

WHAT! NOT HEARD OF TOM MERRY & CO.?

The GEM 2^d

LIBRARY

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EVERY
WEDNESDAY



**A BOLD BID FOR
LIBERTY!**

(See the grand story of
school life—inside.)

MEET THE CHEERY CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S IN THIS—

A Chum's Test!



CHAPTER 1.

The Good Samaritan!

TAP!
"Oh, seat!"
Tap!
"Go away!"
Tap!

"Clear off!" roared Monty Lowther of the Shell.

He paused with what he was writing on the study table and glared irritably at the door.

Somebody, evidently, wanted to pay a visit to the occupants of Study No. 10. And at that moment Lowther was much too busy to attend to visitors. His chums, Tom Merry and Manners, were on the football-field, putting in

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practice for the match with Greyfriars. Owing to circumstances over which he had no control, Lowther could not join them till his present task was finished. Consequently that continued tapping at the door irritated him.

Tap, tap!
Lowther breathed hard.
It was really too bad.
Tap, tap, tap!

A master or a prefect would not have contented themselves with tapping politely like that; they would have spoken and come in. It was not a person in authority. Most probably it was a fag—perhaps Reggie Manners of the Third, intent on "touching" his major for a loan. If it was Reggie, Lowther was prepared to devote a few seconds of his time to dealing with him.

Tap, tap, tap!
Lowther pushed away the sheet he had been writing on

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—EXTRA-SPECIAL STORY OF SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE!

By Martin Clifford

When Knox of the Sixth finds himself in a hole he's none too particular whose good name he besmirches in order to get out of it. But he bites off more than he can chew when he endeavours to force the hand of Tom Merry—the junior captain!



and took up a book—a heavy volume of Poe. Edgar Alan Poe had not much attraction for Mouty Lowther; indeed, he had very little use for books at all. But this one, at least, was very useful just then.

Whoever the tapper was, he was a stickler.

Lowther took a firm grip on Edgar Alan Poe, and rapped: "Come in!"

He watched the study door open, quite interestedly. At the same moment he raised Edgar Alan Poe above his head. For a second the heavy volume remained poised, so to speak, in readiness. Then, as the door opened wide, the volume flew.

"What—Whoop! Wow! Grooogh!"

"Goal!" chortled Lowther gleefully.

"Wow-wow-wow! You—you—"

A figure in Etons sat up dazedly on the study carpet, dabbing fiercely at his nose, from which ran a stream of crimson.

"You—you ass! I mean, what did you chuck that book for?" demanded the figure, rising painfully.

"Oh, Mellish!" ejaculated Lowther, somewhat astonished. "I thought it was young Reggie Manners. Never mind."

"Fathead!" gasped Mellish, dabbing hard.

"Cheer up!" urged Lowther, consoled, perhaps, the more easily as it was not his nose. "Anyhow, what do you want? I'm busy, but I'll give you ten seconds, if it's very important."

Percy Mellish, of the Fourth Form, ceased to dab at his somewhat prominent nasal organ, and stood hesitatingly by the study table.

It was highly unusual for him to pay Study No. 10 a visit; he and the Terrible Three were on the worst of terms, as a rule. The leaders of the Shell did not associate with the "giddy goats" of the Lower School, to whom Mellish acted as toady and hanger-on. And they did not conceal their opinion of Mellish, either. All of which contributed to Lowther's surprise at seeing Percy Mellish now, standing at the table, and obviously trying to get out what he had come to say.

"Well?" inquired Lowther.

"I—I—you see—" began Mellish.

"I don't see," said Lowther frankly. "I believe I mentioned once before that I'm busy, and I want to get this job over and go down to the footer. See? If you've come to see me for any reason, cough it up and travel."

"I—I want to ask your advice, old fellow," said Mellish, getting it out at last.

He coloured at Lowther's stare.

Lowther could not help feeling suspicious. Mellish had never before addressed him as "old fellow." It was easy to see that he did so now with a reason. He had an axe to grind.

Lowther glanced at his watch.

"Give you five minutes, Mellish," he said crisply.

"That's the absolute limit, so cut it short. If you want advice, I've got it on tap, so go ahead."

Mellish, with a sigh of relief, took a seat at the table.

He fixed an appealing glance on the Shell fellow's face.

It did not need extraordinary powers of perception to see that Mellish was in trouble—not an infrequent state with him. And Lowther had a pretty shrewd notion that it was money, as usual.

"I—I came to you as the only fellow that would be likely to help me out," explained Mellish, licking his lips. "I've tried Raeke, but he's hard up, too, and won't help me."

"Gambling debts?" asked Lowther grimly.

Mellish nodded.

"I rather wonder at your coming to me, then. What about your pals? Haven't any of them got a bean to lend you?"

Mellish shook his head miserably.

"They're in the soup, too, though not so deep as I am," he explained. "You see, I thought I saw a chance to get clear of that fellow Lodgey's clutches—"

"Lodgey? Isn't he the bookie who hangs out at the Green Man?"

"That's the man. He puts up there. And now I'm head over heels in debt to him, and he's threatened to come up to the school and tell the Head. What am I going to do?"

Lowther stared at the sneak of the Fourth a little blankly. It was undoubtedly flattering of Mellish to come to a Shell fellow for help and advice; but Lowther had a keen idea that he knew why Mellish had singled him out.

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"You can't borrow the money, then?"

"No."

"Then tell the man you can't pay, but you will as soon as you get a remittance," suggested Lowther calmly. "He won't be fool enough to come up to the school; he knows he wouldn't get a penny then, and that wouldn't suit his book at all. You ought to know that, you ass!"

Mellish shook his head again desperately.

"You don't understand!" he protested. "It's a matter of three pounds—more money than I shall see for weeks. And Lodgey knows I haven't a penny to rub against another. Rather than wait indefinitely, he'll give me away, just out of spite. If I were Racke, for instance, he'd wait willingly enough, knowing I should pay up in time."

Lowther was silent for a moment.

That was true enough, he knew.

Mellish was a "hanger-on" of the smart set in the Lower School—and Lodgey was well aware of it. It was more than likely that, rather than wait weeks for the junior to square, the bookmaker would make an example of him—just to encourage the others, so to speak. It was not, as Mellish had said, as though he were Aubrey Racke. Lodgey often waited Racke's convenience—but he was sure of his money. It made all the difference.

"You've been a fool—a silly fool!" observed Lowther at last.

"Don't I know it?"

"I'm just telling you. You've played right into the man's hands; and now, I suppose, you expect fellows who have nothing to do with you to rally round and save you from the sack, what?"

Mellish crimsoned.

"I—I—"

"Your own friends desert you, and so you have to look elsewhere," went on Lowther relentlessly. "Where do you think I'm going to get three pounds from, in any case?"

"I—I—"

Mellish's glance strayed involuntarily to the paper on which Lowther had been writing when he entered the study.

Lowther followed that glance, and smiled rather ironically.

"I think I know why you've come to see me!" he observed grimly. "You didn't hear by chance that I had some letters this morning, did you?"

"I—well, I did, if you put it like that," said Mellish, realising that frankness was his only hope. "Trimble told me that you were flush, and I thought—I was a fool, I suppose. Well, if you won't help me, it's no use."

And Mellish rose heavily from his seat and walked towards the door.

Lowther's glance went to the letter he had been writing—one of three, each to thank a kind uncle or aunt for the unexpected but welcome gift of a pound, received that morning. Those three windfalls, coming in a bunch, had acted like a tonic on Lowther. He had intended holding a big spread in the study after footer practice.

But now, as Mellish grasped the door-handle, the Shell fellow's heart touched him.

Most of the Shell knew Lowther for an irrepressible humorist. He had "chipped" Tom Merry time and time again for his "softness" in dealing with some malefactor in the junior school. Now he came to the test, Lowther himself was "soft." He could not bring himself to abandon Mellish to Lodgey's mercies.

The door opened, and Mellish paused for a moment in the opening.

"Hold on!"

A gleam of hope appeared by magic on the Fourth-Former's face.

"Come in again!" said Lowther grimly. "Suppose I were fool enough to let you have the money, when could you pay me back again?"

"Not for some weeks, at least," answered Mellish, his face dropping again.

"I thought not. I suppose I'm an ass to do it!"

"You mean—"

Lowther drew out his wallet, and extracted therefrom three crisp notes. He handed them to Mellish in silence.

"Pay me back when you can. And now cut! I've got these letters to finish."

"My hat! You're a sportsman, Lowther!" ejaculated Mellish, his face lighting up.

"Stow it!"

"Well, you are, and though you think I'm a worm, I shan't forget it!" said Mellish, moved a little for once.

"Look here! I've got to finish these letters before I can get down to the footer!" roared Lowther, picking up Liddell and Scott. "If you don't jolly well clear off—"

"Just going!" said Mellish hastily. "All the same, I'm awfully obliged, and if there's anything I can do—"

"There's only one thing."

"What's that?"

"Shut that door—with yourself on the other side of it!"

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"All right. But, I say—"

"What?"

"I—I say, I want—"

Whizz!

"Oh crikey!"

Mellish dodged wildly as Liddell and Scott, propelled with plenty of force and a good aim, whizzed past his ear within an inch and thudded in the corridor. The Fourth-Former came inside the study and closed the door hastily behind him.

Lowther reached silently for Homer, in one large edition.

"I say, I only wanted to ask you—"

"Ask me what?" snapped Lowther, pausing, Homer in hand.

"You won't say a word to anybody about this—this loan?" asked Mellish fearfully. "Not even Tom Merry or Manners. What I've told you is quite confidential, you know."

Lowther's lip curled.

"Did you think I should blab it all over the Lower School, you idiot?"

"Nunno! I only wanted to make sure. You won't tell a soul, then?"

"You can take my word," said Lowther coolly. "Stay another ten seconds, and you'll take Homer—on your ear!"

"Thanks—thanks awfully!" gasped Mellish. "I shan't forget this!"

"Six—seven—eight—"

Mellish leaped to the door, realising that his ten seconds were going fast.

"Nine—ten!"

Whizz!

Thud!

The door closed just in time, Homer collided with the panels, and dropped to the floor, unheeded.

Lowther dismissed Mellish from his mind, and ground on steadily at his letters.

CHAPTER 2.

"One Good Turn—"

"GOAL!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well, shot, Tommy!"

Tom Merry, captain of the junior football eleven, grinned cheerily as the leather, hot from his foot, spun in the corner of the net.

Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House, who had made a frantic but vain attempt to stop it, dragged himself up from the mud and tossed out the ball.

"Good shot, Merry! You won't do it again, though."

"Bow-wow!"

"How about getting in to tea?" asked Manners. "That is, if Figgins is willing to call it a draw—"

"Oh, we'll give you the benefit of the doubt," answered George Figgins at once. "We should have licked you hollow, of course—"

"You mean we should have licked you hollower—"

"I mean—"

"Look here—"

"Peace, my infants!" interrupted Tom Merry, soothingly, just in time to prevent the rival House practice elevens from joining in a heated argument. "We've all shown good form. I think we shall lick Greyfriars on Saturday as hollow as a drum. But chuck it now; it's getting late."

"All right!" assented Figgins. "I think, myself, you School House duffers didn't show up at all badly, but for the bulk of the team you'll want our men. Reddy and Lawrence, and Owen, and Pratt, and French, to mention only a few. Then there's Koumi Rao and Digges. And, naturally, Fatty and Kerr, and—ahem!—little me!"

"Only ten?" asked Tom Merry sarcastically.

"Well, drop Digges—and French," suggested Figgins reasonably.

"Ass!"

"I suppose you'll fill up the team with a crowd of helpless duffers—as usual," said Figgins, sorrowfully shaking his head. "Still, with Fatty in goal, and Kerr and myself at back, we'll stand a chance. You're junior skipper, of course?"

"Just remembered that?" asked Manners.

"Junior skippers need advice sometimes," retorted Figgins.

"Chuck arguing, and listen to me a minute!" interrupted Tom Merry, chuckling. "We're in funds in our study—"

"Oh, good!"

"Now you're talking!" agreed Figgins heartily. "Speaking for Fatty, and Kerr, and myself, we're going through a lean period."

"Same here!" chimed in Kangaroo.

"All you fellows will be welcome in Study No. 10 to tea," said Tom Merry cheerily. "Lowther's standing spread;

he asked me to invite you. Bring your own chairs, that's all."

"My hat! Lowther's a ripping fellow. I never realised quite how ripping till now!" ejaculated Kangaroo. And there was a chuckle.

"This way!" said Manners.

The footballers needed no urging.

Strenuous practice in the keen winter air had put a good edge on their appetites, and they were ready to do full justice to a feed. Rarely had the junior eleven felt so very well disposed towards Montague Lowther of the Shell.

They swept into the Hall in a cheery bunch, and, headed by Tom Merry and Manners, mounted the stairs.

"What the merry thump?" he ejaculated, laying down his pen.

"Here we are!" said Tom Merry.

"So I see. But why the crowd?" asked Lowther, still in the dark.

It was Tom Merry's turn to stare then.

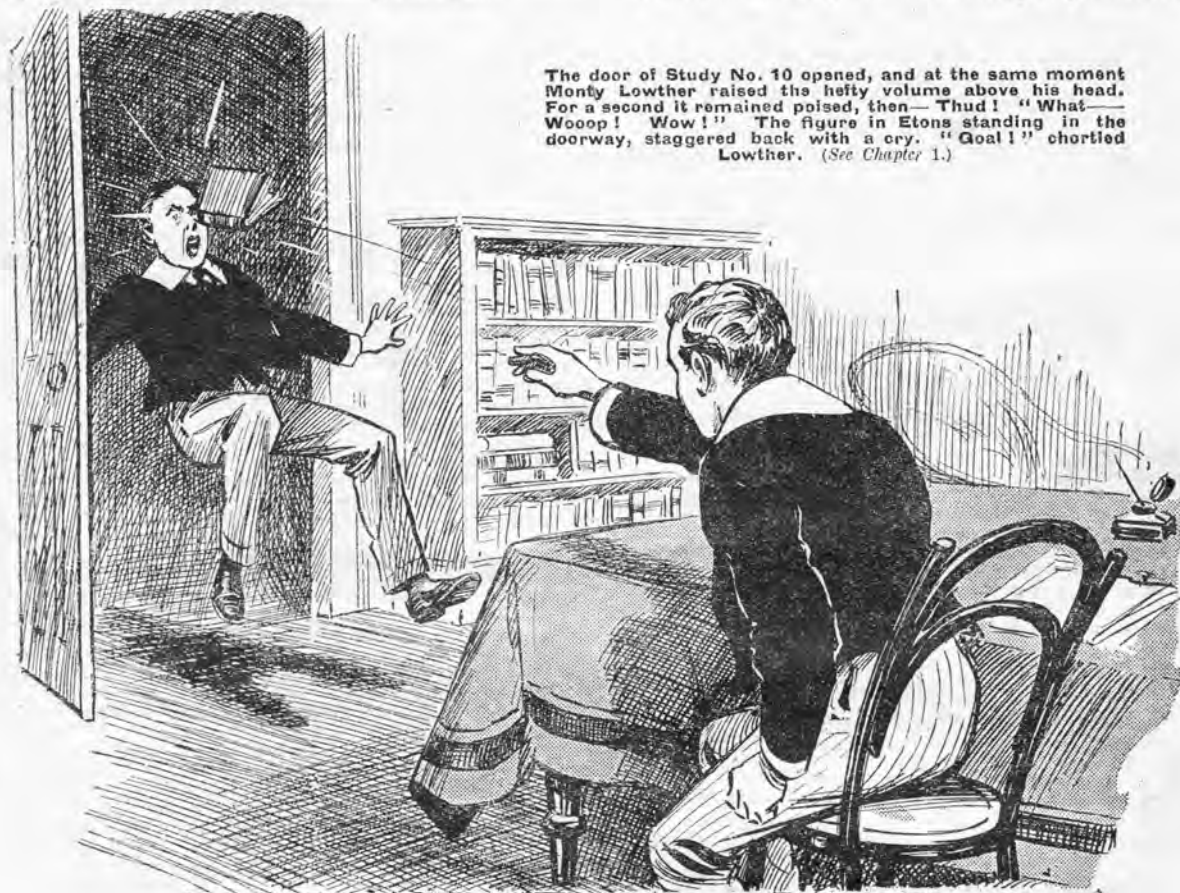
"Why, you ass! Mean to say you've forgotten you're standing spread to the junior eleven?"

Lowther started.

Quite a remarkable expression appeared suddenly on his face.

He remembered—only too clearly.

The advent of Percy Mellish had completely driven the



The door of Study No. 10 opened, and at the same moment Monty Lowther raised the hefty volume above his head. For a second it remained poised, then—Thud! "What—Woop! Wow!" The figure in Etons standing in the doorway, staggered back with a cry. "Goal!" chortled Lowther. (See Chapter 1.)

"Funny Lowther didn't come down to practice," remarked Manners.

"He must have spent more time over those letters than he expected," said Tom Merry.

"Hallo! Here's Skimmy!" ejaculated Manners. "Join up, you walking dictionary!"

"Pray, what is occurring, my dear Manners?" asked Herbert Skimpole mildly.

"Feed!" said Manners, concisely.

"Spread!" supplemented Kangaroo.

"Free tea!" explained Figgins.

"Oh!"

Even Skimpole's slow-moving intellect was able to grasp the import of those monosyllables.

He joined up with the procession with alacrity.

"What-ho! Trimble!" announced Figgins suddenly.

"Roll him away!"

"Oh, let him come," grinned Tom Merry. "More the merrier, you know. You can join up, Trimble, if you don't scoff up all the grub."

"Grub? Then it's a feed?"

"Lowther's giving carte blanche at the tuckshop," explained Kerr.

"Oh, good! Good-old Lowther! I'm on!"

Trimble joined the procession just as it halted outside Study No. 10.

Tom Merry threw open the door, and the crowd of juniors behind him looked over his shoulder into the study.

Lowther had been writing, his letters proving a longer task than he anticipated.

He looked up now, startled and surprised, at the crowd in the study doorway.

thought from his mind. The letters had occupied him since then. Now he realised, with a sinking feeling, that there would be no spread.

"I—I—"

"What's wrong?" asked Manners, puzzled.

"I—you see—" Lowther floundered helplessly.

"I say, is there a feed?" asked Trimble suspiciously.

"I—you see— No, there isn't," stammered Lowther.

"Wha-a-at?"

Tom Merry and Manners stared.

The rest of the juniors, hungry from the football field, looked surprised, and not in the least pleased. They felt that they had been hoaxed, and Lowther's reputation for jesting stood him in bad stead just then.

