undergrowth. "Crooke, are you there? Get a move on!" he gasped.

(See Chapter 4.)

And Baggy raced off, straight to the study where he had left Racke and Crooke.

The two Shell juniors were still in the room. In fact, they were anxiously awaiting Baggy's return. At sight of the fat Fourth-Former Crooke jumped up out of his chair.

"Well, Baggy," he exclaimed, "did you wangle it all right? Did you 'accidentally' burst open the dark-room door?"

"Yes," wailed Baggy.

"And Manners was inside the room?"

"No, he wasn't; Mr. Selby was!" hooted Baggy. "I biffed right into him, and—and the beast went for me before I could get away!"

"My hat!"

"In fact, my head's singing like anything, and I've gone deaf in both ears!" wailed Baggy. "I don't suppose I shall ever hear properly again!"

"And—and Manners wasn't there at all?" said Racke savagely.

"No; I tell you Selby was!" bleated Baggy, gingerly feeling his ears. "The next time you want anybody to burst open a dark-room door to spoil Manners' snapshots of the cross-country race, you can get someone else to do it!"

"That's all right, Baggy—"

"Oh, is it?" stormed the fat junior. "Anyway, I want another five bob from you two to make up for what I've suffered!"

"Give it to him, Racke," muttered Crooke.

Racke handed over the money in silence.

"I'll pay this back with the other," said Baggy, and promptly made a bee-line for the school tuckshop.

"The best thing you can do is slip along to Study No. 10, and have a chat with Manners yourself," said Crooke.

"Yes; but—" began Racke.

"Oh, it will be all right!" snapped Crooke. "Manners



said he would show you the snapshots, and so you can go and ask him if they're done."

"Yes, I could do that."

"And if you've got a brain in your head I suppose you could also find out where he keeps his exposed films," said Crooke. "Anyway, I should find out, if I were you, Racke, or else you and I stand an absolutely first-class chance of being expelled from St. Jim's!"

"I know! I'll go along at once!" muttered Racke. "I—I wish I'd never had anything to do with the rotten stunt, though, Crooke—I do, really!"

And Aubrey Racke left the study in an unenviable frame of mind.

CHAPTER 10.

Selected to Play!

AUBREY RACKE did not walk very quickly along the corridor. He by no means cared for his task of talking to Manners about his unexposed films, and he had no special desire to visit Tom Merry's study at all.

He repeatedly told himself he had nothing to be scared of in talking to Manners. After all, a new cross-country "champion" would be welcomed in almost any junior's

study, certainly in Tom Merry's, and as likely as not the Terrible Three of the Shell would want to fete Racke.

Indeed, they were almost certain to want to, as Racke knew, but that did remove the new champion's secret alarm. He hated going to Tom Merry's study, and he would have welcomed any interruption that would delay the visit. It was for that reason that he sauntered along the passage in which the junior sports notice-board was fixed.

No one else was in the passage, and Racke was not specially interested in sports notices. True Tom Merry had said something about the likelihood of there being a notice there shortly concerning Racke, but Racke had not paid much attention to that. If he had thought about it at all it was to come to the conclusion that the notice concerned the presentation of the Eastwood Cup which he was supposed to have won.

Still, he went to the board, and quite by chance, his eyes rested on the football eleven selected by Tom Merry to represent the Shell in their match on Saturday with the Fourth Form.

It was the usual list of names, of course. Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and all the rest of them—Racke only just glanced at the list.

Then suddenly he started. The last name on the list was his own. He had been picked to play for the Shell Form against the Fourth!

In blank amazement Aubrey Racke stared at the team sheet, but no amount of staring could alter facts. He was picked to play outside-right for his Form!

And as Racke stared, Tom Merry came hurrying up. With the captain of the Shell was Monty Lowther, and both juniors were grinning. They couldn't help grinning at the look of astonishment on Racke's face.

But they were cheery grins, and when Tom Merry broke the silence it was in a friendly way.

"A bit of a surprise for you, eh, Racke?" he said.

"I—I—"

"Scarcely thought you would be put into the Shell Eleven for Saturday's match with the Fourth, I expect," went on Tom Merry. "Well, to be quite candid, I am not sure I should have put you in except for the fact that Manners' ankle won't be fit in time."

"I—I see—"

"Although I meant to give you a try-out at the first opportunity," went on Tom Merry. "After the way you ran to-day, we're all anxious to see how you shape on the footer ground when you put your mind to it, Racke!"

"How I ran to-day—"

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's the idea," he explained. "You see, the Fourth Form have got one or two fliers in their forward line, and the several chaps I've tried on the Shell wings haven't been quite as speedy as I should like. That's why I've been trying Manners there lately."

"Yes, I know that—"

"But as Manners is crooked, naturally I had to try someone else," continued Tom. "As it was speed combined with stamina I was looking for chiefly, selecting the new cross-country champion was rather an automatic choice, in my opinion."

"Then—then you mean I am to turn out for the Shell on Saturday?" said Racke blankly.

"Yes, of course!"

"At outside-right?"

"That's the notion," laughed Tom Merry. "You serve up some sprints like those you served up to-day, and I'll forgive you for want of ball control. Anyway, I hope you have good luck in the match, Racke!"

"Thanks!" muttered Racke, not knowing what to say.

"I'll do my best, of course!"

"There's not much doubt about that after the way you sprinted this afternoon," laughed Tom Merry. "But come along to Study No. 10 and let's talk over the footer. I may be able to put you up to a few wrinkles."

"But—" began Racke lamely.

"Yes, come along, Racke," added Monty Lowther. "You'll find Manners in our room, wailing because Selby has boned the dark-room most of the evening."

Aubrey Racke made no further answer, but he dropped into stride with the other two juniors and they were ready enough to chat.

In fact, Tom Merry seemed to be going right out of his way to be pleasant to Racke. In a way, that was rather curious, because in the past Tom Merry had not had a great deal of use for Aubrey Racke. None of the decent, sporting juniors of St. Jim's had had much use for him, but all that seemed to be altered now. Aubrey Racke had won the cross-country race and he was the hero of the hour.

He may have been a "smoky cad" in the past, but he couldn't have been so bad as he had appeared. No chap who was could have run the race he had run that day, Tom

Merry had decided. Therefore it was possible Aubrey Racke had been rather misjudged in the past.

At any rate, that is what Tom Merry chose to think, and he was friendliness itself as he pushed open the door of Study No. 10 for the new champion to enter.

"A visitor, Manners," he called out.

"Not that fat duffer Baggy," laughed Manners. "Oh, it's you, Racke—come right in, old chap!"

Racke went into the study. He saw that Manners had on the table a certain amount of photographic material, including a spool of films. Laughingly Manners held up the spool.

"The snaps I spoke to you about are in this roll, Racke," he said. "I haven't had a chance to develop them yet because the Selby bird has been in the dark-room for ages. I shall get on to them to-morrow."

As he spoke Manners opened a drawer in the table and dropped the spool in amongst the other photographic articles it contained. He shut the drawer, and Tom Merry laughed.

"Switch off, old top," he said. "We don't want to talk about snapshots. We're here to discuss footer. Racke's just found out he's to play in the Shell Eleven on Saturday!"

"Good! I bet you're bucked, eh, Racke?"

"Yes," said Racke.

"And we shall all be watching for you to serve up some topping sprints along the touchline," went on Manners. "As I shan't be playing I shall be there with the old reflex camera and another spool of films in the film attachment, so there will be some more snaps for you to see."

"Yes," said Racke again, and he lapsed into silence once more.

But Racke's silence did not matter in the least. Tom Merry was there to do the talking, and the junior captain of St. Jim's had quite a lot to say.

Clearly and cleverly he told Racke exactly what was expected of him in the match; how he had better keep just clear of the half-back opposed to him, and wait for long, swinging passes out to the touchline.

"Then you want to sprint up like mad, just as you did this afternoon," said Tom. "Naturally you'll simply run away from the Fourth Form half, and you want to sling the ball into the centre when you're about fifteen yards from the corner flag."

"Yes, I see."

"And don't balloon the ball," urged Tom Merry. "There's no reason why a centre should imitate an air-plane. If the coast is clear, a low pass is much better than a high one."

"I suppose it is."

"Very much better," declared Tom Merry. "It stands to reason it is, because a centre-forward or one of the inside men has a much better chance of scoring with his feet than with his head. We're not all Buchans at St. Jim's, you know."

Tom Merry talked on.

He was a true football fan, in that he spent his spare time playing the game instead of watching others play it, and he had his own theories concerning tactics.

Aubrey Racke listened intently enough, but how much he understood is another matter. Still, Tom was not to suspect that, and so he talked on until bed-time.

Without question, Tom Merry was still going out of his way to be pally with the new junior champion. Racke must have seen that, and maybe he felt ashamed of himself as a result. Certainly the bumptious Aubrey Racke of the past did not show himself that evening.

In the Shell dormitory that night it was quite obvious that all the talk was about him. All of it was about the footer, too, and, whittled down, came to the question—had Tom Merry done wisely in selecting Aubrey Racke to play for the Shell in the Fourth Form match?

That was a discussion which kept the juniors talking until lights out, and started afresh next morning, Friday. Indeed, it was the chief topic of conversation all the day, and there was quite heated discussions about it. Had Tom Merry made a mistake, or had he done right? No one could be sure, of course, but everybody was at liberty to air his opinions.

And when the news that Racke was to play against them reached the Fourth Form there was equally divided opinion, with Jack Blake rather inclined to side against Tom Merry's judgment.

"Speed isn't everything," he declared. "We all know Racke is a flyer at cross-country work, but how's he going to shape with a ball at his feet?"

"Yaas, there's somethin' in that, deah boy; but Tom Mewwy knows a feahful lot about footah."

"Of course he does, ass; but even people who know a fearful lot can make mistakes, can't they?" said Jack Blake.

"As a matter of fact, I'm not so sure I haven't made a mistake by including you in the Fourth Form team, Gussy."

"Gweat Scott!"

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"Great mistake, you mean!"

"What uttah wot!" cried Arthur Augustus indignantly. "As a wingah I wathah think I can hold my own with anybody. But, of course, you're only twyin' to be funny, you duffah!"

"Not at all!"

