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EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



AN UNREHEARSED INCIDENT!

(An exciting situation in the rousing story of
St. Jim's—inside.)

A GRAND LONG STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO., OF ST. JIM'S—

The *TRIPLE*



CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry's Great Idea!

FIGGINS, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn of the New House at St. Jim's were coming in from footer practice when they encountered Monty Lowther of the School House.

They looked very suspiciously at Monty as he came up with a sweet and amiable smile upon his face.

Like the ancient gentlemen who feared the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands, Figgins & Co. always had their doubts about Monty Lowther when he looked especially bland.

"Hallo, you School House bounder!" said Figgins. "What are you looking for—a thick ear?"

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"If I were, there's nobody here who could give me one," he observed. "But I'm on a friendly mission. I say, though, haven't you chaps got that red stuff off your noses yet? Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. glared.

Monty had struck on a very touchy point with them.

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Their noses were very red, and the effect was rather comical. As a result of a recent nocturnal raid on Gordon Gay & Co., of Rylcombe Grammar School, in which the New House heroes, and Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth in the School House, had taken independent parts, they had had that tinge of vivid redness imparted to their noses.

The Grammarians had been waging fierce and unremitting warfare against St. Jim's lately, and both Figgins & Co. and Blake & Co. had gone out upon that fateful night and had broken into the rival school to make the enemy "sit up." But they had accidentally run into each other in the dark, had roused Gordon Gay & Co. from their sleep, and they had come back to St. Jim's each with his nasal organ anointed with a liberal dose of red dye.

That dye was guaranteed fast and indelible, and even now, after hours of desperate rubbing and scrubbing, the colour could still be seen.

Their red noses were sore points with Figgins & Co.—in more ways than one—and any chipping or reference to the subject was bound to rouse their ire.

"Look here, you cheeky School House waster——" began Figgins wrathfully.

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AND THEIR GRAMMARIAN RIVALS, GORDON GAY & CO.

ALLIANCE!

By

Martin Clifford.

If the St. Jim's juniors are ever to get even with their old rivals of the Grammar School—who have pulled off a number of stupendous japes on them—they must cease to squabble amongst themselves. That much is clear to Tom Merry, the junior captain. So Blake of the Fourth, Figgins of the New House, and Tom Merry of the Shell agree to sink their petty differences of opinion and unite in a common cause—the overthrow of Gordon Gay & Co. Thus springs into being the Triple Alliance!



"Oh, all serene! There's no need to get ratty," said Lowther. "I've come to invite you chaps to a meeting."

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn exchanged glances.

"What's the meeting about?" asked Figgins guardedly. "If it's a rag—"

"Nothing of the kind," said Monty Lowther. "It's a meeting of peace. We're holding it in the Shell Form-room. Tom Merry's the speaker, and a lot of chaps have been invited. Study No. 6 will be there."

"Then count us out!" said Figgins decisively. "We refuse to have anything to do with those idiots. Blake's a raving maniac, and you can tell him I said so."

"Rather!" said Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

They were feeling particularly hostile towards Blake & Co., owing to the failure of their rag on the Grammar School. But, be it said, Blake & Co. were equally hostile towards Figgins & Co. Each blamed the other for that midnight fiasco, as a consequence of which they had been made the laughing-stocks of St. Jim's.

"Now, you chaps needn't feel so sore about it," said Monty Lowther pacifically. "It was jolly hard cheese you made a mucker of that jape. But forget it all, and turn up at our meeting. Tom Merry's got a ripping proposition to put forth. We want to make a good, representative meeting of it, and the pleasure of your attendance is requested."

"Will there be a feed?" asked Fatty Wynn hopefully. "There's one thing I will say for you School House chaps, you usually stand good feeds. It's jolly good of you to come over and invite us, Lowther."

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"No, there isn't a feed, Fatty. It's just a meeting—a sort of giddy council of war, you know."

Fatty Wynn looked disappointed.

"What the dickens is the good of a meeting without a feed?" he demanded. "It's like your cheek to come and ask us, if you want my opinion?"

"Why, you cheeky New House waster!" said Monty indignantly. "Don't they feed you in the New House? Haven't you had any dinner?"

"Dinner!" snorted Fatty contemptuously. "Yes, I had two helpings of beefsteak-pudding and a dozen potatoes, and two lots of apple-pie, and a few biscuits and a tart or two. Of course, I'm still hungry."

"Then you can go and eat coke!" said Monty Lowther. "This is a

meeting, not a grub-hunt. Are you chaps coming, or aren't you?"

"Oh, all serene!" said Figgins. "We'll come along and give Tom Merry a hearing. If we find we're expected to listen to him spouting a lot of piffle we'll toddle off, that's all."

"Good egg!" said Monty. "The meeting starts at six o'clock sharp, in the Shell Form-room."

Monty went away, to canvass further members for the meeting.

At six o'clock Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn made their way to the Shell Form-room in the School House. They found it rather crowded. Tom Merry & Co. were there, with several members of the Shell. Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of Study No. 6, and some other Fourth-Formers, were also in attendance. Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen of the New House, came into the room after Figgins & Co.

Some grins greeted the appearance of Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, with their red noses. But they were not the only ones to be seen. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were most conspicuous by their ruby-tinted nasal organs.

Arthur Augustus, the swell of St. Jim's, was arrayed in all his usual splendour, but the rubicund hue of his aristocratic nose rather impaired the classic dignity of his appearance.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Redfern affably. "I see you haven't got the red stuff off your boko yet. It's quite an art shade, really, but it doesn't quite harmonise with your fancy waistcoat, you know."

"Weally, Wedfern, I have suffahed quite suffish of this howwid chippin'!" exclaimed D'Arcy, his monocle gleaming.

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with indignation. "I must wequest you to welwain from further comments on my nose, you boundah, ethalwise I shall feel it my painful dutay to give you a fealful thwashi!"

"Order! Order!" called out Manners, rapping on the table with an ebony ruler.

Tom Merry, the captain of the Lower School at St. Jim's, mounted his rostrum—otherwise Mr. Linton's desk—and cleared his throat to address the meeting.

Monty Lowther, having constituted himself the usher, had armed himself with a bicycle horn, which he honked at the slightest provocation.

"Gentlemen!" cried Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

"Rats!"

"On the bawl!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If any silly fathead interrupts, Manners, biff him on the napper with the ruler," said Tom.

"To hear is to obey," said Manners grimly. "Order for the chair!"

Honk! Honk! Honk!

"My hat! What on earth's that thundering row?" demanded Kerr.

"It's only me," grinned Monty Lowther. "I'm the usher!"

"Then kindly 'ush that rotten noise," said Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!"

"Gentlemen!" bawled Tom Merry, waving his arms aloft. "Gentlemen, this meeting has been called—"

"A lot of silly fatheads, that's what I'd call 'em!" said Figgins, with a contemptuous sniff. "Did you ever hear such a rowdy lot, Reddy? Still, the School House always was more like a bear garden."

"Rather!"

"Rats!" shouted Clifton Dane. "Throw those cheeky New House rotters out!"

"Chuck it, you burbling fatheads!" roared Tom. "This is a peaceful meeting of war—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen! Why should all this silly squabbling go on among ourselves, when we have a common enemy outside against whom we should all stand together in fighting?" cried the Shell captain. "There is no need for me to remind you that St. Jim's has been made the object of a cheeky offensive by that worthless rabble at Rylcombe Grammar School—"

"Well, whose fault was that?" demanded Figgins warmly. "It was up to you, Tom Merry, as leader here, to sit on Gordon Gay before he got too cheeky. He's beaten you all along the line."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rats! Dry up, Figgins!"

Honk! Honk! Honk!

"Sit on that frabjous idiot with the bike horn, somebody," said Lawrence. "That thumping din is getting on my nerves—worse than the speaker, in fact!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen, I appeal to you to ring off and give a chap a hearing!" cried Tom Merry, waxing red and wrathful on his rostrum. "This is not a time for scrapping and strife on our own ranks! While we do that, Gordon Gay & Co. will continue to rule the roost at Rylcombe and call themselves top dogs. We must work hand-in-hand together, put our shoulders to the wheel, and our noses to the grindstone—"

"My hat! He wants us to be a lot of giddy acrobats!" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Honk! Honk!

"Cheese it!" shouted the captain of the Shell. "Will you silly chumps—ahem!—listen quietly while I propound a wheeze that I feel sure will meet with unanimous approval? Gentlemen, look before you and see what you have staring you in the face! Is the prospect pleasant?"

"No fear!" said Redfern. "It gives me a pain to look at such a funny freak!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom glared at the meeting.

"You—you dummies!" he spluttered. "Here am I trying to infuse into you a spark of feeling for the cause we have on hand, and you stand cackling there, like a lot of hens. The prospect of being under-dogs to the Grammar School is not to be tolerated. Chaps, I call upon you all to buck against the Grammar School as one man! I appeal to you to sink all differences at home, forget all petty squabbles among yourselves, and pull together in the task of giving the Grammarians socks!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Hark at our giddy Cicero!"

"Bravo!"

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CHAPTER 2.

The Triple Alliance!

THE meeting was really attentive at last.

"That is the spirit I want you to get!" said Tom impressively. "Gentlemen, recent events have proved that party strife at home must go by the board, if we're to maintain the position of St. Jim's as top dog at Rylcombe! Now, I've been thinking things over, and I've a proposition to make to the meeting. My idea is, to combine forces and ideas against Gordon Gay & Co., and form ourselves into a Triple Alliance!"

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"The Triple Alliance, gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, will unite the Shell and the Fourth, the School House and the New House, in one common cause—the squashing of the Grammar cads!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo!"

Enthusiastic cries arose at Tom Merry's stirring words.

"Hands up those in favour of the Triple Alliance!" cried the captain of the Shell.

All hands in the room immediately shot up.

"Good egg!" chuckled Tom. "Then the vote for the Triple Alliance is passed unanimously!"

"Also nem. con.!" grinned Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry had inspired the meeting; there was no doubt about that! School House and New House, as a rule, agreed upon nothing except ragging each other, and Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., in the School House, usually disagreed upon everything. But they all heartily concurred about the Triple Alliance.

"United we stand, divided we come a cropper!" said Tom. "By sticking together, we shall be able to sock it to Gordon Gay & Co., and give 'em a taste of our quality!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard your wposition as a weally wippin' ideah, Tom Mewwy."

"Then there's nothing more to be said," grinned Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Members of the Triple Alliance agree to act together, putting aside all personal and domestic disputes, for the honour and glory of St. Jim's!" said Tom impressively. "We undertake to consult with one another over any wheeze, scheme, or stunt that may be proposed, before any such wheeze, scheme, or stunt is carried into execution!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the ticket!" said Figgins enthusiastically. "Down with the Grammar School—we'll go all out for that!"

"Rather!"

"Three cheers for the Triple Alliance!" said Tom Merry, in a ringing voice. "Hip, hip—"

"Rats!"

"Yah! Rats on the Triple Alliance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Those sudden rude interruptions came from outside the closed door of the Form-room. Tom Merry & Co. blinked round and gasped.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom. "What the dickens—"

"Go and eat coke, you chumps!" came a well-known voice through the keyhole. "The Triple Alliance is all rot and piffle! You'll have your work cut out to put it across the Grammar School! Yah!"

It was the voice of Gordon Gay, the leader of the Grammarians! And, by the sound of things, he was not alone!

"Mum-m-my only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Grammarians rotters! They've had the cheek to break in here!"

"Nab 'em!"

"Smash 'em!"

"Pulverise the cads!"

Tom took a flying leap from the desk and tore to the Form-room door. Blake and Figgins reached the door with him. They tugged at the handle, but the door would not budge.

A mocking laugh sounded on the other side.

"That's done you, dear boys!" said Gordon Gay's well-known voice. "We've caught the lot of you properly! We were rather windy at first in breaking in, but seeing none of you chaps about, we chanced it. Then we came along here, heard you gassing, and locked you in. Now we can have a chat—what?"

"You—you—you—" spluttered Tom Merry, in helpless fury.

"Sorry to have to stoop to cavedropping, but all's fair in love and war, you know, and we've been listening to all your silly rot about the Triple Alliance!" went on the Grammarian leader cheerfully through the keyhole. "We consider the Triple Alliance a lot of tripe—in other words, it's blithering bosh, balderdash, and bunkum! The three officers you've elected are a trio of hopeless maniacs, and

would be better off in a home. You can all go and eat pancakes!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry pounded on the door.

"You—you rotters! Open this door!" he howled.

"Not much! Open it yourselves, you wasters!" came back the voice of his rival. "Well, we must be off, I suppose. The atmosphere of this old casual ward of yours is frightfully depressing. Toodle-oo, old tops! Watch your step, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter from the rest of the Grammarians outside.

Thump! Biff! Crash!

Tom Merry & Co. were making desperate assaults on the door with their fists and feet.

"Yawwoogh! Oh, bai Jove! My foot! Yow-wow!"

"Gerrooogh!" moaned Blake, sitting up dazedly and rubbing his head. "Wh-wh-what the dickens—"

"One of those rotters must have opened the door on purpose and then bunked!" gasped Tom Merry, who was sprawled on top of Figgins. "Oh dear! Grooogh!"

"Yow-wow-wow! Gerroff!" came in a muffled gurgle from Manners, who was lying flattened under the heavy, corpulent figure of Fatty Wynn. "Oo-ow! I'm squashed! Draggimoff, somebody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a mocking yell of laughter at the end of the passage.

The juniors, sprawled on the floor outside the Form-room door, arose in hot haste. Tom glared down the corridor, and caught a fleeting glimpse of Gordon Gay's face in the gloom of the gathering evening.

"After them!" yelled Tom. "We'll spifficate the rotters! Come on!"

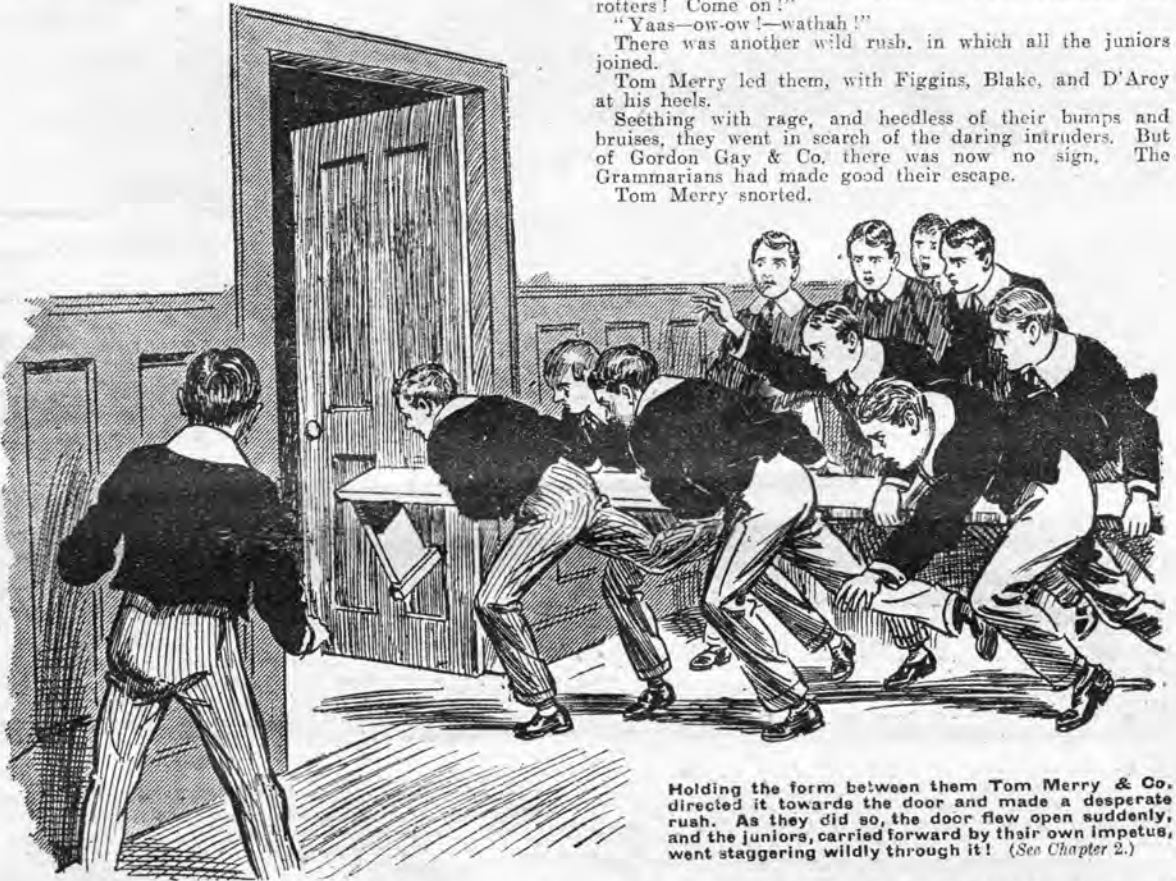
"Yaas—ow-ow!—wathah!"

There was another wild rush, in which all the juniors joined.

Tom Merry led them, with Figgins, Blake, and D'Arcy at his heels.

Seething with rage, and heedless of their bumps and bruises, they went in search of the daring intruders. But of Gordon Gay & Co. there was now no sign. The Grammarians had made good their escape.

Tom Merry snorted.



Holding the form between them Tom Merry & Co. directed it towards the door and made a desperate rush. As they did so, the door flew open suddenly, and the juniors, carried forward by their own impetus, went staggering wildly through it! (See Chapter 2.)

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" groaned Blake. "Here's a fine send-off for the Triple Alliance! We must get that beastly door open somehow! Let's burst it open!"

"That's it!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Use one of those heavy forms and bash in the lock! We'll get old Glyn to repair it afterwards, and save a row."

Figgins, Blake, D'Arcy, Redfern, Fatty Wynn, and Tom Merry all lent a hand in rushing the big oak form to the door. Holding the form between them, they directed it towards the door, and, on the word from Tom, made a desperate rush.

But then a surprising thing happened.

Just as they were rushing forward with the form the door suddenly flew open. They could not pull themselves up in time, and so, carried forward by their own impetus, they went staggering wildly through the doorway with the form, and out into the corridor beyond.

There was a fearful crash as the end of the form cannoned into the wall opposite.

Biff!

"Yow!"

"Yah!"

"Yaroooooop!"

Down went the juniors in a struggling, kicking heap, and down went the form with a sickening thud. There was a gasp from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as the form hit him in the region of his fancy waistcoat, and then a fiendish howl arose from him as the end of it, dropping to the floor, clumped on his big toe.

"Never mind," he said, as he and his chums returned to the Form-room. "Wait till the Triple Alliance gets going! Gordon Gay had better look out, that's all!"

The captain of the Shell spoke grimly. The disastrous ending to the first meeting of the Triple Alliance only had the effect of increasing his determination to make the Grammarians sing small—or perish in the attempt!

CHAPTER 3.

The Stunt of the Season!

"MY giddy aunt!"

Tom Merry gave vent to that exclamation in a tone of suppressed excitement.

The Terrible Three were seated in the tuck-shop at St. Jim's the following day, regaling themselves with ginger-pop and tarts after footer practice. Jack Blake & Co. of Study No. 6 were also there, sampling the tarts and the foaming glass that cheers.

The juniors wore their overcoats over their footer attire, and very fit and cheery they looked.

Tom Merry had glanced at a newspaper that Mrs. Taggles had left on the counter, and one paragraph had caught his eye. After his first exclamation Tom remained silent for a few moments, then his eyes gleamed, and he smote the counter with a mighty thump.

"Eureka!" he cried. "I've got it!"

There was a fiendish roar as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's

glass overbalanced, and a flood of foaming ginger-pop swept over him.

"Oh, bai Jove! You clumsy boundah, Tom Mewwy!" roared the swell, gazing down in horror through his monocle. "Look at my clobber! I'm drenched!"

"Mop it up with your hanky, old chap!" said Tom pacifically. "There's no need to make a fuss over a small matter."

"Small mattah!" screeched Arthur Augustus. "Why, you uttah ass, my clobber is ruined!"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy! I say, you chaps, I've struck a wheeze out of this newspaper!" exclaimed Tom. "If we can get the wheeze to work, it will be a real corker! Read this paragraph, my sons!"

Tom held out the newspaper and indicated a paragraph to his chums.