"Another little joke of Lowther's, what?" asked Kangaroo, rather grimly.

"Sorry I can't see the joke, Merry," said Figgins gruffly.

"Look here—" began Tom Merry desperately.

Something was wrong, that was plain. But he felt that, for once, it was not one of Lowther's little jokes.

"Hold on, you fellows!" called Manners, as several of the juniors turned to leave the study. "Lowther can explain, can't you, Monty?"

Lowther crimsoned under the glances which were directed at him, but he shook his head at length.

"No; I'm sorry, but I can't."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Manners.

"Look here, you fellows. I meant to have a spread, but I find I can't," said Lowther, still crimson. "The money was wanted for—something else. I'm sorry if I've raised your hopes for nothing. But it can't be helped."

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"Oh, if it's like that," said Figgins, mollified.

"It isn't a joke, I give you my word."

"Right-ho, then! Sorry to have—ahem!—buted in," said Figgins, puzzled, but realising that it was no business of his. "Come on, Fatty!"

"Sorry, Lowther!" said Kangaroo.

"Same here!"

Lowther nodded as the members of the junior eleven turned and left the study.

As soon as the door closed Tom Merry and Manners fired out the same question simultaneously:

"What happened?"

"Where's the money gone?"

"Look here—" began Lowther.

"You had it when we went down to footer—"

"Now you aren't standing the feed. Why not?"

"I'm sorry; but I must ask you chaps to trust me," said Lowther calmly. "Some unforeseen circumstances arose, and—and the money went. I can't say more than that. Let it rest!"

"Just as you like," said Manners, in surprise.

"You're not in any trouble, old man?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

"No, ass!"

"Let it drop, then!"

And the Terrible Three let it drop for the remainder of that day.

But, although they did not mention the matter, both Tom Merry and Manners wondered a good deal about the fate of the three remittances which they knew Lowther had received that morning, and which had been in his possession when they went down to practice after classes that very afternoon.

If Lowther chose to say nothing, it was no business of theirs, though "funds" in Study No. 10 were usually regarded more as common property than belonging to one fellow.

Lowther had never been known to be "close" before, and his chums could not pretend to understand his new attitude.

But they dismissed the matter from their minds by the time for dormitory, and Lowther appeared glad that nothing was said in regard to it.

He tumbled into bed with the rest, but he did not sleep at once. He was reflecting, rather bitterly, on Mellish and his troubles. He could only hope that Tom and Manners would forget his remittance. He felt very much like taking Mellish by the scruff of the neck and forcing him to explain what had become of the money. The thought that he had appeared "stingy" rankled in Lowther's mind.

He slept at length, but not for long.

Somebody was at his bedside, shaking him gently.

A voice whispered in his ear:

"Not a sound!"

Lowther opened his eyes, and made out a dim shape in the darkness of the dormitory—a pair of eyes glinting into his own.

"Wharrermarrer?"

"Quiet!"

"What's wrong?" whispered the Shell fellow in astonishment.

"It's me—Mellish?" came back another whisper.

"What on earth do you want at this time of night?" demanded Lowther indignantly.

"Not so loud, you ass! I came to put you on to a good thing—to pay you back for the loan you've made me."

"Have you got the money?"

"No. I'm just going down to the Green Man to pay Lodgey, an' maybe have a little flutter. I heard from Racke to-night that there's a young fool there, living in the village, with more money than brains—easy pluckin'. A fellow keepin' his wits about him could rook the idiot right an' left."

"What's all that got to do with me?"

"Don't you see? Come with me, an' we'll rook him together. I'll put you up to the ropes, Lowther—in return for what you're doin' for me. I've learned one or two wrinkles from the landlord—easy enough to work on an unsuspectin' pigeon like this fellow appears to be. You'll get back your three pounds; and when I pay you back you'll have doubled your money. Comin'?"

Lowther stared at Mellish's shadowy outline blankly.

Apparently the sneak of the Fourth was not entirely devoid of gratefulness. This was his peculiar method of repaying Lowther for his kindness. The Shell fellow was to be "let in" on a little game to rook an unsuspecting young blackguard from the village. It did not seem to have occurred to Mellish that Lowther would not have touched the gamblers or their money with a barge-pole.

"You fool!" was Lowther's comment.

"What? Don't you realise—"

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"I realise that you'll be rooked yourself—you'll pay Lodgey my three pounds, and then lose three more to him. When you get back here you'll be as much in debt as ever."

"What rot! I tell you—"

"You asked my advice once to-day," said Lowther coolly. "Take it now. Chuck it—before you get your fingers burnt worse than at present."

"You're a fool!"

"Chuck it!"

"Well, I'm goin', whether you do or not!" whispered Mellish irritably. "I thought this would be a chance for you to make a bit, but please yourself. You'll wish you'd come when you see me burstin' with banknotes in the mornin'."

"When?" said Lowther.

"You're not comin', then?"

"No. And if you had any sense you'd pay Lodgey and get clear while you can. He'll—"

Lowther paused, breathing hard.

In the silence of the dormitory he heard the faint sound of a closing door.

CHAPTER 3.

A Close Shave!

"THE ass!"

Monty Lowther stared grimly in the direction of the dormitory door, which he knew had just closed behind Mellish.

"The frabjous cuckoo!"

For some moments Lowther sat up in bed, his thoughts regarding Mellish being the reverse of pleasant.

Presumably, Percy Mellish had meant to be kind by waking the Shell fellow and offering him a share in the "plucking" of some young fool at the Green Man. But Lowther did not take it kindly. He felt irritated.

And now Mellish, serene in his confidence that he could "rook" the unsuspecting stranger, had gone off alone to be "rooked" himself, Lowther had little doubt.

Lodgey and his cronies at the Rylcombe public house were not the sort to let Mellish "in" on a good thing, as they were apparently doing. There was little doubt that the wealthy stranger was a "bait," and probably as much an adept with the cards as Mr. Lodgey himself. Mellish was doomed to lose what money he had on him—Lowther's three pounds. And then he would be in exactly the same position as he had been before.

"The—the blind idiot!"

Lowther hesitated a few more seconds; then he slid out of bed softly.

It was no business of his if a reckless Fourth-Former chose to play the fool after lights out. But Mellish had come to him for help, and to the extent of his power Lowther had given it. The thought that his three pounds were to pass into Mr. Lodgey's keeping, without squaring Mellish's former debt, roused the Shell fellow to action.

He would go after Mellish; the Fourth-Former had not more than a few minutes' start. By doubling in the lane Lowther could easily overtake him—and then he had his plan cut and dried. There would be a quick and safe return to St. Jim's, and Lowther had half a mind to demand his three pounds back, and leave Mellish to wriggle out of his scrape as best he could.

In the pitchy dark, Lowther dressed as quickly as possible, fearful of making some sound that would awaken his chums. But there was no sound but the steady breathing in the beds about him, as he slipped on his jacket and took his boots in his hand.

He had almost reached the dormitory door when his foot caught against a bedpost.

"Ow!"

Lowther had only his thin sock over his foot. He had hurt himself. But after that one sudden exclamation no further sounds escaped him.

He slipped to the door and opened it.

Outside, the passage was clear.

He closed the door, without noticing a faint creaking as of someone sitting up cautiously in bed.

In the corridor the light from the moon illuminated his path. In a few seconds the Shell fellow had slipped along the corridor and into the little box-room which was used by juniors desirous of leaving the school after lights out.

"I thought so," murmured Lowther.

The window was raised. Mellish had left it so, in readiness for his return. Had a master or prefect come prowling round before that time, and closed the window, Mellish would have had an unpleasant problem to face—how to get into the school before morning. But that was a risk that the "giddy goats" were used to taking.

Mellish was gone; he had a good start.

As swiftly as possible Lowther clambered over the sill

and dropped lightly to the leads below. From thence to the quad was the work of a few moments.

He stood, taking stock of the shadowy quadrangle, and then set off quickly, hugging the shadows of the walls till he reached the gnarled old oak which grew near the gates.

The twisted boughs overhung the lane, and Lowther shinned rapidly along a bough and dropped.

One glance to assure himself that there was nobody about, and the junior set off for Rylcombe at a quick trot.

He ran in the grass at the side of the lane, so that he could slip under cover of the hedge, in case of meeting some late wayfarer. P.-c. Crump, for instance, would be only too pleased to yank him back to the school, and pay off one of his old scores against the "young rips" of St. Jim's.

But P.-c. Crump did not appear in the lane, and Lowther approached the little garden of the Green Man without having encountered anybody.

He gave an exclamation as a shadowy figure, with its coat-collar turned up, slipped across the lane in the moonlight and tried the wicket-gate leading into the inn garden. "Mellish!"

The figure evidently did not hear that exclamation. It disappeared into the garden.

Lowther put on speed and came up to the gate.

Beyond, Mellish was just walking across the lawn, en route for the french windows giving entrance to Mr. Lodgey's sitting-room.

Lowther slipped through the wicket-gate and called softly: "Mellish!"

The figure ahead spun round as though it had been shot.

"You, Lowther! What do you want?"

"Hold on a minute, old bean."

Mellish waited, his breath coming in gasps, as Lowther came up with him.

That sudden halt had shaken the sneak's nerve.

His greeting to the Shell fellow was not at all friendly.

"You fool! What have you come for? You startled me!"

"Serve you jolly well right, you idiot!" retorted Lowther unsympathetically.

"Well, what do you want? Have you changed your mind?"

"Eh?"

"You're comin' in to help rook this village blighter—what?" asked Mellish, his alarm diminishing. "I rather fancied you might think it worth it, on reflection."

Lowther stared.

"You fool! No, I haven't come to join in your shady swindling game. I came to save you from making a bigger fool of yourself than you have already!"

Mellish's face lapsed into a sneer.

"Just what do you mean by that?" he inquired sardonically.

"Exactly what I said!" snapped Lowther. "You're coming back to St. Jim's with me."

"What! With this fellow oozing banknotes within a dozen yards of us? Not likely!"

"You born idiot! Can't you see an inch in front of your silly nose?" demanded Lowther patiently. "This chap isn't to be rooked; he's probably an associate of Lodgey's—"

"Talk sense," urged Mellish.

"And they'll clean you out between them—just as they've done before," went on Lowther regardless. "You're just going in there to give them three pounds, without squaring your debt at all. Can't you see that, you dummy?"

Mellish's eyes narrowed.

He had not set his heart on "rooking" the unknown, and risked breaking bounds, just to be turned back on the threshold in this manner. Lowther was a fool—that was Mellish's opinion. Here was a gilt-edged chance to wash out his debt to Lodgey and enrich himself at the same time. It was too good—much too good—to be missed. Not for Lowther, nor a whole battalion of Lowthers, would Mellish have turned back just then.

His expression showed as much.

"Suppose you leave this to a fellow who understands it?" he suggested coolly. "You've done me a good turn by lendin' me enough to square with Lodgey, but you musn't set up as an expert on gamblin', you know. This isn't the first time I've been here. I tell you I'm on a dead cert. By to-morrow mornin' I'll have enough to pay you back an' then to spare. Now let me go, and cut back to the school before your giddy pals find out you're gone!"

Lowther listened to that from Mellish with a frown.

His look was grimmer than ever as the black sheep of the Fourth turned away towards the french windows.

"Hold on a minute!"

Mellish did not heed.

"Hold on, I tell you!"

Mellish was going on, but Lowther made a leap.

His grip fastened on the sneak's collar, and he whirled Mellish round again, gasping.

"You fool! What's this game? Lemme go, hang you!"

"Not just yet," said Lowther, smiling. "You see, if you're too much of an ass to take a straight tip, there's only one way of dealing with you. You're coming back to St. Jim's now, if I have to yank you by the neck every inch of the way! Get that?"

Mellish bit his lips savagely and his eyes glinted.

He did not look very grateful for Lowther's assistance at that moment.

But there was no help for it. He would have felt tempted to have knocked Lowther flying, only Lowther could have eaten him in a physical encounter.

"Wait a sec."

"What's up now?"

"I must pay Lodgey, at least, you fool. Lemme go!"

Lowther shook his head.

"Lodgey will keep till to-morrow," he observed calmly. "You may have got some sense from somewhere by then. If you go in there to-night I know you'll lose that three pounds, and it's not good enough. Kimmon!"

"Hold on, I tell you!"

There was a glint of triumph in Mellish's eyes now—a scheme had come to him. A yell would bring out Lodgey and a barmen or two, and Mellish was known to them, while Lowther was not. The barmen would soon dispose of Lowther, which was all Mellish wanted.

He opened his mouth to yell.

Unfortunately for him, Lowther sensed his plan just in time.

Mellish's yell ended in a gurgle as Lowther's hand was clapped suddenly over his mouth. The next second a handkerchief was crammed in his mouth, and Mellish was reduced to impotence.

"Urrrrgh! Mooooooh! Grrrrrrrrr!"

"Take it quietly, old top," urged Lowther, grinning. "This way. It's for your own good, you know."

Mellish felt like doing anything but taking it quietly. But he had no choice. With Lowther's grip on his collar, and Lowther's knee butting into him from the rear, he had no opportunity to lag.

"March!"

Mellish marched, with a helping knee every time he felt inclined to slow up.

He marched to the wicket-gate, with Lowther in his rear.

They came out into the lane again, Mellish still gurgling wildly in his endeavours to rid himself of his gag.

"Keep cool," grinned the humorist of the Shell. "You'll have a fit of apoplexy if you go on at that rate!"

Mellish's answer was a further infuriated gurgle.

"Step it out—"

Lowther stopped suddenly.

Crunch! Crunch! Crunch!

It was a heavy step in the lane; somebody was approaching the Green Man!

There was little time to think.

Mellish stopped gurgling, and shivered with fright as the footsteps drew nearer.

"This way!" hissed Lowther in his ear.

Mellish felt himself bundled to the side of the lane, and he stumbled wildly down into the ditch. Lowther was a second after him.

The ditch was wet and muddy, but that could not be avoided. Any discomfort was better than discovery. The unknown might be P.-c. Crump, or a master, or a prefect. Lowther and Mellish crouched in the ditch, hardly daring to breathe.

Crunch! Crunch! Crunch!

The footsteps halted—right opposite their hiding-place. The two juniors held their breath.

Then, as the footsteps came nearer, Lowther moved.

Evidently, the unknown had heard their hurried scuffle out of his way, and he was coming to investigate.

Flight was the only hope.

"Cut!" gasped Lowther.

He leaped out of the ditch, and Mellish after him.

Lowther had hardly taken a couple of steps ere he collided violently with a tall figure. Mellish dodged round them both and bolted along the lane at breakneck speed.

"Ow!"

Lowther, gasping from the impact, turned aside to flee. But the figure shot out a hand, and an iron grasp fastened on the junior's jacket collar, dragging him back.

"Got you, my beauty!"

Lowther started afresh.

He knew that voice—it was Knox, of the Sixth, a prefect, who had hold of his jacket collar.

In that moment Lowther thought and acted swiftly.

Fortunately, he had not donned an overcoat, merely donning a muffler round his neck.

He wriggled fiercely now, with one object in view.

Knox had fast hold on his jacket. But, with a jerk, Lowther slipped out of the garment, and Knox took a sharp pace backwards, an empty jacket in his hands.

Lowther, in his waistcoat and muffler, shot away into the darkness at full stretch.

Behind him he heard an angry shout:

"Stop! Stop, you young scoundrel!"

Lowther did not heed that command.

He was running as if for his life.

CHAPTER 4.

Knox's Way!

"O H, gad! The fool!"

Gerald Knox, of the Sixth, crushed the sheet of paper in his hand and glanced about him guiltily.

Any fellow watching Knox as he stood before the letter-rack in Hall might have been surprised by his distinctly furtive manner. Fortunately for Knox, there was nobody to see—he was down early.

Awakening before rising bell, the prefect had found sleep impossible, and risen. Now he was glad that he had, otherwise, anybody might have spotted the letter that was waiting for him with the rest in the rack.

An ordinary letter would have passed unnoticed, likely enough, but not this one. The remarkable scrawl in which it was addressed would have attracted facetious attention immediately.

"Master Jerald Knox, Esquire,
St. James Skool,
near Rylcombe.
Lokal."

One glance at that address was enough to inform Knox of the identity of his correspondent.

A week or two previously a bookmaker of doubtful reputation, Joseph Banks, had been staying at the Green Man. Knox had had a little bet with him—and lost. He had tried again—and lost. Unforeseen circumstances had forced Banks to change his quarters suddenly, and now he was hunting in fresh fields and pastures new. But he had not forgotten Knox, or the little matter of nine pounds ten shillings between them.

Knox had opened the letter, fully aware of the nature of the epistle it contained.

"Dere Mister Knox,—Pleese exkuse the liberty I takes in writing you at the skool, but I shoold like to let you know I am hard up and shoood appreshiate payment of the little debt you owe me as soon as convenient.

"You may find it difficult to raise the money," but I tell you flat I cannot wait. Let me have it by Monday, or I shall have to take measures. I am sure your headmaster wood like to know all the goings-on his senior boys has with honest sportsmen like meself.

"I am in reel earnest, as I find it unhealthy to be back in your district for some time, and I must have the money. If you can't raise it look out for trouble with both eyes.

"Very trooly yours,

"JOSEPH BANKS."

It was a lengthy letter, and must have given Mr. Banks considerable trouble to compile. Its tone left nothing to guess at. Mr. Banks found it impracticable to return to the Rylcombe district for some time; he had no object to serve by treating Knox leniently. If the nine pounds ten shillings was not forthcoming by the following Monday, Knox would be shown up by letter to Dr. Holmes.

There was a faint hope in Knox's breast that the Head would disdain to take any notice of a communication from such a character as Mr. Banks; but then there was a bigger risk that he would make a few inquiries. Where there was smoke there was usually fire.

The prefect crushed the letter in his hand and rammed it into his pocket as the sound of voices heralded the first of the juniors down from the dormitory.

Knox headed for his study—to think.

He had hardly seated himself when the door opened, and Sefton glanced in.

"I say, you laid that bet for me with Lodgey last night, what?" he asked.

Knox nodded sourly.

"Oh, good! I say, did he clean you out again? You look as though something of the kind happened!"

"Oh, go to Jericho!" snarled Knox, from the armchair. Sefton grinned, and closed the door.

Knox grunted to himself, and relapsed into thought.

The night before he had laid Sefton's bet, and one of his own, too. It was the only hope of raising ten pounds

by Monday. On Saturday, the St. Jim's junior eleven would meet Greyfriars on the football field. On form, St. Jim's looked winners—and Mr. Lodgey, of the Green Man, thought so, too. He had fallen in eagerly with Knox's suggestion that he would like to back Greyfriars. If St. Jim's won, Knox would be more deeply in the mire than ever. But in the event of a Greyfriars victory, he would clear ten pounds—enough to settle with Banks.