"Then I can onlay considah that you've gone dottay in your old age," declared Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I wufuse to discuss such a wedic mattah."

"Redic is right."

"On the contwawy, it's uttahly w'ong!" roared the swell of the School House. "Ewevybody knows that you didn't pick me to play. I pwactically picked myself on my form, bai Jove!"

In other studies similar discussions were taking place, and Tom Merry was alternately praised for taking a legitimate risk in playing Racke and condemned for having made a blunder. He grinned cheerfully at the disputants.

And when the all-important Saturday came the rival factions were still discussing the Racke question. They continued to discuss it when they all gathered round the touchlines to watch the Shell v. Fourth Form game, which would finally decide the question.

But Tom had at least one piece of satisfaction, for Kildare came into the dressing-room just as the Shell fellows were changing. He drew the junior skipper to one side.

"I see you are playing Racke, Merry?" he said.

"Yes."

"Because of his pace, of course?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I know it's rather like a gamble, Kildare," he admitted. "Still, the Shell forwards haven't been any too fast of late. I thought I'd risk trying Racke because of his speed and proved stamina."

"Exactly, Merry," answered Kildare. "It's not a bad experiment, and I shall be interested to see how it turns out."

The captain of the school left at that, and Tom Merry had no further doubts. If Kildare agreed with his choice of Aubrey Racke as outside-right, then it was all right.

As a result of those few words from the skipper, Tom Merry took his side on to the field cheery and confident.

CHAPTER 11.

Shown Up!

SCARCELY had the Shell juniors taken a practice ball to one of the goals than Jack Blake led the Fourth-Formers on to the field. As usual, Jack Blake & Co. looked remarkably fit and workmanlike, and Arthur Augustus, their dashing right-winger, was immaculate in a brand new St. Jim's shirt and knickers. There was a specially loud cheer from the spectators for the swell of the School House.

But there was just as many cheers for Tom Merry & Co., because nearly all the New House juniors had come across to watch the game.

As the match was between the Shell and the Fourth of the School House, naturally no New House juniors were included. But they were there to cheer one side or the other, and to keep their eyes open watching their rivals' form.

George Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn were well to the fore in the cheering line, and Figgy had a word of encouragement for Racke.

"Don't get nerry, old top; you'll be all right."

"Rather!" shouted Kerr.

"If you sprint up like you did in the cross-country race we shan't be able to see you, you'll be moving so fast," grinned Fatty Wynn. "Good luck, Racke!"

Aubrey Racke made no answer. He did not even look towards the New House juniors, and he did not take part in the leg-loosening practice in front of the net. He just stood there apart from the other Shell juniors, a little white, certainly nervous.

Presently Kildare came on to the field. As became the captain of St. Jim's, Eric Kildare spent a good deal of his spare time "talent spotting," so he liked to referee junior matches. It gave him the best possible opportunity of studying the form of the younger members of the school.

With a wave of his hand he beckoned Tom Merry and Jack Blake into the centre of the field, and a coin was spun in the air. Then it was seen that Jack Blake was pointing to the school end of the ground. The Fourth Form had won the toss.

"But that isn't worth much," said Figgins. "No wind to speak of, and not enough sun to dazzle the eyes of an owl."

"Not even an owl like Baggy Trimble," grinned Kerr. "Oh, sorry, Baggy! Didn't see you behind me."

Baggy snorted indignantly, but no one heard his snort because Kildare had used his whistle, and Tom Merry was

kicking off. The long-looked-forward-to Shell v. Fourth match had started.

Away went the Shell front line, Tom Merry streaking through the opposing half-backs in great style. But Levison, playing at right-back for the Fourth, nipped across very neatly and tackled.

Round swung Tom Merry, and he whipped the ball to Lowther, and Monty trapped it like lightning. Then on he went, but there was no chance of the humorist of the Shell going through on his own. Still, there was a magnificent opening for one of those long, swinging passes out to the touch-line, and Monty Lowther seized the opening.

"Yours, Racke!" he shouted, and he slipped the ball smartly to the new winger.

Aubrey Racke did his best to accept the pass. He knew, of course, that all eyes were upon him, and he knew what was expected of him—a terrific burst of speed along the touch-line, and he ought to have been able to do it.

In fact, it might be said that the coast was absolutely clear for a sprint, because Herries, the Fourth Form left-

"Altogether, then!" And a roar went up—quite a friendly, encouraging roar.

"Hard luck, Racke!"

"Stick it, old son!"

"Better luck next time."

Racke bit his lip, while Gerald Crooke on the touch-line grinned sarcastically. He edged his way through the crowd until he got to an open space, and there he waited for Racke to pass him.

When Racke did pass it cannot be said that Crooke was very encouraging.

"If that's the sort of tosh you're going to serve everybody will begin to smell a rat!" he whispered. "You've got to bluff them you can sprint, somehow or other. Look, here comes a chance!"

The fine run up the field by Digby had been nipped in the bud by Clifton Dane, and a fine clearing kick had put Tom Merry in possession.

With one of his lightning passes, the Shell skipper whipped the ball out to the wing, and it was the right wing

ENGLISH football followers are evidently not the worst in the world. There is a football ground in the Argentine, around which has been erected a barbed wire fence ten feet high. This precaution was taken after a referee had been rather badly treated.

Mr. Dean, the secretary of the Clapton Orient club, had an amusing experience not so long ago. He sent by wire the names of the Clapton Orient players who would take part in a match away from home, adding his own name at the end of the message. Imagine his surprise when, on reaching the ground and obtaining a programme, he found that "Dean" was included as the Orient's outside-left.

At the start of a recent match at Chelsea, the referee handed "Andy" Wilson a coin with which to toss up. Then he forgot all about it, but the crowd noticed that Wilson carefully picked the coin up and—no, he didn't put it in his pocket. He handed it to the referee.

Hope and Dennison, two players of the Clapton Orient team, joined Norwich City in the same month, and left in the same month three years later. Each has since helped a First Division and a Southern Third club, and they have now joined forces again with the Orient.

A club which averages three points from every couple of matches can reckon on winning the championship of its section. So the slogan of the would-be champions should be: Win every match at home and draw away.

It is said that Ted Harper, the centre-forward of Blackburn Rovers, never even saw a first-class football ground until he was signed on as a professional by the Blackburn club.

half, had left Racke unmarked in order to tackle Lowther. Racke knew that, and tried to do the right thing. He kicked the ball ahead and dashed after it. But it was not much of a dash, and, to the amazement of Tom Merry & Co., Herries was overhauling the cross-country "champion" hand over fist.

Before Racke could get to the ball again, Herries was level with him, then past him, and once Herries had his foot to the leather there was not much hope for Aubrey Racke.

He tried to use his shoulder on the Fourth-Former, but Herries was much too quick for him. He side-stepped the new outside-right, beat him with absurd ease with a body feint, and whipped the ball ahead to Digby.

Off raced Digby, but the crowd scarcely looked at him. Instead, they all stared at Aubrey Racke, astounded that the one thing expected of him—speed—he had failed in.

There could be no doubt about it. Herries had beaten him easily in a twenty-yard sprint for the ball, and Herries was by no means the speediest player on the field. Experts like Figgins of the New House just couldn't understand it.

"I—I suppose he's nervous," Figgie ventured.

"Yes, must be," nodded Kerr. "Give him a shout!"



Hartlepool United have two George Richardsons often appearing in their team. Crewe Alexandra have forwards appearing side by side whose names are Harold Morris and Harry Morris. Pity the poor reporters.

An official of the Burnley club got so worried not so long ago over the fact that his movements in search of players could not be kept secret that he disguised himself by having his moustache shaved off.

George Kay, formerly of West Ham and now with Stockport County, has played football in Germany, France, Holland, Spain, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. Of the Continental players, he thinks the Czechs are the best.

Two of the Burnley full-backs—Waterfield and McCluggage, spend their spare time with homing pigeons. Waterfield has several birds which have taken prizes.

Frank Hoddinott, the New Brighton centre-forward who has played with Chelsea and the Crystal Palace, is considered the best boxer among professional footballers. He has also won many sprint events, and is a fine high jumper.

Something like half a dozen players of the Aston Villa first team are very keen on dogs, and it is suggested that soon the directors will have to provide kennels on the ground.

The oldest player in first-class football this season is James Hampson, the full-back of South Shields. But he has still some years to go ere he equals Meredith's record of playing in an English Cup tie at the age of fifty.

Another famous stalwart back is Frank Womack, of Birmingham, who is now in his twentieth season with the club. He is the captain of the side.

again. At the same time Tom Merry gave vent to a shout.

"Steady does it, Racke!"

"Away you go, old top!" added Monty Lowther. "Race Herries for it!"

The ball was some little distance ahead of Racke, and Herries was a yard behind the new forward, but they both jumped into speed at the same instant. And scarcely more than an instant later Herries was in front, literally running away from Racke again.

The Fourth-Former seemed to have no trouble at all getting to the ball, and his footwork completely beat Racke, so much so that the Shell winger descended to doubtful tactics. He shot out his left leg, and if Herries had not been very quick he would have been tripped.

As it was Kildare called out a word of warning.

"Steady, Racke—steady!"

Aubrey Racke said nothing, but his eyes were glinting, and his face was a little pale. He knew that Herries had made him appear ridiculous in the eyes of the spectators, and Aubrey Racke settled inwardly with rage at the

thought. His feelings towards the burly Fourth-Former at that moment were the reverse of friendly.

But Herries was to show up the Shell outside-right still more in a very short time. Naturally, Herries had only one desire just then—to do his very best for his side.

And obviously the best tactics from his viewpoint were to look after Monty Lowther and leave Racke more or less alone. If Herries had not realised that, Jack Blake would probably have reminded him, for Monty Lowther was always a handful if given more than a suspicion of "rope," while Racke was giving Herries little or no trouble.

Beyond any reasonable doubt, Herries played the right game in devoting his attentions to Lowther, and again and again he was able to overtake Racke when the ball was slung out to him, and so prevent a centre being put across.

It maddened Racke. He knew he was making an awful hash of matters, and he could not help himself. Sprint as he would, Herries was always there to overhaul him, and as the game wore on that process of overhauling became infinitely more easy.