They all gathered round curiously, and this is what they read:

"STRANGE CASE AT BOYS' COLLEGE!

MASTER GOES INSANE!

WARNING TO SCHOOLBOYS!

"An alarming report comes from St. Mostyn's School, near Stowe, Dorset, where the history master, Mr. Amos Keete, B.A., whilst taking his class at lessons, became suddenly deranged, and had to be placed under restraint, following his violent behaviour towards the boys."

"For some time Keete had been regarded as an eccentric man. His pupils had made some fun of him in consequence, and his derangement takes the form of hallucinations that all schoolboys are laying snares for him, either to injure or do away with him. He has been dismissed from his position at St. Mostyn's School, and he is now at large."

"Since leaving St. Mostyn's School, Keete has made his appearance in several places, intimidating schoolboys, and obsessed with an insane desire to wreak vengeance on them for his imaginary grievances. He still believes that he is a master, and has power to bend schoolboys to his will. So far he has committed no serious offence, but schoolboys are warned, if they meet him, to humour him, as by doing so they may then render him comparatively harmless."

"Keete has held positions at several boys' colleges, although still a young man. He commenced his scholastic career at Rylcombe Grammar School, in Sussex, from which he was soon dismissed, owing to his mental condition. His description is as follows: Age, 32, medium height and build, long black hair and moustache, wears horn-rimmed spectacles, and affects a somewhat curious style of dress, comprising a long-tailed coat, tweed trousers, white spats, and a dilapidated top-hat. Usually has on a high collar and a bow, and makes strange grimaces with his face, especially when excited. A photograph appears on back page."

The St. Jim's juniors gazed at this astonishing report, and they gasped.

"Well, my only hat!" said Blake. "Here's a giddy go! A potty schoolmaster is at large, then, who hates all schoolboys. That rather takes the bun—what?"

"Yaas, watbah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I sincerely twust, deah boys, that Mr. Amos Keete doesn't show himself in this neighbourhood. Ordinavvy mastahs are quite bad enough, bai Jove, without us havin' the wild waviety to deal with!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!" Tom Merry chuckled.

"But I say, though, what a lark if the mad master did turn up around here!" he said.

"Idiot!" snorted Blake. "We don't want any daft maniac with a bee in his bonnet coming here!"

"Of course not," agreed Tom. "But listen, my sons, and I will a tale unfold!"

"Dry up, ass!" said Blake. "Amateur theatricals are off!"

"No fear!" said Tom, his eyes gleaming with fun. "They're going to be on, I hope—very much on! Now, Gordon Gay & Co. are bound to be jolly interested in this newspaper report, seeing that the mad master was once at the Grammar School. They've never seen him, of course, but they'd be interested in the report, just the same. If the mad master turned up at the Grammar School all of a sudden, thirsting for gore, and with a plan of vengeance on the school that years ago gave him the sack, that would create a bit of a scare, wouldn't it?"

"I should say so!" grinned Blake. "But I don't suppose this Keete crackpot will get as far as Rylcombe."

"Same here!" agreed Tom. "That helps the wheeze! Think what a scream it would be, if we worked off a spoof Amos Keete on the Grammar School, and gave Gordon Gay and his crowd the scare of their lives!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Now do you see my wheeze?" said Tom. "We've got

a description and a photograph of the cracked schoolmaster in this page, so that it ought to be easy to impersonate him. And think what a jape it would be against the Grammarians if the scare came off, and they believed that they were being pursued by the anti-schoolboy maniac! It would be the jape of the term!"

"Rather!"

Blake leaned against the counter and fairly chortled. "Oh, my Sunday panama! That's a prime wheeze, Tommy—really Al at Lloyd's!"

Tom Merry's eyes glistened with fun.

"If the Triple Alliance tackles the job properly, and we all work together, it will be a jape on the Grammar School that will make Gordon Gay & Co. squirm!" he chuckled. "It will be better than anything those bounders have ever worked off on us, you know. We shall be able to knock 'em right off their perches! Let's go over and see Figgins & Co. We shall want Kerr to take the part of the mad master. He's an absolute marvel at make-up and impersonation. Remember the time he dressed up as Railton, and spoofed the whole school? It was a masterpiece!"

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry & Co. finished their tarts and ginger-pop and hurried across to the New House.

When they entered Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form passage they found Figgins with a frowning brow writing out an imposition for Mr. Ratcliff. Kerr was puzzling over a crossword puzzle, whilst Fatty Wynn was busy demolishing the remains of a rabbit pie.

A deeper frown crossed Figgins' furrowed brow at the entry of the School House fellows.

"Get out!" he grunted, without looking up.

"Bunk!" said Fatty Wynn. "We're—um—um—busy!"

"Oh, chuck all that rot!" said Tom Merry. "I've come to call an extraordinary general meeting of the Triple Alliance. I've got an idea!"

"Whose?" asked Figgins.

"Mine, you idiot!" said Tom, with a glare. "If you're looking for a thick ear, Figgy, I'll— But we haven't come for a row. Just feast your peepers on that newspaper report!"

Figgins, Kerr and Wynn read the newspaper paragraph and looks of wonder crossed their faces.

"My word!" said Kerr. "That's the first case I've heard of a schoolmaster being driven potty by boys. It's usually the other way about."

"Rather!" said Fatty Wynn feelingly.

"Now, to get to business," said Tom Merry. "I want to submit an idea which has already been approved by the School House section of the Alliance. This affair of the mad master can be used against the Grammarians, if we work it right. My wheeze is, to have a spoof Mr. Amos Keete turn up at Rylcombe, and send all the Grammarians into a blue funk. See what a lot of sport we could get out of that! Now, Kerr, it's up to you as a champion actor and impersonator, to assume the role of the mad master, and proceed to give Gordon Gay & Co. a high old time. Do you catch on?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!" roared Kerr. "Trust me! That's a corker of a wheeze. I'll do the trick!"

The Triple Alliance chuckled.

Kerr, the canny Scots junior, was really a born actor and a marvellous impersonator. Many a time and oft had he astonished and amused his schoolfellows by dressing up in various roles. He had even impersonated Gussy, and the deception had been so complete that Gussy's chums themselves had been taken in.

Kerr had, practically all the make-up he would require among his amateur theatrical "props." As for the redness of his nose that now distinguished him, a little grease-paint would hide that. He proceeded at once to take down from the newspaper all the particulars concerning the appearance of Mr. Amos Keete.

The Triple Alliance spent some time in Figgins' study, discussing their plot for the hoaxing of the Grammarians.

As Blake pointed out, the chances were a hundred to one against the real mad master appearing anywhere near Rylcombe. And Kerr said that he was quite willing to run the risk of his deception being discovered.

After the conference in the New House, Tom Merry took out his bicycle and rode away from St. Jim's. It was almost locking-up time, when the Shell captain returned. He announced to his waiting chums that he had been as far as Latcham, and that everything was "all serene."

CHAPTER 4. The Mad Master!

GORDON GAY came into the Common-room at Rylcombe Grammar School the next morning, wearing a look of deep perplexity.

His chums, Frank Monk, Carboy, the two Woottons and Mont Blong, the French junior, were standing

by the window, "jawing" footer. They looked curiously at their champion and leader as he came up.

Gordon Gay had a newspaper in his hand.

"I say, you chaps, here's a jolly rummy go," he said.

"What's that?" inquired Frank Monk.

"Well, it's a rummy affair altogether," replied Gordon Gay. "This paper has just come in by post, addressed to the boys of the Junior School, and it seems to have been posted in Latham. There's a paragraph marked off in blue pencil, and I thought at first that it might be a lark of some of those St. Jim's scallywags. But look here!"

The other Grammarians gathered round curiously. Gordon Gay held out the self-same newspaper that Tom Merry had picked up in the tuckshop at St. Jim's the previous afternoon. The paragraph concerning the mad schoolmaster had been marked off in blue pencil, so that it should not be missed.

But there was something else to attract the eyes of the Grammarians.

Across the top margin of the page of the newspaper were scrawled these words, in blue pencil:

"BEWARE! I HAVE YOU MARKED DOWN! I WILL TAKE VENGEANCE ON YOUR SCHOOL!"

The Grammar School juniors blinked at this strange message, and at the marked report, and they gasped.

"Mum-m-my only hat!" ejaculated Harry Wootton.

"Mon Dieu!" said Mont Blong.

"I—I say," said Jack Wootton, "surely this is some fat-headed joke! The newspaper report about a mad master is probably all spoof, and—"

"No, I don't think it is," said Frank Monk seriously. "Now I come to think of it, the pater has mentioned this man Amos Keete to me before. He was a master at this school some years ago, and everyone thought he was slightly dotty. He used to get up to the most idiotic tricks, for a master, and in the end he got so queer that dad gave him the sack. He left in a bit of a huff, I believe. Oh crumbs! So he's gone right off his onion, now, and is running wild about the countryside, making a dead set against schoolboys."

"And—and he's got us marked down!" said Carboy. "He's going to take revenge on our school!"

Gordon Gay knitted his brows in a deep frown.

"This affair rather takes the biscuit," he said. "It's a bit off, I must say, having this blessed mad master hanging over our heads, like a giddy sword of Damocles. We shall have to keep our weather eye open for the old maniac, I suppose, and the sooner he's fitted with a strait-jacket and shoved into an asylum, the better I shall like it."

The Grammarians were greatly disturbed, and, to tell the truth, a little uneasy over the news.

Surely, no one but a madman would send such a threat to a boys' school, unless, of course, the whole affair was a hoax.

But the fact that Amos Keete had once been a master at the Grammar School, and that the newspaper report was undoubtedly quite authentic, went far to dispelling Gordon Gay's suspicion of a hoax.

He did not, indeed, suspect for one moment that the sending of the newspaper, and the "threat" it contained, was the work of his old rival, Tom Merry. Had Gordon Gay "smelt a rat," events would have turned out very differently!

After tea that day Gordon Gay & Co. were standing in their school quadrangle, discussing the strange affair, when there was a rush of feet at the gates, and the tall, weedy figure of Tadpole came dashing in.

Tadpole was wild-eyed with terror, and he was running as though pursued by all the fiends imaginable.

He halted, gasping, before Gordon Gay & Co., and flung back a nervous look towards the gates.

Tadpole was in a truly parlous state. His hat was missing, his jacket was torn, his trousers contained many rents, and his collar was dangling at the back of his neck. Moreover, he was smothered in mud from head to foot. His head and shoulders were festooned with weeds, ooze, and slime.

Evidently, Tadpole had been very much in the wars!

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Gordon Gay, regarding the weedy junior in amazement. "Tadpole! I thought you had gone down to Rylocombe to get some paints and canvases for your new picture! What the merry dickens—"

"Yerroooooch!" gurgled Tadpole, blinking through his coating of mud at Gordon Gay & Co.

"Have Tom Merry & Co. been ragging you?" exclaimed Monk.

"Grooooooh! Nun-no!" spluttered Tadpole. "I—I say, you chaps, I've seen him!"

"Seen who?" gasped Gordon Gay.

"Amos Keete!"

"Eh?"

"The mad master!" cried Tadpole excitedly. "It's a fact, I tell you! I've had a struggle with Amos Keete! The rotter jumped out at me in the lunge, and chased me into the wood. Gerroogh! He caught me at the bottom of a gully, and was going to kill me—"

"Good heavens!"

"Oh, draw it mild, Tadpole!"

"He was mad—absolutely raving wild and violent!" screeched Tadpole, waving his long arms and shedding mud in all directions. "I had to fight for my life down in that gully! I got free at last, and ran for it, and had to tear my way through the bushes. I fell into a ditch, and the rotter wouldn't let me get out! I waded along a good way and dodged him at last. Oh dear! Grooogh! It was awful!"

Gordon Gay & Co. looked at Tadpole in amazement.

It was quite plain that Tadpole had had a great scare, and as regards his dash through the bushes and his fall into the ditch, the tattered state of his clothes and the mud fully corroborated the story.

Gordon Gay drew a deep breath.

"Then—then that potty schoolmaster has turned up here, as he threatened!" he said. "Oh crumbs! Are you sure it was him, Tadpole, and not some funny bouncer trying to frighten you?"

"Ooooh!" gurgled Tadpole. "Of course it was Amos Keete. I recognised him at once from the photograph and the report in the newspaper. He was dressed exactly as the paper said, and you should have seen the awful look on his face, and his big, glaring eyes! He's absolutely a raving lunatic, there's no mistake about that. I'm lucky to have got back alive!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Gordon Gay's chums looked dismayed.

The affair was unnerving, to say the least.

The Grammarian leader gritted his teeth.

"Look here, if the chap who scared Tadpole really is the
(Continued on next page.)

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mad master, we can't allow him to stay prowling about here!" he said. "I vote we go out and run the rotter to earth. If he's still lurking in the wood, we ought to be able to round him up easily."

"Ahem!" coughed Carboy. "The point is, Gay, if the old lunatic is armed—"

"We'll catch him somehow," said Gordon Gay. "Anyway, it's up to us to stop his mad tricks before he does any damage. Let's take along some rope. Come on!"

Tadpole squelched away, looking very pale where the mud did not obscure his face, while Gordon Gay & Co., arming themselves with rope, sallied forth from the Grammar School in search of the alleged madman who was prowling outside.

They went not without some misgiving. Gordon Gay & Co. were not the boys to be afflicted with nerves, in the usual way. They were, indeed, quite mighty men of valour. But they had never before had a real, live madman to deal with. Tracking a lunatic schoolmaster was quite a new experience.

The Grammarians plunged on, and made their way with all stealth into the wood. At length, they came out into the lane on the other side, leading to the cross-roads and St. Jim's.

They halted on the grassy bank at the side of the lane, and were discussing their next plan of action, when they were startled by hearing sounds as of a great stampede coming from round the bend in the road nearby.

A minute later there was a rush of feet, and a party of St. Jim's juniors dashed into view, with Tom Merry and Blake, D'Arcy and Figgins in the lead.

They were running at top speed, and apparently were in the throes of the direst terror.

Tom Merry waved to Gordon Gay as he came tearing up.

"Look out!" he shouted. "Run!"

"Why, what—" gasped Gordon Gay.

"Run!" shrieked Blake. "Run for your lives! The mad master—he's after us!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Some of the Grammarians' knees began to knock, but Gordon Gay was made of sterner stuff. He gave a contemptuous snort.

"Oh, bosh!" he said. "It doesn't take much to throw you St. Jim's asses into a blue funk, by the look of things. But we're not scared, are we, chaps?"

"Nun-n-no!" gasped Monk, with a nervous look up the lane.

"Of c-c-course not!" stammered Jack Wootton, in a manner that belied his words.

"Anyway, we're hopping it!" said Tom Merry. "You chaps can stay and take your chance with the old madman if you like, but we prefer to give him a wide berth."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "Discvetion is the bettah part of valour, bai Jove! Wun like anythin', deah boys!"

Tom Merry & Co. dashed on, and the Grammarians were left standing at the side of the lane, looking most uneasy and apprehensive.

When they were out of sight and hearing of their rivals, Tom Merry & Co. halted, and burst into roars of laughter. They fairly chortled!

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Blake. "That was rich! Those bouncers have swallowed the mad master story whole! They think he's scared us to death!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gay tried to make out he was as brave as a giddy lion, but the whole lot of 'em looked knocked into a cocked hat!" chuckled Tom Merry. "I'll bet old Kerr will make 'em shiver in their shoes, especially when he threatens 'em with that toy pistol he's got."

"Rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, lower down the lane, Gordon Gay & Co. were undergoing a nerve-racking experience.

Whilst they stood there on the grassy bank, a strange figure had appeared round the bend in the lane.

CHAPTER 5.

Spoofed!

HE was a weird and wonderful individual, wearing a dilapidated top-hat, a long-tailed frock-coat that had evidently seen better days, a pair of baggy tweed trousers, and spats. His hair was black and straggly, and it bunched out in great profusion from under his old topper. He had a good growth of black whiskers that stuck out quite viciously. Round his neck was a tall collar and tie. In his hand he grasped a cane. A pair of horn-rimmed spectacles were perched on his nose. His eyes looked glaringly through them with the wildest glitter imaginable. The expression on this person's face was most diabolical, and when he caught sight of Gordon Gay & Co. his behaviour became unnerving.

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He rolled his eyes and opened his mouth, gnashed his teeth, and jumped quite two feet in the air. He waved his arms with a wild gesture, somewhat in the manner of a hypnotist switching on the "fluence."

"Ah-ah-ahhhh!" he cried, in blood-curdling tones that sent cold shivers down the backs of Gordon Gay & Co. "Grammar School boys! Yes, Grammar School boys! Ah-ah-ah!"

He licked his lips and swished his cane.

"Yah-ah-ah!" he roared, dancing again like a Dervish. "Now is the time for vengeance! Destroy all boys! Away with the pests! They shall persecute me no longer! 'Tis I, Amos Keete, who will persecute them! I'll have them grovelling at my feet and shrieking for mercy! But I will give them no quarter! Ah-ah-ahhhh!"

Gordon Gay & Co. backed away, trembling and gasping. The sight of this maniacal-looking man, with his wild eyes and extraordinary capers, inspired them with awe and trepidation, in spite of themselves.

This, then, was the unhinged schoolmaster who had sworn vengeance on all boys!

Gordon Gay & Co. blinked at him as he approached.

They could not help feeling nervous.

The sight of this strange being was sufficient to inspire fear into the bravest.

"Oh dud-d-dear!" stuttered Carboy, going pale. "He's mad! Just look at his face—and his eyes! He's as mad as a March hare! And—and he's coming for us!"

Gordon Gay & Co. were too astounded to do anything but stare.

Mr. Amos Keete—alias George Kerr of the New House, in disguise—crept towards the startled Grammarians like some wild beast of prey bearing down on its victim.

He looked really mad and demented.

He screwed his face up into most horrible contortions, and the manner in which he rolled his eyes was truly ghastly to behold.

"Ah-ahhhh!" he hissed, with a sort of fiend-like cackle. "At last I have Grammar School boys in my power! My time has come! Do not move, or I will give you a taste of this!"

He whipped out a fearsome-looking weapon—in reality, only a toy pistol, but the sight of it made Gordon Gay & Co. gasp and recoil in horror.

The sunlight glistened on the barrel of Kerr's dummy revolver and made it look most realistic and deadly.

"Come down into the road!" snapped the pseudo mad master, flourishing the toy pistol before the startled Grammarians.

Gordon Gay & Co. complied with that request with alacrity.

The "mad master" looked vicious and dangerous, and they had no wish to be shot!

They left the grassy bank and stood in the middle of the road, a trembling party indeed!

Had it not been for that gun, they would soon have settled the "mad master's" hash! As it was, the sight of that horrible-looking weapon, and the fearsome look on its owner's face, filled Gordon Gay & Co. with alarm and dread.

"Oh, my only hat!" muttered Harry Wootton. "The old lunatic! Then he's armed with a gun! If he sh-should sh-shoot—"

Gordon Gay gritted his teeth.

"We've got to humour him, that's all!" he said. "For goodness' sake, chaps, don't make him wilder than he is now! Heap soft sawder on him, and—and do what he says! He's not safe with that gun!"

The masquerader of St. Jim's looked ferociously at his unnerved victims. He gave an awful cackle.

"Ha, ha, ha! So you young rascals are frightened of me, eh?" he cried. "Ah-ahh! My time has come to bow all schoolboys to my will! How dare you look at me like that, boys! Where are your manners? You think I'm mad, eh?"

"Oh, nun-no, sir!" stuttered Gordon Gay.

"Not at all, sir!" said Frank Monk hastily.

"Well, I'm not mad!" said the pseudo Amos Keete, with a horrible leer at the Grammarians. "It's you boys who are mad, not me! I am your master, and you will kindly treat me with respect, otherwise it will be the worse for you!"

The "mad master" fixed Gordon Gay with a gleaming gaze.

"Boy!" he rapped, in a thunderous voice that made the Grammarian hero jump. "What's your name?"

"Oh crumbs! Gay, sir!"

"Very well, Gay," hissed the supposed madman, rolling his eyes in a truly unnerving manner. "Pick up those ropes and tie these boys together in a line!"

"But, I say, sir—" remonstrated the Grammarian leader desperately.

"Do as I say, sir!" howled Kerr, with a most diabolical glare.

Gordon Gay hastened to comply.