But, with the advantage of playing on their own ground, allied to their brilliant form at present, St. Jim's looked for a win, and expected at worst a draw.

Knox, as he lounged before the fire, racked his brains for some way out of the problem which beset him. He dare not think of his position if St. Jim's won. It was Greyfriars or serious trouble.

"By gad! They've got to win—somehow—anyhow. I wonder—"

There was a gleam in the prefect's eyes as he cogitated. He had no scruples to contend with—only the difficulty of finding a suitable way out for himself.

"Gad! I can't make Greyfriars win—but I can make St. Jim's—lose—"

Knox rose to his feet.

He had had that scheme in mind since rising. Now it was worked out in his mind to his satisfaction.

He stepped to the study door and called along the corridor:

"Fag!"

After a few moments, Curly Gibson of the Third came scuttling up the Sixth Form corridor.

"Did you call, Knox?"

"Find Tom Merry, and tell him to come to my study at once," snapped Knox.

"Right-ho!"

The prefect watched the fag trot off on the errand with a smile on his lean features.

He waited irritably for Tom Merry to appear.

Tap!

"Come in!"

It was the captain of the Shell, looking surprised. He had not, so far as he could remember, any particular sins on his conscience just then.

Knox was looking very serious, but not, as was his wont, angry. He motioned the Shell captain to a chair.

"Sit down, Merry."

"Thanks," answered the junior, in deeper and deeper surprise.

Knox grown polite was something to wonder at.

"I want to talk to you about something very serious, Merry," began Knox, eyeing the junior closely. "But we'll let that stand over for a few minutes. Now, you're junior captain."

"Yes."

Tom Merry could think of no other answer to that. "Have you picked your team to play against Greyfriars on Saturday?"

"Most of them," said Tom, more and more astonished. "There's one or two places to be filled, of course. We want the very best side we can put out to meet the Friars."

"Exactly!" assented Knox. "That's why I thought I'd just mention a fellow in whom I've been takin' rather an interest lately. I dare say you know who I mean?"

"Can't say I do. You don't mean Levison?"

"Oh, no."

"Or Roylance, or Clive, or Hammond?"

"I'm afraid you're rather overlooked this chap's form," explained Knox, watching Tom Merry narrowly. "He's not a fellow you're on very good terms with."

"Oh!"

The Shell captain's expression showed plainly enough what he thought now. It was not difficult to perceive at this stage that Knox wanted one of the "slackers" included, for some reason of his own. Tom Merry did not, naturally, suspect him of having a bet on the match.

"Well, who is it?" asked the junior sharply.

"Don't prejudice your mind in advance—it's Mellish."

"Oh!"

Once again there was no misconstruing the expression on the junior captain's face.

"You don't think much of him, perhaps?" asked Knox thoughtfully.

"I don't," answered Tom Merry frankly. "He's an unfit slacker—every fellow in the Lower School knows that as well as I do, Knox. It's impossible to think of playing him. There would be an uproar—even if I were fool enough to put his name down."

Knox raised his eyebrows.

"You're junior skipper, I suppose? If you shoved his name on the list, the team would have to lump it."

"Well, I'm not going to," said Tom Merry finally. "I'm sorry, if you wanted to see him given a show, but it can't be done. If that's all you've got to say, I'll be going."

"Just a minute!" smiled Knox calmly.



Mellish opened his mouth to yell, but the next moment Lowther's handkerchief was crammed home in his mouth, and the yell ended in a gurgle. "Urrrh!" "March!" Mellish marched—with Monty Lowther's knee butting into him from the rear every time he felt inclined to slow up. (See Chapter 3.)

"Well?"

"You might see your way to doing this just as a favour to me," suggested the prefect coolly.

"Why on earth should I?" ejaculated the Shell captain.

"Take a look at that."

Knox reached across to a chair, on which lay an Eton jacket.

He tossed it to Tom Merry, who stared at it blankly.

"Ever seen it before?" asked Knox, grinning.

"Not that I remember."

"Look at the initials on the tab," suggested Knox.

Tom Merry glanced at the tab, and then started.

Quite plainly two letters were marked—M. L.

"Search the pockets!" said Knox satirically. "You'll find a letter and some papers belonging to your friend Lowther."

Tom Merry felt in the pockets, and drew out a letter. There was no room for doubt—it was Lowther's jacket.

But he was still in the dark as he stared at Knox.

The prefect was grinning coolly.

"Last night," he explained, "I was just seein' that all was secure when I spotted a junior leaving the school via the oak against the wall. I followed him—and caught him outside the Green Man. He struggled, and got away—but left this jacket in my hands. It was your pal Lowther, Merry."

Tom Merry paled a little.

The jacket was Lowther's—that was past denial. And back to his mind came the recollection of the night, when he had heard the dormitory door closing. He had sat up—and discovered Lowther's bed empty. At the time he put it down to the fact that Lowther had had toothache lately—and that he had probably gone down for something to ease it. He had dropped off to sleep again before his chum returned, whenever that was.

Now, there was a much more serious complexion put

on the matter. Lowther had been out of bounds—to the Green Man—and here was his jacket to prove it!

Unbelievable as it was, there was no denying actual proof.

"There—there must be some mistake!" gasped Tom Merry, at last.

Knox smiled again.

"No mistake, I assure you," he answered calmly. "I saw him, though he thought I didn't. And here's his jacket. Enough evidence for Dr. Holmes, I imagine."

"My hat! The silly idiot must have been mad!" ejaculated the captain of the Shell dazedly. "Pub-haunting—it's ridiculous—impossible!"

"Well, I'm reporting him—and I hope he gets the sack!" said Knox grimly.

Tom Merry set his lips.

"Knox, there must be some ghastly mistake here—Lowther isn't that kind of chap! Give me time, and I'll find out—"

Knox raised a hand.

"I'm prepared to believe that there may be some excuse for him," he said judicially. "I'll even do you a favour, and give you time to tax him with it—on condition—"

"What do you mean?"

"—that you do me a favour," smiled Knox easily. "I have heard that one good turn deserves another. Think it over. I'll give you till this evening to put up the list. Play Mellish, and I'll forget Lowther and his jacket. If you can't oblige me you can't expect me to oblige you. That's all. You can cut."

"But—but—"

"Cut!"

"But, don't you see—"

"Sharp!" snapped Knox. "Unless you want the ash-plant!"

Tom Merry left the study, his brain in a whirl.

CHAPTER 5.

The Lesser Evil!

"TOM MERRY—" "Stop a minute—" "What about the list?" "Am I down?"

Tom Merry started.

He had walked from Knox's study almost mechanically, his mind fully occupied with the quandary in which the rascally prefect had landed him.

There was quite a little crowd of fellows waiting for the captain of the Shell in the corridor, but it took their combined voices to bring home their presence to the skipper.

"What—what—?"

"The list, fathead!" roared Kangaroo.

"You haven't forgotten you said you'd shove it up to-day—what?" asked Clifton Dane, looking puzzled at Tom Merry's blank expression.

"Oh! The list. All right!"

"Who's playing?"

"Never mind now!" snapped the Shell captain shortly. "I've got to think it out. Give a fellow room!"

And, somewhat to the surprise of the fellows, Tom Merry elbowed his way to his study and disappeared within.

Closing the door, the junior paused a moment, and then locked it. He did not want to be interrupted for a few minutes, until the breakfast bell sounded.

He had much to think about—much more than the selection of the junior eleven to oppose Greyfriars on the following Saturday. He had promised to put up the list that day—and Knox had given him till the evening. As the team was practically drafted, that would not have been a difficult matter in normal circumstances.

But Knox's disclosure altered everything; it placed Tom in an unenviable position.

He threw himself down in the study armchair to think.

Lowther—his pal for terms—taking up the shady ways of Racke and Mellish and that dingy crowd! It was unbelievable—even when he had just been confronted with irrefutable evidence.

Lowther was not that kind of fellow—if it were true, he must have had some reason. Possibly he was hard up, and too proud to ask his pals for help. He had tried to raise the wind at Mr. Lodgey's expense, perhaps. At any rate, there was no denying the fact that he had been to the Green Man the previous evening, after lights out. And fellows did not break bounds and frequent dingy public-houses just for the sake of the air.

"The silly, born fathead!" murmured Tom dismally. "I'd never have believed it for a moment—but for the jacket. It's Monty's jacket, right enough. And—and I know he left the dorm last night for something or other. Poor old chap. He must have been hard up—my hat!"

Back into Tom Merry's mind came the recollection of Lowther's three remittances—and their mysterious disappearance. Lowther had refused to give an explanation, after promising to stand a spread all round. Where had the money gone? In the light of Knox's evidence, Tom had little doubt. It was only too plain.

"Dash it all, the ass must have been going the pace pretty steeply to lose three pounds—and then go back again!" ejaculated the Shell captain. "Perhaps he thought he'd win it back—some hopes, from a secondarily swindler like Lodgey! Oh, the ass!"

Once again Tom Merry pondered dismally what he was going to do—what solution he was to find to the quandary he was in.

One thing was certain—he could not give his chum away, or allow Knox to do so, if it lay within his power to stop him.

Whatever Lowther had done, Tom was sure, knowing him better than anybody at St. Jim's, save Manners, that he had acted on some foolish impulse, and was probably already regretting it keenly enough. Monty was no blackguard, like Racke. At all costs Tom would save him from the Beak—a flogging, and very probably the sack!

The captain of the Shell set his lips at last, and drew a sheet of paper towards him.

The football list had to be put up—so the sooner it was done, the better. Knox made it a stipulation that Mellish should play, and he would hold his tongue. Tom could not help wondering why Knox should have taken such a sudden interest in Mellish, but it was none of his business. He little suspected the depths of Knox's cunning.

If Mellish was not put in, Lowther would go before the Head, and possibly leave St. Jim's. Convinced as he was that his chum had succumbed to a momentary temptation, Tom Merry saw his duty plainly enough.

Playing Mellish was equivalent to betraying the team of which he was captain. But failing to play Mellish was equivalent to betraying his chum—with worse results than

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a licking on the football field. In those circumstances, Tom chose the lesser evil.

He took up his pen and read over the list he had made, debating which name to strike out. Whoever was dropped to make room for Mellish would want to know why, no doubt. But that could not be avoided.

"Not Fatty Wynn—that's certain!" murmured Tom grimly.

His eyes ran over the defence, but he could not weaken the defence; that would have been suicide. It had to be one of the forwards, then. But it was impossible for the team to dispense with either Gussy or Talbot, the wingers. And playing a hopeless "dud" in any of the other forward positions would result inevitably in a terrific muddle. But it had to be.

"Levison!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

Levison, the last choice for the eleven, was perhaps the weakest member of the forward line. But compared to Percy Mellish, he was a second Steve Bloomer.

"It's got to be!" murmured the Shell captain grimly.

He drew a line through Levison's name, and substituted that of Mellish. He could not help crimsoning a little as he read down the list now—marred by that shady slacker in the forward line. What would the fellows think—and say—he could already imagine. What Levison would say was not to be thought about.

Rap! Rap!

"Hallo, there! Sporting your oak, Tom?"

There was a rattle at the door handle, followed by a rapping on the panels. It was Lowther's voice that sounded from the passage.

"You can come in. Half a mo'!"

Tom Merry rose and unlocked the door.

He gave his chum a rather peculiar glance as he entered the study. He wondered whether Lowther would choose to say anything regarding his midnight expedition—waiting, as he must be, for Knox to call him up for punishment. But if Lowther chose to say nothing, Tom would not.

And Lowther had nothing approaching the guilty air which he might have been expected to carry.

"What's the idea of locking yourself in, old man?" he inquired in surprise.

"Keeping out a crowd of busybodies who wanted to help me pick the team," answered Tom, smiling slightly.

"Oh, I see! I say, have you seen Knox?"

"Ahem! Yes!"

"Oh, my hat! Did he look good-tempered?"

"Not very."

"Oh dear! I'm half expecting trouble from dear old Knox—though it may blow over. It's all right if he doesn't say anything. Have you decided the team, old man?"

"Yes."

Lowther stared a little at Tom's monosyllabic response. He saw no reason for this apparent constraint, as was natural enough in the circumstances. Lowther did not even know for certain that Knox had recognised him the previous night—he had forgotten the clue of the jacket. In any case, he had no sin on his conscience, and Mellish was in it, too. And Lowther knew that Mellish was a crony of Knox's. The prefect would not give Mellish away. Unless Knox spoke to him, Lowther felt secure.

He strode to the table now and picked up the football list.

"This is it—what?"

"That's it!" assented Tom Merry.

"Oh, good! I'm down!" ejaculated Lowther, in relief.

"Manners isn't, though. Don't you think he's quite up to form, old man?"

"Not quite!" answered Tom Merry, rather puzzled by Lowther's complete confidence. He began to wonder if Knox had made some ghastly mistake. Then he dismissed that thought again. The evidence of the jacket was irrefutable; even without Lowther's absence from the dorm and the disappearance of his three pounds.

"I say—" ejaculated Lowther suddenly.

"Yes?"

"Do my eyes see aright, or are there visions about?" exclaimed the humorist of the Shell, his amazement growing.

"What's the matter?"

Tom Merry steeled himself for the first crash of the storm which he was well aware Mellish's inclusion would arouse.

"Mellish!"

"Exactly."

"Mellish! Mellish!" repeated Lowther dazedly. "What the merry thump have you shoved that smoky, dingy, slacker down at inside-right for?"

"Ahem! You see—"

"Mellish!" roared Lowther, as if unable to believe his senses. "Are you mad, you frabjous jabberwock? Have you gone right off your giddy onion, you image? Mellish! What on earth is the name of this game, Tom?"

"Hold on a minute—"

"Mellish!" shrieked Lowther. "Is it a joke, or has your

brain added? Since when could Mellish kick a footer a dozen yards?"

"Keep cool," urged Tom Merry, crimsoning himself. "You see—"

"Blessed if I do!" snorted Lowther frankly.

"I had to put him down—"

"Had to? Did he threaten to give you a thick ear if you didn't?" demanded Lowther sarcastically.

"Nunno! But it was time Mellish had a trial—"

"When we play the Third, and not before!" said Lowther decidedly. "Mellish—against Wharton, and Bob Cherry, and Todd, and Vernon-Smith! My only summer bonnet! Why, they'll eat him!"

"Well, he's in," said Tom Merry finally.

"I can see that," agreed Lowther coolly. "He's in now, but I take it it's some kind of a potty jape—what? If he's not out again before the match comes off, I fancy I can see a lynched skipper lying about! The fellows won't stand it!"

"They'll have to," answered Tom Merry shortly. "I'm skipper, I suppose? Mellish plays against Greyfriars. If the team isn't satisfied, they can elect another captain afterwards. Until then my selection stands."

Lowther gasped.

There had been arguments—heated ones—in the past, over selections with which the juniors—those who had been left out—did not agree. But this was beyond a joke; it was asinine. Even Baggy Trimble would have known better than to pick Percy Mellish to stand up against the stalwart Friars. It was impossible! And yet Tom Merry had done it, and was apparently sticking to his remarkable decision!

"Look here, Tom—"

"Chuck it, old man!"

"But look here, you can't play Mellish!"

"Mellish plays!"

"But he jolly well doesn't play!" roared Lowther furiously. "If you haven't taken leave of your senses, what the merry thump do you mean by it? I tell you, the fellows will lynch you!"

"Mellish plays!" repeated Tom Merry firmly. "There's no argument about it!"

"Isn't there, by Jove!" ejaculated Lowther, flushing.

"I've never known you act like a blithering imbecile before, Tom Merry, but you're making a start now! Mellish can't play! You can't be playing him for his footer—"

"Shut up!" urged Tom Merry, becoming irritated himself.

"And you can't be playing him for his good looks, or the way he does his back hair—what?" hooted Lowther indignantly. "I tell you flat, if Mellish plays—"

"Oh dear! Yes?"

"Then I jolly well don't, for one!"

snapped Lowther. "And I imagine the rest of the team will feel the same about it. If you're sticking to Mellish, Tom, you can cross my name out! That's final!"

"Oh!"

"Doesn't that bring you to your senses?" snapped Lowther.

Tom Merry gave him a very peculiar look. Then he shook his head.

"I'm sorry. But Mellish plays. I'll put Clive in your place at left-half, old man."

For a moment there was dead silence in Study No. 10.

Then Lowther, with a snort, turned to the door.

The slam, as he passed out, could have been heard from one end of the Shell corridor to the other.

CHAPTER 6.

Not Having Any!

TOM MERRY shrugged.

As the slam of his study door echoed along the corridor he could hear Lowther's footsteps rapidly departing.

"My hat! This is a go!"

Tom was beginning to realise that the inclusion of Percy Mellish was not fated to pass off so quietly as he had hoped. Looking at the matter from the point of view of the rest of the team, it was really not to be expected.

Lowther's attitude, in the peculiar circumstances, had at first surprised the captain of the Shell. But it was not so

remarkable, on reflection. Lowther, of course, knew nothing of Knox's bargaining with Tom; indeed, he had not appeared half so apprehensive on that score as he might have done. There was nothing guilty in Lowther's manner. But the evidence was too strong to be gainsaid.

The Shell captain smothered any irritation which his chum's conduct had aroused.

As a member of the team, Lowther was quite right to protest vigorously against the inclusion of a rank outsider who was bound to make a present of the match to the Friars. That Mellish was included in order to shield him from the consequences of his own folly was not a solution that was likely to occur to Lowther.

"Never mind. I shall have to go through with it."

Tom Merry opened the door and strode along the passage. Clang, clang, clang!

The breakfast bell sounded.

The junior captain paused. Then he turned back to his study and took up the football list. He headed again for the Hall, which would be deserted now. A few moments later Tom Merry slipped into his place at the Shell table, his list posted for all to see as soon as breakfast was over.

He was the object of a good many glances and whispers during the meal. Evidently Lowther had been talking.

"I say, Tom!"

It was Manners, who sat next to him.

"Yes, old chap?"

"They're saying that you've decided to play Mellish in the team. Who on earth got hold of the yarn?"

"Ask Lowther!" suggested Tom, glancing across the table at that junior.

"Eh? It isn't true, is it?"

"You'll see the list after brekker, old man. I've just shoved it up."

"But what does Monty know about it?"

"All there is to know. He's seen the list."

"Who is that talking, please?" rapped Mr. Linton, from the head of the table.