The crowd realised it to their amazement. Aubrey Racke, who had "run" seven miles across country in such brilliant form, was tiring. Already the little pace he had been able to serve up was leaving him. He was easily the slowest player on the field as half-time approached.

And because of Racke's weakness the Fourth Form were more than holding their own. They were exerting a pressure which was giving Tom Merry's defence a gruelling time.

Again and again Jack Blake swung the ball out to his right, where Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was giving a very different show from Racke's wretched display. The swell of the School House was right on top of his form.

"Pass, deah boy!" he shouted more than once; and when the desired pass went Gussy's way the swell of St. Jim's did not waste any time.

He forged ahead along the touchline. He slung in some perfect centres; and Digby, Jack Blake, and Clive were always in the middle to do their best to put the finishing touches to his work.

But the luck was not going very well for the Fourth. Twice Jack Blake hit the crossbar when the Shell goalie, Gore, was hopelessly out of position; and, later, a lightning first-time shot from Digby missed by the smallest number of inches.

Still, the Fourth kept pegging away.

At a few minutes to the breather they were pressing harder than ever, and Kildare had his watch in his hand when Jack Blake gave Digby a beautiful ground pass.

But Digby was well marked by Harry Noble, and he knew what to do. He flicked the ball ahead.

"Yours, Gussy!"

"Wight, deah boy!" panted Arthur Augustus.

Digby raced for the goal-mouth, with Jack Blake and Clive in close attendance, for Arthur Augustus was travelling along the touchline in brilliant style.

With the calmness of a veteran almost he drew Bernard Glyn, at back, then centred.

"Heads up!"

And heads were up, especially Jack Blake's. In fact, Blake took the ball in the centre of his forehead and deflected it almost on to Digby's foot.

And quick as lightning Digby trapped, raced forward, then flicked the leather sideways; and the next thing the crowd saw was Jack Blake taking a first-time shot on the run.

Boomph!

The ball left Blake's foot like a shot from a gun, and Gore, under the Shell Form cross-bar, flung himself full length. But he could only get the tips of his fingers to the ball, and that was not good enough. The leather flashed to the back of the net, and the Fourth Form were one up!

The moment following the re-start Kildare whistled for half-time.

"I think you had better play straight on, Merry," he said. "The light isn't going to be any too good when the finish comes."

"Right-ho, Kildare!"

Because of that order to play on without the usual ten minutes' "breather," Tom Merry had no chance of having a quiet word with Aubrey Racke. But Tom was not specially sorry about that. After all, there was not very much he could say to the new winger who was losing the game for his side. There was barely time for a few heartening words to the rest of the team as the game was restarted.

"Keep it up, you chens! Never say die!"

In grim earnestness the Shell eleven went off their mark. Some sterling work by the inside forwards sent the ball swiftly up the field, and Tom Merry put Monty Lowther in possession.

Away went Monty.

He tricked Herries neatly, but he could not beat the back. All the same, there was a perfect opening for a forward pass, and Lowther naturally seized the opening.

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"Come in, Racke!" he shouted, and whipped the ball ahead.

The leather travelled swiftly to a point almost exactly between Reilly, the Fourth Form goalkeeper, and Aubrey Racke, and Racke was running at the time. He had a flying start and only a few yards to go to have Reilly and the Fourth Form goal at his mercy.

Truly it was the chance of a lifetime, and Racke did his utmost to take advantage of it. Certain it is that he ran as hard as he could over those few yards of ground.

But Reilly had also started to run. As quickly as he could the goalie came streaking out, but it seemed impossible that he could get to the ball before Racke.

Reilly himself didn't think that he could. Still, he tried, and the seemingly impossible happened. He beat Racke easily in the race for possession and booted the ball out of play.

In blank astonishment, the players of both teams stared at Racke. If that was the best sprint Racke could put up, how in the world had he managed to win the cross-country race? No one could begin to imagine, least of all Tom Merry.

In fact, Tom did not think much about it, for he was losing patience. He rapped out a remark to the junior he had put into the side for the sake of his "speed."

"Why on earth didn't you sprint for it, Racke?" he said.

"What's the matter with you?"

"I've—I've sprained a muscle in my leg——"

"But you're not limping!"

Aubrey Racke made no answer, but his eyes glinted again. He knew he was making a fool of himself, and the knowledge did not tend to improve his temper. He felt almost that he hated everybody on the field. And he wished heartily that he had never agreed to play.

He knew it had been a fatal mistake. His obvious lack of speed would be the topic of conversation for days amongst the juniors of St. Jim's. It might quite easily give rise to suspicions about his running in the cross-country race. Racke had not thought of that before, but he thought of it now and grew alarmed.

But growing alarmed was not going to help him.

He must do something more than that to prevent Tom Merry and all the others talking too much about his slowness; and in trying to shine Aubrey Racke undoubtedly worked very hard for the remainder of that match.

True, his motive had nothing whatever to do with his desire to benefit his side. If it came to that, Racke did not care very much whether the Shell beat the Fourth or vice-versa. But he did care very much whether he was talked about afterwards.

So Racke raced up and down the ground with the other forwards, and did not realise that he was losing his wind and his strength in his efforts. Anxiety was keeping him going, and he did not know he was getting slower and slower.

But he did know that his temper was giving out; and once, when the end of the game was in sight, he gave vent to it. He tripped Herries badly somewhere about the half-way line.

Pheep!—the whistle shrilled.

Kildare was a great stickler for clean play, and he looked angrily at Aubrey Racke.

"Play the game, Racke," he snapped.

"It was an accident——"

"Nonsense!" answered Kildare. "You swept Herries' legs from under him. Don't let it occur again!"

Herries, being nearest to the ball, took the free kick himself while Racke stood on one side, scowling. He saw Herries get his instep to the leather, and he heard the cheers of the Fourth Form partisans round the touch line. Herries had booted the ball almost into the goalmouth.

But what was even more important was the fact that Jack Blake was in possession. The ball had dropped practically at Blake's feet.

Quickly the chief of Study No. 6 swung round and glimpsed Digby unmarked. He flicked the leather to him and Digby raced ahead.

Then back came the ball to Jack Blake, and Gore rushed out from the goal. It was his one and only chance because Jack Blake was coming right through.

But Gore's chance was not a very rosy one. He knew that and did his best, but Jack Blake had the advantage and he did not waste it. He flashed the ball past the goalie and it found a resting place in the top right-hand corner of the net. The Fourth Form were two up!

"And that just about finishes the business!" said Figgins. "Tom Merry's crowd will never get on terms now."

"No chance at all," agreed Kerr. "Whatever Merry wanted to play Racke for, I can't think. He's absolutely thrown the game away for his side."

"No doubt about that!"

Kerr voiced the thoughts of the rest of the onlookers. What little form Racke had had earlier on, he had completely lost by now. It was almost true to say he could not raise a gallop. Certainly, he was left by his own colleagues of the front line whenever Tom Merry & Co. started a raid on the Fourth Form defence. Aubrey Racke was hopelessly whacked!

Everybody saw that. Everybody realised when there were only a few minutes left in the game that Racke was run to a standstill, and that meant the Shell Form were practically playing one short. And no Shell Eleven, handicapped to that extent, could hope to hold its own with Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth.

Yet, in the very last minute of the game, Tom Merry snapped up a pass from Lowther and dashed through. He raced on until a back was upon him, then transferred to Lowther. As usual, Monty Lowther spun round, meaning to use his wing partner.

But Tom Merry shouted excitedly:

"No, not to Racke— Inside again, Monty!"

"Right!" gasped Lowther, and round he spun a second time, completely deceiving Herries. "Here you are—"

As he spoke Monty slipped the ball ahead, and, taking it in his stride, Tom Merry went through.

He feinted his way past Levison and swerved into the

thing wrong. There were only ten juniors. Manners looked up from the focussing arrangement of his camera.

"Hallo, who's missing, chaps?"

"Racke!"

"Well, go and fetch him, some one," said Manners. "I can't have a team-photo spoilt because Racke's cleared off!"

"Oh, I shouldn't bothah, Mannahs, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I expect Wacke is feelin' wathah wotten aftah the display he gave. Weally, I shouldn't bothah!"

"No, never mind about Racke," added Tom Merry. Harry Manners shrugged his shoulders, and the Shell team was snapped without the missing outside-right.

Then the rival teams trooped towards the school, considerably more silent than was usually the case after an inter-form footer match. They were all puzzling over the Aubrey Racke mystery.



"Oh, my hat! Well run, Racke!" said Manners, as Crooke came panting up. Crooke turned his head swiftly. But Manners was not looking at his face, he had only read the runner's number. There was a click as the amateur photographer of St. Jim's released the shutter of his camera, and Crooke instinctively flung up his arm to shield his face! (See Chapter 5.)

penalty area. Then he let fly with all the strength he had in his right leg.

Bang!

The ball flashed for the net at an amazing speed, and a shout went up from the crowd; then a veritable roar. Tom Merry had reduced the score against the Shell Form to two goals to one in the last few seconds of the game!

"And by far the best shot of the match!" shouted Harry Manners on the touchline, armed as usual with his camera. "Good old Tommy!"

"Yes, topping shot, old chap!"

"Wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I considah that was the best goal I've ever seen scored for a long time. I hardly think I could have done better myself, bai Jove!"

The final whistle went—Pheep! The players trooped off the field to where Harry Manners was waiting to take photographs of both sides.

"The winners first, chaps," he cried. "Come on, Blake, get your cripples into some sort of formation, instead of wandering about like lost sheep."

"That'll do!"

"Yes, fine," said Manners, clicking his camera shutter. "Now, Tommy, line up the Shell!"

The Shell team lined up, but obviously there was some-

CHAPTER 12.

Photographic Proof!

"HERE you are, you chaps!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It'll be a bit of a crush, but it can't be helped. We'll soon have tea ready!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther stood hospitably on each side of the closed door of Study No. 10, and Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth, and Figgins & Co. of the New House, pressed forward. As often happened after an inter-form footer match, there was to be a spread in Study No. 10.

With a cheery laugh Tom Merry pushed open the door; then the laugh vanished completely from Tom's face. In place of if there came an expression of violent indignation, for Study No. 10 was not untenanted as it ought to have been. Baggy Trimble was there. Tom Merry fairly rushed into the room.

"Trimble, you fat rotter, what are you doing here?" he shouted.