The masquerader of St. Jim's ordered his terrorised victims to stand in a line in the road, whilst Gordon Gay tied them together with the ropes which they themselves had brought along.

Unknown to Gordon Gay & Co., Tom Merry and his chums were hidden behind the trees near by. They had crept back through the fields, and were watching the fun in great glee. They chuckled softly at the success of the jape.

When the operation was over, Gay was ordered to place himself at the head of the line, and Kerr fastened him there with his own hands.

He played the part of the madman with such realism that even his chums, hiding behind the trees, had to gasp.



While Blake got the dinghy, Tom Merry tore a leaf from his notebook and wrote a few words upon it in large capitals. Then he pinned the note to Gordon Gay's chest as he lay there in the grass, bound and gagged. (See Chapter 8.)

Kerr stood before the line of roped up Grammarians and surveyed them with gleaming eyes.

"Shun!" he commanded, with a wild wave of his arms.

Gordon Gay & Co. "shunned."

"Right-turrrn!" snapped Kerr.

They turned, facing in the direction of St. Jim's.

"Quick-march!"

There seemed no help for it but to obey. Gordon Gay & Co. looked at the dummy revolver and at the terrifying face of the supposed Amos Keete, and they stepped off at a quick pace.

And as they marched onward the disguised Kerr strutted along beside them, with his coat-tails fluttering in the wind, his old topper set at a jaunty angle on his head, and his eyes gleaming through his horn-rimmed spectacles like those of a hungry hawk.

Tom Merry & Co., as soon as their deluded rivals had gone, detached themselves from their hiding-places and made a quick detour back to St. Jim's. They were in transports of mirth at the success of the jape.

Kerr, meanwhile, kept his victims on the march.

He was thoroughly enjoying the situation, and he chuckled softly to himself many times as he pranced along at the side of the strung up Grammarians.

To them, he looked very grim and fierce. It was best, they thought, to humour him, and await an opportunity of catching him unawares.

But Kerr was very wide awake, and he gave them no such opportunity.

They reached the cross-roads, and at the "mad master's" curt command they kept straight on. Soon the ancient

and stately pile of St. Jim's came into view, and the Grammarians trembled with helpless wrath.

"Oh crumbs!" moaned Gordon Gay. "What will those St. Jim's bounders say when they spot us?"

"They'll probably run for their lives, as they did before!" growled Monk. "I—I wish we'd followed suit, now, and bunked before this old madman came along!"

"Silence!" thundered Kerr.

Rounding the bend, they saw Tom Merry & Co. and a crowd of juniors standing at the gates of St. Jim's.

Gordon Gay looked hopefully at them, but his heart soon sank within him.

Directly they caught sight of the "mad master" the St. Jim's juniors raised loud yells of alarm and promptly scampered in at the gates.

"Look out!" was the cry.

"The mad master's coming!"

"Lock the gates, for goodness' sake!"

Slam!

The gates of St. Jim's clanged-to, and Tom Merry & Co. gazed out into the Rylcombe Lane with most convincing looks of terror.

Kerr, to keep up the effect, was dancing in the roadway,

waving his arms and glaring like one thoroughly possessed. His facial contortions were weird and wonderful in the extreme, whilst the howls he uttered as he gnashed his teeth at the juniors through the bars of the gates were awful to listen to.

"March on!" he screeched at the Grammarians. "I'll get these other young jackanapes later, when I've settled with you! Get along—do you hear?"

Gordon Gay & Co. went on helplessly. The "mad master" looked so deadly that they dare not disobey.

"Lift your feet up!" hissed Kerr, with a ghoulish glare. "Raise your knees as you march! Smartly! Left, right—left, right!"

Gordon Gay & Co. marched on past St. Jim's, doing the "goose-step" at their tormentor's behest.

It was as much as Tom Merry & Co. could do to keep from bursting into howls of merriment. They fairly collapsed when their duped rivals were out of sight and hearing.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" gurgled Tom Merry. "Old Kerr's doing it on those bounders properly! They're scared to death to lift a finger against Kerr, in case he does something desperate. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ye gods and little fishes! If they only knew the giddy truth!" chortled Figgins. "Kerr's made 'em do the goose-step! He's making 'em shiver in their shoes! What a scream! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hope he keeps 'em spoofed long enough to work off the rest of the jape," said Blake.

"Trust old Kerr!" grinned Figgins. "He's a giddy madman to the life. He won't let those bounders catch

him napping! He'll keep 'em goose-stepping all the way to the old barn, and leave 'em tied up there!"

"I wonder what Gay would say if he knew," chortled Tom Merry. "It'll be at least an hour before they get free. What a scream!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A quarter of an hour later George Francis Kerr, once more himself, so to speak, entered Study No. 10 in the Shell passage at St. Jim's. There was a chorus of shouts from the members of the Triple Alliance, who had eagerly awaited his return.

"How did it go, Kerr?"

"Enter Mr. Amos Keete!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr grinned.

"Everything worked like a charm!" he chuckled. "I took 'em into the barn like lambs to the slaughter. They were hanging on the chance to rush me, but they didn't get it. I left 'em slugging each other and trying to get loose at the same time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Kerr!"

Kerr was the hero of the hour, and the Triple Alliance roared over the manner in which the Grammarians were dished, diddled, and done.

CHAPTER 6.

Still on the Track!

"HERE we are!" said Gordon Gay.

"Hallo, Budge!" said Harry Wootton.

It was the following afternoon, Wednesday, and a half-holiday at both St. Jim's and the Grammar School. Gordon Gay & Co., deeming it wiser, from considerations of their personal liberty, not to alarm Dr. Monk too much on the score of the supposed "mad master," had been very reticent as to the details of the encounter with Amos Keete. The Grammarians had been looking forward to the exploration of the old Norman ruins on the island in the river that afternoon, not to mention the "spread" that was to follow, and a dozen of them arrived early at the boathouse of Mr. William Budge, about a mile from the village on the banks of the River Rhyl.

It was a gloriously clear afternoon, and the river sparkled in the sunshine. Mr. Budge kept several boats, and he did a thriving business with the boys of the Grammar School. One specially big and roomy boat was often used by parties of the juniors. It was called the Daisy, and it was the Daisy that Gordon Gay & Co. wanted now, and which they had come out specially to secure.

Mr. Budge was seated on a bench outside his boathouse, smoking his pipe and looking out across the river. He touched his cap to the boys. Gordon Gay & Co. were good customers of his. At the adjoining cottage could be obtained all the tuck necessary for river parties. That was why Mr. Budge's place was so popular among the juniors.

"Well, Budge," said Gordon Gay, "can we have the Daisy this afternoon?"

"Certainly, Master Gay," said Budge.

"Thanks, old chap; but, mind, if anyone else comes along and asks about the boat, don't let on that we've taken her out."

Mr. Budge grinned. He knew all about the rivalry between St. Jim's and the Grammar School, and he had seen something of the conflicts between Tom Merry & Co. and Gordon Gay & Co.

"Right you are, Master Gay," he said. "I understand."

"You see," went on Gordon Gay, "we're making up a party of a dozen for a picnic, and we're going to take the grub in on the Daisy, and camp on the island up the river. We've got to keep it awfully dark, as Tom Merry and a lot of those St. Jim's wasters are in the vicinity. We've seen 'em. And if they knew what we're up to they'd have the nerve to try to collar our grub, or something. Remember, Budge!"

"I'll be careful to do as you say, Master Gay. If Master Merry comes along here, asking questions, he shan't get anything out of me."

"Good!" said the Grammarian leader. "Come on, chaps! Let's load the boat!"

Gordon Gay & Co. walked away, and crowded into the cottage by the boathouse, where all the luscious supplies were available. As Mr. Budge resumed his pipe and his contemplation of the river a hidden listener stole silently from the thicket behind, and Figgins of the New House was revealed. Taking care to keep out of sight, Figgins scuttled away to the trees close by the towing-path, where

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the Terrible Three, Jack Blake & Co., and Figgins' own chums, Kerr and Fatty Wynn were awaiting him.

Kerr was quite unrecognisable in the disguise he had on, although anyone would have recognised him as the maniacal Mr. "Amos Keete," who had made his appearance at Rylcombe yesterday and had so scared Gordon Gay & Co. He had come out again from St. Jim's this afternoon, wearing his disguise, and anxious to "work off" some further japes on the unsuspecting Grammarians.

The heroes of the Triple Alliance looked eagerly at Figgins as he crept up out of the willows.

"Found out anything?" asked Tom Merry quickly.

"Rather!" chuckled Figgins. "Gordon Gay and a party of Grammar School fellows have hired the Daisy for a run up the river, to explore the ruins on the island. They're going to have their tea on the island, and they're in the cottage now, laying in supplies."

"My hat!"

Fatty Wynn passed his hand ecstatically over his ample waistcoat.

"We shall be there!" he murmured.

"Rather!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "We shall be there! How many of them are there, Figg?"

"A dozen," said Figgins. "It'll be a pretty big party for their boat by the time they've got the tuck loaded up."

"There are nine of us, excluding our giddy mad master!" chuckled Tom. "That makes ten, with Kerr, and as Fatty eats enough for three, there'll be enough tuck to go round, if Gordon Gay lays in stocks for a dozen."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, I don't see why you chaps should always be making fun of my appetite," said Fatty Wynn peevishly. "I'm not an over-eater, you know, but I do believe in laying in a solid foundation."

"Your foundation's enough for a giddy regiment, though, Fatty," grinned Tom. "Anyway, we've got to work this stunt by strategy. There are twelve Grammarians, and ten of us, and we can't tackle superior numbers except by strategy. That's where you come in, Kerr. We'll let those wasters get on the island with their tuck, and then you can appear there, and scare 'em off. You look so real and wicked, Kerr, and act like a regular old madman. You ought to be able to work the giddy trick."

"Rather!" said Manners. "I think my cinematograph camera ought to come in jolly useful, too!"

Manners had with him a camera, slung on a strap across his shoulders. It was a large camera, with a handle attached to it.

This was Manners' latest acquisition—a cinematograph camera. Manners was a keen amateur photographer, and his camera was his hobby.

Manners had been saving up for a long time to buy a cinematograph camera—not a toy, but an instrument to take real living pictures. A handsome "tip" from his uncle in Lancashire had now rendered the purchase possible, and Manners had brought it along with him this afternoon, hoping to take some "moving" pictures of Gordon Gay & Co. He had already tested the instrument the day before, in filming the march-past of the Grammarians at St. Jim's, whilst in the hands of the "mad master." The film had been developed and proved a huge success, though quite unknown to Gordon Gay & Co., of course!

"Good wheeze!" said Figgins heartily. "We'll make those bouncers sit up, and you can film 'em, Manners. But mum's the word!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we're all agreed on our plan of action!" said Tom Merry.

"We are!" said the members of the Triple Alliance solemnly.

Meanwhile, Gordon Gay & Co. had loaded up the Daisy with a huge consignment of tuck and had set off down the river.

Four strong pairs of arms pulled with a will at the oars, and carried the boat through the water at a good pace.

Some distance up the river rose tree-tops that marked the island in the centre of the stream. They pulled quickly into the island, and drew into the landing-place.

"We're lucky to have such a jolly fine day!" said Frank Monk. "Here we are, far away from the madding crowd and mad schoolmasters—not to mention those St. Jim's duffers! We can leave the boat here and pitch camp in the middle of the island."

"Let's get ashore, then," said Gordon Gay. "Lend a hand with this prog, you chaps. My word! We've brought enough to feed a giddy battalion!"

The tuck and all the necessary cooking utensils were taken ashore, the Daisy was tied up, and Gordon Gay led the way into the interior of the island, to a glade that made an ideal camping-ground.

There, Tadpole and Mont Blong were left to prepare the picnic, whilst Gordon Gay and the others improved the

shining hour by exploring the old Norman ruins in the middle of the island.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. had followed the Grammarians up the river, and had landed round the island, quite close to where the Daisy was tied up. Kerr, wearing his "mad master" disguise, crept away cautiously through the trees.

"We'll hang back," said Tom Merry. "Wherever you go, we shan't be far behind, so that if anything goes off-side we'll be on hand to help."

"All serene!"

Kerr was a trained scout, and he managed to get across the island without being seen by the Grammarians. Hiding among the trees, he caught sight of Gordon Gay & Co. among the ruins.

"My word!" chuckled the masquerader of St. Jim's. "So the dear boys don't suspect anything. Let me see, there must be two of the bounders on the island somewhere, getting the feed ready."

Kerr did not take long to locate the glade where Tadpole and Mont Blong were preparing the tea.

The tablecloth was laid out neatly over a tarpaulin on the grass, and all the good things were spread in tempting array upon it. Tadpole had a petrol stove going at full pressure, and upon it was a frying-pan, containing some sizzling sausages. Mont Blong was frying rashers of bacon over another stove, whilst on a little spirit stove the kettle was boiling. The air was fragrant with the appetising odour of sausages and bacon, and the amateur cooks were quite red and hot as a result of their labours.

"Ciel!" said Mont Blong, giving a sniff and turning to Tadpole, who was pumping the stove. "You are burning ze sausages, Tadpole. Zere is too much flame from ze stove, n'est ce pas?"

"Oh, rats!" said Tadpole. "I know what I'm doing, I suppose? You get on with the rashers, Froggy, and—Why, what—Yah! Wow! Yerroop!"

There was a flare from the stove and a fiendish howl from Tadpole as the flame licked hungrily at him. He gave a wild leap in the air and sucked his fingers.

"Yow-ow-ow! I'm burnt! Oooogh!"

"Ze pork pies—zey burn!" wailed Mont Blong, and he made a clutch at the bag of pork-pies that stood near by.

Tadpole, after some desperate efforts, managed to put out the flame.

"Now, Froggy—"

"Mon Dieu!" cried Mont Blong, going suddenly pale.

The French junior was standing gazing in the trees ahead like one transfixed.

Tadpole blinked, and he, too, gave vent to a startled gasp. Creeping into the glade from behind the trees was a form they knew so well. It was the "mad master," looking more horrible and bloodthirsty than ever.

CHAPTER 7. Bowled Out!

"GUG-G-GREAT Scott!" stuttered Tadpole, in horrified accents.

"Ma foi!" said Mont Blong faintly.

Kerr rolled his eyes and gave a truly horrible leer.

"Ah-ah-ahhhh!" he said, in rasping tones. "So again we meet! You little rascals are trespassing on my island!"

Tadpole and Mont Blong were too much smitten with terror to reply. Tadpole's knees knocked, whilst the Gallic junior's hair almost stood on end. The "mad master" came closer, a look of positive lust in his glaring eyes.

He gave a harsh, dry cackle.

"Ha, ha! I have caught you! Yesterday you escaped me, but now I shall have vengeance! I will kill you, and hurl your lifeless bodies into the river! Yah-ohhhhhh!"

Kerr made a sloop, with hands clutching at his "victims," and Tadpole and Mont Blong, who had been rooted to the ground in horror, became instantly galvanised into action.

Uttering yells of terror, they turned round and fled!

They stood not upon the order of their going, but fairly flew from the glade. They tore for dear life among the trees, ripping their way through bushes and brambles in their haste to get away.

Kerr picked up a frying-pan and gave chase, uttering the most bloodcurdling yells imaginable. These sounds increased the terror of Tadpole and Mont Blong. Fear lent them wings, and they reached the water's edge in record time.

"The boat—quick!" gasped Tadpole. "We must warn the others before that old rotter does anything dreadful!"

"Ah, oui, oui, oui!"

Mont Blong wrenched off the rope that tethered the Daisy to the bank. He and Tadpole scrambled into the boat in hot haste. Tadpole took up the oars, and pushed off, just as the terrifying figure of the "mad master" burst out of the trees.

"Yah-ah-ahhhh!" howled Kerr, dancing like a dervish on the bank, and waving the frying-pan furiously in the air. "Come back, do you hear?"

Tadpole and Mont Blong heard, but they certainly did not go back! They sat in the boat and trembled. Tadpole lugged at the oars with all his might, and the Daisy shot out of sight round the island.

As soon as the two scared Grammarians had gone, the demeanour of the "madman" on the bank changed as if by magic. Instead of dancing and yelling like one possessed, Kerr dropped the frying-pan, and held his sides, and shook with laughter till the horn-rimmed spectacles on his nose fairly wobbled.

Manners came out from among the trees near by, almost doubled up with mirth.

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "That was rich, Kerr—really rich! You scared those duffers beautifully, and I've taken some ripping films. They've left all the tuck, too, and our chaps are taking it away to our boat!"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's the ticket!" responded Kerr.

The two juniors hurried back to the other side of the island, where Tom Merry & Co., who had scurried away with the raided tuck, were putting it on their boat, which was waiting on the bank.

Fatty Wynn, who was minding the boat, gave a joyous chirrup when he saw the tuck.

"Oh, good! So you've got the Tommy! My word, what a fine lot! Good old Kerr! Hurrah!"

"Don't make too much row," said Kerr cautiously. "Tadpole has raised the alarm by now, and Gordon Gay and the others will be coming after me. I'd better trot along and see if I can scare them off."

"Rather!" said Manners. "Let's keep up this 'mad master' jape as long as possible. I want to get some more

funny films. I'll follow you up, Kerr, and film the proceedings!"

Whilst Tom Merry & Co. rowed away to the river-bank with the raided tuck, Kerr crept away through the trees, with Manners trailing him, eager to do more work with his cinematograph camera.

As soon as Tadpole and Mont Blong had rowed out of sight of the "mad master," they tied the boat up once more and dashed in the direction of the ruins. They came on Gordon Gay & Co. suddenly as they rounded a fallen mass of masonry, and the party of Grammarians stared at the two panting juniors.

"The 'mad master's' here!" gasped Tadpole. "On the island!"

Gordon Gay looked incredulous.

"You must be day-dreaming," he said.

"I tell you we saw him!" screeched Tadpole. "With our own eyes we saw him, didn't we, Mont Blong?"

"Oui, oui!" said Mont Blong, waving his hands frantically. "Ze scatty mastair—he appear all of ze sudden, and—helas!—we have to do ze bunk!"

"He's properly off his head!" said Tadpole wildly. "He thinks it's his island, and we're trespassers!"

"Great pip!"

"More of the old lunatic's delusions, of course!" said Gordon Gay, looking very grim. "Well, if this doesn't just about take the bun! We came all the way up here specially to enjoy ourselves for the afternoon and keep out of that old loony's way, and he turns up on the island! If he's still there, now's our chance to rope him in. Let's have a scout round."

"I—I say—" began Tadpole nervously.

"Oh, come on!" said Gordon Gay. "I'm worrying about our tuck!"

"Same here!"

The Grammarians followed Tadpole and Mont Blong back to the boat and rowed round the island. They were about to take the boat in when a fearsome figure pranced before their view, coming from behind the bushes.

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Solution of Last Week's "HIDDEN NAMES" Puzzle.

1. Herbert Plantagenet Mauleverer.
2. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
3. Samuel Tuckless Bunter.
4. Sidney James Snoop.
5. Napoleon Dupont.
6. George Tubb.
7. Paul Pontifex Prout.
8. George Alfred Gatty.
9. William Gosling.

Gordon Gay & Co. pulled back in dismay, and blinked at the "mad master."

Kerr's antics were calculated to unnerve anyone.

He glared at them ferociously.

"Go away!" he yelled, pulling out his toy pistol and waving it threateningly in the air. "This is my island! I am monarch of all I survey! My right here is none to dispute! From the centre all round to the sea, I'm lord of the fowl and the brute!"

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Monk. "He's spouting poetry now! He's as mad as a hatter!"

"I shall fire!" screeched Kerr, executing the wildest capers on the bank. "You little rascals shall not land on my island! Go away! Be off! Dismiss! Take ten thousand lines, all of you!"

"G-great Scott!"

"You're expelled!" shouted Kerr, determined to fully impress the Grammarians with the depth of his "insanity." "You're all expelled! Go away, or I shall shoot! Take that boat away from my island, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Look here, sir! We want our tuck!" said Gordon Gay desperately. "If you let us have our tuck we'll leave your island—"

"Go!" howled Kerr, brandishing the wicked-looking toy pistol. "This gun is fully loaded! I am a good shot! Gay, I have marked you down! If you are not gone by the time I count six, I shall fire! One—two—thr—"

Gordon Gay & Co. did not tarry longer.

In the face of such a threat there was simply no argument left.