"Ahem! I was speaking, sir," answered Manners.

"So was I, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Kindly save your discussion until after the meal!" said Mr. Linton severely.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

But mystification around the Shell table was rife.

When the Shell streamed out of Hall, there was a rush to surround Tom Merry.

"Merry, what's this about Mellish?"

"Where's the list?"

"It's all rot, isn't it?"

Tom Merry held up a hand.

"List's on the board, as usual!" he shouted, above the

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uproar. "If anybody has any objections to make, they'll find me in the study till classes!"

"This way, ye cripples!" yelled Kangaroo.

He led a rush for the notice-board, and Tom Merry turned towards Study No. 10. He thought of locking the study door behind him, but left it open. There was bound to be a stormy interview with the rest of the team sooner or later. Better get it over at once.

Meanwhile, the shouts of the juniors who crowded round the notice-board were plainly audible.

Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn and Talbot and Gore of the Shell, Blake and D'Arcy and Julian and Roylance and Hammond of the Fourth, and a score more speedily collected to read Tom Merry's list.

It was a sound enough list, with one glaring exception:

"Goal, Wynn; backs, Figgins, Kerr; halves, Redfern, Noble, Clive; forwards, D'Arcy, Mellish, Merry, Blake, Talbot."

A terrific roar was its reception.

The roar followed a deep silence, during which the juniors had apparently lost their voices.

"Mellish!"

"Mellish! Then it's true!"

"That slacker!"

"That smoky cad!"

"That—that fumbling idiot!"

"Tom Merry must have taken leave of his senses!"

"He's got my place!" roared Ernest Levison, above the din. "My place! Why, I can play Mellish off his feet! That fooling ass—"

"Come on!" shouted Kangaroo grimly. "Let's go and see Merry! We want an explanation! If Mellish plays, the match will be a gift for Greyfriars! And that's not good enough! This way!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Back up!"

It was an excited and wrathful crowd that followed the Australian junior up the stairs and along the Shell corridor. Something was "up" with Tom Merry. Exactly what it was the juniors intended to discover while there was yet time.

Tom Merry was in his study, as he had said.

He glanced up coolly as a score of faces appeared in his study doorway. Fellows were crammed like sardines in order to get a look at the captain of the Shell.

"Adsum!" observed Tom quietly.

"We want to know—"

"What's this rot—"

"This apology for a list—"

"Shut up!" shouted Kangaroo, waving his arms for silence, and fixing Tom Merry with a grim glance. "I'm spokesman, and I'm asking you, Merry, for an explanation of this list you've just shoved on the board. Is it a joke?"

"Not at all!"

Kangaroo took a deep breath.

"We're not quarrelling with your selection as a whole; only there's one fellow in it who couldn't shine in a kindergarten eleven!"

"Oh?" asked the Shell captain, with mild interest.

"I guess you know well enough who we mean!" went on Kangaroo grimly.

"You mean Mellish?"

"Just that."

"Well, I shouldn't have put him down if he wasn't playing, should I?" asked Tom Merry reasonably.

"So you think Mellish is a better man than Levison, or Julian, or Roylance, or a dozen others?"

Tom Merry paused.

He had resolved to carry this affair through with a high hand for his chum's sake. That he would probably be deposed from the captaincy afterwards did not influence him. But he could not honestly say that he considered Mellish a better man than any fellow in the junior school. Even Trimble ran Mellish pretty close in the sporting line.

"I've made my choice!" he answered firmly. "If the committee doesn't like it, they can ask me to resign at the next meeting! But the team against Greyfriars stands!"

Kangaroo gasped.

There was a reason for Tom Merry's extraordinary conduct—he felt that. No fellow in his senses would have acted in this manner. And it was impossible to suspect Tom of wanting to lose the match.

"Look here, Merry—"

"We're not standing it!"

"You think you're a giddy grand panjandrum—"

"Wait a minute!" bellowed Kangaroo authoritatively.

"We'll call an emergency meeting of the committee to decide this at once! All the members of the committee are here, aren't they?"

"Yes, rather!"

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"The rest clear, then!" rapped the Cornstalk coolly. "We'll come in, if you don't mind, Merry!"

"Shut the door, Figgins, old chap!"

Figgins shut the door of Study No. 10 in the faces of the eager inquirers without, and the committee—the Terrible Three, Talbot, Kangaroo, Blake, D'Arcy, Figgins, and Redfern—sat round the table.

"I propose Kangy chairman!" said Blake.

"Seconded!" rapped Redfern.

"Now, then, Merry," began Kangaroo, "you ought to realise that this wants an explanation! You've always been a jolly good skipper, and we've had no fault to find with you—"

"Thanks awfully!" grinned Tom.

"But this time you appear to have gone off your head!"

Tom Merry remained silent.

He might have expected this, but he had to face it. He did not catch Lowther's glance.

"I'm going to put one or two straight questions," said Kangaroo judicially, "and I want straight answers! 'No. 1: Do you think Mellish is worth a place in the eleven?'"

Tom Merry drew a long breath.

It was beginning to become difficult to maintain his stand.

"I've put him in!"

"We all know that! But you haven't answered the question! Do you think he's a better man than Levison, for instance?"

"Look here—"

"Do you think he's a better man than Julian?" rapped Kangaroo.

"I—I—"

"Is he a better man than Roylance?"

Tom Merry crimsoned.

Really, he could think of no answer to those questions.

Kangaroo nodded grimly.

"Pretty plain, I think?" he asked. "Merry doesn't think Mellish is worth his position, yet he's putting him in! Why?"

"Goodness knows!" said Blake.

"Does he look as if he were enjoying it?" asked Kangaroo.

Tom Merry's crimson deepened.

"Not exactly!" agreed Blake, grinning.

"It's quite plain to me that Merry isn't playing Mellish because he wants to, but because he's got to!" went on Kangaroo, with the utmost coolness.

"My hat!"

"But—but what—"

Tom Merry sat silent and dismayed.

Under the Cornstalk's keen cross-examination his motives were becoming increasingly clear.

"Tommy, will you tell us why you're forced to play Mellish?"

The Shell captain shook his head.

"I've picked him, and that's enough!" he answered finally.

"Not quite!" said Kangaroo, grinning now. "Somebody's got a hold over Tom, or he wouldn't be sitting there looking like a beetroot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—" began Tom Merry angrily.

"Now, it's out of the question that he's been up to shady stunts, like Racke & Co., and fallen foul of authority. In any case, a master wouldn't force him to play Mellish. But somebody is. Who?" demanded Kangaroo keenly.

Lowther had been sitting in silence watching his chum.

He had followed the trend of Kangaroo's argument clearly enough, and it seemed the only explanation.

Some power was being exerted over Tom Merry—he was being forced to play Mellish against his will. Who was wielding the power?

"My hat! If—"

Lowther broke off short.

Like a flash had come to him the recollection of Knox's summons to Tom Merry that morning, before breakfast. Tom had said nothing of what passed at that interview. Was it possible that in some way Lowther's own misdeemeanour was at the root of the matter? The mere thought that his chum might all the time have been shielding him from Knox was enough for Lowther.

"What's up?" asked Kangaroo, with interest.

"Thought of anything, Lowther?" asked Blake.

Lowther nodded.

"I'd like to speak to Tom in private, if you fellows don't mind," he announced coolly.

Tom Merry started violently.

"Monty, you ass—"

"You men come back in ten minutes, and we may have an explanation for you," suggested Lowther calmly.

"Oh, all right!"

"Ten minutes!" said Kangaroo warningly. He left the study with the rest of the committee. "Now, Tom," said Lowther calmly. "Well?"

CHAPTER 7 Two Changes!

MONTY LOWTHER gazed at his chum with a very peculiar expression on his face. Tom Merry avoided his glance.

In the circumstances, Tom had no wish to let Lowther know the reason for his remarkable inclusion of Mellish; but it was evident that Lowther, like Kangaroo, had some questions to ask. Lowther, having resigned, was no longer a member of the team. But he was still on the junior committee, and that gave him the right to ask as many questions as he chose.

"Look here, Tom—"

"I hope you realise that my decision is final," said the captain of the Shell quietly.

"Look here! I believe I got huffy over nothing, old

"Well, you seem to know all about it," commented Tom.

"A little grey matter wanted, that was all, old man. You shove Mellish in the eleven—a hopeless outsider whom you wouldn't look at normally—and can't give a reason. When Kangy suggested that you couldn't help yourself, I began to smell a rat. You saw Knox this morning—you put up the list since then. So he made your playing Mellish a condition of his keeping dark about catching me outside the school last night, what?"

Tom Merry nodded.

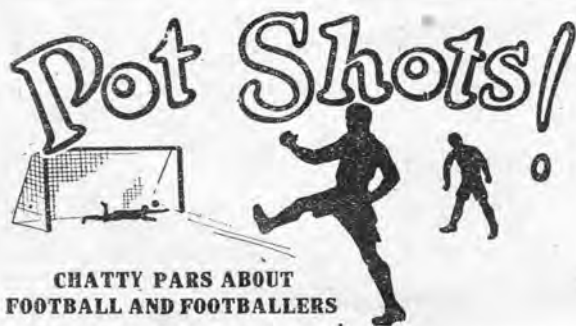
"Well, and what on earth do you think of me?" ejaculated Lowther grimly. "A giddy, pub-haunting, smoky black-guard like Mellish, I suppose?"

"Oh, chuck it, old man!" urged Tom Merry. "I didn't know what could have made you take to Mellish's ways, but I thought you must have been hard up, and wouldn't let your old pals know. If it's cash, you've only got to name the amount—"

"Well!" breathed Lowther.

"Manners and I will see you through," said Tom Merry, smiling. "There's no need to associate with those sharpers down at the Green Man, you know."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" stuttered Lowther dazedly. "So



CHATTY PARS ABOUT FOOTBALL AND FOOTBALLERS

SKIPPING is a favourite exercise with footballers. There aren't many of them, however, who make an attempt to break the non-stop skip of Tom Pratt, who played for Preston, Tottenham, and Woolwich, in the old days. He once skipped 7,300 steps without a stop.

How's this for the summing-up of the qualifications necessary in a football referee? "He must be able to run like a hare, and be possessed of the skin of an elephant, the brain of a stockbroker, and the tact of a Prime Minister." No wonder few referees are considered perfect!

The players of Oldham Athletic have this season been put through regular treatment by artificial sunlight. It is supposed to make them shine on the field.

There is a novel arrangement on the ground of the Crewe Alexandra Club. Home and visiting teams enter the arena from different sides of the field, and there is still another separate entrance for the referee and linesmen.

chap," said Lowther seriously. "Kangy thinks you're being forced to play Mellish—and it certainly looks like it. And something occurred to me. What did Knox want to see you about just before brekker?"

Tom Merry started.

"Only—only—"

"Only what?"

"I can't tell you," said Tom, with a deep breath.

Lowther was silent for a moment. His suspicions were growing rapidly. His next question took the Shell captain completely by surprise.

"It wasn't about me breaking bounds last night, I suppose?"

Tom Merry flashed his chum a glance of sheer astonishment. So far as he was aware, Lowther had no inkling of the reason for Knox's summons. But if he had only suspected before, that glance was enough to convince Lowther.

"Then it was, Tom?"

"Look here, Monty—"

"I'm looking!" retorted Lowther, unmoved. "I'm looking at a fellow who's trying to foist Mellish on to the footer team in order to shield me from Knox!"

Had Lowther exploded a bombshell in front of his chum, he could not have taken him more aback.

The humorist of the Shell grinned cheerily, and laid a hand on Tom Merry's shoulder.

"Old chap, you're an ass!" he said soberly.

In two hundred and thirty matches for Liverpool Fred Hopkin, the outside-left, only scored four goals. But he has helped his colleagues to many others, so he doesn't mind.

If anybody asks you who is the First Division player with the longest service, the answer is Frank Moss, of Aston Villa. He first played for them in 1910, and is still playing so well that they call him the ever-green Moss.

The fact that a report of a big football match has been broadcast has been known to reduce the attendance to half the usual number. That's why many clubs don't permit their games to be sent over the wireless.

George Stephenson, who is now with the Derby County attack, tried many things before he became a "pro" footballer. He started in a grocer's shop, from there went to a blacksmith's, and then into the pit.

Many of the referees now carry a little book in which they record the goals. In these days when goals are scored so often this is a necessary precaution, otherwise the "ref" might report the wrong result.

The footballers in Spain are the early birds. But they don't get up at six in the morning to catch worms. They do their training before the sun gets too hot.

It is proposed to get together another top class club in Manchester. At present London is the only place which supports more than two big League teams.

The receipts from matches played by Aston Villa during the club's history range from five shillings and threepence to £5,546. Something like a jump!

West Ham are the aristocrats of football. They have a King as manager and two Earls in the team.

you swallowed it—swallowed all the fairy-tales that Knox spun you!"

"Dash it all, Knox didn't say anything, excepting that he caught you outside the Green Man!" said Tom Merry. "But I knew you were hard up—"

"Since when?"

It was Tom Merry's turn to stare at that.

"Since yesterday, when you lost three pounds all of a sudden!" he answered.

"Oh!"

Lowther nodded silently.

"Oh! I see. Naturally, you wondered—"

"I woke up last night, and saw your bed empty, so I knew that Knox was speaking the truth," went on Tom quietly. "In any case, he's got evidence against you."

"What evidence?"

"Your jacket—with the initials on the tab, and a letter or two in the pockets."

"Oh, my hat! I'd forgotten that!"

"Well, Knox hasn't; and he fixed a bargain with me. Mellish plays—and he says nothing about you. Goodness knows what he wants Mellish to play for; he says he's been taking an interest in the chap lately, but that's all moonshine."

"I should jolly well say it was!" ejaculated Lowther

indignantly. "Now I see daylight. By Jove, you're a good pal, Tom!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Well, you are, you know. Not many fellows would have faced the committee just to save me from getting my gruel. But now you've told me what you know, I'll enlighten you a little. I haven't taken to pub-haunting, though I admit on the evidence you couldn't imagine anything else. I can't tell you what happened to those three pounds, though I jolly soon will. But last night, I wasn't the only fellow concerned."

"What? Who else was there?"

"Mellish!" answered Lowther grimly.

"M-Mellish?"

Tom Merry could only stutter at that startling piece of information.

"Mellish, as large as life," said Lowther coolly. "You see, the ass woke me up in dorm and suggested that I should accompany him on an expedition to the Green Man. Naturally, I refused. Then, thinking to bring the fathead back by his ears, I followed him as far as that rotten pub. I'd got him in hand when we ran full tilt into Knoxy, and he grabbed my jacket. Mellish got clear away; but it was bright moonlight, and Knox must have recognised him easily enough. See?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"If Knox reports me, he'll have to report Mellish, too," said Lowther, with conviction. "As Mellish is one of his kidney, and runs shady errands for him, he won't dare do that. Mellish could say a lot more than Knox would like the beak to hear. Of course, Knox didn't mention Mellish to you?"

"Oh, no!"

"You're an ass, old chap, but I'm grateful!" said Lowther. "It was ripping of you to stick up against the fellows, but there's no need. Knox won't dare take a step."

"My hat, I'm sorry I ever suspected you, old man!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Cut it short," grinned Lowther. "Now, we've got to deal with Knox. But first I'll bring Mellish along. He's got something to tell you."

"Buck up, or the committee will be back," warned the Shell captain.

Lowther left the study, and returned a minute later accompanied by Percy Mellish.

Mellish did not look happy. He eyed Tom Merry in the deepest alarm.

"What—what do you fellows want with me?"

"Only a confession," said Lowther cheerily. "See that poker?"

"Oh dear! Yes," answered Mellish dismally.

"I shouldn't like to bend it over your trousers, old bean. But yesterday you got a promise from me—I want you to tell Tom the facts of the case. You know what I mean?"

"That—that loan?"

"Just that. Hand over the poker, Tom, will you?"

Lowther caught the study poker as the captain of the Shell tossed it across.

But there was no call for the poker. Mellish was already hastening to explain. As Tom Merry learned where Lowther's three pounds had gone he grinned.

"Satisfied?" asked Lowther.

"Fathead! I might have known you weren't on the razzle."

"Just a minute, Mellish!" snapped Lowther, as the black sheep of the Fourth edged towards the door. "Where do you usually meet that man Lodgey?"

"Eh? Er—er—" Mellish did not seem anxious to answer that question. "By the stile in Rylcombe Wood. Why?"

"Because I'm coming along with you there this evening to see you hand over the three quid," said Lowther calmly. "Now you can cut. Oh, half a jiff, though! Have you seen your name on the board to play against Greyfriars?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're not playing. There's been a—ahem!—a misunderstanding. But don't say a word to anybody, if you value your neck. Get me?"

"I'll keep mum," answered Mellish, glad to escape. "What's on, some kind of a jape?"

"Some kind of a jape," assented Lowther calmly. "Now buzz."

Mellish "buzzed" with alacrity.

Lowther turned to his chum, grinning.

"I hear the committee returning," he observed coolly.

"I'd better explain—" began Tom Merry.

"Leave it to me, old chap," urged Lowther.

"Oh, all right! What have you got in your head now?"

"You'll see."

Kangaroo looked into the study, with the rest of the junior committee behind him.

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"Ready to explain, Tommy?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah! Are you goin' to let us into the mystewy, Tom Mewwy?"

Lowther held up one hand.

"Bell for classes will go in a minute. Tom has explained satisfactorily, and all's well again. Meet here immediately after classes, and I'll unfold a scheme."

"Bai Jove! There is a most wemarkable air of mystewy bwoodin' ovah this studey!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth.

Clang, clang, clang!

It was the bell for classes.

The committee, still awaiting enlightenment, had no alternative but to go into classes. Important as were the affairs of the junior football eleven, neither Mr. Linton nor Mr. Lathom could be relied upon to perceive it.



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy flew down the touchline, swerved in a lunge, just before Johnny Bull sent him spinning with a hefty header. "Man!" gasped T.

But after classes Kangaroo led a rush for Study No. 10.

Lowther and Tom Merry were there, and Manners was seated in the armchair, busy with his camera.

"Committee all here?" asked Lowther, in quite an official manner.

"Yes, rather!"

"Manners is in this scheme already," explained Lowther. "I can now give you fellows some good news."

"Go ahead!"

"Isn't Tom Mewwy goin' to speak, deah boy?"

"Tom's leaving it to me for the time being," answered Lowther cheerily. "I have pleasure in announcing that Mellish is dropped—"

"Hurrah!"

"That's better!"