"Nothing, Merry," gasped Baggy, in alarm. "I—" "Yes, he is!" cried Lowther. "He's out to pinch the blessed grub!"

"Not at all!" protested Baggy. "I haven't touched

your beastly grub. I couldn't touch it, because the cupboard door's locked and the key isn't in its usual place in that vase on the mantelshelf—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove!" cried Arthur Augustus. "You feahful young fabwicatiah, Twimble. In Tom Mewwy's place, I should administrah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Yes, and he's going to get one, too," suddenly shouted Manners, darting to the end of the table. "What have you opened this table-drawer for, Trimble? What have you been doing to my photographic materials?"

"N-nothing, Manners—"

"Yes, you have," roared the amateur photographer. "You've been monkeying about with my stuff! Oh, my hat! What have you done to this spool of film?"

"N-nothing at all, Manners—"

"Collar the fat villain!" roared Manners. "Bump him and sit on him; he's jolly well spoilt my snaps of the cross-country race!"

"Not weally, deah boy?"

"Yes, he has," hooted Manners. "Just look at this spool yourself. The label with the word 'exposed' on it has been cut, and—the film unrolled!"

"Gwent Scott!"

"I'm sure it has!" cried Manners hotly. "I can tell by the loose way it's wound up now. My hat, Baggy, if you've jiggered up my films on purpose, I'll—I'll—"

Baggy grew wildly alarmed.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake had gripped him by a fat arm each, and all round him there were indignant, wrathful faces. It seemed to Baggy that he was in for a bad quarter of an hour.

And Baggy Trimble was not a fellow who could stand a bad quarter of an hour stoically.

"I never touched the film, Manners!" he hooted.

"Honest Injun I didn't!"

"But you opened this drawer?"

"I may just have opened it," wailed Baggy. "But—but it was only to see what Crooke had been doing to your photographic stuff."

"What?"

"I mean—Wow! Stop it! Lemme gerrup!"

But Tom Merry and Jack Blake refused to let Baggy Trimble do anything of the sort. Instead they rolled him on the study floor and commenced a brisk course of bumping. It was the only known method of getting the truth out of the fat Fourth-Former.

"Leggo!" roared Baggy. "I didn't touch the film, you beasts! Merry, old chap, I just happened to look through the study window during the match, and I saw Crooke in here at that open drawer. I came in just now to see what he had been up to."

"Yes?"

"But I don't know anything, really, and I must go!" gasped Baggy. "I've got an appointment with the Head. I really must go! Yaroo!"

The bumping had commenced again, but Harry Manners suddenly held up his hand. He was looking very grim.

"Hold on, chaps!" he cried. "I'll take this roll of film along to the dark room, and I shall be able to find out in a minute or two whether it's been exposed to the light and ruined."

"Yaas, that's the ideah, deah boy!"

But what about that other roll of film? asked Tom Merry. "You know you used two spools on the cross-country race. Do you think that has been tampered with, too?"

Manners did not answer at once. He had forgotten the other spool of exposed negatives, and he searched in the table drawer again. He found it after a few seconds.

"No, I don't think this one has been touched," he exclaimed. "But I'll jolly soon know when I start to develop. You keep that fat rotter here, chaps, while I go to make sure in the dark-room."

Manners raced away, and Baggy Trimble grew more alarmed than ever.

"It isn't fair to blame me!" he moaned. "I haven't done any cheating!"

"Eh?"

"N-nothing, Merry, and I really must go at once. Mr. Latham is waiting for me."

"Rats!"

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, bump the ass if he starts babbling!" snapped Jack Blake. "Ring off, Trimble! We don't want to hear your cackle!"

Baggy "rang off," and Tom Merry and Jack Blake let him get up. Then, for once in his life, the fat Fourth-Former realised that silence was the best paying game. He sat dismally in a corner of the study, hoping that Harry Manners would find his films all right.

He had not long to wait. In a few minutes Manners came rushing back into Study No. 10, and it was evident

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from the expression on his face that things were not all right. His face was dark with anger. In one hand he held a long strip of black film.

"Absolutely ruined!" roared Manners. "It must have been unrolled and exposed to the daylight, and, of course, it's now as black as a boot."

"My onlay toppah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "What about the othah film, deah boy?"

"That's all right," said Manners. "It was the roll I used first, soon after the race had started. I've left it washing in the dark-room. These spoilt snaps are of the finish of the race. Baggy, you mean little rotter, what did you do it for?"

"I—I didn't!"

"Yes, you did!" shouted Manners. "You know you did; and—and I'm going to give you a hiding you'll remember all the term. Let me get at the fat beast, chaps!"

That last remark terrified Baggy Trimble. In desperation he made a dash for the door, but Figgins and Kerr were there to stop him. They held on grimly, and the fat Fourth-Former roared wildly.

"Honest Injun, I didn't touch the film!" he gasped. "I told Racke and Crooke I wouldn't—"

"What?"

"I mean to say—"

"Bump him!" ordered Tom Merry. "Hard!"

"Oh, wow!" hooted Baggy. "You beasts! Don't you dare—Yoooop!"

Bump! Bump!

"Grooh!" wailed Baggy. "Oh, my back! You ask Crooke, if you want to know, not me!"

"Eh?"

"Yes, you beasts!" gasped Baggy. "I didn't want to destroy any snapshots of Racke in the race—"

"What's that?" cried Tom Merry. "Blake, there's something funny in all this. Bump the truth out of the fat spoofer!"

But Jack Blake suddenly released his grip on Baggy. Always very shrewd, the chief of Study No. 6 turned quickly to Manners.

"Why not go and get your other strip of film, old chap?" he flashed. "He keeps bringing Crooke's name into the business, and now he's mentioned Racke."

"Not at all!" gulped Baggy. "I'm not a sneak! Besides, it's nothing to do with me. I told Crooke I wouldn't try to spoil any more photos, after biffing into the Selby bird in the dark-room—"

"My onlay toppah!" cried Arthur Augustus. "I distinctly wemembah that incident. Deah boys, I actually saw Baggy Twimble burstin' open the dark-woom door on purpose, because he thought Mannahs was inside developin' films."

"I didn't!"

"That's what you told Mr. Selbay, anyway," declared Arthur Augustus severely. "Weally, Mannahs, I think you will be very wise to take Blake's advice, and go and fetch your other negatives. It will, at any rate, pwevent any more wotten attempts to destroy them, bai Jove!"

"You bet I will!" said Manners grimly. "While I'm gone, you chaps bump some more of the truth out of Trimble. The fat little rotter's been hinting at a lot of things lately, and a good bumping ought to make him do more than hint."

And Manners, leaving Baggy Trimble to the tender mercies of Tom Merry & Co., dashed off again to the dark-room.

CHAPTER 13.

Caught Out!

IN another study not very far away from Study No. 10, Aubrey Racke and Gerald Crooke were about to have tea.

In fact, the kettle was singing on the hob, and the two cronies were only waiting for Clampe, who had been invited to tea, to put in an appearance. Not that Racke and Crooke were thinking much about Clampe; they were too busy discussing the Shell and Fourth footer match of that afternoon.

"Of all the rotten footer I ever saw put up, yours was the worst, Racke," jeered Crooke. "I never thought you could make such an ass of yourself."

"Oh, I don't want your criticism!"

"My dear man, it isn't what you want, it's what you've got to have!" declared Crooke. "I am not at all sure you haven't given the show away with your display as a winger. At any rate, you've started every chap in the school gassing about you."

"Rot it!"

"Is it?" jeered Crooke. "Suppose I told you that I heard Figgins say to Kerr— Oh, come in, whoever you are!"

This was in answer to a very polite tap on the study door.

Without more ado the door opened and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in. There was something very grim and stern about the swell of St. Jim's at that moment. He had his monocle firmly in his eye, and he was viewing Racke and Croke very severely through it.

Croke leaned back angrily.

"Well, what are you here for, D'Arcy?"

"I'm on a vewy unpleasant mission, Cwooke," replied Arthur Augustus. "I wegwet to say I have been detailed to wequest your pwesence and the pwesence of Wacke in the Shell Form Common-woom."

"Eh?"

"And at once, Cwooke!" added Arthur Augustus. "For your information, there is a Lower School meetin', and you are wequiahed to attend."

Arthur Augustus made no reply.

"Is—is it, D'Arcy?" asked Racke.

Still silence from the swell of St. Jim's, and Racke and Croke followed him from the study without asking any more questions.

Without speaking, Arthur Augustus led the way to the Shell Common-room. At the door of the room Lowther and Harry Noble were stationed. They appeared to be the official doorkeepers, for they opened the door for Arthur Augustus, Racke, and Croke to enter the room.

And in the room were all the Fourth Form and Shell Form of the School House, and in addition, Figgins & Co., Redfern, and all the New House juniors. At the far end of the room there was a table, and at the head of this sat Tom Merry. On each side of Tom were Figgins and Jack Blake.



"Well run, Racke!" "Three cheers for the winner!" The juniors crowded round the successful Shell junior. Aubrey Racke was the hero of the hour for the first time in his life. "Congwats, Wacke, old man!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. (See Chapter 6.)

"Rats!"

"And if you wefuse to attend, then I shall have to wetiah for assistance in ordah to take you to the meeting by force," said the dandy of the Fourth. "I shall hate havin' to do that, but the mattah is quite out of my hands. Pway decide whethah you will come of your own' fwee will, or would wethah be cawwed there?"

Racke and Croke went as white as a sheet. An evil conscience was making cowards of them; but Croke, at any rate, did his utmost to conceal his feelings. He turned angrily again to Arthur Augustus.

"What are you burbling about, D'Arcy?" he said.

"What's the meeting about?"

"I'm not at liberty to say, Cwooke!"

"But you know?"

"Yaas, I know," admitted Arthur Augustus. "Still, it's no good discussin' that mattah. The weal point is, are you two comin' to the meetin' of your own free will or not?"

Neither Racke nor Croke were exactly fools. They saw from Arthur Augustus' manner that something very serious had happened, and they automatically rose to their feet. At the same time Gerald Croke continued to do his utmost to keep up his appearance.

"I expect it's something to do with the presentation of the Eastwood Cup to you, Racke," he said.

All round the table were other leading lights of the Lower School of St. Jim's.