They bent to their oars, and the Daisy went swiftly away down the river.

Kerr stood on the bank, and danced, and waved, and yelled, and performed all manner of tricks, such as only would be expected of a madman!

Gordon Gay & Co., having gone some distance, looked back at the prancing figure on the island.

Gay snapped his teeth down hard.

"Look here! I'm not going to be done like this, madman or no madman!" he exclaimed. "Keete's thoroughly off his rocker, that's evident, and he's dangerous. Now, I've got an idea. If you chaps row Monkey and I back to the island out of sight of old Keete, we'll land without the old rascal spotting us, and keep an eye on him till you chaps come back with help. How's that?"

"I'm game!" said Frank Monk. "Blow Amos Keete! We want our tuck! We'll see if we can't catch him on the hop!"

The boat was rowed cautiously back to the island, hidden from the view of the disguised Kerr; and Gordon Gay and Frank Monk jumped ashore. Then the Daisy went on, with the other Grammarians on board, to fetch help from lower down the river.

By this time the form of the "mad master" had disappeared from view.

"Now, be jolly careful!" said Gay, as the two Grammarians slipped quietly into the bushes. "We dare not risk a shot from that blessed pistol!"

"Hark!" said Frank Monk tensely. "Here's someone coming!"

They listened, and sure enough footsteps sounded on the grass near by.

Next minute the form of the pseudo mad schoolmaster came into view.

Kerr had returned for one of the stoves, which Tom Merry & Co., hidden close by the opposite bank, needed for the preparation of the raided feed. He still had on his disguise.

Satisfied that the Grammarians had all been driven off, Kerr came on unsuspectingly.

Gordon Gay and Monk, hidden behind the bushes, exchanged grim glances.

"Here he comes!" muttered Gay. "Now, Monkey, don't give him a chance to draw that gun. Nab him!"

Upon the word the two arose, and they flung themselves on the "mad master."

Kerr swung round, with a cry of alarm, but too late!

Gordon Gay and Monk pounced upon him like Rugger three-quarters on the attack.

Crash!

"Got him!" said Gay breathlessly.

Kerr went down with a roar by the water's edge, with Gordon Gay and Monk piling on top of him.

As he did so the toy pistol came rolling out of his pocket, and it fell close to the struggling trio.

Frank Monk gave a shout.

"Great Scott! It's only a dummy gun, after all! The old rotter's been spoofing us!"

"My hat!" panted Gordon Gay. "Then he may not be so dangerous, after all! Duck him!"

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Four strong, vice-like hands gripped Amos Keete. Kerr struggled frantically, but all to no purpose.

The Grammarians sent him headlong into the water, and he disappeared with a tremendous splash.

"Gerrroooooogh!"

The water near the bank was too shallow to be dangerous. The two Grammarians retained their grasp of the "mad master," and when he came up again, spluttering and choking, they prepared to duck him again.

But the Grammarians released their victim in amazement. They gazed at him open-mouthed. The immersion in the water had brought about a startling change in the "mad master's" appearance. Kerr's wig and whiskers had been knocked awry, and the water had washed off the artificial colouring of his complexion and the darkening of his eyebrows. His features were now recognisable, and Gordon Gay and Monk found themselves gazing at a face that was well known to them. One name was uttered by two voices in a simultaneous shout of amazement:

"Kerr!"

CHAPTER 8.

A Change of Identity!

GORGE KERR lay, grovelling and spluttering, on the ground, half in the water and half out.

Gordon Gay and Monk blinked down at him in utter stupefaction.

"Kerr!"

"You awful spoofer!"

"Grooooooogh!" said Kerr.

"You howling impostor!" shrieked Gordon Gay.

"You spoofing bounder!" yelled Monk.

Kerr, gouging the water out of his eyes, sat up and gave a grin. There was no help for it now; the game was up!

"Oooogh! Yah! Gerrugh!" he said. "You—you've bowled me out!"

Gordon Gay's face was a study.

"Kerr! Then it was you all the time!" he ejaculated. "There's no mad schoolmaster at all!"

"That's about the size of it, I reckon!" grinned Kerr.

"I spoofed you beautifully, didn't I, with my terrible looks and dummy gun? What do you think of that for a hoax, you Grammarian bounders? Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you spoofing humbug!" choked Frank Monk.

"You—you—you—"

Words simply failed Gordon Gay.

Kerr gave a chuckle, and then shouted at the top of his voice:

"Rescue, St. Jim's!"

"Why, what the—?" gasped Gordon Gay. "Yow-ow! Yah! Yaroooooogh!"

Kerr, with a quick movement, had grabbed them both and knocked their heads together with a sudden crack that elicited fiendish yells from the two Grammarians. They tried to get hold of Kerr again; but the canny Scots junior was too quick for them, and eluded their grasp by dodging swiftly.

There was a tramp of footsteps through the trees, and Tom Merry & Co. arrived in full force.

Gordon Gay and Monk were then quickly secured.

"Oh crumbs!" exclaimed Tom. "Then these bounders have tumbled to the game, Kerr!"

"Where are the others?" demanded Figgins anxiously.

"They've gone on down the river in the boat," said Kerr. "I expect they've gone to fetch help. Well, I've had a bit of a run for my money; and, anyway, we've got these bounders' tuck!"

"Yaas, wathah! You've been done bown, Gay, deah boy!"

The two Grammarians writhed frantically.

"You—you rotters!" roared Gay. "You've raided our tuck, then!"

"Rather!" responded Tom Merry cheerfully. "You raided ours last week, and now we've purloined yours. Tit for tat, you know. Well, chaps, let's take these two away and get on with the grub. Fatty will have had the sosses and the bacon fried by now."

"What-ho!"

Despite their struggles, Gordon Gay and Monk were yanked through the trees and dumped into the St. Jim's fellows' boat and taken off to the creek, where Fatty Wynn, very red of face, had the picnic prepared.

"Hallo!" he said. "So the game's up! You've caught those two bounders!"

"Rather!" said Tom. "Get some ropes, chaps, and tie 'em up fast, so that they can't escape. Better gag 'em, too, in case they attract attention. I don't suppose the others will be back for some time yet. They'll have to go a good way down the river before they can get help. Anyway, let's get on with the feed!"

Gordon Gay and Monk were bound and gagged and left in the grass near the boat.

They could only writhe and splutter behind their gags, but the looks they gave their captors were eloquent enough of their feelings.

They had to lie there and suffer the anguish of seeing their rivals enjoy the raided picnic.

The members of the Triple Alliance were joyful.

The victory over Gordon Gay & Co. was exhilarating, and the prospect of a feed was satisfying in every way to the victors of the jape.

"Tain't an ordinary picnic, you know," said Figgins. "We've earned it with the sweat of our brow, so to speak—won it by giddy valour—and that's what makes it so jolly ripping! I propose a special toast in honour of old Kerr, without whom this scrumptious spread would not have been forthcoming."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "Before pwoposin' a toast to the Twiple Alliance, deah boys, let us dwink to the vewy good health of our fwient and ally, Kerr, the ex-mad mastah, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who went into a blue funk?"

"Grammar School duffers!"

"Who ate their tuck?"

"We did!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The point now arises," said Figgins; "what are we to do with these bounders? The others will be coming back soon with reinforcements, and we look like getting it in the neck. Personally, I don't feel in the mood for scrapping, after a feed."

"Same here!" said several voices.

Tom Merry had been very thoughtful during the latter part of the feed. His eyes were twinkling, and he gave vent to a deep chuckle. The other members of the Triple Alliance looked inquiringly at him.

"I've got an idea," said Tom. "Listen to your uncle. The Grammarian crowd have gone down the river to fetch help. They mean to catch the mad master. They'll be jolly disappointed if, after taking all that trouble, they found out that they were after a mare's nest. I think it only fair that they should make a capture. They won't get the real madman, of course—not even the spoof one that sent 'em



CHATTY PARS ABOUT FOOTBALL AND FOOTBALLERS.

IN football, reputation comes and goes quickly. Of the eleven players who appeared for England against Ireland last October, only one—Hill, the centre-half—was retained for the corresponding match this October.

Blackmore, the centre-forward of Bolton Wanderers, used to practice shooting into an apple barrel, and he didn't think he was doing really well until he could send the ball into the barrel with nine kicks out of ten. A good man at the target.

West Ham United have a first team which does not contain a single Scottish player. It is, indeed, an all-England eleven, and the success of the side shows that managers who make long journeys often overlook the talent which is near home.

Joseph Miller, the right half-back of Middlesbrough, has played in five different grades of football in five seasons—First and Second Divisions of the Scottish and the English League, and also the Southern Third Division.

And Kerr was toasted with right good will.

The masquerader of St. Jim's bore his blushing honours thick upon him with becoming modesty.

"The feed looks jolly good," said Kerr. "These real-and-ham patties are about my mark. Go ahead, gents; there's plenty here, and we got it cheap. Wire in!"

"What-ho!"

The juniors needed no second bidding. They wired in with a will, and proceeded to do full justice to the feed.

Fatty Wynn was in his element. He travelled through the good things at a rate that made Gordon Gay and Monk writhe in torment to watch him. He rapturously vouchsafed that he had never tasted better pork-pies, and that the tarts were prime. The others heartily concurred with Fatty, and vied with him in stowing away the luscious provender.

There was plenty for all, and at last even Fatty, champion trencherman though he was, leaned back in the tall grass, undid a couple of buttons in his waistcoat, and announced that he was satisfied.

"Jolly good feed!" said Blake appreciatively.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry smiled sweetly across at his old rival.

"Well, Gay, old sport, methinks we've done you a beautiful brown this time!" he said. "We don't want to boast, of course, but you really must admit that this rather knocks you into a cocked hat. I say, chaps, who's top dog at Rylcombe?"

"St. Jim's! St. Jim's!" roared his followers.

Sunderland may not nowadays live up to their old title of the team of all the talents. But that they do their best for their supporters is shown by the fact that between Christmas Day of 1924, and the eighth of October this season, they never failed to score in a League match on their own ground.

Alec James, the famous forward of Preston North End, is the son-in-law of David Willis, the former Newcastle United half-back who is now the trainer of Notts Forest.

Three brothers occupying the same position in three different League teams is the unique record of the Bakers. Alfred is the right-half of the Arsenal, James the right-half of Nelson, and Aaron, the right-half of Leeds United.

Crawford, the goalkeeper of Blackburn Rovers, claims that the house in which he was born at Stirling gives a view over nine ancient battlefields. No wonder he "fears no foe in shining armour."

Ivor Poyntz, the Hartlepool United player, has done a bit of travelling in his time in search of points in football. He has had seven clubs in eight seasons, and to add to his wanderings, he has played in five different positions in the same team this season.

In the years since the War, Chelsea hold the record of having gone for a longer time undefeated than any other Football League club. In the season of 1925-6, the Pensioners did not meet with defeat until their fifteenth match. But even after that good start they didn't win the championship.

James Seddon, the centre-half of Bolton Wanderers, was found in a curious way. The reserve team went to Chorley to play a match, but being one short they pressed Seddon into service.

off in a blue funk. Any old madman will do. Gordon Gay, for instance. He's the nearest approach to a raving lunatic I know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I tumble!" exclaimed Figgins. "You're going to dress old Gordon Gay up in Kerr's 'mad master' disguise, and leave him for his own gang to capture?"

"Right first time, Figgy!" chuckled Tom. "Of course, we shall have to leave Gay on the island, and take Monk with us. That will be as easy as anything. Now, Kerr, what about the disguise? You didn't lose the wig and the whiskers?"

"No fear!" said Kerr. "Then you want me to disguise old Gay to look like the spoof Amos Keete?"

"Rather! Can you do it?"

"I should say so!" replied Kerr. "I brought along a lot of extra make-up stuff, you know, in case I needed it. The water hasn't done it much harm. Let's set to work now. We shall have to hurry."

Gordon Gay was dragged across, and Kerr set to work with thoroughness and dispatch.

The captive's bonds and gag were temporarily removed.

Gordon Gay wriggled with wrath.

"You—you horrid bounder, Tom Merry! Lemme gerrup!" he roared.

"Not this time, old son," responded Tom cheerfully. "This is where you undergo a giddy transformation, you know."

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Now, don't struggle, or you may get hurt. We're going to rig you up as the 'mad master,' for the rest of your crew to capture when they come along. If you cut up rusty you'll get it in the neck, but if you're quiet we'll treat you like the apple of our eye. His legs first, Kerr!"

Kerr removed all the clothes that appertained to the "mad master" disguise. Then he and Tom Merry and Blake grabbed Gordon Gay. The Grammarian leader began to kick violently, but he was held in a grip of iron, and between them they got the baggy trousers on him. The trousers were secured, and following them came some highly coloured socks, and a pair of boots and spats.

Gordon Gay struggled desperately, and seemed about to explode with wrath. His captors, however, were too many for him. The "mad master's" garments were fastened on him, and his limbs were tied up with rope. Gordon Gay was practically helpless, then. Blake held his head still, whilst Kerr proceeded with the make-up. The Scottish junior worked deftly and skilfully with the grease-paints, and under his practised hands Gordon Gay's face rapidly underwent a transformation. With the wig, the whiskers, and the eyeglasses in position, the disguise was complete.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at Gordon Gay and roared.

They could not help gasping at Kerr's marvellous handiwork.

Only a keen and practised eye could detect the make-up.

Gordon Gay wriggled convulsively in his bonds and gave forth the most lurid threats and epithets. Tom Merry rammed a gag into his mouth, and tied it there securely. Gay's roars trailed off into choking gurgles. What with these sounds, and the wild manner in which he rolled his eyes, he might have been mistaken anywhere for a madman.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Manners. "Is that Gay, or is it a real loony? I say, Gay, is that really you, old man?"

"G-r-r-r!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sounds awful, doesn't it?" said Tom. "And just look at the bloodthirsty look in his eyes! I'm blowed if he doesn't look more like a madman than you looked, Kerr!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now we must get him across to the island, dump him, and hide here till the others arrive," said Tom. "Get the dinghy, Blake."

Whilst Blake got the dinghy, the captain of the Shell tore a leaf from his notebook and wrote in pencil upon it, in large characters, these words:

"PLEASE DISPOSE OF AT ONCE. DON'T UNGAG, OR HE'LL BITE. SEE YOU LATER."

The Shell captain pinned that note to Gordon Gay's chest as he lay there in the grass, bound and gagged.

Then the leader of the Grammarians was placed in the dinghy, and Blake and Figgins rowed him across to the island. There Gay was dumped, and the dinghy returned to the bank.

They were only just in time, for no sooner had the St. Jim's jaspers hidden themselves with their boat in the long grass by the bank than the splashing of oars sounded, and the Daisy, accompanied by two other boats, came into view round the bend in the river.

The boats contained Grammarians, all looking very grim and determined. The three boats drew up to the island, and their occupants landed. And Tom Merry & Co., watching from afar, chuckled deeply to themselves!

CHAPTER 9.

The Grammarians' Capture!

"CAREFUL how you go!" said Tadpole.

He spoke nervously.

The reinforced Grammarian contingent were making their way carefully among the trees on the island. The two Woottons led the way, armed with boat-hooks.

The hunt for the "mad master" had begun!

"Shssh!" said Harry Wootton warningly.

"I wonder where Gay and Monk are?" said Carboy.

"There's no sound or sign of them. Ah! Listen!"

"Ecoutez!" said Mont Blong tensely.

The Grammarians listened with bated breath, and heard the faint sound as of a body wriggling in the grass among the trees.

Tadpole shook with excitement.

"Th-ther's somebody hiding there!" he gasped.

Jack Wootton motioned to his brother, and they made their way carefully through the undergrowth. Looking between the branches, a low, thrilled gasp escaped Harry Wootton. He gripped his brother's arm.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

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There, on the grass, bound hand and foot, lay a fearful-looking form that both recognised at once.

"My only hat!" breathed Jack Wootton. "It's Amos Keete! Then, Gay and Monk must have nabbed him, and left him trussed up here!"

They called to the others that the "mad master" was caught. Tadpole, who came first through the trees, gave a whoop of delight.

"Hurrah! It's Amos Keete, all right! Gay and Monk have tied him up! That's fine!"

Harry Wootton bent down and read the message pinned to the captive's chest:

"Please dispose of at once. Don't ungag, or he'll bite! See you later."



"Lift your feet up!" thundered the "mad master." Gordon Gay & much as Tom Merry & Co. could do to keep from bursting into h Kerr's doing it on those bound

"Great Scott!"

The Grammarians gazed at the trussed-up figure of the "mad master" in thrilled excitement.

"Gerrrooogh!" came behind the gag.

"My word!" said Carboy, with a shiver. "He's a regular maniac, isn't he? Just look at his eyes! Oh crumbs! For goodness' sake don't move that gag!"

"No fear!" said Harry Wootton. "Before we take him away, though, let's have a hunt round for old Gay and Monk. Surely they can't have left the island. We want the tuck."

"Rather!"

But, much to the Grammarians' bewilderment, there were no signs of Gay and Monk, or the tuck.

"Perhaps Gay and Monk will explain everything when we see them," said Harry Wootton. "They've evidently got something up their sleeve, otherwise they wouldn't have left this merchant tied up here, with this note, telling us to deal with him. Come on! The best thing we can do is to get

him away quick! I'm blessed if I quite like the idea of having a madman on my hands, even though he is tied up. Let's hand him over to the police as soon as possible!"

"What-ho!"
The captive was carted away through the trees, and dumped unceremoniously into the Daisy.
The Grammarians scrambled on board their respective boats, and rowed away from the island.

They were suffused with excitement and jubilation at their capture. They, naturally, felt the glory of having such a notorious character in their hands, and they were anxious to get to Rylcombe with all speed, and deliver up the captive in a duly impressive manner, before anything untoward took place.



Tom Merry & Co. marched on past St. Jim's, doing the "goose step." It was as a matter of course. "Oh, my hat!" gurgled Tom Merry. "Old Grundy properly!" (See Chapter 5.)

The "mad master" really did look terrifying, as he lay there in the stern of the Daisy, rolling his eyes, and screwing up his face into the most ghastly contortions.

"Pull away, chaps!" said Jack Wootton. "This will be a fine feather in our cap—what? We've captured the giddy lunatic master, and those St. Jim's wasters are probably still hunting for him down Rylcombe way. Won't they feel jolly small when they hear that we've bagged him!"

"Rather!"
The fellows at the oars pulled with all their might, and the Daisy went along at a fine pace.

Tom Merry & Co. followed at a distance in their own boat, with Frank Monk on board. They caught up with the Grammarians in the more crowded part of the river, and passed them without exciting suspicion.

At last the landing-stage was reached.
Tom Merry & Co. had already tied up their boat, and left it in charge of a boatman, with a tarpaulin thrown over their bound and gagged prisoner. They looked greatly

interested when Tadpole & Co. came rushing up with their wild-eyed captive.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom. "Who the dickens have you got there?"

"The mad master, of course!" cried Tadpole shrilly. "Look at him! It's Amos Keete! That makes you stare, Tom Merry, doesn't it? This is where the Grammar School scores again! Come on, chaps—this way to the police station!"

"Vitement! Vitement!" cried Mont Blong excitedly.
The Triple Alliance looked at one another as the Grammarians swooped onward with their helpless prisoner. They almost exploded.

"I—I say, this is rich, you know!" gasped Figgins. "They're yanking old Gay off to the police station!"

"Oh, well, there'll be no harm done, and it will be a jolly fine rag!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Poor old Gay! No wonder he looks mad! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a surprise—packet for those bounders when they get to the police station!" gurgled Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Let's hop along and see the fun," said Tom Merry. "We must be in at the death! I wouldn't miss it for worlds!"

"No fear!"
Manners, hidden behind a boat, had made a film of the landing of the supposed mad master.

Doing their best to contain their laughter, Tom Merry & Co. went up the lane in the wake of the Grammarians. Quite a crowd followed the prisoner as he was hustled into Rylcombe High Street and along to the police station.

The St. Jim's fellows in the village, who came running up from all sides to see the cause of the excitement, were startled at first, and then amused, when the word went quietly round from Tom Merry & Co. that there was a joke on.

Tadpole & Co., feeling very proud of themselves, swept their prisoner along the High Street, and rushed him up the steps of the police station.

P.-c. Crump was in the station, and he stared in astonishment when that vast throng of schoolboys invaded the place.