"Also that I have reconsidered my resignation, and shall

play at left-half as usual. Everybody, excepting Clive, will be pleased to hear that—

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Tom has explained the whole thing to me," said Lowther seriously. "Listen, my infants."

The committee listened while Lowther explained the mystery briefly.

At the end there was a murmur.
"Bai Jove! You are an ass, Tom Mewwy; but I believe that, in the remarkable circs, I should have done the same, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Certainly, if Lowther was in danger, Tom did right," admitted Kangaroo. "I'm sorry for doubting you, Tommy."

"Same here!"
"And here!"

"Shut up, you silly asses!" urged Tom Merry, grinning.
"Now, about my scheme," continued Lowther calmly. "We're going to pull dear old Knox's leg in style. Why do you think he wanted Mellish to play?"

"A bet on the match!" said Blake, with decision.
"We know he's that kind of a rotter!" remarked Kangaroo.

"He's been borrowing lately, I know that," said Manners. "I heard him touch Kildare in the corridor the other day."

"It's a bet, sure enough," said Lowther. "Knox doesn't care a brass farthing whether Mellish plays or not, personally—only to serve his rotten ends! Well, we're going to be kind to Knox and leave Mellish in the team—"



tackle, and centred almost at Jack Blake's feet. Blake made a ball went whizzing an inch over the bar. "Hard luck, old (See Chapter 9.)

"Wha-a-at?"
"Till Saturday," explained Lowther. "Then Tom will make a couple of last-minute alterations—Levison inside-right, and me left-half. That will prevent Knoxy from getting wind of the change in time to call off his bet."

"My hat, it will serve the cad right," agreed Blake, with enthusiasm.

"He will find himself landed in a weally awful mess," conqurred Arthur Augustus seriously.

"Just what he deserves," said Lowther decidedly. "He'd have lost the match for us, if he could. Now he'll lose his money instead—that is, if we win."

"No doubt whatever about that," remarked Blake.
"That's that, then. Spread the news to all the reliable fellows—but swear them to secrecy. Mellish and Clive will

stay on the list, so as to pull Knox's leg, till the very last minute."

"You silly asses—"
"Hip, hip—"
"Hurrah!"

Knox of the Sixth, who was descending the stairs, heard that cheer as it echoed along the Shell corridor.

But he little guessed what it portended for him.

True to his word, Lowther accompanied Mellish to the latter's rendezvous with Mr. Lodgey that evening, and destroyed the I.O.U. which Mellish received in exchange for the three pounds. This done, only Lowther took it upon himself to give both Mr. Lodgey and Mellish a piece of his mind. Perhaps, however, it was as well that the humorist of the Shell did not expect thanks, for his well-meant words certainly did not receive a grateful reception from their recipients.

CHAPTER 8.

Saints v. Friars!

"GIBSON!"

Curly Gibson of the Third spun round from an animated conversation with Wally D'Arcy and Reggie Manners in Hall as that voice smote his ears.

Curly was fag to Knox, and he was used to springing to attention smartly at the prefect's slightest command. Knox had a way with fags—a way which earned him deep respect, if not popularity.

Saturday had dawned—a perfect day for football. And the football list—with Percy Mellish included at inside-right—still adorned the notice board.

There was no discussion among any of the juniors; they seemed to have taken it as unalterable. Knox had rather expected a fuss, but he was pleased to see Mellish accepted without one. His little scheme seemed to be working on oiled wheels.

Now, with dinner just over, he spotted Curly Gibson, and called to him.

"Yes, Knox?"

"Cut up to my study. I'll be there in a moment. I want some fagging done this afternoon."

"Oh, dear."

"What?"

"Oh, yes, Knox! Just going!" gasped Curly.

Knox smiled, and then strolled after the fag. Wally D'Arcy and Reggie Manners glared after him. They had been planning a run on their bikes that afternoon with Curly Gibson. Owing to Knox, Curly would not be able to join them.

"Beastly cad!" observed Reggie vengefully.

"Rotten slacker!" grunted Wally savagely. "He'll only keep Curly busy with odd jobs till it's too late to go out. Br-r-r-r-r!"

Fortunately, perhaps, for Wally and Reggie, Knox did not hear those unkind remarks as he mounted the stairs to the Sixth Form corridor.

He appeared quite in a cheery humour as he entered his study, to find Curly Gibson waiting there, rather nervously.

"I'm havin' a few friends to tea, kid," said Knox airily.
"Yes, Knox."

"Get some supplies in, and smarten up the study a bit."

"Yes, Knox."

"When you've laid the tea you can cut off. You were going out with D'Arcy and Manners, weren't you?"

"Y-yes, Knox. Thanks awfully!" ejaculated Curly, almost overcome by that really extraordinary consideration on the prefect's part. It would have been more in Knox's line to have kept the fag handy to wait upon him and his friends at tea.

"Here's a pound note. A quid's worth of tuck ought to be enough. And get a packet of sweets for yourself."

"Mum-mum-my hat! I mean, thanks ever so, Knox!" gasped Curly dazedly.

Really, he hardly knew whether he was dreaming or not. "Get a move on, then," snapped Knox, more in his usual tone. "I'm leaving you to it."

"Rely on me, Knox."

The prefect nodded, and left the study.

He left Curly Gibson gasping.

Never, in his stormy career as Knox's fag, had Curly experienced such luck. He had never known Knox in such a benevolent mood. It would hardly have surprised him more had the prefect given him an encouraging pat on the head.

Meanwhile, the prefect was descending cheerily into the Hall again.

He had been worried—desperately worried—over that debt of nine pounds ten shillings to Mr. Joey Banks. Now, thanks to his brainwave in dealing with Tom Merry, that little

amount was certain to be wiped out that very afternoon. That morning, Knox had received an unexpected remittance of a pound, and a fresh scheme had entered his mind. It was his cheery intention that afternoon to lay as many bets as possible with his friends against St. Jim's—asking them all to tea first in order to get them in a good humour.

On form, Tom Merry & Co. appeared quite likely winners. With the advantage of playing at home, they were good enough for almost any of the "sportsmen" of St. Jim's to risk their money on. Only Gerald Knox was possessed of inside information, so to speak, which made it a certainty to back Greyfriars.

In Hall, Knox paused a moment to run his eye afresh over the list on the board. The list gave him cause for continued satisfaction. Mellish was still down to play—and the kick-off was only an hour distant.

Whistling cheerily, Knox strolled out into the quad.

He spotted Monteith of the New House under the elms.

"Monteith, old man."

"Hallo!"

"Care for a little gamble?"

"What on?" asked Monteith suspiciously.

"The junior match this afternoon—against Greyfriars."

Monteith grinned.

"Catch me backing Greyfriars!" he answered derisively. "They haven't an earthly against young Merry and his lot."

"That's a matter of opinion," said Knox easily. "I rather fancy Wharton an' his crowd myself. By the way, comin' over to a bit of a beanfeast after the game, old man? I'm standin' a spread."

"Yes, if you like."

"Bring Webb and Hall, too, old man."

"Thanks, I will."

"You don't feel inclined to back your fancy?" asked Knox cunningly.

Monteith gave him a glance, and grinned.

He knew that Knox was in low water—and it did not take a very powerful intellect to perceive that he hoped to raise the wind by backing Greyfriars against his own school. But, in Monteith's opinion, at least, his chances were slim. Monteith did not reckon with the full extent of Knox's cunning.

"I'll have a quid on St. Jim's—even, if you like," he answered. "You're a fool, though—you're bound to lose."

"Done!" said Knox.

He took out a little notebook and entered up the bet.

Then, with a nod to Monteith, he strolled off in search of fresh victims.

Webb of the New House was just emerging from the Cloisters when Knox buttonholed him.

"Care to back your fancy, old man?"

"Eh? What's on?" asked Webb, puzzled.

"I'm open to back Greyfriars this afternoon—purely for the sport of the thing," explained Knox calmly. "I'm flush, you see. By the way, comin' over to tea with me afterwards? Monteith is comin'—I asked him to speak to you."

"I'll come, with pleasure."

"Right—ho! Backin' or not?"

"You're a fool to back the Friars!" said Webb candidly. "But if you're keen, I'll risk ten bob—even chances, of course."

"Oh, of course!" agreed Knox. "That's fixed, then. See you at tea-time!"

Webb strolled on towards Little Side, and Knox strolled on in search of Hall, and Baker and Langton. He found them all and fixed a bet with each of them, by the time the Greyfriars charabanc rolled in at the gates, and the hilarious welcome given by Tom Merry & Co. reached his ears from the quad.

"Nearly time to start!" he murmured, looking at his watch. "Better be on the ground."

To reach Little Side from the Sixth Form corridor, where he had just buttonholed Baker, Knox had to pass once again through the Hall.

He glanced casually at the football list—grinning afresh in anticipation of perceiving Mellish's name there.

But somehow, Mellish's name escaped him.

Knox paused, and looked more closely.

Then he jumped almost clear of the floor.

It was not remarkable that Mellish's name should have escaped him. It was not there. A thick line had been drawn through it, and in the place where it ought to have been was that of Ernest Levison, of the Fourth.

For a moment Knox stood gaping at the list unable to credit the evidence of his eyes. There was another thick line through a name—Clive's name! Lowther had been substituted in that case. But it was not Lowther's substitution that filled Knox with alarm and apprehension. It was the absence of the junior on whom he had counted to spoil the Saints' chances of winning. So sure was Knox that Mellish, even trying his hardest, would be nothing

better than a clumsy passenger, that he had not even troubled to take the junior into his confidence. Mellish would have played badly to order if Knox had asked him to—but that was not needed. Mellish's best was imperceptibly removed from his worst—and confidences increased the risk Knox was running.

On the foundation of Mellish at inside-right, Knox had built a series of dream castles. As he gazed fixedly at the thick line and Levison's name beneath it, his castles came crashing down about his ears.

A moment before he had been congratulating himself on the bets he had just succeeded in laying. The mere thought of them now filled him with horror.

"By gad! By gad! He's gone back on me—the young villain! I'll—I'll have him expelled! Chucked out neck and crop! But—but if they win—"

Knox trailed off.

Whatever he might do to Lowther afterwards would not compensate him for the really tremendous losses he faced if St. Jim's won.

Phce-eeeee—ecccc!

It was the whistle—the kick off!

The ball was rolling—and Knox's financial fate trembled in the balance from now till the game was over. With a gulp, the prefect rushed for the House door, and pelted down the steps.

There was a chance yet—even with a full side, St. Jim's would find Harry Wharton and his merry men tough nuts to crack. Greyfriars never had a more staunch supporter than Gerald Knox as he doubled down to the ground.

He was met by grins from Monteith and Webb and Hall and Baker and several others. Quite a number of seniors seemed to have developed a sudden interest in the match.

Knox did not answer their chaff.

His face was quite haggard as he turned his eyes on the game.

Ernest Levison was playing at inside-right—and his style of play was considerably different from what might have been expected from Percy Mellish.

When a long pass from Noble sent him through, he dribbled cleverly into the penalty area before giving the leather to Tom Merry. The Shell captain steadied himself, and Knox's heart seemed to leap into his mouth. But a rush from Johnny Bull, the visiting right-back, put Tom off his balance, and Tom Brown, of New Zealand, dashed in to clear just in time.

"Oh, gad!"

Knox mopped his brow.

Though the afternoon was chilly, he was wet with perspiration.

"Merry and his men are showing up well, what?" called Monteith, with a chuckle.

"Wait a bit!" gasped Knox.

He mopped his brow again when there was a further attack on the visiting goal, but a smart save by Squiff averted the danger.

The ball swept to the other end, and Harry Wharton fastened on to it. He sent a long, swinging pass out to Vernon-Smith on the wing, and the Bounder fairly flew along the line. As Figgins went out to tackle him, he feinted cleverly and put across a perfect centre. Kerr darted in to charge Wharton, but the Greyfriars skipper tapped the ball to Nugent, who let drive from point-blank range. Fatty Wynn had no earthly. He turned round glumly to pick the spinning ball out of the back of the net.

"Gad! What luck!" gasped Knox.

There was a roar from the crowd of Greyfriars supporters round the ropes.

"Hurrah, Friars!"

"Well shot, Nugent!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Knox could, with great satisfaction, have joined in the cheering, but he refrained. He watched the game, feeling slightly cooler.

St. Jim's rallied, but they found the visitors firm as a rock in defence. And Wharton came dribbling through again, passing Noble, and feinting neatly past Figgins, and bearing down on Fatty Wynn's citadel. Knox almost gave a chirrup of joy as the Greyfriars skipper steadied himself, side-stepped Fatty's sudden rush, and drove the ball coolly into an empty net.

"Goal!"

"Oh, good old Wharton!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Two up! Something like a beam of happiness lit up Knox's thin features at that moment.

The ball was set rolling again, Tom Merry & Co. pulling up their socks grimly to face a deficit of two goals.

Sniffing cheerily, Knox waited in happy anticipation of seeing the Greyfriars score increase by leaps and bounds. He could almost feel Monteith & Co.'s money in his pocket at

that moment. His joyful thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the voice of Toby, the page.

"Which Mr. Railton would like to see you in 'is study at once, Master Knox," he informed the Sixth-Former.

Knox gave a savage exclamation.

"Hang it! What dashed rotten luck!"

He gave another glance at the two teams on the footer field. It was sickening to be called away just then, but there was no help for it. Besides, it was obvious that Greyfriars were in exceptional form, and they looked capable of holding, and even adding, to their early lead. He nodded to Toby.

"You'll find me up in the study Monteith, old man!" the Sixth-Former called calmly.

Monteith grunted unintelligibly.

Knox chuckled, and there was a grin on his face as he made his way towards the School House.

CHAPTER 9.

The Fruits of Victory!

"OW!"
"Oh crikey!"
"Oh dear!"
"Oh deah!"
"Two down!"

It was a gasping chorus as Tom Merry & Co. threw themselves down to rest in the dressing-room at half-time.

The St. Jim's eleven were gasping as if for a wager. They looked puffed—and they were puffed.

Greyfriars were in form—there was no doubt, no possible shadow of a doubt, on that score. Harry Wharton & Co. were invariably strong rivals, and the St. Jim's team had not expected to beat them without some trouble. But, somehow, the boot seemed to be on the other foot. If there was any beating going on, it was the home eleven, and not the visitors, who were getting it.

"They're all over us!" breathed Lowther heavily.

"Oh, cheer up!" gasped Tom Merry manfully.

"Never knew 'em in such form," said Figgins, breathing hard.

"Back up, you know," murmured Kangaroo.

"I'll back up, fast enough, next half!" responded Figgins grimly.

"We've got to pull ourselves together," announced Tom Merry firmly.

"We have!" agreed Lowther.

"If we die, we'll die fighting!" continued the captain of the Shell. "Like as not the Friars have shot their bolt."

"I only wish they had!" breathed Lowther.

"It stands to reason they can't keep up that fearful pace all the giddy afternoon," said Tom Merry grimly. "And, in any case, if they can, so can we. We're two down—but teams have been worse off than that before now, and yet pulled the game out of the fire."

"Put me down for a couple of goals, anyhow," suggested Blake.

"Bai Jove! Wely on me for anothah couple. Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

"And me," volunteered Levison.

"We shan't want any more," answered Tom, grinning. "But, seriously, the Friars' form can't last. We'll start the second half with a rush, and hold them in their own half as long as we can. A good bombardment will cool their courage a bit."

"Good wheeze."

"And when you feel like slacking off, remember Knox!" said the captain of the Shell grimly.

"My hat, yes!"

"If we lose, Knox wins," said Tom. "We're playing Knox, as well as Wharton and his men. Put your beef into it!"

"What ho!"

Phcececeep!

Kildare, who had consented to referee, was blowing for the resumption.

It was a tired but grimly-determined eleven that lined up to face the Greyfriars men in the second half.

Harry Wharton & Co. were looking very cheery.

They were, indeed, somewhat surprised at the ease with which they were overrunning their ancient rivals; but, nevertheless, it was a pleasant enough surprise. Two up, with the game well in their hands, was how Harry Wharton & Co. looked at it.

They led off with a rush, and in a moment the struggle was ding-dong again.

A series of circumstances seemed to have conspired against the home team during the opening half. What-ever they essayed, it had gone awry. The Friars, on the other hand, could do nothing wrong.

(Continued on next page.)

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Now, however, there was some change.

When Harry Wharton came through, he was tackled smartly by Figgins, and the ball was booted half the length of the field towards the Friars' goal. Tom Merry trapped it, and swung it out to Gussy on the wing. The swell of St. Jim's flew down the line, swerved in to evade Tom Brown's tackle, and centred almost to Blake's feet. Blake made a lunge, just before Johnny Bull sent him spinning with a hefty charge, and the ball went whizzing an inch over the bar.

"Hard luck, old man!" gasped Tom Merry, his face brightening.

"Better next time!" grinned Blake.

Squiff took the goal kick, but the leather was soon back in the region of the visitors' goal again. The Saints appeared at last to be getting the measure of their opponents, and the attacks on Fatty Wynn's citadel were fewer and farther between.

"Up, St. Jim's!"

"Into them, Tom Merry!"

"You've got them groggy!"

A roar of cheering round the ropes urged the home eleven on to greater and greater efforts.

But the time wore on, and although the Greyfriars goal was hard besieged, it did not capitulate. Time and time again Squiff's goalkeeping averted the danger, or Johnny Bull's hefty kicking sent the ball spinning out of harm's way.

"Pull up your socks!" breathed Tom Merry, as the ball went into touch.

"How much longer, Kildare?" asked Lowther.

"Ten minutes."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Now or never!" rapped Tom Merry, as the ball was thrown in.

Lowther made a leap and trapped it.

He turned away as a Greyfriars man tackled him and tapped the leather to Blake. Quick as thought Blake transferred to Talbot on the wing, and Talbot sped away like a flash.

"Hurrah!"

"On the ball!"

"Talbot! Talbot!"

Time was short, and Talbot knew it.

He sped clear of the defenders till he was almost at the corner flag. A quick glance showed him plainly enough that his inside men were marked. Feinting as if to pass, he veered in suddenly towards goal. Johnny Bull came towards him, but a moment too late. Talbot's foot flashed, and the leather flew. Squiff made a frantic leap, but the ball spun past him right into the top of the rigging.

"Goal!"

"Oh, good old Talbot!"

"Good man! Oh, good man!" shouted Blake deliriously.

Talbot was almost pummeled to pieces by his jubilant chums.

But the whistle went for the line-up, and time was shorter than ever.

The ball rolled, and Tom Merry leaped towards it. He took it fairly off the toe of the Greyfriars skipper and sent it out to Talbot with a long, swinging pass. Once again Talbot was away, but this time he was tackled before he got near to the goal.