As Arthur Augustus and his charges entered, Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"Close the door, Noble!" he called out. "Stand with your back to it so that no one else can come in. Racke, it's only fair right at the start to tell you why you have been brought before this meeting."

Aubrey Racke bit his lip.

He felt that it was up to him to make an indignant rejoinder, but he could not think of one. He could only stare in rapidly growing alarm at Tom Merry. Very quietly Tom Merry broke the silence.

"Racke, at the finish of the St. Jim's Junior Cross-country Race you were proclaimed the winner," he said. "Some time next week Lord Eastwood will visit St. Jim's, and the challenge cup will be presented to you. Before that presentation is made this meeting wants to know whether you won the race fairly?"

"Of course he did!" exclaimed Crooke, fearing what Racke would say in his alarm.

"I'm not speaking to you, Crooke!" snapped Tom Merry.

"I asked Racke the question!"

"Well, Crooke has answered it for me," said Racke. "Of course I won the race fairly!"

"Then please come here to this table!"

In silence Racke approached the table. Lying on it was a gaslight print from a photographic negative. The print was still damp, showing that it had only just come from the washing-bath. Tom Merry picked up the print and handed it to Racke.

"That snapshot was taken by Manners," he said sternly. "You can see that it was snapped not very far from the cross-roads where Monteith was acting as 'check' in the race. You'll notice, too, that it is a snapshot of one of the competitors!"

"I—I see that!"

"And you can see that the number on the runner's vest is No. 13," went on Tom Merry. "That's plain enough, isn't it?"

"Yes!"

"And No. 13 was your number!" cried Tom Merry. "Now look at the runners face, which was turned straight to the camera. Crooke, you had better look at it, too!"

Slowly Crooke came to the table.

He knew, of course, that he would see his own face in the snapshot, but he looked at it carefully. He went white. But there could be no possible mistake about the snap. It was an absolutely likeliest photograph of Gerald Crooke.

But Crooke refused to give in.

"I—I see what you're driving at, Merry!" he cried. "At least, I can imagine. Anyway, that snapshot can't be of me, so the photo is faked!"

"Manners," rapped Tom Merry, "tell the meeting how you obtained the snapshot!"

Manners jumped up, and his evidence was very clear. He explained how he had been in the hedge and had snapped Racke, as he thought, as a junior raced past. Then Manners went on to explain that one spool of his film had been wilfully destroyed.

"Only the rotter who did it can't have known about my having a second spool," Manners added. "If he had, I expect that would have been destroyed, too. As it is, I developed the films, soaked them in methylated spirits, so that they could be dried quickly, and got out this gaslight print. It's just an ordinary snapshot, of course, without any faking about it."

"It can't be!" cried Crooke.

"Wait a minute, Crooke!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You shall have your say when we have finished with our evidence. Trimble, come along up to the table!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Baggy, coming forward. "This isn't my fault, Racke. Honest Injun, I didn't give you away—"

"Hold your tongue, Trimble!" rapped Tom Merry. "Wait until questions are put to you. You went to Rylcombe Woods on the afternoon of the race?"

"Y-yes, I did just walk through the woods—"

"And you saw Racke and Crooke change places soon after the start of the race," said Tom Merry, "and again just before the finish. In other words, Racke and Crooke, both dressed exactly alike and wearing the same number on their running vests, each ran half the distance?"

"Oh crumbs—"

"Answer 'yes' or 'no'!"

"Yes," gulped Baggy. "Of course, I would have told you before, Merry, only I—I didn't like to give Racke away—"

"That's enough!" rapped Tom Merry. "Now, Crooke, you and Racke can speak. What have you got to say?"

And what could Racke and Crooke say in the circumstances? They were caught out, and they knew it!

Baggy Trimble's evidence, that unanswerable snapshot of Harry Manners—there could be no bluffing away facts like those. Even Gerald Crooke realised that, and he did not try. He merely attempted an excuse.

"It was all a jape, of course, Merry—"

"A jape?" said Tom scornfully. "How about that promise of Racke's uncle to send Racke money if he shone in sport at St. Jim's, then? You seem to have forgotten that you showed Trimble the letter. If you like I'll call upon Trimble to explain further."

But Racke and Crooke did not like. They could only hang on Tom Merry's next words and hope for the best; but when those words came they did not end the suspense for the black sheep.

"You two had better go out of the room," the junior captain said. "D'Arcy will call you in when we've decided what is to be done."

"Yaas, pway step out of the woom," said Arthur Augustus. "You can wait in the cowwidor."

Racke and Crooke waited. It was rather a long wait, and they did not talk much during it. It was with intense relief that Racke and Crooke saw the aristocratic features of Arthur Augustus appear round the door again.

"Pway come in!" said the swell of the School House; and Racke and Crooke entered.

(Continued on next page.)



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

HE'S SELFISH!

A keen footer player, living at Birmingham, tells me that he is captain of his school team, and he finds the job anything but a bed of roses. It's like this. His right-winger is a very brilliant player, possessed of astonishing speed and precision when it comes to slamming the leather goalwards. But he can't dribble for toffee! The trouble is this right-winger is a bit swollen-headed. He knows he can foot it along the touchline quicker than anyone else in his team; he knows that most of his shots at goal are good 'uns. Yet he will play to the gallery; he will attempt to keep the ball longer than he should. The result is invariably the same, so my correspondent says. This right-winger gets beaten, and valuable chances are lost to his side. He's been taken to task over this selfishness, but talking doesn't seem to make any difference in his play. Now, my correspondent wants to know if this selfish winger should be dropped from the team. If he is dropped the captain, as is usual, will come in for a storm of criticism from onlookers who don't stop to think of the matter from an impartial point of view. Yet it is obvious that this selfish player is no real use to his side. What I would advise is this. Call a meeting of your footer club committee, my Birmingham chum, and have this winger up before you. Give him a strong talking to—a final warning. Then, if he persists in playing his selfish game, drop him out of the team. It's a rotten job, I know. Still, for the sake of the side, it should be done.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,028.

IS WALKING GOOD FOR HIM?

J. W. (of Eltham) wants to know if walking is a good exercise. It certainly is, my chum. But you've started the wrong way, you know. You tell me that you got a sudden craze for walking and kicked off with a twelve-mile tramp. Of course, you were a bit stiff when you got home, but you're wrong when you say that that awful stiffness told you that walking wasn't good for you. Now, if you had taken things a little more modestly at the beginning—say, a three-mile walk—that stiffness would not have developed. Your next tramp could be over a distance of five miles, and so on until you had reached a reasonable distance limit. Don't forget you're only thirteen years of age. There's plenty of time for you to do Brighton and back when you are older and in tip-top training. Small beginnings lead to the big things. Don't try and jump the ladder even over a matter of walking. Take it rung by rung, so to speak. It's not half so painful, believe me.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

The GEM for next week is a bumper one, chums, for it contains an extra-special and extra-long Guy Fawkes' story, featuring your old favourites, Tom Merry & Co.

"ANYBODY SEEN OUR GUY?"

is the title of this sparkling yarn, which is guaranteed to supply the biggest bang of the week! Martin Clifford shows up to the greatest advantage in this magnificent tale, and it behoves all "Gemites" who want to make sure of not missing a special treat to order their copy WELL IN ADVANCE!

Look out, too, for the solution of last week's

"HIDDEN NAMES PUZZLE"

also another thrilling instalment of

"THE ROOKWOOD DICTATOR!"

By Owen Conquest.

—the serial of the year.

Your Editor.

Very quietly Tom Merry delivered the verdict.

"Of course, you've realised that the junior cross-country race can't stand, Racke," he said. "That must have been quite clear. Whether you would rather have the Head deal with the whole affair, or whether you will accept a Lower School licking from us, is for you to decide."

"A—a Lower School licking!" muttered Crooke. "If we accept that, what happens afterwards, Merry?"

"Racke will have to go to the Head and make some excuse about not having run the proper distance during the race," explained Tom Merry. "What excuse he does make won't concern us—it's got to be jolly well clear enough, though, to wash out the last race and have quite a new one."

"I see!"

"And then Racke will have to write to his uncle also, explaining he didn't run the full course," continued Tom Merry. "We're all agreed that it isn't right he should get money through cheating. That letter will have to be shown to one of us before it's posted."

"And the licking?" muttered Aubrey Racke.

"That will take place now," said Tom Merry. "And I warn you it'll be a stiff one!"

The two cads of the Shell looked at each other, and Crooke shrugged his shoulders. There was only one thing the two black sheep could do. They must take the licking or accept the alternative, which would most likely be expulsion. Crooke put their decision into words.

"We'll take the licking."

"Right!" answered the captain of the Shell. "Six of us have been detailed to administer it. D'Arcy, bring the cane!"

Details of the licking received by Racke and Crooke need not be described. It was a very severe licking; but there was not a trace of bullying about it. It was just rough justice being meted out, and Racke and Crooke were remarkably lucky in getting off so easily.

In fact, it was not nearly so painful as the one they were both likely to get when they went home for the next vacation. They would probably find big trouble awaiting them, for both black sheep had to appeal to their respective fathers for the cash they owed to the various local tradesmen.

The whole affair was more or less forgotten by Tom Merry & Co., however, in the excitement provided by the re-running of the junior cross-country championship. And, so far as thrills and excitement went, the second race more than equalled the first.

This time there was no Racke to go dashing ahead, and the juniors were more or less in a bunch as they came out of the corner of the woods. Manners, his right ankle fit now, was slightly in front; but Arthur Augustus was running him very close.

But it is little use trying to "spot" the winner of a cross-country race at the commencement of the event. It is the finishing half-mile which counts for so much, so the spectators crowded back into the school gateway.

And they had not long to wait for their first glimpse of the runners. On they came in a bunch, it seemed, in the distance. Certainly, there was no one leading the way home as had been the case when Aubrey Racke had become "champion." But various partisans thought their favourites were in front.

"Tom Merry wins—"

"Blake, you mean!"

"No, I jolly well don't! Oh, my hat, look at Figgy!"

And George Figgins of the New House was worth looking at. Long-legged and wiry, he was running dead level with Tom Merry. Just behind was Jack Blake and Kerr. But the race was between Tom Merry and Figgy—everybody was sure of that.

"Come on, Tommy!"