"Ho! Wot's all this 'ere?"
Tadpole, who was in the forefront, touched his hat respectfully, while Mont Blong raised his hat, and made a sweeping bow.

"Monsieur—"
"If you please, Mr. Crump, we've captured the mad schoolmaster, and we've brought him here to deliver him up to the law!" said Tadpole impressively.

Mr. Crump gasped.
"Wot, you young rascallions? Don't you come playing any of your jokes 'ere!"

"Joke!" exclaimed Jack Wootton, with some warmth. "Oh, not at all, I assure you! We—our chaps—captured the madman, and we've brought him here so that he can be shoved in a lunatic asylum straight away. He's raving mad and dangerous! Look at him, sir—thoroughly rabid!"

P.-c. Crump gazed at the prisoner as he lay on the floor. Truth to tell, the captive did look thoroughly rabid. The expression in his eyes and on his face told of a wildness that was all-consuming.

"Ho!" exclaimed Mr. Crump. "Wot I says is this 'ere. 'Oo is 'e?"

"The mad schoolmaster, you know!"

"Ho!" said Mr. Crump sarcastically. "Then, p'raps you'll tell me 'ow Mr. Amos Keete 'appens to 'ave been found days ago at Pebblesea, and is now in a nursing-home?"

"But—but" stuttered Tadpole—"but this—is the mad schoolmaster, sir! He chased us! He threatened us! He tried to blow up some of our chaps yesterday—"

P.-c. Crump snorted, and proceeded to remove the gag from the prisoner's mouth.

As he did so the "mad master" made a remark which was startling to say the least.

"You—you silly owls!"

Tadpole jumped.

"Why, what—Who—"

"I'm not a madman!" roared the prisoner. "I'm Gordon Gay!"

Tadpole's jaw dropped. Mont Blong went limp and turned quite pale. The other Grammarians looked blankly at the prisoner.

P.-c. Crump smiled grimly.
Tom Merry & Co., who had crowded in at the door, burst into roars of laughter. A great long, loud, lifting roar burst through the precincts of the police station.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"It's Gay!" stuttered Harry Wootton, as if in a dream. "Gordon Gay! Then it—it's a joke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Tuck in your tuppennies, kids!" said Manners, insinuating his cinematograph camera between the heads of his chums.

"I must get a film of this! Look at Wootton's face; it's worth a guinea a box! Ha, ha, ha!"

P.-c. Crump dragged off the wig and the whiskers and the spectacles from Gordon Gay's face. He wiped some of the grease-paint off as well, and the well-known features of the Grammarian leader were revealed.

"Yurruhh!" gurgled Gordon Gay. "You dummies! You burbling idiots! You howling cuckoos! Yow-ow! Lemme loose!"

"My heye!" exclaimed Mr. Crump. "So this is a joke—wot? You young rips—"

Wootton looked dazed.

"I—I say, Gay, how on earth did you come to be dressed up like that?" he said in a faint voice. "There was a real mad schoolmaster, wasn't there?"

"No!" howled Gordon Gay. "It was all spoof! There wasn't a mad master at all! It was Kerr all the time—Kerr, of St. Jim's! Those St. Jim's rotters worked a game of spoof on us! Monk and I bowled Kerr out on the island; and then these other rotters caught us, and dressed me up, and left me on the island. Yarroogh! Ow! Lemme get at 'em! Lemme loose!"

Jack Wootton swayed as the horrible truth of the whole affair dawned upon him. The others blinked at each other, utterly flabbergasted.

"Oh!" gasped Wootton. "What a sell! What—what asses we've made of ourselves! We shall never hear the end of this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Hear us smile! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ere!" snorted P.-c. Crump. "Houtside! Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"I'm sorry, sir! It was only—ha, ha!—a harmless joke!" gasped Tom Merry, as he bent down and proceeded to cut his old rival's bonds. "No harm meant at all, sir, I assure you! Ha, ha! I mean, honour bright! Ha, ha!—Yarooooogh!"

Gordon Gay had landed a doughty left on Tom's nose.

"Lemme get at you!" howled the incensed Grammarian leader, jumping up. "You spoofing rotter—"

"Houtside!" roared the enraged P.-c. Crump.

Saints and Grammarians surged out into the High Street, where roars of laughter greeted the pseudo madman. Gordon Gay, dressed in his long-tailed coat and baggy trousers, looked very comical.

Even he and his chums had to see the humorous side of the affair.

"Well, you bounders, I rather think we've put the kybosh on you this journey—what?" said Tom Merry.

Gordon Gay burst into a rueful laugh.

"Yes, you old scallywag!" he said. "I admit it was a jolly good wheeze, that mad master stunt of yours, and we were spoofed beautifully. No grudge, of course, although I've had a rough time. But I'll never admit that St. Jim's is top-dog! You can go and eat coke!"

"Oh, very well," chuckled Tom. "We shall see, old top."

"Rats!" was Gordon Gay's emphatic, if inelegant, retort. "What have you done with Monk?"

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled.

"Monky?" said Tom. "Oh, you'll find him in our boat, down by the water. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at in that!" grunted Gordon Gay. "Come on, chaps! Let's rescue Monk. Look here, Tom Merry, you might hand him over."

"You can go down and take him from our boat with all the pleasure in the world!" said Tom blandly.

"No larks, mind!" said his rival suspiciously.

"Oh, no! No more larks! We've finished for to-day, old scout."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians, with Tom Merry & Co. behind, went down to the river where the boat was tied up. Gay got into the boat and pulled back the tarpaulin. Then a gasp of astonishment escaped him.

Lying in the bottom of the boat was what, at first sight, appeared to be the bound and gagged figure of a nigger minstrel. At a closer scrutiny, however, the features of Frank Monk became recognisable, despite his black complexion. The white rings round the hapless Grammarian's eyes and mouth were further traces of Kerr's handiwork. Gordon Gay & Co. fairly blinked at him.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "There's Monk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the onlookers.

Gordon Gay took the gag from his schoolfellow's mouth. Monk began to splutter wildly.

"Yarroogh! Lemme loose!" he howled. Oh, dear! Gerooooogh!"

Gordon Gay & Co. lifted their hapless schoolfellow from the boat and took him away, with ferocious looks at their hilarious rivals.

Tom Merry & Co. returned to St. Jim's flushed with

triumph and chortling with mirth over the fun they had had. The Grammarians went back to the Grammar School snoring. But, as Gordon Gay said darkly, in spite of the ignominies they had suffered at the hands of the St. Jim's japers, their spirit was not conquered—not by long chalks!

CHAPTER 10.

Gussy in a Fix!

TOM MERRY was sitting on the table in Study No. 10 two days later, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pocket, and a frown of portentous thoughtfulness on his youthful brow, when Monty Lowther came into the room.

"Hallo!" said Monty, staring at him. "Wherefore the worried look, old son?"

It was not usual to see Tom Merry, the jolliest junior at St. Jim's, so deeply immersed in reflection.

"Hallo, owl!" said Monty Lowther, in a louder voice, as Tom did not appear to notice his presence. "What's the matter? Are you trying to work out some mathematical problem, or have you got a pain in your gear-box?"

Tom gave a grunt.

"There's something in the wind!" he said.

"Ah!" said Monty, looking serious at once. "The Grammar cads are up to something!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"We scored properly with the 'mad master' jape, but it seems they're not going to take it lying down," he said. "I've been watching points, to see whether Gordon Gay realises that he's been done brown and put in the shade. But the cheeky bounder doesn't seem squashed. He and the other duffers have got something on between them."

"Like their cheek!" said Monty Lowther. "Well, Tommy, if they do pop up again, they'll have to be sat on, that's all!"

"Rather!" said Tom. "Now, you know the wheeze the Triple Alliance have agreed on?"

"The cinematograph stunt?" asked Monty.

"Yes."

"Well, it's all right, isn't it?" demanded Lowther. "I reckon it's a jolly good wheeze! Manners has taken all those films of the Grammarians, and they've turned out ripping films, too—just like real screen comedies. In fact, I reckon our films are a jolly sight funnier than some of the comedies we see at the cinemas! We've all had a whip-round, and we're going to hire a cinematograph-machine from Wayland. I've written some funny sub-titles for Manners' films, and on Saturday we're going to hire the hall at Rylcombe for a cinema show, when our own films, and a few others, will be shown. We're going to send Gordon Gay & Co. some invitation tickets and get 'em to turn up and see themselves on the pictures. That'll be a scream, won't it? They'll be knocked right into a cocked hat! It will settle the question once and for all as to who's top-dog at Rylcombe!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'm afraid there's going to be a hitch, Monty," he said. "We can't have the hall. It's my belief the Grammarians have got wind of something, and they've forestalled us."

"Oh, crumbs! How's that, Tommy?"

"Well, I rang up the manager of the hall a little while ago, while you were in the dark-room helping Manners make the sub-title films to stick on the reel," said Tom. "As soon as I got on, and the manager heard my voice he said, 'Is that you, Master Gay?' He was evidently under the impression that it was Gordon Gay speaking. Then, when I told him who I was, and asked him whether we could hire the hall for a cinema show on Saturday, he said he was sorry, but the hall was already engaged for that night."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I tried to get out of him who had booked the hall, but he was as mum as an oyster," went on Tom. "By his tone, I should imagine he was concealing something. Now, I've noticed that some of Gay's gang have been very prominent in the vicinity of the village hall this last day or so, and that made me suspect that there was something in the wind. It's my belief they've booked the hall on Saturday evening for some stunt or other."

Monty Lowther gave a whistle.

"Then, in that case, Tommy, it's up to the Triple Alliance to find out what the game is!" he said.

"Let's call a meeting," said Tom.

The other members of the Triple Alliance were rounded up. Blake & Co. were at home, writing impositions, and they nobly responded to Tom Merry's call. Figgins and Kerr were in the gymnasium, having a round with the gloves. They ceased hostilities and went to the tuckshop to rout out Fatty Wynn. Manners, who had been in the dark-room, putting the finishing touches to his great film

"comedy," came into Study No. 10 just as the others had all gathered there.

"Hallo!" he said, when he saw the crowded study.

"What's on?"

"A council of war," said Tom Merry.

"Well, what's the giddy racket?" asked Manners.

"What's Gordon Gay done now?"

"The thing that worries us is, what's the Bounder going to do?" said Tom; and he proceeded to recount his information to the assembled company.

The Triple Alliance all looked most solemn and serious.

"My hat!" said Blake. "We can't allow the Grammarians to muck up our cinema show. What's to be done, Tommy?"

"We've got to find out what those bounders are up to," said Tom. "For that purpose, we shall have to send out spies. It's getting dark now, and we ought to send out the spies without delay. Let's draw lots."

"Right-ho!"

The slips were cut out, one for each fellow present, and one was marked with a cross. Then these were folded, placed into a top hat, and shuffled. The members of the Triple Alliance then drew their lots.

"Blank, me!" said Manners, with something like a look of relief.

"Same here!" said Figgins.

"And me!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

There was an exclamation from Arthur Augustus as he unfolded the slip he had drawn from the top-hat.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr. "It's Gussy!"

"Good old Augustus!"

"Then Gussy's our spy!" said Tom Merry. "H'm! I'm not sure that he's a suitable chap, exactly—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I uttably wepudiate that remark!" said the swell of St. Jim's with considerable dignity. "I am quite suah that I should make a wippin' Secwet Service chap. As a fellow of tact and judgment, I wegard myself as bein' the most qualified for the job, bai Jove!"

"All serene, Gussy," said Tom. "Wait till it's dark, then, and you can cut off. Remember, it's up to you to nose out information, and not get caught. If you do, our cause will suffer!"

"I undahstand, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "Wely on me to get on the twack!"

Dusk was falling, and lights were beginning to glimmer in the windows of St. Jim's, when a dark figure might have been seen—to borrow an expression of the novelist—stealing away from the School House.

That dark figure made its way to a certain spot in the wall overlooking the Rylcombe Lane, where an old oak tree gave access to the top of the wall. The mysterious marauder clambered up into the tree, swung along the lower branches and got on the wall, finding secure foothold among the ivy that grew thickly on the brickwork. As he scrambled over the top of the wall, his topper fell off and went down into the grass on the other side.

The climber was quick to follow it. He jumped down from the wall, and as he landed there was a strange sound in the gloom.

Serunch!

"Oh, gweat Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—for it was he—"My toppah! I have jumped on it, bai Jove! How fwightfully clumsy of me! Oh, deah!"

Gussy picked up his battered topper and gazed at it sadly in the light of the lamp in the lane.

That topper had once been a most resplendent article of headgear—but now, alas!—it resembled a concertina in shape, and its pristine beauty had departed. Gussy pushed it out as best he could and set it firmly on his head.

Then he started off down the Rylcombe Lane, in the direction of the Grammar School, at a quick pace.

Arthur Augustus, true to his trust, was on the "twack!"

It did not take him long to reach the Grammar School.

Darkness had settled on the countryside and the tall, red-brick pile of Rylcombe Grammar School was wrapped in gloom. Lights gleamed brightly at the windows. Glancing round cautiously, to make certain that he was not observed, D'Arcy commenced to clamber over the tradesmen's gate, which gave access to the school quadrangle.

The swell of St. Jim's was an athlete as well as an aristocrat, and he found the gate moderately easy to negotiate. He creased his trousers, and got his jacket smothered in dirt, in the operation of climbing over into the enemy camp, but D'Arcy did not mind. He was prepared to sacrifice anything—even his own personal appearance—for the good of the cause.

Dropping softly on the other side of the gate, Arthur Augustus scuttled off in the darkness. He was making his way across towards the main school block, keeping well within the shadows, when suddenly he gave a start.

Three schoolboy figures came looming up out of the

darkness. One of these he recognised as the tall, weedy form of Tadpole. They were coming directly towards him!

"Oh, cwumbs! I—I sincerely twust they haven't spotted me!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, drawing back towards the large woodshed that stood nearby. "If I am discovahed—bai Jove! They're comin' wight acwoss here! I'd bettah hop into this shed."

Gussy suited his actions to his words. He skipped quickly into the dark, silent interior of the woodshed. He stood by the door and listened tensely.

The three Grammarians were coming!

There was no mistake about it! Gussy took a cautious look through the door, and saw the three dark figures bearing down on the woodshed.

"Oh, bai Jove! They're comin' in here!" he exclaimed. "I must hide, bai Jove!"

Gussy looked round him desperately. On his right lay a heap of faggots and some garden implements. In a far corner was a large wooden box. He stepped towards this quickly, and as he did so, the footsteps of the approaching Grammarians sounded perilously near.

Gussy raised the lid of the box and, without more ado, climbed inside.

The box was empty, and it was large enough to admit him, with a squeeze. He lowered the lid, and there was a click as the lock snapped to.

He was locked in!

Arthur Augustus crouched there inside the box in the woodshed, scarcely daring to breathe, and he listened intently. He heard the three Grammarians enter the shed.

"Buck up, you chaps!" came Carboy's voice. "We've got to get this beastly box up to the Common-room! Kim on!"

Arthur Augustus gave a gasp of horror at these words. Next minute there was a bump as three pairs of hands grasped the box and turned it over.

"I say, this seems pretty heavy!" said the voice of Tadpole.

"Perhaps Gay left some things in it!" broke in Jelks minor. "It's locked, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Tadpole. "There's no need to undo it, though. Let's get it indoors, so that we can get on with the rehearsal!"

"Right-ho! Lend a hand!"

Bump! Bump!

(Continued on next page.)



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The imprisoned Gussy received a severe shaking up as the Grammarians dragged the box out of the woodshed and proceeded to hoist it on their shoulders.

Bump! Bump!

"Whew!" gasped Carboy. "This box is heavier than it looks! Gerrup! Have you got it, Tadpole?"

"Groooogh! Not yet! A little more over to me—Yah! You clumsy ass, Jelks!"

Crash!

The box fell to the ground, and Tadpole, who had received a clump on the foot with it, commenced to dance and yell.

Poor Arthur Augustus, now lying upside-down inside the box, wriggled and gasped. He dare not give himself away. He must remain quiet, and hope for the best.

"Oh, come on!" said Carboy. "We've got to take the blessed thing in somehow! All the others are waiting for us! Stop that row, Tadpole, and yank it up! Heave-ho!"

Up went the box, and Gussy, locked up inside, underwent a variety of strange sensations.

Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!

He could hear the staggering footsteps of the three Grammarians as they bore the box away. It swayed and rocked perilously, and the luckless occupant felt quite dizzy.

At length he realised that Carboy & Co. had got the box indoors.

"Kim on! Up the stairs with it!" he heard Carboy say breathlessly. "Whew! I had no idea this box was so weighty! Mind how you go on now, Tadpole!"

Arthur Augustus felt himself being carried along at an acute angle; and, with a good deal of jolting and bumping, the box was carted upstairs and into the room.

CHAPTER 11.

Returned Without Thanks!

GUSSY, cramped up in the box, heard a hum of voices all around him.

"My hat! Here you are at last!" came the voice of Gordon Gay. "What have you chumps been dawdling for? You've held up the giddy rehearsal!"

"Groooogh! This box is jolly heavy, and—"

"Oh, rats! Dump it over there, and let's get on with the washing!"

The box landed on the floor with a bump.

"Now," said Gordon Gay, his voice coming clearly to the hapless prisoner inside the box, "that box is the treasure-chest—see? It contains the treasure of the enemy, and this scene is supposed to be in the hold of the ship. The pirates swarm on board, armed to the giddy teeth, waving their cutlasses, and they make off with the treasure-chest after a gory battle. Sir John Fitzbooter and the gallant remnants of his crew are in the hold defending the treasure. We'd better rehearse the scene now before it gets too late and the prefects start chipping in!"

"Can't we rehearse in the open air to-morrow?" asked Harry Wootton. "I'm blessed if I fancy scrapping with giddy weapons in here! There's not enough room, you know. Let's do the cave scene now, and leave the fight in the galleon till to-morrow in the open air—say, in the wood."

"Couldn't he be did!" said Gordon Gay. "Tom Merry has smelled a rat, and those St. Jim's bounders are trying to find out what we're up to; but we're jolly well not giving them the chance! Saturday, when our pirate play comes off in the village hall, will be soon enough for Merry to know, and then he'll open his eyes—what? Those St. Jim's asses rather fancy their luck at amateur theatricals, but we're jolly well going to show 'em a thing or two this journey!"

"Oh, rather!"

"Now, Carboy, Tadpole, and Jelks, have you got your costumes on?"

"Ye-es!"

"Thank goodness!" said Gordon Gay. "Now, Monky, line up your defenders round the treasure-chest. You've got to defend the treasure that's inside the chest. When I appear with my band of sea robbers, you yell out: 'By my troth, it's Captain Kidd! Oddsbobs, men! Slaughter him for a scurvy sea-rat!' Then things begin to hum—see?"

"All serene!"

Poor Gussy, imprisoned within the "treasure-chest," cramped up in a most uncomfortable position, with his top-hat jammed almost over his eyes, listened tensely.

He heard the Grammarians ranging themselves for the rehearsal.

Then someone gave a blood-curdling yell that rang with intensity through the room.

"Yo, ho, my rum-soaked minions! 'Tis Sir John Fitzbooter himself! He has the treasure in yon oaken chest!"

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'Sblood! 'Sdeath! The treasure, you wolves! We'll take the treasure!"

"Woowooooogh!" howled the "pirates."

"By my troth, it's Captain Kidd! Oddsbobs, men! Slaughter him for a scurvy sea-rat!"

Crash! Wallop! Biff! Thwack!

Things began to hum with a vengeance.

Tin cutlasses and cricket stumps (which were serving temporarily as swords) rattled fiercely together; pirates and defenders of the treasure-chest yelled and lunged away at one another in the most bloodthirsty manner, and the treasure-chest itself fairly shivered under the tramping of feet and the many impacts it received.

"Yah! Yawwoogh! Bai Jove! Oh cwumbs! Yawwoooooogh!" gurgled the luckless prisoner within.

Whack! Biff! Wallop! Crash!

"Away with the treasure, ye wolves!" roared Gordon Gay, in his guise as Captain Kidd, the pirate bad and bold. "To our galleon with the chest! Gunpowder and smoke! Yo, ho, ho, and—Yarooooogh!"