"Centre!" rapped Tom Merry.

Talbot obeyed on the instant; and as Tom received the ball he was for the moment unmarked. There was no time to hesitate. One glance, and the captain of the Shell let drive. Squiff shaped to meet the ball, but it curled away from him; and a fresh roar greeted the levelling of the scores. With a long shot Tom Merry had evened matters.

"Shurrup, you silly asses!" he gasped, as the rest of the team surrounded him. "One more—and there's only a minute or two to get it!"

Kildare restarted the game, and the St. Jim's players threw themselves into it heart and soul. But the Friars were cool and grim still, though their confidence was shaken. They had only to hold their own for a minute or two.

They did even more. Wharton received a pass from Bob Cherry and came dashing through. Fatty Wynn set his teeth as the Greyfriars skipper steadied and shot. It was a hard, swerving ball, almost out of Fatty's reach. But with a supreme effort the Falstaff of the New House reached it and clawed it to him with a sudden grab. Next moment and he had punted it down the field again.

"Oh, well saved!"

"Played, Fatty!"

"Levison!"

"Go on, Levison!"

Ernest Levison had the ball now, and he was justifying his inclusion with a vengeance. He was dribbling cleverly past Peter Todd—past Johnny Bull—and as Kildare glanced at his watch the Fourth-Former took swift aim. The leather

flew, missing Squiff's outstretched fingers by a hair's-breadth. Kildare blew the whistle for time and the winning goal in one breath.

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"St. Jim's! Oh, well played!"

"Hurrah for Levison!"

The crowd of juniors round the ropes surged on to the ground. Levison found himself grasped and lifted shoulder-high, and he was almost deafened by the cheering.

"My hat! You fellows deserved it!" ejaculated Harry Wharton to Tom Merry, as they came off together.

"It was a close thing!" grinned the Shell captain. "Can you fellows stop to tea? We've got a bit of a spread all ready for you."

"Just for tea, then we'll have to travel," assented Harry Wharton. "We've got a long journey before us, you know."

"This way for the tea-buffet!" shouted Monty Lowther, making a megaphone of his hands.

The Greyfriars men took their defeat philosophically, and accompanied their hosts cheerily into the School House and up to Study No. 10 to tea.

Tea was a cheery meal—a very cheery meal. And when Harry Wharton & Co. went down to the gates to pile into their charabanc at last Tom Merry and his chums saw them off with great ceremony.

"See you again at Greyfriars soon!" shouted Harry Wharton, as the charabanc rolled away from the gates.

"And give you a real licking!" shouted Bob Cherry in his stentorian voice.

"Bow-wow!"

The charabanc rolled out of sight, and the St. Jim's eleven returned to their studies. Only the Terrible Three were looking serious.

"After the feast the reckoning!" observed Manners thoughtfully.

"You mean the fruits of victory!" grinned Lowther. "I'm not worrying for one!"

"We've got to be prepared, though," said Tom Merry. "Knox will be in a towering rage—"

"A regular tantrum!" agreed Lowther.

"And he'll try and take it out of you, old chap."

"He can't report me without dragging in Mellish; and I told you he wouldn't dare do that. Mellish knows too much about him."

"Wait a minute!" broke in Tom Merry. "Why need he mention Mellish at all?"

Lowther looked rather taken aback at that.

"Knox grabbed your jacket; he knows you were the fellow he nearly caught. Even if he recognised Mellish, too, he needn't say so. He can forget all about him if he likes—and he jolly well will like!"

"I suppose that's so," assented Lowther more seriously.

"I say—" interrupted Manners.

"We've got to deal with Knox some way," observed Tom Merry grimly. "He's not wreaking his giddy rage on you, old chap!"

"Listen to me a minute," suggested Manners patiently.

"Well, what's up?"

"Nothing, old man. Knox will come up to the study soon to see Monty. He'll be bursting with wrath, and will want to cart Monty straight off to the Head to be barked, won't he?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," agreed Lowther dismally.

"That's where my scheme comes in," explained Manners calmly.

"Oh, have you got a scheme?"

"Ass! Haven't I been trying to get a word in edgeways this last ten minutes, dummy?"

"Well, get on with it!"

"Knox will come up to the study, breathing fire and murder—" recommenced Manners.

"Exactly!"

"He'll find two of us at home—Tom and me."

"Eh? Not much use for me to skulk off in hiding somewhere!" ejaculated Lowther. "I'm bound to biff into Knoxy sooner or later."

"Wait a second, old chap! Your intellect works rather slowly, you know. I didn't say you would be in hiding."

"Well, suppose you make yourself quite plain, if you've really got a scheme at all?" suggested Lowther sarcastically.

"All in good time," continued Manners, unmoved. "Tom and I will be in the study to meet Knox, and we'll hold him there—either in conversation or by force—"

"What in thunder for?"

"What evidence has Knox got against you, fathead?" demanded Manners impatiently.

"The jacket—that's all," answered Lowther, after a pause.

"Just that," assented Manners calmly. "Don't you see? While we occupy Knox's mind you'll be scouting in his study, safe from interruption. If you can't find your own jacket you're a Dutchman!"

"My hat! I see!"

Knox was a little puzzled as his guests gathered round him, all of them looking very cheery. "Well," said Monteith, "if it's all the same to you, we'd like to settle our little wagers now." "Just as you like, of course," said Knox. "Let's start payin'." And he held out his hand suggestively. Simultaneously, six guests held out their hands in the same attitude. "What——" Gerald Knox jumped. (See Chapter 10.)



"Time you did!" agreed Manners caustically. "Once you've got hold of Knox's evidence his teeth will be drawn. He wouldn't have the nerve to report you without any evidence. He'd only be able to say that he recognised you in the moonlight; and that would sound too flimsy for the Beak. If it came to that, there's as much evidence as that against Mellish; and we know Knox won't drag him into it. Once you've got your jacket, Knox is tied up. See?"

"I see!" assented Lowther, grinning. "Let's get up to the study, then," said Manners coolly. "Tom and I will guarantee to interest Knox long enough for you to rout out the whole giddy study."

And the Terrible Three, grinning, went up to their study.

CHAPTER 10.

Not Nice for Knox!

"HERE they come, by gad!"

Gerald Knox chuckled to himself.

Footsteps sounded in the Sixth Form corridor, and Knox had little doubt as to whom they belonged. He had been waiting patiently now for some time, anticipating quite a cheery meeting with his guests.

Curly Gibson had laid the tea in style, and Knox had been round the study carefully to see that everything was in order. He wanted to cheer Monteith & Co. up as much as possible.

Knox was in a better humour than he had been for weeks. His bet with Lodgey at the Green Man would square him with Mr. Joey Banks, and leave a margin of ten shillings. When he had collected the amount owing from Monteith, Webb, Hall, Baker, and others, he would have something like five pounds in hand—quite a happy prospect for a fellow who had only recently been worried to death by his debt to Joey Banks.

The match was over; long over, in fact.

There had been a great deal of cheering towards the end, though Knox's study was too far away for him to hear what was said. But he was sure of his money. A quarter of an hour before the finish he had called Jameson of the Third to ask the score—and had learnt that it was the same—two to nil in favour of the visitors. The suspicion that the

St. Jim's eleven had scored three goals during the last ten minutes had not crossed his mind.

Since the match, the Greyfriars men had partaken of a hasty tea and left in their charabanc. Knox's guests had shown no eagerness to be with him. But it was past tea-time now, and if they were coming, they were due.

Those footsteps in the passage dispelled any faint doubts which might have been stirring in Knox's breast. Monteith & Co. had to face Knox sooner or later; they would have been foolish to discard a free tea on account of their respective debts to their host.

Knox grinned cheerily as there was a tap at his door.

"Come in, old chap!"

"Old chap," turned out to be Monteith.

The New House captain gave Knox quite a cheery nod as he entered the study. He was followed by Webb and Hall and Baker and Sefton. Langton came in a moment later. It seemed that Knox's guests had come in force, apparently finding comfort in numbers.

"Hallo, you fellows! I was beginning to wonder if you were comin'!"

"Oh, we thought we'd come together!" said Monteith, grinning.

"Well, take a pew," urged Knox. "There's just chairs enough to go round, I think. Shut the door, Langton, will you?"

"Pleasure, old man."

Langton shut the door, and Knox's guests gathered round him, all of them looking very cheery.

Knox was a little puzzled; but he was all the more pleased. If the losers were cheerful, collecting the spoils would be easier.

He prepared to broach the matter tactfully.

"You men prefer tea before discussin' our little wagers, what?"

Monteith frowned. He appeared to be spokesman to the party.

"Well, no, if it's all the same to you, Knox. We'd like to settle now. Plenty of time for tea."

"Just as you like, of course!" said Knox, staring. This

eagerness on the part of his guests to settle up was gratifying, but rather mystifying.

"You've heard the result, I suppose?" asked Langton delicately.

Knox grinned.

"You fellows had hard luck. Who would have thought St. Jim's would lose?"

It was the turn of Knox's guests to stare as he made that remark.

"Who would have thought what?" ejaculated Baker.

All the seniors gazed afresh at Knox; all of them, apparently, beginning to perceive the reason for his polite welcome. Knox was under the erroneous—the totally erroneous—impression that he had won his bets. It remained to disillusion him.

"You see—" began Monteith, with the utmost tact.

"Perhaps you weren't on the scene right at the finish?" asked Webb, knowing full well that Knox had not been on the scene at all after seeing Greyfriars take the lead.

"Not right at the finish," assented Knox, with a smile. "But I called a fag just before the whistle, and he told me the score."

Knox's guests appeared a little happier.

"Then you do know," said Monteith. "We may as well settle up, then. Of course, it was hard luck—a great rally!"

"Good enough. Let's start payin'," agreed Knox, at present quite unsuspecting.

He held out his hand suggestively. Simultaneously, six guests held out their hands in the same attitude.

"What!"

Gerald Knox jumped.

For the first time a doubt—a horrible doubt—entered his mind. He had not been on the ground right at the finish, but he had taken it for granted that Tom Merry & Co. could not draw level, let alone win, in the last few minutes. For the first time he wondered in sudden alarm if he had taken a little too much for granted.

"Look here—" began Baker.

"What's this game?" demanded Webb indignantly.

"Pay up, Knox!" urged Hall.

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"Square up, you know. We should have paid up if we'd lost!" remarked Monteith grimly.

"But—but you did lose!" gasped Knox, clutching at his hair in a sudden frenzy.

Monteith stared.

"Didn't—didn't Greyfriars win, two to nothing?" demanded Knox, licking his lips.

"You ass! That was the score until ten minutes from the end!"

"Oh, gad!" groaned Knox.

"St. Jim's put on three goals—"

"Three!" shrieked Knox, his last hope gone.

"Talbot got the first—"

"Oh, gad!"

"Merry scored the second with a long shot—"

"But—but—"

"An' Levison scored the winnin' goal right on time," explained Monteith, with great satisfaction.

"Levison!" repeated Knox, pale as a ghost. "Oh, gad, I'm—I'm done! Levison? Why, if Mellish—" Knox's voice trailed off in incoherent rage.

That Levison should have scored the winning goal was the last straw. If only Mellish had played! The difference between Levison and Mellish had made all the difference in the world to Knox.

"Look here—" began Knox desperately.

"Payin' up?" asked Webb, rather unpleasantly.

"Not—not just now!" gasped Knox, his face going white and livid by turns. "I'll square, if you'll give me time. But I haven't got enough in the study just now. I—I'll have to ask you fellows to wait a little."

"Oh!"

The faces of Knox's guests showed how they felt at having to wait. From Knox's utter dismay, they had more than a suspicion that they might have to wait for ever.

Monteith's lip curled scornfully.

"You've made bets that you can't settle?" he snapped.

"I—I—I never thought—"

"You reckoned on winning, what?" said Monteith grimly. "You haven't a penny to pay us, but you'd have collected your money fast enough if you'd won. I think you'll find no decent fellow will speak to you, Knox, till you've settled your debts. Come on, you men!"

Knox did not attempt to detain his guests.

One by one, giving Knox a farewell glance that showed him plainly enough what they thought, they filed out of the study.

Knox leaned feebly against the mantelshelf, breathing hard.

Debts to the Sixth-Formers he could stand; he had only

their scorn to expect until he could settle. And scorn would roll off Knox easily enough.

But Joey Banks would have something more dangerous to say than a few scornful words; a letter from him would mean the "sack" from St. Jim's, without a doubt. And Lodgey—from whom Knox had hoped to win ten pounds to square with Banks? Lodgey would be clamouring for his money—though he would give the prefect longer than Banks.

"Gad! Oh, gad, what a mess I'm in! And all through that young scoundrel—all through Levison playin' instead of Mellish! Those young rotters, Merry an' Lowther, must have plotted this between them—to prevent me knowin' until the last moment. Very well, if I have to leave St. Jim's, I'll see that Lowther goes with me, hang him!"

There was an ugly expression on Knox's face as he strode towards the study door.

His castles in the air had crashed; there was nothing before him now but a long period of screwing and scraping to pay his debts, even if Banks could somehow be persuaded to wait. And if Banks would not wait, it was "the sack" for Knox. In that case, the prefect took faint comfort in the thought that he would not go alone. If the evidence, together with a lurid account, not too closely allied to the truth, did not secure expulsion for Lowther, it would not be the fault of Gerald Knox.

He had one thought foremost in his mind at the moment—to find Lowther and drag him before the Head. Taking it out of Lowther would afford him some satisfaction; and his enmity against the humorist of the Shell was deep and burning.

This was another of Lowther's little jokes—landing Knox into debt by getting Tom Merry to alter the list as suggested, and then alter it back again at the last minute. Well, he was going to return this little joke—with interest. Crash!

Knox arrived outside the door of Study No. 10 and crashed his foot on the door, sending it flying open.

"What the thump?"

"Who—"

"Lowther here?" rapped Knox.

"Can't you see he isn't?" said Tom Merry, who, with Manners, was admiring some prints in an album.

Knox glared.

"I don't want any cheek, Merry! Where is he?"

"He didn't tell us, Knox. He left the study some time ago. Won't you come in and sit down?"

"Where did he go?" roared Knox, ignoring that kind invitation.

"Well, he may have gone for a walk," began Manners thoughtfully.

"Where?"

"I said he may have done," urged Manners. "There's no saying, of course. Supposing he went as far as Rylcombe—"

"Has he?"

"He'd have to hurry to get back here in time for call-over, wouldn't he, Knox?" asked Manners innocently.

Knox gasped and glared, almost beside himself with rage. Tom Merry and Manners wore expressions of childlike innocence, but it was obvious that they were indulging in a little cheery leg-pulling.

But Knox did not leave the study—indeed, had he known it, he would not have been allowed to leave the study. He knew that if anybody in the junior school could inform him of Lowther's whereabouts, Tom Merry or Manners could.

Fortunately Knox had thought to bring his ashplant with him. He slid it down into his palm now.

"Where is Lowther?" he demanded briefly.

"He may have gone up into the box-room—" recommenced Manners, while Knox eyed him wolfishly.

"You young villain, has he?"

"To look for an old cricket-bat," continued Manners artlessly. "Or he may have gone to see the Head and have a chat over old Æschylus—the Head's no end interested in Æschylus, you know—though I don't say he has. Then, again, he may have dropped into old Taggles' lodge for a nip of gin—"

"You—you little toad!" snarled Knox.

"Or he may be having a late tea with Kildare, who refereed the match this afternoon," went on Manners, with a burst of inspiration. "Chatting over that last goal, you know. Did you see Levison score that goal, Knox?"

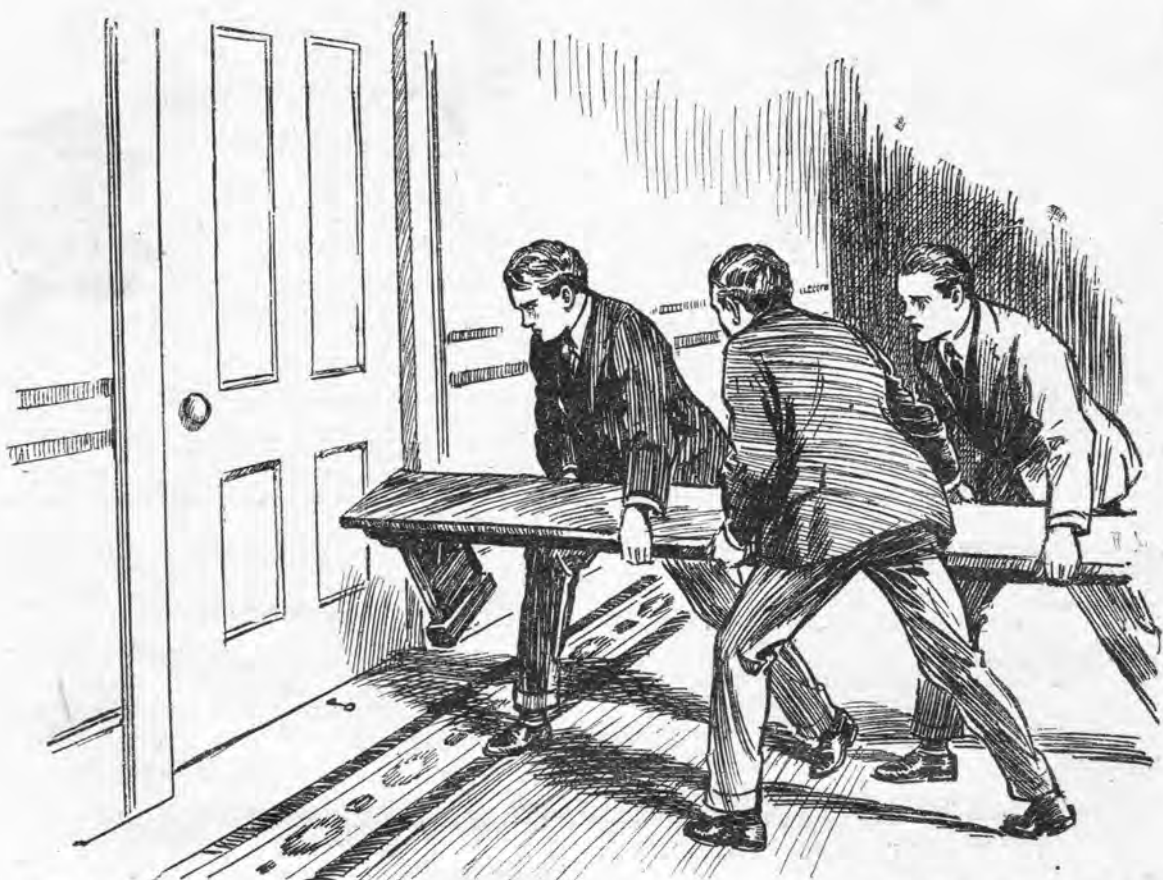
Knox gulped.