"Sprint up, Figgins! Don't go to sleep, Figgy!"

On the friendly rivals came. They were running dead level again. They were still level when there were only a few yards left in the race.

"Quick, Monteith!" shouted Kildare. "Get the tape across the gateway—it's going to be a dead heat!"

It certainly looked like it until Tom Merry forced himself just a few inches in front.

"Stick to it, Tommy! Come on!"

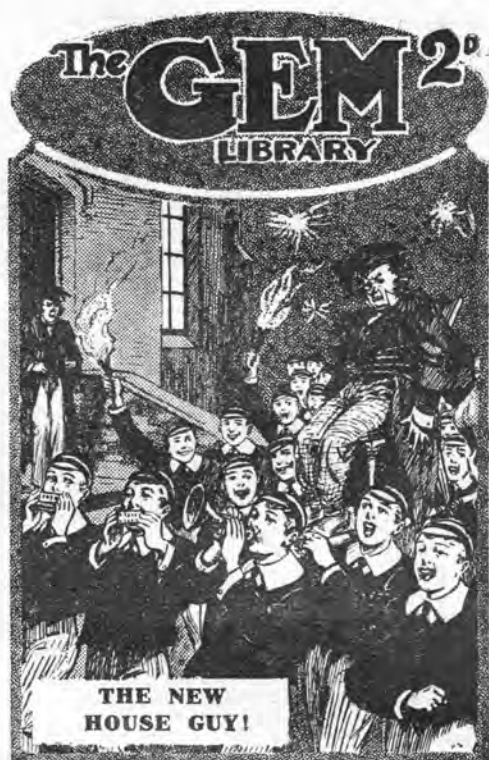
"Sprint, Figgy! New House wins!"

And George Figgins did sprint—a wonderful last-moment spurt that carried him perhaps a foot in front of Tom Merry.

He flung up his arms, and his chest broke the tape that Kildare and Monteith were holding, so there could be no shadow of doubt about that result. George Figgins of the New House was the new junior cross-country champion of St. Jim's.

THE END.

THE FIFTH AT ST. JIM'S!



There'll be a lot of big bangs next Saturday; a lot of cheery laughter and youthful noise for the Glorious Fifth will be celebrated once more.

And next week's GEM will give an extra filip to the great occasion, for Martin Clifford has written

A Special Guy Fawkes Story

that will provide the biggest BANG of the week. If any of you chaps miss

"ANYBODY SEEN OUR GUY?"

you'll be missing the treat of the year.

ORDER YOUR GEM EARLY, BOYS!

A COWARD'S BLOW! Someone has foully struck down Carthew of the Sixth, and the evidence seems to point to Lovell as being the guilty party. But his chums know him too well!

The Rookwood Dictator!

By Owen Conquest.



An Amazing School Story of Jimmy Silver & Co., the Heroes of Rookwood.

Who Did It?

"MY—my hat!" breathed Jimmy Silver at last. "It makes it look as if one of the Fascists did it, but that's impossible, Morny!"

"I agree," said Mornington quietly. "But the question is, what will the Head think?"

"We were told to go to Dicky at once," put in Raby. "Better get along and thrash the whole thing out, Jimmy." Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Carthew hasn't come round yet, of course?"

"Not yet. When he does, he may be able to clear you chaps. That is, if he saw his assailant."

"Come on!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

Way was made for the Fistical Four, and they hastened to Masters' Corridor. Why anyone should stun Carthew was a complete mystery to them, but it had occurred. And the Fascists were implicated—though they were certain among themselves that their identity had been borrowed by the guilty party.

In response to Mr. Dalton's invitation, Jimmy Silver opened his study door, and Lovell, Raby and Newcome trooped in behind their leader.

Mr. Dalton's glance was quite inexpressive.

"So you have returned, Silver? Where have you been, my boy?"

"Picnicking in Coombe Woods, sir," answered Jimmy.

"Very good. Why are you late for call-over?"

"We smashed a few cups and things packing, sir. And I'm afraid we left it rather late before starting."

"That we will pass over for the present," said the Form master seriously. "I want you to answer my next question carefully. Did you meet anybody whom you know while you were out?"

"Not a soul, sir," answered Jimmy. "Excepting—"

"Yes?"

"A rascal whom we fell foul of once before—a Captain Punter, sir. You remember him, I expect. We ragged him. We didn't meet anybody else, sir."

"Are you aware that Carthew has been brought in, stunned?"

"Mornington told us, sir."

"It comes to this," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "Do not think for one moment that I suspect you—I do not. But Carthew did not go out till late in the afternoon—we have Knowles' word for that. Naturally, every junior who returned to the school after the time the deed was done is more or less under suspicion. In the circumstances, your being late for call-over has attracted attention. And a card found on Carthew—throwing suspicion on this—ahem!—organisation known as the Fascists. I shall not ask you boys if you know anything about these Fascists—it would be remarkable if you did not—but I do not con-

sider that a fair question. I merely require your assurance that you know nothing whatever with any bearing on Carthew's accident this afternoon. Have I that?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Jimmy Silver, at once.

"We've been in the woods all the time, sir, as Jimmy says!" agreed Raby.

"Lovell—Newcome. You say the same?"

"Naturally, sir!"

"Very good!" said Mr. Dalton. "You may go now, my boys. I trust that the culprit will be discovered in due course. If anything comes to your ears, you must not hesitate to inform me. This is an act of utter hooliganism—and you will not be sneaking, as you call it. You have nothing to tell me?"

"I'd like to say a word, sir," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully.

"Go on."

"That—that card, sir. I don't think the Fascists had anything to do with stunning Carthew. It looks more like a trick of the guilty party to put it on to them. I'm told that the Fascists were only formed to prevent injustice, sir."

Jimmy Silver paused after that rather bold speech. Mr. Dalton gave him a very peculiar glance. But he did not pursue the point.

"Thank you for the suggestion, Silver. I will bear it in mind. That will be all."

The Form master nodded, and the Fistical Four left the study. They repaired to the End Study, with Mornington and Erroll, to discuss the matter which was occupying the minds of the whole school. Who could have stunned Carthew? And for what reason? The card pointed to the culprit being in the school. But it was impossible to fix suspicion on any fellow in particular.

"It wasn't one of the Fascists," said Mornington finally, over supper in the End Study. "Some out-and-out cad using our name—that's plain. But who else had a grudge against Carthew?"

"Goodness knows."

The study door opened, and Conroy looked in, with a glum expression.

"You fellows heard the news?"

"The culprit found?"

"No. All half-holidays stopped till the chap is caught!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Rotten, isn't it?" asked Conroy.

"Awful!" groaned Lovell. "Dash it all, we shall have to put our thinking-caps on and find out who it was."

"And Carthew's come round," added Conroy. "He's in a pretty bad way, it seems. But he says that he saw a figure, in a cowl and robe, with a black mask—there may have been more."

"By gad!"

"Somebody pinched our clobber," said Lovell grimly.

"But who?" asked Newcome.

A Grim Clue!

THERE was silence in the End Study.

The inmates were thinking hard—turning over in their minds all the possible delinquents.

"By Jove, it's pretty rotten to have to suspect fellows in our own Form," said Raby thoughtfully.

"The card points to it being somebody in the Fourth," said Mornington.

"And not a Fascist," added Erroll. "Some fellow who wanted to put the blame on our shoulders."

"That takes us a little way," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "We agree that it wasn't one of us, and that leaves only a few chaps whom we haven't admitted to the Fascist Band. Peele, Gower, Lattrey, and their kidney."

"We're narrowin' the circle of suspicion," remarked Mornington. "Take your choice, gentlemen—Peele?"

"Give a chap justice—even Peele!" said Lovell. "Why should Peele knock Carthew over the head?"

"No reason that we know of," admitted Morny. "Matter of fact, I believe they're on rather friendly terms. How about Gower?"

"Hasn't got the nerve, for one thing," said Lovell. "You know he always follows Peele's lead."

"Wash out Gower, then, Lattrey? By gad!"

"What are you gadding about?" demanded Lovell.

"Lattrey!" repeated Mornington, a shade of excitement crossing his face.

"Out with it, Morny. What do you know about the chap?"

"Nothin'—nothin' definite," answered Mornington, regaining his calm. "But we've got down to this. It's a Fourth Form man we're after—an' one of the cads, at that. There aren't many cads in the Fourth, thank goodness. Lattrey's as likely as anybody—an' much more likely than some. An' I've just remembered somethin', too."

"What's that?"

"Carthew was hurt late in the afternoon, when most of the fellows were playin' footer, or boatin', or, at any rate, well clear of the lane. Carthew was attacked only a few hundred yards from the gates, only a few minutes after he left Knowles' study. Dalton told you that much, I suppose?"

"Dicky said that every fellow who came in after that was more or less under suspicion," said Jimmy Silver.

"More or less," agreed Mornington. "But rather less, in my humble opinion."

"Why?" demanded Lovell impatiently.

"Because any fellow who was out at that time was well away from the scene—as you were yourselves," continued Mornington coolly. "On the river—in the woods—in the village—anywhere; but not in the lane a few hundred yards from the gates. An' I can imagine any fellow who did the job streakin' back to the school as quick as he could an' sneakin' in the back way, too. What do you think?"

"It's certainly probable," admitted Erroll.

"Now we come to the chap who was seen leavin' the school soon after footer practice began," went on Morny calmly. "I dodged off the field—"

"When you thought my eye was off you, you slacker!" remarked Erroll.

"Exactly, dear man. An', havin' nothin' to do, I hung around the gates for quite a time. I can't go as far as to say that nobody went out or came in without my spottin' them until Carthew was brought in, but I don't think they did. Whilst I was there that fat fool Muffin played a silly trick. He wants bumpin'!"

"A silly trick?"

"Yes. He went up to Knowles, who was standing near, and put his fingers to his nose. Knowles made a jump at him, but Muffin cleared off like the wind, yellin' somethin' about tellin' the Dictator if he was touched. Then I saw Lattrey come out, and disappear through the gates and—"

"When?"

"Quite early. But he seemed excited, an' he refused my charmin' society on his little stroll. Lattrey's usually keen enough to pal up with me, if I'd let him. Point number one. Then he was carryin' a small bag. Why was he takin' a bag out of gates, an' where to? Point the second. Then—an' I'm tolerably sure of this—he didn't come in again before Carthew arrived, with Bulkeley an' Neville carryin' him."