The schoolboy pirate chief gave a yell as the lid of the box on which he was dancing came up. A mighty smite from someone's boot had shattered the lock, and Gussy, giving a heave, pushed the lid up. Human flesh and blood could stand no more of that terrific jolting and thumping. The treasure-chest came open, Gordon Gay went sprawling on the floor, and the form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy arose from the box, with an anguished gasp.

"Yawwwwwugh!"

Pirates and defenders of the treasure-chest ceased their doughty smiting at one another, and stood transfixed with amazement. Gordon Gay sat up on the floor and gazed like one in a dream at the "treasure" that was revealed.

"Gwoooogh! Oh deah! Bai Jove! Yow-ow-ow-ow!" gasped Gussy.

There was a concerted howl from the flabbergasted Grammarians.

"D'Arcy!"

"It's Gussy of St. Jim's!"

"That image!"

"Great pip!"

Gordon Gay staggered to his feet. He glared at Arthur Augustus.

Gussy knelt in the treasure chest, groped for his monocle and jammed it into his eye. He blinked round the room.

A strange scene met his gaze.

Gordon Gay & Co. were dressed as pirates and seamen of the Spanish Main. They looked very picturesque and thrilling in their amateur theatrical garb. The wind was now completely knocked out of their sails, so to speak, by the revelation from their treasure chest.

They gazed at the swell of St. Jim's and gasped.

"Gussy!" ejaculated Gordon Gay, in a faint voice. "You—here! You—you horrid spy! You've been in that box all the time!"

"Gwoooogh! Yah! Oh cwumbs! Yaas, wathah! Ow-ow-wow!"

The Grammarians looked wrathfully at each other.

"Then the secret's out!" hooted Monk. "He knows all about our pirate play for Saturday, and now those St. Jim's rotters will try to mess it up!"

Gordon Gay's look became very grim.

"Let 'em try to put their spoke in, that's all!" he said. "It can't be helped now, you chaos. This giddy tailor's dummy has acted the spy, and he's found out what we're up to. He doesn't look as though he's had a very cheery time of it, though! Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay burst into a laugh at the sight of Arthur Augustus.

The other Grammarians looked at him, and they, too, gave vent to roars of mirth.

Gussy was in a hapless state. His once immaculate attire was badly creased and crumpled, his jacket was ripped up the back, his collar was dangling ungracefully over his left shoulder, his hair was rumpled and dishevelled, and his battered topper looked most ludicrous, stuck on one side of his head.

"Gwoooooogh!" he gasped. "Weally, you boundahs, I fail to see any cause whatevah for laughtah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gordon Gay. "We do, old scout! Well, Gussy, that was a jolly clever idea of yours, though it beats me how you came to think of it. You're in a cleft stick now, you ass! You can go back to St. Jim's with your information, when we let you go, but you can also tell the giddy Triple Alliance that we defy 'em to do their worst! We're giving a first-rate play in the village hall on Saturday, members of the public are being invited, and dogs, infants in arms, and St. Jim's microbes are not admitted! We're going to rope in a lot of kudos over it, and St. Jim's will never succeed in mucking up the show!"

"Wats!" said Gussy warmly. "Wait and see, you boundah!"



The mysterious marauder jumped from the wall. As he landed, there was a strange sound in the gloom. Scunch! "Oh! Gwheet Scott!" It was the dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "My toppah! Bai Jove, I have jumped on it!"

(See Chapter 10.)

"Oh, rag him!" said Monk. "We'll teach him to come in here, spying on us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Scrag him!"

"Scalp him!"

"Look here, you wuff wottahs— Yawwoogh!"

Gussy went down inside the box under a perfect horde of pirates and seamen. They rolled him about, and sat on him and squashed him, and jammed his topper over his eyes, and poured ink over his face, and rammed his collar and necktie down his back.

"Now, fetch a hammer and some nails," said Gordon Gay. "We'll nail up the box!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carboy rushed away for hammer and nails. The lid of the box was forced down on Gussy, and the Grammarians sat on it.

"Good egg!" chuckled Gordon Gay, when the hammer and nails arrived. "We'll send Tom Merry & Co. their treasure, all nicely boxed up! We shall have to get another box for the play, but it's worth it!"

Bang, bang, bang! went the hammer, as Gordon Gay proceeded to nail down the lid.

Muffled gurgles came from within.

"Yewwugh! Lemme out, you wottahs! Gwoooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"There!" said Gordon Gay at last. "That's got Gussy boxed up! We'll bribe old Jenkins to take him to St. Jim's on his trolley!"

Jenkins was the handyman of the Grammar School. He had a trolley which he used specially for wheeling boxes and trunks. Jenkins was an obliging fellow, especially when it was made worth his while. Certain coin of the realm passed between Jenkins and Gordon Gay & Co., and ten minutes later Jenkins left the Grammar School by the side gate, trundling along his trolley, on which reposed the treasure chest.

Jenkins chuckled as he listened to the smothered gurgles and moans of the prisoner within the box.

Arriving at St. Jim's, he rang the bell, and Taggles came lumbering out of his lodge.

"Ho!" said the worthy porter, glaring wide-eyed through the bars of the gate. "Wot's this?"

"Box for Master Merry," said Jenkins, with a grin. "Come on, put a jerk in it, old 'un. I can't wait 'ere all night."

Taggles opened the gate and took in the box.

Jenkins chuckled, and trundled his trolley away.

Taggles gave a jump as he heard the weird sounds proceeding from the box.

"Ow! Gwoooogh!"

"My heye!" ejaculated the startled porter, closing the

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gate and blinking down at the mysterious box in the lamp-light. "There's something alive in this 'ere box!"

There came the sound of hurrying footsteps, and the Terrible Three and Blake, Herries, and Digby came up.

They were looking anxious.

"Seen anything of D'Arcy, Taggles?" demanded Tom. "It's nearly bed-time, and he hasn't come in yet—I mean, we've lost Gussy. My hat! What's this?"

The juniors were looking at the box.

"Which that box 'as just arrived for you, Master Merry," said Taggles. "Fine time o' night to be delivering boxes, Hi must say! And wot Hi says is this 'ere, there's something fishy about that box! 'Ark!"

Strange gurgling sounds were coming from the box.

Tom looked at the label in amazement. It ran thus: "To Master Tom Merry, St. Jim's. Perishable Goods—To be Opened Immediately!"

"My hat!" said Blake. "What the dickens——"

"Gwooooooh!" came a muffled moan from the interior of the box. "Lemme out, deah boys! Yow-ow-ow!" Blake leaped clear of the ground in amazement.

"It's Gussy!" he ejaculated.

"Gussy!" said Tom Merry faintly.

"Oooh! Huwwy up!" came an urgent voice from inside the box. "I'm cwamped! I'm stifled! Lemme loose!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry. "Gussy's been nabbed, and sent back in a box!"

"Get a crowbar and a hammer—quick, Taggles!" said Blake.

Taggles grumblingly fetched the crowbar and hammer, and Tom Merry and Blake set to work to open the box. The sounds of mighty smiting attracted fellows from all directions. By the time the box was open quite a crowd had collected.

Blake and Tom dragged off the lid, and a strange figure arose.

"Gwooh! Yah! Oh deah! I say, deah boys——"

"Gussy!"

"It's Gussy!" came a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake seized Arthur Augustus by the scruff of his neck and fairly yanked him out of the box. He glared at him in the lamplight by the gates.

"You—you duffer, Gussy!" he roared. "Then you've failed! They grabbed you—the bounders! You haven't found out anything——"

"Gwoooooh! Don't shake me like that, Blake! Weally, you wuff wottah, you won't give a fellow a chance to explain. I've found out quite a lot!"

"Eh? What's that, Gussy?" said Tom Merry quickly. "You've got some information, then?"

"Yaas, wathah! Gwoooooh! But let me get this howwid stuff off my face, deah boys, and clean myself up, before I give you my weport."

Gussy was accompanied into the School House by a chortling throng.

After a much needed wash and change, he went along to Sturdy No. 6, where the rest of the Triple Alliance were anxiously awaiting him.

When Gussy told them his story, they gasped. They laughed, too—they couldn't help it!

"Well, Gussy, you're a coughidrop!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Things couldn't have turned out better, really, although you had to rough it. But, still, you have this consolation, old chap, it was for the good of the cause."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The Alliance has now to consider steps whereby to put the kybosh on Gay's pirate play," went on the captain of the Shell. "We want the village hall for a cinematograph show on Saturday. We've got the films ready, and

we want the Grammarians to see 'em and squirm. Now, my sons, it's time to toddle off to bed. Get your brain-boxes to work, and think of some wheezes. We'll hold another meeting to-morrow to discuss 'em. Whatever happens, chaps, that show's got to fizzle out."

"Rather!"

And the members of the Triple Alliance went to bed to think out ideas for putting the "kybosh" on the Grammarians.

CHAPTER 12.

Kerr Does It Again!

FIGGINS & CO. came into their study in the New House the next day, to find it occupied by the Terrible Three and Blake & Co.

Figgins started.

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

"Hallo, Figgys!" said Tom Merry solemnly. "We've got a wheeze. It's a corker of an idea—against the Grammarians, you know—and we need Kerr's help again."

"Oh, good!" said Kerr. "What is it?"

"We're going to play another game of spoof on Gordon Gay, and do him in the eye properly over this Saturday entertainment affair," said Tom, with a chuckle. "So far, you know, they're quite in the dark about our film wheeze. They don't know that we've made a complete film record of the 'mad master' jape, and made a screaming comedy out of it, with sub-titles written by Monty. That's a treat in store for them. Now the wheeze is, Kerr, for you to dress up as a giddy traveller representing a film company. You've got to toddle along with Manners, who will be disguised as well, as a camera-man, and palm yourselves off on the Grammarians. Tell 'em you'd like to assist their show by giving them a cinema entertainment as well. They'll take to you like lost brothers!"

"My word!" said Figgins, his eyes dancing. "That's a great idea!"

"Ripping!" chuckled Kerr. "Of course, my job will be to work myself into their confidence, so as to give you chaps an opportunity of taking a hand in affairs."

"Exactly!" grinned Tom. "Once you've got into those bounders' confidence, the rest should be easy. You can take some films of 'em, too, just to please 'em. Manners can take his cinematograph camera, and that ought to make an impression. As regards the cinematograph projector itself, I've fixed up with that firm at Wayland for the hire of a machine. It will be quite easily installed in the village hall; in fact, you can get Gordon Gay and his crowd to help you instal it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Triple Alliance.

"Then you can find out all their plans and let us know, and we'll take the necessary steps to turn their giddy pirate play into a hopeless washout!" chuckled Tom. "Don't you see how beautifully we can work things if the wheeze comes off? All the Grammarians will be in the hall on Saturday, eager to be entertained. They'll be entertained by a mucked-up pirate play, and then by a cinema show that will make their hair stand on end!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good wheeze!" said Kerr eagerly. "We'll set about the stunt right away. There's nothing like striking the giddy iron while it's hot. Where's my make-up box?"

Kerr set to work with a will, and the others rendered all the assistance required.

The champion masquerader of St. Jim's soon transformed himself into a red-haired young man of thirty, or thereabouts, dressed in a neat tweed suit, brown shoes, and a Trilby hat. No one—not even his own chums—recognised him.

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at him in wondering amazement. "My word!" gasped Tom. "You really are a giddy marvel, Kerr! That disguise would take in anybody!"

"Now for Manners!" chuckled Kerr. "We've heaps of make-up and disguise in our amateur theatricals box. I think I'll make you look stout, Manners, and give you sandy hair and a moustache."

"Right-ho!" said Manners.

Manners was soon disguised, under Kerr's swift and skilful treatment. He became, instead of a schoolboy, a rather plump and florid-looking man of about twenty-five.

The others gazed at the two disguised juniors, and they chuckled hugely.

"How's that?" said Kerr, as he put the finishing touches to Manners' eyebrows.

"First chop!" said Tom Merry.

"Couldn't be better!" chuckled Figgins.

"Oh, good!" said Kerr. "Well, Manners, let's get your camera and toddle off. We'll go down to the printers in Rylcombe, and get some business cards printed. That will make the thing look genuine. They print cards while you wait, and only charge half-a-crown for fifty."



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information on all the clubs, read

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The two masqueraders left St. Jim's, Kerr taking a handbag, so as to look more businesslike, and Manners equipped with his cinematograph camera on a tripod.

If it was possible to delude the Grammarians again, Kerr was the man to do it, and Manners was a very able assistant.

They went first to the printer's in Rylcombe High Street, and emerged from there, ten minutes later, equipped with some neatly-printed cards.

"Now to beard the giddy Grammarians in their den!" chuckled Kerr.

The two disguised juniors made their way to the Grammar School.

Gordon Gay & Co. were chatting near the gates when the two neatly-dressed young men, one carrying a handbag and the other a cinematograph camera, walked boldly in.

"Good-afternoon!" said the one with the handbag.

Gordon Gay & Co. raised their caps respectfully to the strangers.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" they said.

"Would you kindly direct me to—er—Master Gordon Gay?" said the first speaker, consulting a notebook. "I wish to speak to him on a rather important matter."

Gordon Gay & Co. looked astonished.

"I'm Gay, sir," said the Grammarian leader, stepping forward.

"Ah! Well, I am very pleased to meet you, Master Gay. Allow me to present my card."

The disguised Kerr handed Gordon Gay one of the cards he had just had printed. The Grammarians looked at it wonderingly. This was how it ran:

"THE BRITISH EDUCATIONAL AND TOPICAL FILM CO.
Representative: Mr. J. B. Jimson."

Gordon Gay & Co. opened their eyes at this.

They regarded the strangers within the gates with new interest.

"My hat!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "You are Mr. Jimson?"

Kerr bowed.

"Mr. James Jimson, at your service," he said. "This is my colleague and camera-man, Mr. William Waggors."

Manners bowed.

"We hear that you lads are shortly giving an amateur theatrical entertainment in Rylcombe, Master Gay," said Kerr, in a businesslike way. "Being travelling representatives of the British Educational and Topical Film Co., we are naturally interested in your project. We are anxious to do all we can to further healthy and instructive entertainments among the youth of the land, especially through the medium of the films. Now, I wish to make you an offer of a complete cinematograph equipment, including some very fine films, as an additional attraction for your show."

Gordon Gay & Co. gasped.

They looked at Messrs. "Jimson" and "Waggors" eagerly.

"I—I say, you really mean that, sir?" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "You're not joking?"

"Of course not, my lads!" laughed "Mr. Jimson." "If you care to accept our offer, we are completely at your service. Here is a cinematograph camera with which we take our films. We have an up-to-date cinematograph projector at Wayland, and we are willing to instal this at your entertainment absolutely free, provide you with a programme of films—mostly comedies—and send a man to show the films, so that you need have nothing to worry about. Now, how does that strike you?"

Gordon Gay drew a deep breath.

He looked at his chums with dancing eyes.

"I—I say, isn't that ripping?" he exclaimed. "A cinema show all for nothing! That'll bring 'em, won't it? It will put another one over on St. Jim's, too!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, my lads, what do you say?" said the cheery-looking "Mr. Jimson."

"It's awfully good of you, sir!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "We'd be only too jolly pleased to have the cinema show, if it will be no trouble to you."

"No trouble at all, Master Gay, I assure you!" said Kerr, with a wave of the hand. "We are only too glad to assist at schoolboy entertainments. Would you like us to take a film of you now?"

"Oh, rather, sir!"

"How topping!"

"Will the film be ready by Saturday, sir?" asked Gordon Gay eagerly. "We'd like to see ourselves on the films."

"You shall see yourselves on the films, never worry!" said "Mr. Jimson," with a chuckle. "'Waggors,' get your camera ready!"

The Grammarians were all agog with eagerness to be

filmed. It was a new experience for them, especially as they would afterwards be seeing themselves actually on the moving pictures.

"Mr. Jimson" paraded them in the quadrangle, and "Mr. Waggors" set up the cinematograph camera. Gordon Gay & Co. put their caps and neckties nice and straight, and posed for the film.

Click-click-clickety-click! went the camera.

"Smile, boys!" said "Mr. Jimson."

Gordon Gay & Co. smiled sweetly.

"There!" chuckled the disguised Kerr. "I think that will make a nice film. Now, boys, when would you like the cinematograph apparatus fixed up in the hall?"

"What about Saturday afternoon, sir?" said Gordon Gay.

"We're running a pirate play, you know, and we shall be busy ourselves in the hall all the afternoon, rehearsing and getting the stage and all the props fixed up. Will that suit you?"

"It will suit admirably, Master Gay!" said "Mr. Jimson." "Expect us at the village hall at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon. I'll bring the films and all the apparatus with me."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Gordon Gay. "You're a brick! I say, though, there's another school near here—St. Jim's, you know—and we have scraps-up now and again and all that. Just at present we're trying to do those bounders in the eye, and if they heard about the cinematograph stunt they'd be wild, and would want to mess it up. Now—"

"Ah, I understand perfectly, Master Gay!" chuckled "Mr. Jimson"—alias Kerr. "You may rely on me to make sure that the St. Jim's boys do not interfere with the cinema show."

"Oh, good!" said Gordon Gay, in great relief.

The two St. Jim's masqueraders took leave of the Grammarians in the most friendly manner possible. Gordon Gay & Co. were jubilant at what they considered a fine stroke of luck. As Gay said, a cinema show as well as a play was rather unique, and it would "make those St. Jim's asses sing small!"

Meanwhile, Messrs. "Jimson" and "Waggors" made their way, by a devious route, to St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. met them at the gates, and inquired eagerly whether the wheeze had worked.

"It's working like a charm so far!" chuckled Kerr. "The Grammarians are no end keen! We've got permission to enter the hall on Saturday afternoon to fix up the cinematograph. Once Manners and I get in there, you can trust us to do the rest! We've actually got old Gordon Gay and his gang to pose for a film for us! They were properly taken in again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry & Co. went indoors, chortling.

CHAPTER 13.

Not According To Plan!

SATURDAY!

The great day had come!

Gordon Gay & Co. had been looking forward very eagerly to that particular day, and so had Tom Merry & Co.

The Grammarians were feeling confident that their rivals would not succeed in making a fiasco of their show. The hall was kept closely guarded, all the props and costumes had been smuggled in overnight, and, in short, everything pointed to the Grammarians' plans being a complete success.

The idea of having a cinematograph entertainment afterwards—with a film showing themselves on the screen—captivated them greatly.

Gordon Gay & Co. made much of it, and the bills they got out announcing the show looked very imposing indeed.

This was the placard that was posted outside the village hall that afternoon for all and sundry to see:

"RYLCOMBE GRAMMAR SCHOOL JUNIOR DRAMATIC CLUB

(President, Gordon Gay, Esq.)

present

"CAPTAIN KIDD'S REVENGE,"

A Thrilling Pirate Play of the Spanish Main,

Written by Messrs. Gay and Monk,

To-night at 7 o'clock sharp,

followed by

A GRAND CINEMATOGRAPH ENTERTAINMENT,
showing all the latest Comedies, Dramas, etc.
THE SHOW OF A LIFETIME! PUTS ALL OTHERS
IN THE SHADE!

Admission by ticket only.

Dogs not admitted. St. Jim's fellows chuckled out on their necks.

BY ORDER."

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At four o'clock promptly, Kerr and Manners, disguised as Messrs "Jimson" and "Waggers," of the British Educational and Topical Film Co., arrived at the village hall in a cab from Wayland, with a cinematograph machine and all the necessary paraphernalia, including a sheet for the showing of the films.

Gordon Gay & Co., who were on guard at the door, greeted them joyously and admitted them at once.

The Grammarians had been busy in the hall.

The stage was very well got up. Tadpole had painted the scenery. It was a trifle lurid, perhaps, but it was most effective.

The stage props and traps had been manufactured, at some pains and much labour, by Gordon Gay & Co. The deck scene on the pirate boat had taken some time to rig up—not to mention numberless planks of wood, pounds of nails, reams of canvas, and pots of paint! A storm and a wreck were supposed to take place in that scene, and Gordon Gay had had the water laid on behind so as to give the impression of "lashing waves"; and flash-powder for lighting. Drums, tin cans, and other "noises off" had been installed to provide the necessary thrill and realism of the raging storm.

As Gordon Gay said, there was nothing like being thorough over a job!

The masqueraders of St. Jim's looked at all these things as Gordon Gay proudly explained everything to them, and they chuckled softly.

Kerr and Manners took mental notes, and they did not miss much.