Then he lifted the ashplant.

"Get up, and hold out your hand!" he snapped.

"Eh? What for?"

"I'm going to cane you till you tell me where to find Lowther!" snapped Knox grimly.



"Now, put your beef into it!" snapped Knox. The heavy form started forward with all the weight of three hefty seniors behind it. It had almost reached the door when Baker gave a gasp, and dragged instead of shoving. Macgreggor slowed too, just in time to save Knox's study door. "You fools! What's wrong?" hissed Knox. "Why, the key's on the ground," said Baker. (See Chapter 11.)

CHAPTER 11. Knox Tumbles!

MANNERS sighed. Tom Merry grimaced, and gave his chum a glance.

Knox, his face crimson with anger, glared from one to the other, as if uncertain which to start on first. The hand that gripped his ashplant trembled.

Neither Manners nor Tom Merry had the look of a fellow about to suffer a castigation at Knox's hands. On the contrary, a close observer might have discerned that they were disguising their grins with difficulty.

But Gerald Knox was not at that moment a close observer. He was in a rage; a royal rage, worthy of the Head at his best, as it were. Knox's castles had come tumbling down; and all through Lowther. Lowther had to pay to the fullest extent possible. And Knox intended Lowther's chums to get some of the rebound, so to speak.

He made a start by grabbing Manners' coat collar and yanking him suddenly out of his seat at the study table.

"Now, you young scoundrel!"

"Leggo!" roared Manners.

"Drop that, Knox!" rapped Tom Merry, his lips setting.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Chuck it!" said the captain of the Shell coolly. "You're not pitching into Manners, old bean!"

"I'm going to lick this young villain within an inch of his life!" roared Knox ferociously.

"Better not begin," urged Manners grimly.

"What?"

"Chuck it, while you're safe," advised Tom Merry, approaching Knox from the opposite side to which Manners stood.

For answer, the prefect raised his ashplant.

He brought it down with all his force across Manners' shoulders.

Whack!

"Yarooooop!"

Harry Manners gave a spasmodic wriggle as he felt the ashplant bite into his shoulders. Then:

"Grab him!"

"Both together!" snapped Tom Merry.

"What—" commenced Knox.

He had no time for more.

The arm that held the ashplant was seized from behind and dragged back, until the prefect gave a howl of pain. He spun round, and a weight as of a ton of coals landed on his back. It was Manners, on vengeance bent.

"By gad, I'll smash you!"

Knox realised dimly that he, a prefect of the Sixth, was being attacked by a couple of unruly juniors. But he had no doubt that he could subdue them single-handed. He dragged his arm free and hit out recklessly.

"Down him!" gasped Manners.

"Sit on him!" yelled Tom Merry.

Knox was hitting out wildly, but he found his work cut out to deal with two sturdy juniors in a fighting mood. Left and right from Tom Merry thudded home on Knox's ribs, and the prefect gasped. Right and left from Harry Manners dashed home in Knox's eye and on Knox's nose, and the Sixth-Former staggered wildly.

"Wow! Woop! You young scoundrels—"

Crash!

Just how it happened Knox never knew.

But a leg was hooked round his. The next moment he smote the study carpet with a resounding smite.

Knox sat dazedly in the rising dust.

"Well?"

"Well?"

Two voices spoke in unison.

Two grim, rather elated faces confronted Gerald Knox as he strove feebly to raise himself on one elbow.

"Had enough?" asked Manners kindly.

"Going to keep quiet, like a good boy?" asked Tom Merry in his sweetest tones.

"You—you—you'll be flogged for this!" stuttered Knox venomously. "Flogged and expelled, by James! I'll see to it. Lemme gerrup, hang you!"

"Not just yet," grinned Tom Merry.

"You—you—do you know what you'll get for assaulting a prefect?" hooted Knox indignantly.

"I know what we should get for assaulting most prefects," admitted Tom Merry, grinning. "But you're different, you know. Something seems to tell me that you're going to overlook this."

And Manners chuckled.

Knox could only gasp.

Why he had been set on and handled like a sack of coals was beyond his understanding. If Tom Merry and Manners expected to save their chum from the prefect's wrath they were doomed to disappointment. Knox's wrath, like wine, was likely to improve with keeping. And setting on a prefect was a serious offence—a very serious offence indeed. Knox was quite right when he said that a flogging apiece was the least the two juniors could expect as a reward. Tom Merry's hope that Knox would be prepared to overlook this was likely to be ill-founded. Knox had rarely been in a less overlooking mood, so to speak.

His eyes gleamed at his captors now.

"Hang you!"

"Thanks!" smiled Manners urbanely.

"Take it smiling," urged Tom Merry. "You're here till Lowther comes back—that's all. Then we'll explain. Patience, you know."

Knox did not look patient.

He gritted his teeth, and made a sudden effort.

He half-dragged himself up, but Manners sat grimly on his chest; and Tom Merry, leaving his legs, seized his ears one in each hand.

"Now, are you lying quietly, or shall I bung your fat head on the carpet?" asked the Shell captain, breathing hard.

"You—you—"

Knox struggled wildly.

Bang, bang, bang!

The next moment he regretted it.

"Whoooooooooop!"

"There!" gasped Tom Merry. "I warned you. Want some more?"

Knox did not want any more.

With a crimson face, and fairly gasping with suppressed rage, he lay quietly after that. His head was ringing. He did not want it to split quite.

There was a step in the corridor, and Knox's eyes gleamed with hope.

"My hat! What the merry thump!"

It was a fag who glanced in the half-open door—Curly Gibson of the Third, Knox's fag.

Knox gave a gasp.

"Gibson, fetch Kildare and Darrell and Rushden! These young scoundrels have assaulted me!"

"My only summer bonnet!" ejaculated Gibson in amazement. "You fellows are going it, aren't you?"

"Never mind us," urged Manners. "And you needn't call Kildare and the rest. Knox won't want them on the scene when Lowther comes back!"

"Oh! I really came to ask you fellows if there's a jape on; but I suppose there is now!" grinned Curly.

"What do you mean?" rapped Knox.

"I saw Lowther go into your study a few minutes ago," answered Curly, torn between a desire to shield Lowther and a lively fear of Knox as his fag-master.

"By gad!"

Knox had little doubt now that he was the victim of some jape, and that Tom Merry and Manners were detaining him until Lowther had finished his mission in Knox's study.

The thought lent the prefect strength.

"Now, you young hounds!"

With a fierce effort Knox unsettled Manners from his seat. The next moment Knox's right took Manners on the jaw, and the Shell fellow went over backwards like a nine-pin.

Manners rolled on the study floor, gasping feebly.

Knox leaped up and lashed out at Tom Merry as the Shell captain barred his progress from the study. Tom staggered as Knox's fist took him in the chest, and Knox sprang to the door, bowling Curly Gibson over in his haste.

"Woop!" yelled Curly as he smote the floor.

"Wow-wow-wow! My jaw!" mumbled Manners feebly, scrambling up.

"My chest!" gasped Tom Merry. "Yow! And he's got away, after all!"

"Never mind. Monty will have locked the door," said Manners, massaging his jaw with the utmost tenderness.

Tom and Manners and Curly Gibson stared from the study doorway at the fleeing figure of Knox of the Sixth. Much as the prefect wanted to deal with Tom Merry and Manners, his first care was to apprehend Lowther, and now he knew for certain that the humorist of the Shell was to be found in his own study.

Knox breathed fury as he thought of the jape that Lowther was most probably playing. If Lowther had wrecked the study—Knox's imagination balked at the horrible possibility.

He came into the Sixth Form corridor like a whirlwind. It was deserted, and Knox's study door was closed.

Knox grasped the handle and turned. It did not open.

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"Locked!" gasped Knox. "Lowther! Are you there?"

A sound from within the study convinced Knox that Lowther was there, though the locked door was evidence enough by itself.

"Hallo! That you, Gerald, old man?"

Knox gasped.

But he could not give way to rage yet. Lowther had the study at his mercy. Knox yearned for the time when he would have Lowther at his mercy.

"Lowther, unlock this door!"

"Sorry, old bean!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Sorry, old scout! You'd only get in the way, you know."

"What—what are you up to, you young villain?" demanded the prefect, hardly daring to ask.

"What do you think?" came Lowther's voice, with the suspicion of a chuckle.

"You—you open this door! You'll be flogged for this—expelled!"

"Shan't be long," urged Lowther cheerily.

"You—you—"

Knox stuttered helplessly on the outside of his study. He turned away suddenly.

There was a form near the wall at the end of the corridor. As Knox's eyes lit on it Baker emerged from his study, followed by Macgreggor.

Knox ran to the heavy form.

"Baker—Macgreggor! Lend a hand! There's a young scoundrel in my study, wreckin' it. I'm goin' to break down the door."

"What—you ass!" began Macgreggor.

"You fathead!" agreed Baker.

"Grab the form, I tell you! Do you think I want my study ruined?" howled Knox impatiently.

"But—but—"

"Hang your butts! Take that end!" snapped Knox, beside himself with excitement.

Macgreggor and Baker hesitated at first, but they grasped one end of the heavy form. It was Knox's study door, after all.

"Now, all together!" hissed Knox. "An' let her rip. I'm goin' to skin that young hound when I get at him!"

"I say—"

"Ready? Get a hold—" began Knox.

"But, I say—"

"Get a hold!" roared Knox.

"Oh, all right!"

Macgreggor and Baker took a hold on the form. Knox aimed it straight at his study door.

"Now, put your beef into it!" snapped Knox.

"One, two, three!"

The heavy form started forward, with all the weight of three hefty seniors behind it.

It had almost reached the door when Baker gave a gasp, and dragged instead of shoving. Macgreggor slowed, too, just in time to save Knox's study door.

"You fools! What's wrong?" hissed Knox.

"Something just came under the door," grinned Baker. "Looks to me like a key."

Knox started.

He bent down and picked up a key from the threshold of his study.

"Yours?" grinned Macgreggor.

Knox did not answer.

He jammed the key in the lock.

CHAPTER 12.

Taming the Dragon!

NOW, by thunder!" Knox burst open the door of his study and entered it very much after the manner of a tornado.

He glared round the apartment in search of Lowther, looking as though, when he found him, he intended to eat him.

But, at least, at first glance, there was no sign of Lowther.

Knox's eyes burned.

"By gad! I'll—"

What exactly Knox proposed was not revealed.

He strode to the little curtained alcove, behind which was his bed. Sixth-Formers slept in their studies, unlike the lower Forms. And Knox had no doubt that Lowther was beyond the curtain—probably skulking under the bed in the faint hope that the prefect would omit to look there.

"Now, you young villain! Come out! The game's up!"

Knox jerked aside the curtain and glared into the alcove.

But, really, it seemed as if Knox's terrific wrath would have to go on being bottled up indefinitely. There was no sign of Lowther in the alcove.

Knox peered under the bed, but there was nobody there. He glared round the study again, gasping.

Baker and Macgreggor, in the study doorway, could not help grinning.

"By thunder! He must be here!" ejaculated Knox savagely.

"Well, you know best," remarked Baker, chuckling.

"Has he squeezed up the chimney, do you think?" asked Macgreggor thoughtfully.

Knox leaped to the fireplace and peered as far as he dared up the chimney. The fire had died down, and a really adventurous fellow might have attempted to escape by that way. Knox reached up, and his hand came down again, empty but sooty.

"He's not there, unless he's tucked half-way up!" he grunted.

"By Jove! We forgot the window!" remarked Baker.

"It's shut!" said Macgreggor.

"And I left it fastened!" snapped Knox.

In a moment he was at the sash.

One glance was enough. The sash was not fastened now, and, peering closely, Knox discerned one or two

"Could you swear to it?" asked Macgreggor, who was a Scot. "I don't say Lowther is that kind of kid, but if he said he wasn't in the study you'd have a job to prove it, wouldn't you?"

Knox breathed hard. Then he grinned.

It was not for entering his study without permission that he was about to descend on Lowther; it was in respect of a far more serious matter—that of being caught outside the Green Man public house at midnight. Naturally, Macgreggor did not know that. And Knox had enough evidence to satisfy him that Lowther had been in his study—for some reason. Curly Gibson had seen him, and Tom Merry and Manners were waiting for him to return from somewhere. What Lowther's reason was Knox did not at the moment trouble to think. He was actuated by the terrific rage into which his betting losses had thrown him. Lowther was to be the scapegoat for Knox's sins, though not officially.

"It's not just study ragging!" snapped Knox, pushing to the door. "I'm after him for something worse than that!"

"Oh!"

Gerald Knox strode down the Sixth Form corridor, without troubling to thank Baker and Macgreggor for their aid. They stared after him a little blankly.

The Coming of Herr Schwartz!

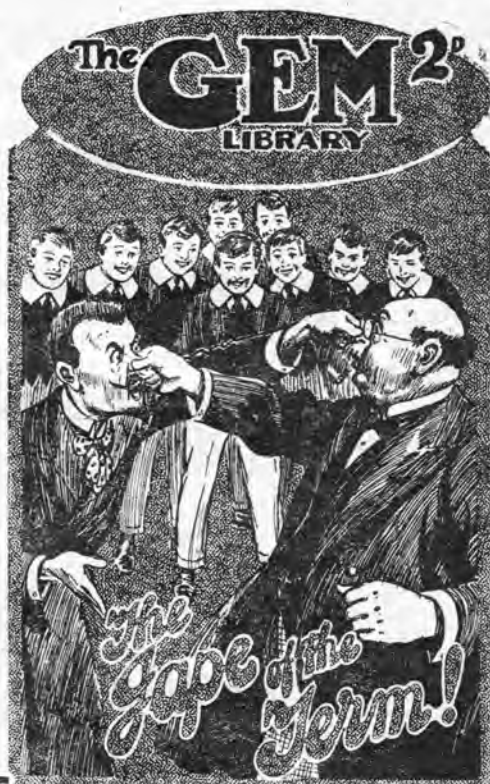
The coming of a new German master at St. Jim's is not looked upon with favour by Tom Merry & Co., it being their unanimous opinion that they already have enough "rot" to learn without "swallowing mouthfuls" of the German language in addition.

All the same for that, the advent of Herr Schwartz is the signal for a series of astounding japes, adventures and misadventures, into which Monsieur Morny, the French master, finds himself precipitated willy-nilly. Your favourite author aptly names his next story:

"THE JAPE OF THE TERM!"

for it's one big scream of a laugh from the opening chapter to the climax. Don't miss it, whatever you do, chums.

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muddy marks on the lower woodwork. That, then, was the way Lowther had gone—having first slipped Knox's key under the door.

Knox ground his teeth.

"Make way, you men!" he snapped, grabbing up his ashplant again.

"What's the kid done?" asked Macgreggor, rather mystified. "He seems to have left the study in apple-pie order. What was his little game?"

Knox started and glanced afresh round his study.

He had fully expected to find the room a wreck, but in searching for Lowther he had not noticed that everything, as far as a glance could see, was as it should have been.

"Thank goodness I was in time!" snapped the prefect grimly.

"You stopped his little game, whatever it was," agreed Baker. "He must have got the wind up, and shoved your key under the door, hoping to escape suspicion."

"Eh? I know it was Lowther!"

"Recognised his voice, what?" asked Macgreggor.

"Naturally."

Tom Merry & Co. had handled him once, and for that outrage they were to pay dearly. But the prefect's primary objective was Lowther.

The door of Study No. 10 was shut when Knox arrived outside it. He knocked with grim satisfaction.

"Come in!"

Knox threw open the door.

He glanced fiercely round the study.

Three juniors were seated quietly at the table, writing.

Tom Merry had a Livy propped up before him, and was hard at work with a dictionary by his side. Manners was poring over a maths paper, while Lowther was sedately delving into a French volume by the celebrated Victor Hugo, and copying out voluminous notes ready for Monsieur Morny next day.

None of the three juniors looked up as Knox entered.

It was almost as if they did not realise anyone had entered the study at all.

"Lowther!"

Knox rapped out the name like a machine-gun.

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Monty Lowther glanced up, quite innocently, from Victor Hugo.

"Hallo, old man! Want anything?"

Tom Merry looked up and grinned.

"Cheer-ho, Knox, old chap! Want me to help you with your construe?"

Manners shoved back his maths paper, and smiled.

"Is that you, Knox? What an unexpected pleasure."

Gerald Knox's eyes narrowed.

"Very funny," he said, with dangerous calm. "At present I'm speakin' to Lowther. Stand up when you're spoken to, you young hound!"

"Thanks! I'm not standing up for a prefect who uses language like that," answered Lowther calmly. "If you've got anything to say, why not get it over, and travel? We've got to satisfy Mr. Linton in the morning, you know."

Knox's narrowed eyes fairly glinted.

But he kept himself in hand with an effort.

"There's no need for you to worry about Mr. Linton to-morrow, Lowther. You'll have left St. Jim's by then."

Lowther stared.

His expression of complete surprise goaded Knox almost beyond bearing.

"You know what I mean well enough!" he snarled. "Didn't I catch you out of bounds outside the Green Man, a low-down public-house? Didn't you run into me, and didn't I grab your jacket, you young waster? Did you think I was goin' to lie low and say nothin' at all? I was only waitin' my time—"

"Waiting to win your rotten bets on the Greyfriars match is more like it!" put in Tom Merry coolly. "You made me a pretty plain offer—play Mellish, and you'd hold your tongue. Luckily, we found a way out in time to save the match. I hope you're landed nicely in the soup, you rotten gambler!"

Knox gritted his teeth.

"You've no proof, and I have!" he hissed. "I kept Lowther's jacket, and it goes to the Head straight away! If Lowther is still a St. Jim's fellow to-morrow mornin' I shall be surprised!"

"Dear man, have you got the jacket with you by any chance?" asked Lowther, with a faint inflexion of sarcasm.

"Eh? No. But I'll soon fetch it."

"Suppose you fetch it before you start making accusations?" suggested Lowther, with complete composure. "You needn't be afraid I shall hide. I've nothing to fear."

Knox panted.

"Wait a minute. If you're gone from this study when I come back, it'll be so much the worse for you!" he snapped.

Lowther did not reply, and went on coolly with his French notes. He looked up and grinned as Knox re-appeared in the doorway a few seconds later.

Tom Merry grinned, too.

Manners chuckled.

Knox was white—partly with rage, and partly at the discovery he had just made.