"That's no more suspicious than us cutting call-over!" snorted Lovell.

"Isn't it? Yet when I followed Bulkeley an' Neville into Hall there was Lattrey, lookin' as white as a sheet. Funny how he got in again without me seein' him. I'm not an unobservant chap, as a rule. I couldn't swear to it, but it's queer, you'll admit?"

"If you're not mistaken, it's queer enough," admitted Lovell thoughtfully.

"Well, I've stated my reasons for suspectin' Lattrey before the rest of the Fourth," said Mornington, shrugging his shoulders. "Not that it matters a fig to me, of course. But if it's one of our men, then Lattrey's my choice."

"Might have been a Shell fellow?" suggested Raby.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Not very likely. They don't breed nerve of that kind in Adolphus Smythe's crew. I'm beginning to think there may be something in what Morny says."

"So am I," announced Lovell. "Lattrey's just the kind of worm to do a thing like that—always supposing he had some pretty strong reason."

"The kind of worm Lattrey is cannot be regarded as evidence," reminded Jimmy Silver. "All the same, it won't do any harm to ask Lattrey one or two questions in dorm to-night, will it?"

"Rather not!"

"No bullying, but a plain answer demanded!" remarked Raby.

The study door opened, to admit Bulkeley's head.

"Bed-time, kids! Get a move on!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. made a move with considerable alacrity. Whoever had attacked Carthew deserved to be visited with the severest punishment; that was agreed. Ragging Carthew was one thing, but attacking him like a hooligan was another. And, with half-holidays stopped till the delinquent was found, the matter demanded immediate attention.

The suspicions that Mornington had outlined were communicated to the rest of the Fascists, but no move was made until Bulkeley had turned out the light. Then candles began to be lit, and several fellows rolled out of bed.

Lattrey sat up in his bed, looking considerably alarmed, as a little group gathered around his bedside.

In the candle-light his face was white, and if innocent, he did not look the part. But fair play was Jimmy Silver's motto, and so far there was nothing but mere unsatisfactory suspicion against Lattrey.

"Look here! What's this game?" snapped Lattrey, as he was surrounded.

"It isn't a ragging, so keep cool," answered Jimmy Silver judiciously. "We're a committee of inquiry into the mystery of the attack on Carthew."

"What? You—you don't suspect—"

Lattrey's tongue clove to the top of his mouth. He was fortunate that in the candle-light his fear did not show up so plainly as it might have done.

"Morny saw you go out of gates looking suspicious," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "You carried a bag, and you didn't want company. This committee wants to know where you went. If you can give a satisfactory reply, that's good enough!"

"Think out a good one, Lattrey, old bean!" urged Mornington.

"Shut up, Morny!"

Lattrey licked his lips.

He had never dreamed that suspicion would centre upon him at once. But he realised that on his reply depended everything that mattered. He pulled himself together with an effort, and contrived to get a sneer into his voice when he spoke.

"Fast enough downin' on me, aren't you, Silver?"

"That's not an answer," said Jimmy coolly.

"Well, if you must know, I went to the village an' took the bag to be mended!" snapped Lattrey, his eyes gleaming at the juniors.

"Oh!"

"And if you're not satisfied, go and tell Dalton your rotten suspicions!" flamed the cad. "I'm goin' to sleep!"

And Lattrey dropped his head on his pillow sulkily.

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders, and Mornington laughed.

"Nothin' doin'—what?"

"We can't treat the chap as if he were guilty," said Jimmy.

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WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

Jimmy Silver & Co., the Chums of Rookwood, angered by the persecution of Mark Carthew, a bullying prefect of the Sixth, form a secret organisation called the Fascist Band of Rookwood. In due course, Carthew and his cronies are given the ragging of their lives, the Fascists being careful to cover up their tracks by electing only a few of their numbers to act on each occasion.

Later, Lattrey bumps into Captain Punter, a rascally book-maker, who expounds a scheme to get Jimmy Silver & Co. expelled from Rookwood. Unable to pay his debts, Lattrey is forced to fall in with the rascal's wishes, with the result that Carthew is found shortly afterwards lying stunned in a nearby lane with a cord pinned to his coat bearing the words: "Hands off the Fourth!—The Dictator," the presence of which turns suspicion on the Fourth at once.

(Now read on.)

"No, you're right, old bean," admitted Mornington. "We can't yet. Good-night, Lattrey!"

Mark Lattrey did not reply.

Mornington's suspicions had hit him hard—had aroused a host of fears in his bosom. But he had his part to play, and there was nothing for it now but to play it out to the bitter end. It was dawn before Lattrey slept properly, and his heavy eyelids did not pass unnoticed in the morning.

"Sleep well, Lattrey?" asked Mornington keenly, as he left the dormitory.

"Eh? No. Toothache," snapped Lattrey.

Mornington nodded, and went down with Erroll.

At the breakfast table, Lattrey's heavy looks were commented upon in whispers. Already suspicion was floating around him—striving to drag him into her net, as it seemed to the cad of the Fourth.

He went in to classes that morning with a haggard face, but endeavouring to keep his nerve successfully. Classes were an ordeal for Lattrey. He had, somehow, to keep his nervous and harassed state from his Form master; but it was difficult.

He was called upon to construe, and boggled miserably over a simple passage from Livy.

Mr. Dalton's keen glance rested on him, and there was more than one murmur in the Fourth.

"By gad! Lattrey's givin' himself away," breathed Mornington to Erroll, in the next seat.

"It looks like it," agreed Erroll.

"Lattrey! Have you prepared this passage?" asked Mr. Dalton grimly.

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"I—I had a headache last night, sir. I've been awake nearly all night with that—and toothache as well."

Mr. Dalton's expression softened. Even a slackler like Lattrey was entitled to consideration if he were unwell.

"Very well. Does your tooth trouble you now, my boy?"

"A little, sir."

"You may go to the House dame and get something to ease it, if you wish," said the Form master kindly.

"Oh, thank you, sir."

Lattrey left the Form-room, and the lesson proceeded.

The cad was deeply thankful for the respite. It gave him time to think. He could see that he was giving himself away; but how to dispose of the terrible fear that gnawed unceasingly at his mind he did not know.

He tottered up to his study, with the intention of staying there until he had mapped out some plan to avoid conviction. Going on at his present rate, he would give himself away completely before long.

He turned into the Fourth Form corridor, and stopped dead. There were voices—masters' voices—coming from the studies! With a wildly beating heart, Lattrey slid into an alcove in the wall and listened.

He recognised the full and fruity voice of Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, followed by the grim tones of Dr. Chisholm, the Head, himself! And their very next words startled Lattrey as if they had been a bombshell.

"I think that will do, Mr. Greely. We will now search this room."

Unable to restrain himself, Lattrey peered round the corner of the wall and glimpsed the Head and Mr. Greely just entering the End Study.

Lattrey's breath became almost inaudible.

There was relief—and a terrible sense of guilt—in his heart at that moment. The Head and the Fifth Form master were searching the studies while their occupants were in classes, and the cad did not need to be told for what they were searching.

Carthew had been stunned, and Lovell's stick had been used. Lattrey had with his own hand concealed it, and he trembled at the thought.

He longed to tear himself away—to return to the Form-room and let matters take their course. But the voices of the two masters held him as if hypnotised.

"There appears to be no sign in this room, Mr. Greely. It is hardly to be expected—Silver and his friends occupy it, I believe."

"Indeed, sir?"

"What have you found, Mr. Greely?"

"Something of paramount importance, sir," came Mr. Greely's fruity voice.

"What—what is that?"

"A stick, sir—a stick, the head covered with bloodstains. It was behind this bookcase—"

"Let me see it, Mr. Greely."

"There is no doubt that that is the stick which was used, I think, Dr. Chisholm!"

There was a pause.

"There cannot be, Mr. Greely. There is a name here, I see, scratched on the band."

"Exactly, sir. The name is that of Arthur Edward Lovell, of this study."

Lattrey gulped.

He could stand no more.

But with a supreme effort, he threw off his look of fear and apprehension. There was no need to fear now. With a set mouth, he returned to the Form-room.

He drew a good many glances as he resumed his place.

Lattrey sat coolly in his seat as the lesson wore on.

A Bolt from the Blue!

"YOU will continue, Muffin—"

Tap, tap!

Mr. Dalton glanced rather irritably at the Form room door.

Tubby Muffin sat down again, laying down his book with considerable relief.

All the Fourth, in fact, appeared relieved and pleased as there came that tap. Nobody enjoyed Latin construe, even with a sportsman like "Dicky" Dalton. Any kind of interruption was welcome—and judging by the august shadow on the glass of the upper panel, it was the Head who wished to speak to Mr. Dalton.

"Your luck's in, Tubby," whispered Lovell, grinning. "The Head will keep Dicky occupied for some time—if he's in his usual form!"

"I hope so," muttered Muffin. "I say, what does 'Arma virumque cano' mean, old chap?"

"Silence!"

"Oh, lor!"

Mr. Richard Dalton glanced severely over his Form before calling in response to the Head's tap. The Fourth obediently relapsed into silence.

"Come in."

The door opened. Mr. Dalton stared a little.

The Head inclined his head, and entered the Form-room. He was followed by Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, and Mr. Greely wore an expression of the utmost seriousness.

"Dr. Chisholm. You wished to speak to me?"

"Yes, Mr. Dalton, I did. Pray, close the door, Mr. Greely."

"Certainly, sir."

Dr. Chisholm's stern eyes roamed over the Fourth, and there was an involuntary hush. The Head's manner was one of grim foreboding. Evidently some fellow had transgressed more seriously than usual, and each of the juniors sat tight and hoped devoutly that it was not himself.

"Mr. Dalton, I have to broach an exceedingly serious matter—referring to Carthew's accident in the lane yesterday."

"Indeed, sir! You have discovered the culprit?"

"I would not say that, sir. But a piece of evidence has been brought to light—"

"I have it here, Mr. Dalton," said Mr. Greely ponderously.

"You mean—"

"I regret to say that I believe the guilty lad to be a member of your Form, Mr. Dalton," said the Head.