The Grammarians, little suspecting the presence of the enemy within their ranks, proceeded with their final rehearsal and the fixing up of things generally, whilst Kerr and Manners erected the cinematograph and got things in place for the showing of the films.

"Well," said Gordon Gay at length, "we shall have to pop back to school to have some tea before the show. We're going to lock this place up, in case any of those St. Jim's bounders try to get in and muck things up at the last minute. Will you be staying here, Mr. Jimson?"

"Oh, yes, I must stay here, Master Gay!" said Kerr. "Mr. Waggers and I have to fix up the cinematograph sheet, you know. But you lads needn't worry. Leave the keys with us, and we'll let you in when you come back."

"Right-ho!"

In blissful ignorance of the real identity of the obliging "Mr. Jimson," Gordon Gay handed over the keys, and he and his followers left for the Grammar School to have their tea before the great performance.

Left to their own devices in the village hall, the two masqueraders chuckled.

Tom Merry & Co. were not far away. Manners fetched them, and Kerr let them into the hall.

The heroes of the Triple Alliance chortled when they saw Gordon Gay & Co.'s preparations.

"My word!" breathed Tom Merry. "This is where we take a hand and alter things a bit—what?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The St. Jim's juniors set to work. There were plenty of tools handy, and they quickly made certain alterations in the fixing of the scenery and effects.

In front of the stage there was an enclosure for an orchestra. A piano had been installed there, together with a number of other musical instruments. Gordon Gay had told "Mr. Jimson" that they had formed an orchestra among themselves, and that the orchestra were going to give the necessary musical part of the entertainment.

Tom Merry & Co. paid particular attention to some of those instruments. They had brought in with them certain other "musical" instruments of their own. These they stowed away under the stage. There was plenty of room under the stage, and as six o'clock drew nigh some of the marauders hid under there.

Others secreted themselves on top of the proscenium, where a plenitude of drapery and fittings afforded them ample concealment.

By the time Gordon Gay & Co. returned there was no sign of the intruders, and Messrs. "Jimson" and "Waggers" had everything fitted up for the cinema show, and the films ready for showing.

"Well, things look all serene," said Frank Monk, glancing round. "I hope the thing goes off all right. I'm feeling rather nervous now that it's close at hand."

"Well, there's nothing to be nervous about," said Gordon Gay. "We all know our parts. Let's get dressed."

Long before the time fixed for the start the hall began to fill with Grammarians and the chosen ticket-holders. Dr. Monk had received an invitation, and had graciously accepted. Juniors flocked in and scrambled for seats, and passed loud remarks upon what they expected the show would be like. The tall, imposing cinematograph machine

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rigged up at the end of the hall, facing the stage, evoked a good deal of excited comment and admiration.

Two Grammarians mounted guard over the door to keep out all undesirables. A good many St. Jim's fellows came down the High Street and clamoured for admittance, but were refused. The doorkeepers were armed with cricket-stumps, in case of argument.

But only one or two minor squabbles took place between the rival juniors. The St. Jim's fellows seemed content to wait outside and pass chaffing remarks concerning the whole affair. But, being quite impervious to such remarks, the Grammarians did not mind much.

The curtain was down, and on the stroke of seven the orchestra took their places. The orchestra consisted of piano, a violin, a banjo, a rickety mandolin, two mouth-organs, a piccolo, a one-string monstrosity called a Jap fiddle, complete with loud-speaker attachment, and a portable jazz set.

A long-haired youth named Hubbard filled the position of conductor. He also played the violin. He stood up in front of the audience, and gravely bowed in acknowledgment of the plaudits. Then, with a sweeping motion of his violin bow, he gave the signal to commence. The tune, according to the programme, was that classic among orchestral overtures, "William Tell."

Screeeee-eeech! Bim! Bom!

The noise that arose from Gordon Gay & Co.'s orchestra could not, even by the wildest stretch of imagination, be called tuneful. A more fearful cacophony had never before been heard! There was plenty of noise and a superfluity of din, but the melodious strains of "William Tell" simply were not recognisable.

In the first place, something was decidedly wrong with the piano. The pianist thumped away at it in desperation born of despair, but he quite failed to get anything out of it beyond a series of clanging jangles and heart-rending discords.

There was also something about the trumpet that didn't seem quite right. It sounded very croupy, and, blow as the trumpeter might, the only sounds he could wreak from his instrument were either in the nature of piercing hoots or deep, ear-splitting honks like a motor-horn.

As for the fiddle, one might have been pardoned the belief that somebody was maltreating a cat, from the weird wails and shrieks and squeaks it gave. The mouth-organs, moreover, were wheezing and shrilling in a manner that mystified their players, until, stopping to investigate, they found some of the holes stopped up with plasticine. The banjoist strummed away at his instrument with vim and vigour, until there was a loud bang and the vellum burst, and gave him such a shock that he jumped clean out of his chair and landed between the legs of the conductor. String after string of the mandolin broke, until its player had nothing left to tinkle on at all, whilst the piccolo, to the distress of player and listeners alike, simply refused to play anything but one wild, whistling top note that anyone might have made simply by blowing hard and vociferously into a lathkey. The jazz set, however, was going great guns, and so was the one-string fiddle, the player of which was sawing and jabbing away with his bow at a great rate, wreaking the most wailful and ear-splitting sounds out of the trumpet.

The result of all these fearful sounds can better be imagined than described. The audience howled and hooted and stamped their feet, and stuffed their fingers into their ears to drown that deadly discord. Startled faces of pirates and seamen peered out from behind the curtain.

"What the dickens is the matter with the orchestra, Hubbard?" shouted Gordon Gay. "You silly asses, it sounds like nothing on earth! You—"

"Yah! Chuck it!" howled the audience wrathfully.

"Cheese it!"

"Call that music?"

"Yah!"

The orchestra gave it up in despair and gazed at their instruments in bewildered wonderment. There was a terrific hubbub from the audience.

"For goodness' sake ring up the curtain and let's start the play!" said Gordon Gay. "Are you all ready?"

"Ye-es."

CHAPTER 14.

Licked to a Frazzle!

UP went the curtain, and the deck of the pirate ship was displayed to view. It was supposed to be night-time, and the stage was wrapped in an impressive semi-darkness. Lanterns on deck illumined the gloom.

Captain Kidd, a fearsome-looking figure with a black patch over one eye and a perfect array of cutlery stuck behind his belt, strode into the centre of the stage. Around

him were ranged his pirate crew—a wicked and blood-thirsty crew indeed, to judge by their looks.

"Ho! What now, my merry sea-wolves?" cried Captain Kidd. "What ails you? Pining for golden doubloons, I'll warrant! But, come, we shall have the pickings of a fine treasure trove ere long—the finest on the Spanish Main! Let's have a song, you dogs—a song!"

Whereupon the pirate crew bawled out with much gusto a ditty that dealt a good deal with their love of a good "Yo, ho, and a bottle of rum!"

The effect, however, was somewhat marred by certain, strange, deep noises that came from below, under the platform. Those noises sent the musical pirates into a good deal of confusion, and they finished up in different keys.

Captain Kidd looked worried.

"The prisoners are below, Mr. Dragon," he said to his lieutenant.

Bang! Bang! Hoot! Honk, honk! Whirrrrr-rrr-rrr! came from below.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled a voice in the audience. "The prisoners are kicking up enough row, old sport!"

Motor-horns were honking, whistles were screeching, and tin cans were being rattled underneath the stage. The din was terrific.

"My hat! I mean oddsbobs!" exclaimed Captain Kidd.

"What the dickens is that thumping row?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Rattle! Rattle! Crash! Wallop!

The banjoist was strumming away at his instrument with vim and vigour when there was a loud bang, and the vellum burst. It gave such a shock to the musician that he jumped clear out of his chair and landed between the legs of the conductor. (See Chapter 14.)



The whole platform fairly shook.

A pirate came running out on deck, pointing to the imaginary heavens above.

"See, captain! In yonder sky a storm is rising! And through the dark a galleon approaches on the starboard quarter. Methinks 'tis the Santa Dozo, bound for Vera Cruz. The sea grows angry. Hist! The storm is breaking!"

Crash! Bang! Wallop!

Fizz-zzz-zzz!

The "noises off" were so startling that the audience jumped in their seats, and Captain Kidd and his pirate crew received such shocks that they wondered whether they could be hearing aright.

Pandemonium seemed to have broken loose. There never was such a storm, on land, or sea, or anywhere! Loud crashes, and thuds, and clangs were heard behind, above, and below the stage. Vivid flashes of lightning rent the "heavens," and one particularly virile ball of fire flew down from up above and set light to the tail of Captain Kidd's coat.

The pirate captain danced about the stage in a wild and demented manner.

"Yarrrogh! Yah! Oh crumbs! Batten the hatches, you wolves! I mean put this beastly flame out, quick! Yow-wow-wow!"

Several pirates ran forward and whacked at their captain's coat-tail until the flames were put out, and it was left smouldering. The effect was rather funny, and the audience rocked in their seats with merriment.

The noise of the "storm" was terrific. The actors tried to get through with their lines, but they had to shout in order to make themselves heard above the din.

Crash! Bang! Wallop! Rattle! Honk, honk!

"Mighty seas are raging!" cried one of the pirates. "The foam-crested waves batter the timbers of our good

ship, and— Yarrroogh Oh, my only Sunday hat! Oooop!"

Swoooooosh!

Water was coming over the sides of the "deck," but it was in more of a stream than a wave. That stream caught Captain Kidd amidships and sent him over on his keel with a mighty bump. There on the deck he floundered, while the tempest raged, and the lightning flashed up above, and water simply swamped across the stage.

Swoosh!

"Gerrrrugh! Stoppit!"

"Turn that water off! Yoooch!"

Other members of the cast came rushing on the stage, led by Frank Monk in his guise of Sir John Fitzbooter. The "storm" was wreaking havoc with the pirate ship. Half the bridge had fallen down, displaying a somewhat incongruous array of soap boxes and ginger-beer crates that were keeping up the rest of the scenery. A lot of "rigging" was down, too, and a number of pirates were hopelessly entangled in it.

Gordon Gay & Co. were utterly dazed.

They could not understand all this a bit.

They had arranged for a realistic and thrilling storm, but this was too much of a good thing.

The audience, having recovered from their initial astonishment, sat in their seats and rocked with laughter.

The play was developing into something like a screaming farce, and the scene on the stage was excruciatingly funny—for the audience.

Captain Kidd jumped up and made a valiant endeavour to carry on with his part.

"Odsbobs, hammer and tongs!" he roared, "Rouse ye, my men! Cover up those beastly soap-boxes, Carboy, you ass! Groogh! No storm or tempest, fire or flood can quench my thirst for gold and blood! Ow! Buzz off, Monk! You don't come on till later, you silly cuckoo! Oh crumbs! Where's my beastly cutlass—I mean, hand me my trusty blade, good Dragon! Ow! Rob and plunder, burn and sack; no Spanish dog shall hold me back! Oh, Jeminy!"

Bang! Bang! Honk! Honk! Whirrrrr-rrr-rrr! came the noises from the stage, mingling with the "noises off" in the production of a din that was most deafening to listen to.

Dr. Monk, finding the "storm" far too realistic for his delicate taste, had risen from his seat and left the hall.

"What mean these voices of the storm?" cried Captain Kidd stridently. "Are they omens that portend the end? Ah, I feel it in my bones that calamity is nigh! Yes, calamity is nigh—"

Crash!
Calamity came with a swift suddenness that carried all before it.

There was a rending noise and a clatter, and a series of swoops and swishes, and everything collapsed on top of the soliloquising Captain Kidd and his crew of buccaneers. The scenery gave way, the canvas caved in, timbers and boxes burst asunder, and everything save the cinematograph sheet rolled up at the top of the stage came down.

The amateur actors were bowled over and completely buried. The stage was a mass of disrupted scenery and heaving canvas, under which could be seen a mass of waving arms and kicking legs.

Weird, gurgling sounds came from the bold, bad, buried buccaneers.

"Yah! Groogh!"

"Gerroff!"

"Gerraway!"

"Ooooooh!"

The audience stood up and howled with laughter. The untimely finish of the pirate play was so funny that they simply couldn't help it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's that, Gay—a shipwreck?"

"Hard cheese, old son!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After much wild struggling, Gordon Gay & Co. extracted themselves from the melée on the stage. Dazed, hurt, and bearing many signs of the conflict, they crawled from under the debris and down to the floor below.

Then, above the laughter, the voice of "Mr. Jimson" rang out.

"Boys, the play has turned out a fiasco! The actors are unable to carry on. I am now going to switch off the lights, and the cinematograph show will shortly commence."

"Hurrah!"

"That's the ticket!"

"Let's have something worth seeing, for goodness' sake!"

Mr. Waggors—otherwise Manners—lowered the white screen, and a moment later all the lights went out.

The hall was plunged into Stygian blackness.

The audience waited patiently. They could hear "Mr. Jimson" and his assistant at work at the cinematograph projector at the back of the hall. Little did they realise that, in the dark, a contingent of St. Jim's juniors had crept from their places of concealment underneath and over the

stage, and were now standing round the projector and Messrs. "Jimson" and "Waggors," to form a sort of bodyguard.

Then the light went on inside the projector lantern, and a square of light showed on the screen.

The audience watched the screen eagerly.

Click, click, click, click!

The cinematograph machine was working now. These were the words that flashed before the startled eyes of the Grammarians:

"EXCLUSIVE PICTURES OF LOCAL PRIZE ASSES!"

Filming Freaks in their lairs! Taken at Rylcombe Grammar School!"

Then flickered on the screen the pictures of Gordon Gay & Co. that Messrs. "Jimson" and "Waggors" had taken at the Grammar School.

Gordon Gay & Co., sitting in front in a state bordering on collapse, and still dressed in their stage garb, blinked up at themselves on the screen.

There they were, smiling at the audience from the sheet with smiles of cherubim-like sweetness. It was a very good film, but the title rather marred the beauty of it!

The audience roared.

"Here, what's the idea?" bawled out Gordon Gay through the pitch darkness of the hall. "Who has had the cheek to call us prize asses and freaks? We—we—"

He broke off, for another film had flashed on the screen. It was called:

"DUPING THE DUFFERS, OR GULLING THE GRAMMARIANS!"

A Screaming Comedy!

St. Jim's Triple Alliance Exclusive."

Gasps of incredulous, unbelieving wrath arose.

The pictures that flashed before the eyes of the audience were clear, real, and vivid. The first scene was at St. Jim's, and the pictures showed Kerr dressed up as the "mad master," assisted by Tom Merry & Co. and other members of the Triple Alliance, who were all convulsed with mirth. Then the film went on to show Kerr sallying forth from St. Jim's in his disguise, his meeting with Gordon Gay & Co. in the lane, and the marching away of the Grammarians.

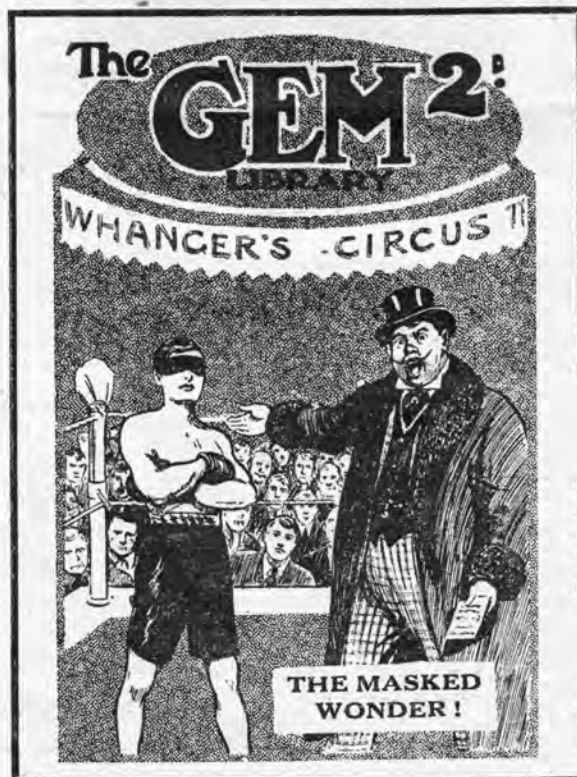
Everything was so life-like and natural. The audience gasped as the whole sequence of events in Tom Merry & Co's "mad master" jape were revealed on the living-picture screen before them!

Gordon Gay & Co. could do nothing but sit in their seats as if petrified and gape up at the screen in horror.

They saw themselves doing the "goose step" past St. Jim's, with Tom Merry & Co. in the background, laughing. The next scene was on the island, and it depicted the scaring away of Tadpole and Mont Blong from the picnic, and the departure of the Grammarians in the Daisy in consternation before the "mad master." There was also a very realistic picture showing Tom Merry & Co. enjoying the raided feed, and the "last scene of all that ends this strange, eventful history," to quote the immortal bard, was the capture of the "mad master" by the Grammarians, the dash to the police station, and the unmasking of Gordon Gay.

The fellows in the audience, amazed though they were, could not help being interested in that film! The sub-titles provided by Monty Lowther were mirth-provoking in the extreme. The audience yelled with laughter as the film went on. The joke was against Gordon Gay & Co., but it was

(Continued on page 28.)



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GRUNDY THE PRIZEFIGHTER!

In his time George Alfred Grundy of the Shell has played many roles. But his latest—that of a prize-fighter at a circus—is perhaps one of the most unique experiences that has ever fallen to his lot. How this amazing adventure comes about you fellows will discover in

"GRUNDY THE PRIZEFIGHTER!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's grand, extra long story of the cheery chums of St. Jim's.

DON'T MISS THIS TREAT—ORDER YOUR "GEM" NOW!

THE LIMIT! Mornington's treacherous desertion of his side on the footer field is in itself enough to rouse the anger of Jimmy Silver & Co., but when Mornington follows up that rascality with a decidedly shabby trick on Biggs, the gardener's boy, it's high time the dandy of the Fourth was taught a lesson!



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

KIT ERROLL befriends an old acquaintance in Albert Biggs, a one-time waif of the slums, who comes to Rookwood and takes up a post as gardener's boy. Valentine Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth, appears to Erroll to "drop" his ragged friend, but Kit refuses. In consequence of this Mornington plots with Peele & Co., three shady rotters, to eject Biggs forcibly from the school.

The plot is nipped in the bud, however, and Mornington is severely reprimanded. Thinking it is Erroll who has "split" on him, Mornington hits out at his old chum, and is given a Form licking in consequence. Anxious to smooth matters Jimmy Silver, some time later, offers Mornington a place in the footer team to meet Bagshot. Mornington accepts, but at the appointed time fails to put in an appearance, a caddish action which reminds the junior captain of the dandy's vow to get his own back for the Form licking.

(Now Read O.S.)

A Startling Interruption!

THE Bagshot fellows were waiting in a group now, staring curiously towards the Rookwood juniors, politely surprised at the delay. Hanson was shouting sarcastically.

"We've waited long enough!" snapped Jimmy Silver, his eyes blazing. "You see what this means, you fellows—that howling cad Mornington has let us down; intended to let us down all along. I half-suspected something of the kind. We'll know how to deal with him for this, though. Grace, get into your footer togs—sharp!"

"Good man!" grinned Putty Grace. "You're showing signs of sanity at last, Jimmy. You'll make a skipper yet!" And Putty Grace changed with alacrity.

A couple of minutes later the whistle went and the game started. But every fellow on the Rookwood side was inwardly raging at Mornington's trickery, and their play suffered in consequence. Even Jimmy Silver's play was careless, and his kicking erratic.

Within five minutes of play Bagshot had scored, and a roar of wrath went up from the Rookwood spectators.

But the desertion of Mornington had put the Rookwood players off their form completely—Jimmy Silver's erratic play alone was enough to put his men off and kill their keenness.

It was only by a miracle that the Bagshot men were prevented from scoring more than once in the next ten minutes, and after a corner kick that had narrowly missed their goal by a sheer fluke, Jimmy called his men in a desperate attempt to pull them together. He realised that Mornington would delight in a Rookwood defeat, and he set his teeth hard and determined that his evil desire should not be satisfied.

After that Rookwood played up well enough, and until the half-time whistle went they more than held their own.

His Own Enemy!

A GRAND NEW SCHOOL SERIAL
DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF
JIMMY SILVER & CO., OF ROOKWOOD.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

"By James! I thought we were booked for the lickin' of the year!" panted Jimmy, as they trooped off the field. "For goodness' sake, forget all about that rotter Morny—we can deal with him afterwards, and we will! Play up—if only to lose him the satisfaction of getting licked!"

"That's just what he wants, the cad!" said Raby breathlessly. "My hat! Yes, we will play up, Jimmy!"

"Leave it to me!" said Putty Grace. "If it hadn't been for me—Hallo, what's on?"

Something was obviously "on!" Near the pavilion a crowd had gathered—an excited crowd. And above the heads of the swarm of juniors showed a policeman's helmet!

"What the merry dickens—?" Jimmy Silver and his fellow footballers hurried to the spot, filled with wonder and astonishment. The sight of a constable in the sacred precincts of Rookwood was something new and surprising.

Pushing their way through the crowd, Jimmy Silver and his stalwarts soon reached the centre of the commotion. A police constable was standing there—a short, tubby man with a big, heavy black moustache, thick, black eyebrows, and a ruddy face.

"My hat!" gasped Lovell. "What the dickens does he want here?"

"Must be after Putty Grace!" grinned Raby. "For chucking that jumping-cracker into the dog-fanciers' shop in Latcham last half. I believe the dogs were barkin' for hours afterwards, and a lot of people complained."

"What rot!" grinned Putty. "More likely he's after Tubby Muffin for trying to palm off a bad shilling at the tuckshop!"

But they very soon learned what it really was! "Biggs' is name is!" the constable was puffing importantly, glaring about him. "That's the name—leastways, it's the name as 'e's goin' under in this 'ere district. An' a right bad lot he is, too—thief an' vagabond, and he's wanted by the p'lice o' three or four counties as well as London! We've received information as he's at this here skool, and I've come for 'im!"

"Phew!"

"Biggs—that's the new gardener's chap!"

"My only hat!"

There was a buzz of excitement.

Another Sensation!

"BIGGS—wanted by the police!"

"My hat!" "I was telled at the skool as he was 'ere on this here football field," went on the constable pompously. "If any of you young gents 'as seen 'im!"

The constable jingled something in his tunic pocket—the sound brought a hush on the excited, alarmed crowd.

"I knew the outsider was a wrong 'un!" said Gower loudly. "My hat! What about Erroll's references now, eh?"

"Erroll ought to be sacked for bringin' such a person to the school!" said Lattrey, his eyes gleaming as he noted the looks on the faces of the startled crowd. "By

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gad! It's a marvel we haven't been robbed before this. I suppose the brute was keeping quiet until he'd got the lie of the land!"

"You young gents knows 'im, then?" said the constable. "Oh, yes!" said Gower coolly. "We had our suspicions from the first, only— My hat! There the rotter is!"

There came a shout from the fringe of the crowd, and next moment Biggs, his face scarlet, came through as the crowd hurriedly broke away to make room for him.

Albert Biggs looked a far different fellow from the ragged, dusty tramp whom Erroll had succeeded in getting into a job as garden-boy at Rookwood. He still wore one of Erroll's lounge suits, and it fitted him well. He was spotlessly clean, and altogether he looked a respectable youth. Behind him showed Tupper, the school page, his rather vacant face showing his great alarm and amazement. Since he had come to Rookwood, Biggs had quickly made friends with Tupper, and as it was their Saturday half day off they had naturally come along to see the match.

Biggs looked at the police constable quietly—almost defiantly. It was plain that a man in an official blue uniform held no terrors for him.

"You arskin' for me, mister, I believe?" he said. "I 'eard you arskin'—and 'ere I am! What do you want me for?"

"He's cool, anyway, by jingo!" whispered Putty Grace. "Blessed if I'd take him for a thief!"

"Nor me!" muttered Raby. "Looks jolly decent! There's something wrong about this! If he had a bad conscience the kid wouldn't come on his own—he'd bolt!"

"It's queer!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

He was deeply concerned—little as he had had to do with the fellow who had befriended Erroll years ago, he had taken a liking to the wail.

And now—
The constable was eyeing Biggs like a gorgon. His hand came out of his pocket with a jingle, and a second hand fell swiftly on the shoulders of Albert Biggs.

"You're Albert Biggs, me lad! Yes—I've seen your face on wanted notices afore this scores of times!" said the constable, in a deep, grim voice. "You come along o' me, and no larks, my lad!"

With a swift movement he grabbed one of Biggs' hands, and then he grabbed at the other.

"Hold 'ard!" gasped Biggs, panting. "I wants to know what I've done, mister! I ain't never done nothin' wrong—never stole a thing in my life! I swear on that! You can't prove nothin' agen me! Let me go!"

He began to struggle, his eyes blazing. Jimmy Silver felt a sudden throb of pity for the hapless wail. He did not suspect—not a fellow there dreamed of suspecting that the whole thing was a rascally hoax. They looked on with varying looks of pity—at least, many like Jimmy Silver did, though a goodly number looked angry—angry that Rookwood should have sheltered such a bad character!

Erroll suddenly appeared, pushing his way unceremoniously through the crowd. His face blanched as his eyes fell on the sight of his old friend struggling in the grip of the constable.

"What—what—Biggs!" he faltered. "What has—?"
"You stand back, young gent!" snapped the constable. "Don't you dare to interfere with the course of justice, young man! This here—"

There was a sudden buzz—a fresh buzz of amazement. The crowd suddenly parted again, and the constable stopped short as he felt a hand clapped on his shoulder.

He looked round—and almost fell down as he sighted the man whose hand had fallen on his shoulder.

He was a rather short individual—portly like himself, and with bushy eyebrows, a heavy, but smartly clipped moustache, and he wore a blue serge suit and a bowler hat. And by his side stood another constable!

Cyril Peele, for the first "constable" was that daring masquerader, almost fainted with sudden fear.

"What—what— Oh gad!"

"You had better come with me, my man!" said the plain-clothes man in deep, stern tones. "Leave that boy alone! Constable, this is the fellow without a doubt—the fellow who is going about masquerading as a police official. Constable, here is your man!"

Cyril Peele's knees fairly knocked together. Never in his life had he been so terrified. He knew well enough that to masquerade as a police official—and worse, to attempt to arrest an innocent person—was a serious crime in the eyes of the police. Moreover, what would the Head say—what would he do? To play such a dastardly trick, to attempt to humiliate an innocent fellow in such a way, would mean nothing less than the sack.

The hapless masquerader shuddered.

The man's hand was still on his shoulder—a terrible feeling. He was either a police inspector or a detective, of course! That much seemed obvious to others as well as to the hapless schemer.

"Look here—" he faltered.

"You can say what you have to say at the station, my man!" snapped the plain-clothes individual. "Constable, handcuff your prisoner!"

"Yes, sir!"

The constable grasped Peele's hands—he was too terrified, too utterly dumbfounded to attempt to resist or refuse. The fellows looked on in dead, breathless silence. The dramatic intervention had staggered them, and they could only stare. Gower and Lattrey looked on in terrified apprehension. Another fellow squeezed through the crowd and looked on in startled wonder.

It was Mornington. That iron-nerved junior had come to see the "fun" regardless of glares from his Form-fellows or possible trouble. He came to see the "fun"—but he saw no fun in the situation now.

He was absolutely taken aback—he simply could not understand it.

But before the handcuffs—they were "property" handcuffs taken from the Rookwood junior dramatic society's property cupboard—could be clapped on Peele's wrists, the plain-clothed individual gave a sudden chuckle.

To the utter amazement of the crowd he calmly knocked off Cyril Peele's helmet. Then he dragged off his mop of black hair, revealing a close-cropped head of dark hair, neatly parted. After which he calmly tugged off Peele's huge moustaches.

The result was astounding—to the crowd.

There arose a howl of amazement.

"Peele! It's that howling cad, Peele!"

Bowled Out!

PEELE!
There was a howl of utter amazement, and the name ran swiftly from mouth to mouth to the fringe of the crowd on the footer field.

The "constable" who had tried to arrest Albert Biggs, the Rookwood gardener's boy, was Cyril Peele, of the Fourth. It was a hoax!

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

His brow darkened. He saw it all now. It was a hoax—a cruel, heartless hoax on Biggs by a fellow who hated him. It was obviously done to humiliate him—possibly the schemer had something worse in mind for the hapless garden-boy had not the plain-clothes detective and the constable come along.

And now they were about to arrest Peele in his turn.

Jimmy Silver could not understand the whole amazing affair. Yet he could understand Peele's rascally motive. Moreover, he knew now why Mornington had not wanted to play—he had this rascally game on with Peele.

But how came the detective and constable on the job?

The matter was serious now, though all the crowd was amazed at the detective's curious and dramatic action in exposing the masquerader—in removing Peele's helmet and disguise.

Moreover, the detective's ruddy features were twisted into a grin now—even the portly constable holding the trembling Cyril Peele was grinning now.

Albert Biggs himself was crimson with indignation, though his eyes showed his deep relief. He had never for one moment dreamed that the "constable" who had come for him was Cyril Peele, his enemy.

"Peele, you rotten cad!"

It was Arthur Edward Lovell who broke the dead silence following the revelation. His face was full of disgust and indignation.

"Take the rotter away, inspector!" shouted Gunner, of the Fourth. "Take the cad away—we don't want scheming tricksters like him at Rookwood any longer! Take him away!"

"I—I—" Peele's face was haggard as he stammered helplessly. But it occurred to him that it was all up now, and that it was better to have the Head on the job rather than be dragged away to the police station. "I—I—somebody run for the Head!" he articulated.

"Hold on! Don't do anything of the sort!" called the "detective" in a surprisingly youthful voice. "Just sit on Gunner, some of you!"

With that, while the crowd gazed transfixed, the detective calmly removed his moustache and his false hair. Then he rubbed his face vigorously with his handkerchief.

At a wink from him, the constable removed his helmet, false hair, and moustache.

There was a stupefied pause, and then a howl:

"Tommy Dodd!"

"And Tommy Cook!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There followed a howl of hysterical laughter as the crowd understood.

But Mornington, Peele, Gower, and Lattrey did not laugh. Their faces were fiendish. Gower trembling with fear and dismay, started to sneak away, but Tommy Dodd's voice rang out sharply:

"Stop Gower, you fellows—don't let the cad escape! Stop Mornington, and Lattrey, too—they're all in this! Stop them!"

Lattrey was also just about to sneak away, but neither he nor Gower had the slightest chance of doing so. Jimmy Silver made a rush at Mornington and grabbed him, though Mornington made no effort to escape—it was beneath Mornington's pride to make an attempt. He stood, trembling with bitter rage and mortification.

Meanwhile, Gunner, Lovell, Raby, and Grace had grabbed Gower and Lattrey, and were holding the schemers fast.

"Doddy!" stuttered Jimmy Silver. "Well, my only hat! You—you spoofers! What does it all mean?"

Tommy Dodd chuckled.

"It doesn't need many brains to see that, my dear man!" he grinned cheerfully. "But as you Classical duffers haven't any at all, I'd better explain!"

"You cheeky Modern cad—"

"Hold on—no ragging now!" said Tommy Dodd, holding up his hand. "Hold those merchants fast to begin with—you'll want 'em presently, especially dear old Morny, who's let the school down in order to help Peele with this little game!"

Dozens of angry looks were cast at Valentine Mornington. He flushed crimson with mingled rage and shame as he met the glances of scorn on all sides.

"You—you knew they were going to play this game, and you did this to stop it!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You've hit it, though we rigged ourselves up like this to give dear old Peele the fright of his life, and to give the rotters a proper public showing up. I think they deserve it!" said Tommy Dodd. "You see—"

"How—how did you find it out, hang you?" hissed Peele. He was almost fainting with overwhelming relief. He had feared police-court proceedings—the sack, anything. And now it was only Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook, two jokers from the Modern side!

But a glance round at the angry, disgusted faces told Peele that he was not to escape scot-free, for all that.

"How did we find out?" said Tommy Dodd sweetly. "Why, we spotted you sneaking into the woodshed, and we heard you discussing the game, and saw you dressing and making up, old fruit!"

"You sneakin', eavesdroppin' hounds!" hissed Mornington.

"Thanks, dear man!" said Tommy Dodd, unmoved. "If you had praised me I should have been seriously disturbed. But I think the fellows will approve of what we did, especially now they know just what your game was."

"It—it was only a lark!" stammered Peele.

"Yes, we've heard a lot about your larks against this kid Biggs!" said Tommy Dodd calmly. "So you call it a lark to try to ruin this chap's character, to call him a thief and a vagabond, and to try to ruin him before a crowd like this? You call it a lark to lead everyone to suppose that the police of several counties are after him—that he is a bad lot? You call it a lark to take him off a prisoner, to bring yourselves within the reach of the giddy law, and to take his money away, to shove him in the London express and send him off to London and leave him stranded there without a penny!"

There was a deep murmur. Doddy went on, his voice changing.

"You rotten cads!" he snapped. "You knew the Head would never allow him to come back after being arrested in public with his character gone; it was your way to get rid of a fellow who's never done you any harm excepting

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what you've made him do! I know what I think about it, and I know what any decent fellow will think, too!"

"So was that the game?" gasped Jimmy Silver. "To— to send Biggs to London and leave him stranded there?"

"Just that!" said Doddy, nodding. "We heard it all—we heard them planning it. I'm dashed glad we did, too!"

"And Mornington's in it; this is why Mornington let us down—one reason, at all events!" said Jimmy Silver, his lip curling. "The howling rotter never intended to play. He left without saying a word that he didn't intend to play! I think we know how to deal with a rotter like that, chaps!"

"Smash him!" roared Cuthbert Gunner, his rugged face red with wrath. "Here, let me get at the sweeps! I'll take all four on together, and give them a licking they won't forget!"

"No you jolly well won't!" said Tommy Dodd, chuckling. "I think this is a Form matter, and my suggestion is to yank the four cads to the end of the playing-fields and duck 'em in the pond there!"

"We'll give them the ragging of their lives to begin with!" said Lovell. "Collar the cads!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Go it!" roared Gunner.

"You dare!" panted Mornington, turning at bay with glinting eyes and savage features. "Lay a hand on me—"

"Here goes!" yelled Gunner.

And he rushed at Mornington.

It was the beginning, and in a moment Mornington and his fellow plotters were held fast. Despite their yells they were twisted over, and then, in a long procession, the crowd of angry juniors frog-marched them away towards the end of the playing-fields.

They had completely forgotten footer now. Hansom of the Fifth raged, but they ignored him and marched on. Mornington's treacherous desertion had been enough to begin with, but the mean and rascally trick on Biggs filled them with wrath and indignation. Most of them had scarcely seen Biggs, nor did he come within their sphere at all. But the schemers had disgraced the Form, and they would not stand it.

Mornington & Co. had to go through it!

The Bagshot fellows stared as they looked on—forgotten now. Pankley & Co. were amazed, but they were too polite to ask questions or interfere. They looked at each other and waited for the return of the Rookwood footballers. Errol had left little side the moment he understood the facts. He was relieved beyond measure in regard to Albert Biggs, but the disgrace on Mornington he felt keenly. He could hardly believe that in such a short time his chum—or his former chum—could have descended so low as to take part in such a mean and cowardly trick. He went back to his study, not desiring to see the ragging of Mornington, and he went with a heavy heart.

Meanwhile, the angry Fourth-Formers reached the pond with their struggling, apprehensive victims. Knowing the state of the pond, Peele, Lattrey, and Gower howled for mercy, but Mornington did not, though he fought and struggled like a tiger. But he was too proud to plead.

"In with them!" yelled Gunner. "Chuck the rotters in!" There was a brief, whirling struggle, and then the raging Mornington, looking far from a dandy now, went flying through the air into the pool. Peele, Gower, and Lattrey followed him in turn.

The pond was not a nice pond at all, as the schemers soon discovered. What it lacked regarding depth of water it made up with deep, evil-smelling mud and slimy weeds, and when Mornington & Co. climbed out at last they looked fearful sights.

"Well, that's that!" gasped Jimmy Silver, setting his lips. "They deserved it if anyone ever did. But—but you see how that cad Monty glared at us? I'm afraid this means more trouble from him for this! He's a reckless, revengeful fool! Anyway, let's get back to those Bagshot fellows, if they're still there."

Pankley & Co. were still there, and though they waxed sarcastic and humorous, they asked no questions and did not refer to the incident—it was not their business! And a minute later the whistle went and the second half commenced. But Jimmy Silver & Co. were feeling better now, and they dismissed from their minds the happenings, and settled down to the game in right good earnest.

It was a gruelling half from start to finish. Rookwood attacked again and again, determined to level up that one goal against them. And ten minutes before close of play Putty Grace put the ball through with a brilliant "daisy-cutter" that beat the Bagshot goalie to the wide.

It was not the last, either. Ten seconds before the whistle went for time, Jimmy Silver got home with a header from a corner kick—a breathless incident in the game that filled the spectators with wild excitement, and made the Rookwood supporters wild with delight.

It was a win for Rookwood after all—a win by one goal—and an ending to the game that filled to the brim Valentine Mornington's bitter cup of rage and mortification when he heard the results. He had lost after all! Once again he had failed—failed hopelessly—in his revenge! He had failed again to get the boy he hated with so unreasonable and senseless a hatred cleared out of Rookwood, and he had failed in his treacherous and disloyal attempt at revenge on his Form! In his study, after a prolonged visit to the bathroom, Mornington sat and smoked cigarette after cigarette, refusing tea and refusing to talk to Peele and Gower. But from the glitter in his dark eyes his chums knew that he was far from being subdued, far from being beaten. His headstrong self-will was going to drive him on still; the campaign was not ended yet with Mornington.

(There's another thrilling instalment of this powerful serial in next week's GEM. Don't miss a line of it, chums.)

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THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE!

(Continued from page 21.)

enjoyable, for all that. The only ones in the hall who did not enjoy it were Gordon Gay & Co. themselves! At last they could stand it no longer. They arose en masse and swooped down the centre of the hall in the dark.

"Stop it!" howled Gordon Gay wrathfully. "You rotters! These aren't the films you said you were going to show! Lemme get at you! You—you—Ooooooooooop!"

The Grammarians did not bargain for the cinematograph being under protection. The doorkeepers, too, had been attacked in the dark, and had been gagged and tied up with swiftness and silence. A horde of St. Jim's fellows swept into the hall, and within the space of a few minutes a wild and whirling conflict was in progress.

Howls of wrath and anguish rose out of the darkness. Sounds of tramping feet and whacking and thumping and bumping shook the hall to its very rafters. Above the hubbub came Gordon Gay's voice in a wild yell:

"St. Jim's rotters! We've been spoofed again!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Sock it to 'em!"

"Pulverise the bounders!"

"Smash their rotten cinema up!"

Tom Merry's voice rose ringingly:

"Back up, St. Jim's!"

"Get the cinematograph out—quick!"

"Down with the Grammarians!"

"Hurrah!"

Gordon Gay & Co. were at a disadvantage in the dark. Tom Merry & Co. had prepared for a fracas at the end. The cinematograph was rushed out of the building, and, while the audience were still scrambling out of their seats in the dark, the St. Jim's raggers were making their escape from the hall.

Tom Merry & Co. gathered in the High Street outside. They had emerged practically unscathed from the conflict. The cinematograph was safe, though some of the films were damaged. But that didn't matter much. The films had been shown; Gordon Gay's entertainment had been turned into a fiasco, and St. Jim's was victorious!

Gordon Gay and his luckless minions staggered through the dark to the hall door. They were badly battered and bent, and mere words could not express their feelings.

"Done!" moaned Gordon Gay. "We've been dished, diddled, and done brown this time!"

The St. Jim's raggers were marching up the High Street, shouting the shouts of victory.

They felt they could afford to chortle!

The Triple Alliance had justified its existence. Gordon Gay & Co. had been beaten in the end—utterly and ignominiously beaten. All that remained for them to do was to hide their diminished heads.

From along the High Street came Tom Merry's voice:

"Who's top dog at Rylcombe, kids?"

The reply came in a loud, lifting roar:

"St. Jim's!"

"St. Jim's for ever!"

"Hurrah!"

And Gordon Gay & Co., standing limply in the doorway of the village hall, with the ruins of their entertainment behind them, had not the heart to reply.

THE END.

(Now look out for next week's extra-long and extra-good story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "Grundy, the Prizefighter!" You'll enjoy it from beginning to end, chums.)

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