"Oh!"

There was a gasp from the Fourth at that.

Surprise and not a little indignation shone on nearly every face. Only Lattrey sat silent and pale as a ghost. But nobody noticed Lattrey just then.

Perhaps the Fourth did not look at Carthew's accident in quite the same light as the Head. Although they were sympathetic, they could not realise the enormity of the matter in the way that Dr. Chisholm could—and did.

To the Fourth, Carthew had been knocked over the head. A serious enough matter, but not so serious as all that. In Dr. Chisholm's eyes there had been a brutal attack upon a prefect, calling for summary vengeance when once the culprit or culprits were discovered.

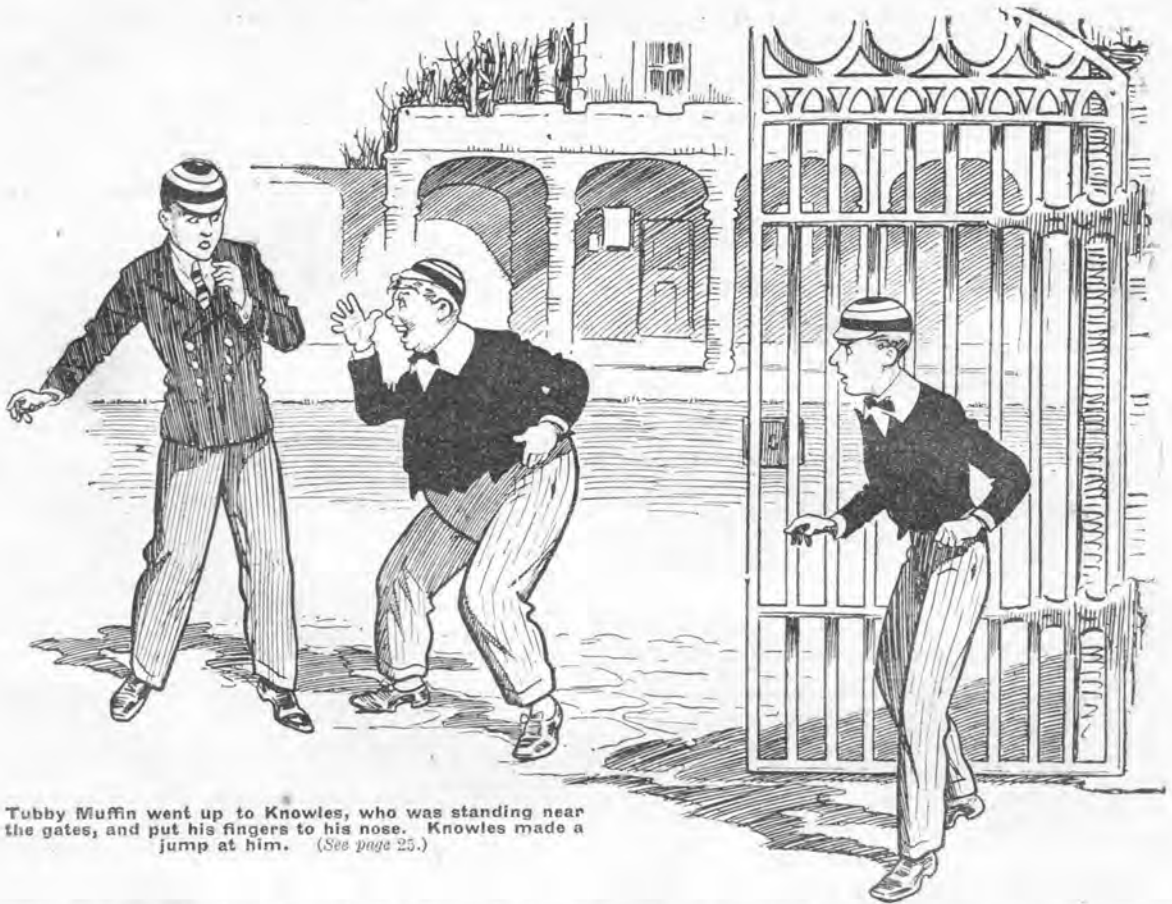
Mr. Dalton, after a startled look had flitted across his face, regained his composure.

"I hoped that the guilty boy would be found elsewhere, sir," he said quietly. "I should be very sorry to learn that there is a boy in my Form who is capable of so dastardly an act."

"I am sorry also," said the Head dryly. "But Mr. Greely has proof. Pray show Mr. Dalton the stick, Mr. Greely."

"This, sir," said Mr. Greely ponderously. "was found in—"

"One moment, please!" interrupted the Head hastily.



Tubby Muffin went up to Knowles, who was standing near the gates, and put his fingers to his nose. Knowles made a jump at him. (See page 25.)

Mr. Dalton had taken the stick—Lovell's stick—found only a few minutes previously behind the bookcase in the End Study. He turned it over in his hands, his face grim. "Bless my soul! There are bloodstains on the head!" "Carthew was struck by some such implement," said Dr. Chisholm. "And this stick was found in concealment, and in a junior study."

"Oh!"

There was a further gasp from the Fourth.

Dr. Chisholm's kindly old face was set and severe. The Fourth did not look happy as his glance played on them. The knowledge that somewhere among them sat the fellow who had stunned Carthew in cold blood alarmed and sobered them.

"My boys, I regret having to address you in this way. But in your midst is the owner of this stick, which you can all see."

Mr. Dalton held up the stick grimly.

"It is upon the owner of this—this implement that suspicion descends," announced the Head quietly. "There are bloodstains on the head, and the stick was found concealed in one of your studies. All this points to the owner being the junior who, I hope, in a reckless moment which he has since regretted, attacked Carthew brutally in the lane. I now call upon the owner to stand out before the class. He may rest assured of fair treatment. I should be loth to condemn him unheard. I am offering him a chance to give himself up to justice, to enable me to make the punishment a little lighter. I am waiting."

Dr. Chisholm pursed his lips and stood grimly in front of the Fourth.

Among the desks there was a murmur.

The Head was trying to be lenient, to make every excuse for the culprit, and to give him every chance. Only a fool would hang back.

"By gad! There isn't exactly a rush," whispered Mornington, leaning across to Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy was silent. And Mornington, as he followed the junior captain's glance, started violently.

That glance rested on Lovell, as did that of Raby and Newcome. It was a glance of surprise, astonishment, disbelief. And Arthur Edward Lovell, as he sat on his form, stared mutely at the stick which Mr. Dalton held up.

He recognised that stick. It was a present from an uncle. On Sundays it was Lovell's custom to take it for walks in

the lanes, swinging it carelessly over one arm. That he should be sitting in the Form-room and looking at his stick in such circumstances almost numbed the junior's senses.

It was monstrous, impossible! But he knew that stick—the knobbly head and the plain silver band, with his name scratched round it. And it was the stick that had stunned Carthew!

Lovell hardly heard the Head begin to speak again.

"I am still waiting! I warn the guilty lad that he will gain nothing by refusing to come forward. The name of the owner is scratched round this silver band."

Another gasp from the Fourth.

And Lovell turned an agonised glance towards Jimmy Silver.

"Jimmy, it can't be—"

"It is, old man," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "How it happened in that state I don't know, but it's yours. Better claim it at once, and we'll all stand in together. The Head will see it's all a mistake."

"For the last time," announced Dr. Chisholm. "I shall call the boy forward by name if he still refuses to admit his guilt."

Arthur Edward Lovell rose in his seat.

With a set face he walked coolly down the gangway and out before the class. While the rest of the Form stared in amazement, Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome followed him quietly.

The Head's face was a study as four juniors confronted him coolly. Mr. Dalton stared at them, astounded.

"What—what—which of you claims the stick?" ejaculated the Head.

"We're all in this, sir," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "It's nothing more to do with Lovell than with the rest of us."

"It's my stick, sir," explained Lovell quietly. "I could hardly believe it at first, but I recognise it well enough. But how it came into that state I don't pretend to know."

The Head gave the Fiscal Four a glance of frank astonishment.

"The stick was found in the study which you four boys occupy," he said at last. "It was concealed behind a bookcase."

"I don't know anything about that, sir," answered Lovell coolly. "I used it last Sunday, as usual. I shouldn't have looked for it till next Sunday. It's usually kept in the corner, with the cricket bats, sir."

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"Yet on this occasion it was concealed," said Dr. Chisholm grimly. "And you are unable to account for the bloodstains? You know nothing of the attack on Carthew?"

"Nothing at all, sir," said Lovell frankly.

"Where were you at the time of the attack?"

"In Coombe woods, sir—picnicking."

"You were all four there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you take no other junior with you?"

"No, sir."

The Head's eyes gleamed a little.

"Can you call any person to witness that you were picnicking at the time of Carthew's accident?" he demanded.

"We can't do that," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "But I

give you my word, sir, that we know nothing of the affair at all. 'Lovell left his stick in the study when we went out. Any fellow might have taken it, and concealed it after he'd stunned Carthew."

"So that is your statement?" asked Dr. Chisholm. "The stick must have been abstracted from the study by some person unknown. The same person concealed it again before you returned. Very good. I do not deny the possibility. But there is another point. Am I not correct in saying that Silver and Lovell, in particular, have been on bad terms with Carthew recently?"

"That's true, sir," said Jimmy, after a pause.

"It has come to my ears that some kind of secret society has been formed among the juniors, and that unheard-of liberties have been taken with prefects. You two boys gave your assurance to Mr. Dalton that you were not concerned in—"

"That is so," said Mr. Dalton, nodding.

"But I suspect that the outrages were conducted with your cognisance," went on Dr. Chisholm keenly. "Indeed, I may go as far as to say that I believe the Fascists, as they are called, originated at your suggestion. That is neither here nor there, however. My point is that you were on bad terms with Carthew. You cannot explain your whereabouts at the time of the attack. And the stick with which the act was perpetrated has been found concealed in your study. It is Lovell's stick. I can draw but one conclusion."

"But I didn't, sir—" broke out Lovell excitedly.

"You are under suspicion," said the Head coldly. "If you are innocent you have nothing to fear. But the evidence, at least circumstantially, points to your guilt. And your friends are under suspicion of aiding you."

(Be sure you read the continuation of this splendid story which will appear in next week's GEM.)

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