"You—you—Where is it?" he stuttered savagely.

"Where's what?"

"That jacket! You've got it, by gad! I know you have!"

"Easy does it, Knox!" urged Tom Merry. "Look at it reasonably. If the jacket's gone, your evidence against Lowther has gone, too. You haven't a leg to stand on."

Knox set his thin lips.

He knew well enough, now, that Lowther had recovered his jacket, and once back in its original owner's possession it ceased to be a piece of evidence. But the prefect was in too heated a frame of mind to ponder over his actions just then. He knew Lowther had been out of bounds, and a prefect's word would be taken in preference to a junior's.

"Stand up, Lowther!" he rapped grimly. "I'm takin' you to the Head, just the same. You can explain to him how you got your jacket back. I shall tell him the truth. Come on!"

Lowther eyed him coolly.

"Just a sec," he remarked quietly. "You can only offer your unsupported word. I rather fancy, if I were cad enough to deny the charge, the Head would take mine in preference to yours, old top!"

"We'll see about that!"

"I've got a reason," went on Lowther. "Hand over that pack of cards, will you, Tom?"

Tom Merry, grinning, handed his chum a pack of well-worn playing-cards.

Knox stared at them as if transfixed.

"Recognise them, old bean?" demanded Lowther.

Knox stuttered.

"I found them in your study—in the table drawer," explained Lowther cheerfully.

"There—there's no name on them!" hissed the prefect.

"No; but there's an I O U from Webb, of the New House, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,045.

for ten shillings stuck between them," answered Lowther imperturbably.

Knox licked his dry lips.

"Hand over the racing-paper, Manners, will you?"

"Certainly, old man!"

Manners handed Lowther a racing-paper—a pink publication which would have shocked the Head considerably if he had seen it.

Knox wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Your name on this, too, Knox?" grinned Lowther, "written in a pretty rotten hand—Lodgey, I suppose! Have you seen enough, old top?"

Knox gasped.

"If you don't think these are enough, I spotted several other things while I was scouting round," continued Lowther calmly, "hidden away in all sorts of odd corners! I could tell the Deak where to find them, Knox! If I reported you, he wouldn't give you time to hide them, would he, Knox?"

Gerald Knox's face had gone from crimson to a pasty white.

He held out his hand now. It was shaking.

"Give—give me those things, Lowther, and we'll let the matter drop!"

"Not good enough!" answered Lowther decisively. "You could go back on your word if you chose—and you'd jolly soon choose! I'll keep these for you—just in case you ever feel like raking up old scores—see?"

Knox nodded.

The junior, he had sought to get expelled had the whip-hand now.

"Then—then if I keep quiet, you'll keep those things out of sight?" he asked. "Is it a bargain?"

Lowther grinned.

"I'm not making bargains!" he answered coolly. "I shall forget I've got these little things, Knox, so long as you forget all about me! I wasn't pub-haunting when you caught me; I was helping a fellow! But you wouldn't understand that. But bear in mind that I'm ready for you if you go to the Head! Now cut off! We're busy!"

Knox breathed hard and deep.

His eyes glittered at the three juniors as, apparently completely oblivious of the prefect's presence, they bent their heads over their preparations again.

It was a bitter pill for Knox to swallow—to have his revenge thwarted, and be told curtly by a junior to "cut."

But there was nothing else to do.

With a set face, Knox left the study.

The Terrible Three worked on in silence for ten more seconds, and then they looked up. There was a roar of laughter in Study No. 10—a roar that brought Talbot and Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and several others hurrying out of their studies to learn the joke.

Tom Merry & Co. were wiping their eyes when Kangaroo and the rest looked in, amazed.

"What's up?"

"Anybody burst a boiler?" demanded Clifton Dane.

"No, it's Knox!" almost wept Lowther.

"Oh, Knox! What about Knox, you dummies?"

Manners, recovering some of his gravity, explained.

A fresh roar greeted that explanation.

"Oh, my hat! Poor old Knox!"

More of the Shell joined the little group and learned the cause of the merriment. Then the roar swelled.

Gerald Knox, in the Sixth Form corridor, heard it from afar. He went into his study, and there was a terrific slam as he shut out the sounds of Monty Lowther's triumph.

For several days afterwards Knox's ears burned at the chuckles and jests, sotto voce, of the junior school. Lowther did not keep his jest to himself. Soon the seniors heard, and Knox's cheeks were crimson most of the day long.

But, more serious than ridicule, the spectre of Joey Banks hovered over Knox for a week or more. Then one morning came a remittance for five pounds.

It was luck at last, and Knox made haste to send it to Banks by the next post. He was just in time. The rascally bookmaker, realising that half a loaf was better than no bread, accepted the "fiver" on account, and agreed to give the prefect time to pay off the rest—which relieved Gerald Knox of a terrific weight.

Minus five pounds, he faced the grins of his friends with greater calm after that. And as Knox took less notice, the grins became fewer.

But there were three juniors of whom Knox steered remarkably clear for a while—the three who had stood together against him to save one of their number—which was a welcome relief for the Terrible Three!

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss next week's humorous long story of Tom Merry and Co., entitled: "THE JAPE OF THE TERM!" It's extra special.)

REMORSE! Valentine Mornington has gone to great trouble and trickery to clear Biggs out of Rookwood, but when the gardener's boy does shake the dust of Rookwood from his feet Mornington's conscience smites him, and he wishes from the bottom of his heart that he had left the wail alone!



His Own Enemy!

A GRAND SCHOOL TALE DEALING
WITH THE ADVENTURES OF
JIMMY SILVER & CO., OF ROOKWOOD

By
OWEN CONQUEST.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

KIT ERROLL befriends an old acquaintance in **Albert Biggs**, a one-time wail of the stuns, who comes to Rookwood and takes up a post as gardener's boy. Valentine Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth, appeals to Erroll to "drop" his ragged friend, but Kit refuses. In consequence of this Mornington plots with **Peete & Co.**, three shady rotters, to get Biggs sacked from the school. Their efforts prove of little avail, however, for Jimmy Silver & Co. chip in, and bring their rascally scheming to nought. Not to be beaten, Mornington challenges Biggs to a fight with the gloves, an action he regrets shortly afterwards when he hears that the hefty Cuthbert Ganner has suffered the humiliation of being "floored" in ridiculously easy fashion by the gardener's boy. Dreading he may share a similar fate, Mornington bribes **Butcher Bagnall** to unlay Biggs, tie him to a tree in the woods, and thus prevent him from turning up for the fight. Unfortunately for Mornington, however, Clarence Cuffy pops up in unexpected fashion and releases Biggs. The fight duly takes place, and after receiving the thrashing of his life, the dandy of the Fourth is sent to Coventry. Enraged at the silence of Peete and Gower which follows, Mornington sends them hurtling one after the other from the study.

(Now read on.)

A Shock for Erroll!

MORNINGTON closed the door again and sat down. Then he lighted a cigarette. But the next moment he threw it into the fire, and rose to his feet. He felt an overpowering desire to learn if Erroll would answer him if he spoke to him. With a cynical smile on his face—though his heart was thumping curiously—Mornington went along to his old study and flung the door open. Erroll was just finishing his tea, and he sprang to his feet as Morny entered. It was the first time Morny had been there since they had quarrelled and parted.

"Just finishin' your tea, Erroll?" asked Morny coolly.

Erroll flushed and hesitated. Then he nodded, his lips setting.

"Yes," he said quietly. "If you wish to see me about anything—"

"Nothin' of importance!" said Morny calmly. "Only the Form have sent me to Coventry, and I was curious to know if you would speak to me, knowin' what a forgivin', amiable nature yours is. Now I know, I'll go!"

And Mornington was turning to leave the room when Erroll spoke. Erroll's face was white, and his eyes gleamed a little. The studied insolence and mocking sneer in Morny's words did not anger him, however.

"Yes, I'll speak to you, Mornington," said Erroll, looking his former chum steadily in the eyes. "But only to give you my opinion of you. I think you're a rotten cad, not fit for a decent fellow to touch! You not only feared a thrashing, but you wanted to make everyone think Biggs funked the fight! I should never have made friends with you had I known the lengths of rascality to which you could

go! I'm glad we are friends no longer! That's all I have to say to you!"

"Thanks, old bean!" said Mornington coolly. "I expected something like that!"

Outside the door Morny's face changed abruptly. The smile went and an almost haggard look came over his hard face. He walked back to his own study, went inside, and locked the door behind him. Then he got out his writing-case and started to write.

His eyes were glittering as he wrote. Erroll's quiet, scornful words had pierced his armour of mocking carelessness as nothing else could have done. But it had only served to add to his bitter desire for revenge—to harden his savage resolve to get Biggs ousted from Rookwood, by fair means or foul! Even now, despite Erroll's words, he could not and would not believe it was all over between them. With Biggs out of the way, he would quickly recover his lost prestige and popularity—and his friendship with Erroll.

He finished writing the letter, read it over first with glinting eyes, and then put it in a stamped envelope. This Mornington addressed to Albert Biggs at Rookwood, after which he went out into the quad and posted it in the school letter-box.

"Gad!" he breathed. "If that doesn't do it, nothing will. If I'd only thought of it before it would have saved me all this. Anyway, I fancy it's put paid to Master Albert Biggs' account!"

Musing thus, Mornington walked back into the School House quite cheerfully, the icy glances of his Form-fellows failing to trouble him that evening.

"Note for you, Master Erroll!"

Tupper, the School House pageboy, handed Kit Erroll the note, as he met the junior about to enter his study after dinner the following day.

"Which it's from young Biggs," said Tupper. "He asked me to 'and it to you, Master Erroll, 'an' bein' 'is pal, I said I would, though it ain't my job, of course, to—"

"Thank you, Tupper!" said Erroll.

He handed the page sixpence, and went into his study with the note, his face showing his surprise. Why Biggs should write a note to him Erroll could not imagine.

But it was addressed to him, and was in Albert Biggs' handwriting.

Erroll tore open the envelope and straightened out the sheet of cheap notepaper. Then he gave a startled exclamation as he scanned the note. For it read as follows:

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"Dear Master Erroll,—I got your letter jest before dinner, and I'm writing to say as I'm going right away, and to thank you more than I can say for the way you've been so kind to me while I've been here. Of course I'll go. Master Erroll, and I see now as it is for the best, and I'm only sorry as I didn't see it before, and I see now as I ought never to have come here causing all this here trouble for you. I do hope as Master Mornington and you will make it up, after I'm gone, as I know he can't really be a wrong one, or he wouldn't have been a pal of yours. It makes me feel mad with myself, as I knows it was through me as you quarrelled. Yes, I see as it won't do for you to be seen by the young gents talking to the likes of me no more, and I'll do as you say—clear out without seeing you again, Master Erroll. Good-bye, and I shan't never forget what you've done for me.—Yours respectfully,

"ALBERT BIGGS."

Kit Erroll's jaw dropped, and he gasped.

What did it mean? He had written no letter to Biggs!

Kit Erroll's face darkened, and he set his teeth suddenly as he began to get an inkling of what it all meant. He stared at the letter, his face going darker and darker, and then, with sudden decision, he crammed it into his pocket and rushed from the room.

The next moment he was making with all speed for the servants' quarters, careless of the risk he was running. He reached the narrow, rickety stairs leading up to Biggs' garret bed-room at last, and he went up them two at a time. If Biggs had only received the letter he mentioned just before dinner, then there was a chance that he was not gone yet—that he was packing up in preparation to go. But a disappointment awaited Erroll in the garret bed-room. It was empty—and there were none of the garden boy's things about the room. The little cupboard in a corner of the room was empty of clothes. Biggs had obviously gone.

Erroll's heart sank, and he was just about to leave the room when his eyes fell on a sheet of notepaper lying on the floor, evidently having been dropped there by accident. He picked it up, suddenly interested. He had no intention of reading it at all, but quite by accident his eyes caught the signature at the bottom. It was "Kit Erroll!"

But it was not his handwriting!

The startled junior had no compunction at reading the letter after that. He knew what it meant and who had written it, and realised only too well that the forged letter had caused Albert Biggs to pack up and leave Rookwood on the instant.

"Oh, the cad!" breathed Erroll.

He guessed what the letter contained, and his guess was correct. It read as follows.

"Dear Biggs,—What I am going to say will upset you very much, I am afraid, old man, but it can't be helped. Things have got to such a state that I must say it, and I know you will understand and agree with me that it is for the best. When I got you the job here I never dreamed that it would lead to so much trouble, both for me and for others. I certainly never dreamed that it would lead to me losing my best friend—a fellow who has stuck by me through thick and thin. I also thought that I should be allowed to see you occasionally—to remain a pal, though you are in a humble position here. But I know differently now, and I fancy you know, too, that it wouldn't do for a chap who's a pupil here to be friendly with one of the servants. I'm sure you must have realised that. Don't think I blame you for taking on the job—I don't. However, I've been forced to the conclusion that it will be much better if you got a job somewhere else. You may be sure I'll do my best to get a good reference for you, old man! By the way, I think it would be better for you not to see me again; no good making matters worse than they are. Keep mum about this, or I shall get it hot if the beaks know I'm writing to you.—Your old pal,

"KIT ERROLL."

Kit Erroll finished reading, and then crushed the note into his pocket. He was fairly trembling with helpless rage.

"Oh, the cad!" he panted. "The spiteful rotter!"

He stood thinking a moment, after which he looked swiftly at his watch and rushed back to his study. Fortunately, he met nobody in the forbidden passages, and, reaching his study, he snatched up his cap and rushed out of the House, scudding for the gates at top speed.

He knew that Biggs could not have been gone long, and that he might possibly reach the station before the train took him away. A sudden thought made him stop, however, his brow clouding.

Would Biggs make for the station? It was scarcely likely. He was homeless, and if he had any money on him he would not be likely to spend it on railway fares—unless he had somewhere to go, and Erroll knew different to this. He would more likely take to the roads again—go tramping for work, as he had been tramping that afternoon when Erroll met him and recognised him as his old chum of the past.

At the thought Kit Erroll turned about and raced for the cycle-shed, intending to cycle along the road until he overtook Biggs. He had the bicycle out in no time, and he rushed it down to the gates.

A junior was just coming through the gates at that moment, and Kit Erroll's eyes glinted, as he recognised Mornington.

Remorse!

IT was Valentine Mornington, and the dandy of the Fourth was smiling—an evil smile of triumph.

Kit Erroll knew why. In that moment he forgot the need for haste. He slammed his machine against the gatepost and faced his former friend, his eyes blazing.

"You—you hound!" he hissed. "You dirty, plotting cad!"

Mornington stared at Kit Erroll—quite startled at the look on the junior's face. But he soon recovered his composure.

"Thanks!" he said coolly, mockingly. "But aren't you forgettin' that I'm in Coventry, old bean?"

"You cowardly rotter!" said Erroll, his voice trembling. "What you've already done is nothing to this."

"Might a fellow ask what he's supposed to have done?" queried Mornington.

"You know what you've done!" snapped Erroll. "You've added forgery to your rotten accomplishments, and, by a sneaking blow in the back, you've insulted and wounded the feelings of as decent a chap and as loyal a pal as anyone ever wished for. You've sworn to hound the chap out of Rookwood, and you've done it by a rotten trick that only an unspeakable outsider could think of!"

Mornington said nothing; he knew it was useless to pretend ignorance, to deny it. But though the scorn and contempt in Erroll's eyes made even his cheeks flush with shame, he gritted his teeth, a sudden fear taking possession of him. How Erroll knew, he could not imagine; he had never dreamed that the hapless, friendless waif would write. He had imagined the fellow would be too bitterly hurt and wounded to do that. Nor could he imagine him telling anyone. But obviously Erroll did know, and Mornington realised that if he raced away on his bike he would catch Biggs up—he himself had watched him depart only ten minutes or less ago.

He must keep Erroll back at all costs until the train went. Mornington knew there was only an hourly train from Coombe, and it was almost due now.

"Might I ask what you are talkin' about?" he said, playing for time. "You're slangin' me—"

"You know—none better, you cur! But stand aside, Mornington!"

"Not likely!" said Mornington, his eyes glinting. "You've called me names, an' I demand to know why!"

As he spoke Morny gripped the handlebars of Erroll's bike. Erroll's eyes met his, and Erroll knew in a moment what his game was.

"Mornington," said Erroll, through his teeth, "stand aside and let me pass, or I'll knock you down!"

"Try it!" suggested Mornington mockingly. "You see, I know you, Erroll, an' I know your angelic patience—"

Mornington got no further than that. He saw Erroll's fist go up, and he made to spring back, but he was a fraction of a second too late.

Crash!

Mornington rolled in the dust, sent there by a terrific drive that would have felled a bigger fellow than the dandy of the Fourth.

"Ow!" yelled Morny in astonished pain.

Erroll grabbed his machine, mounted it, and rode away, disappearing round the corner in a flash. Mornington staggered to his feet. He hugged his chin, and stared up the lane.

He was far more astounded than hurt, however. Nor, amazing as it seemed, was he angry now. He stood staring, a strange expression on his marked features.

Erroll had struck him—Erroll, the easy-going, good-natured, forbearing fellow—the fellow who had stood more from him than a brother would have done! So used had Mornington got to taking it for granted that nothing on

earth could rouse his old chum to action against him, that now it had come Morny was staggered.

What had he done? In that moment Mornington knew that all was over between them—that he had tried his chum's patience to the uttermost, and that it had given way at last. He had allowed his ungovernable temper to drive him on from bad to worse solely out of jealousy—jealousy lest his chum should be stolen from him by Biggs. And it had ended like this! He was looked upon with scorn by every fellow in the school; even fellows like Peele and Gower, the shady blackguards of the Fourth, had refused to speak to him. He was an Ishmael—scorned by all. And up to the last he had believed that Erroll would stand by him despite all he did; that he only had to reform again, and Erroll would renew the friendship gladly enough.

Mornington felt that was impossible now. He had gone too far after all. He had gained his object, but at what a fearful cost.

Yet it was not only that fact that made the dull crimon to steal over the junior's bruised face. In that moment Morny realised to the full, realised with deep self-contempt to what depths he had fallen in his ruthless, reckless campaign against Biggs—an innocent, friendless waif who had never willingly harmed him. And was it any wonder Erroll had stood by the chap—had even chosen to allow his best chum to go from him in order to repay a debt towards the fellow? Biggs had befriended Erroll when he was starving and friendless and homeless—a helpless fugitive in the underworld of London! Was it any wonder that Kit Erroll, loyal to the core and generous to a fault, had insisted upon repaying that debt—on standing by Albert Biggs now he, in his turn, needed a friend, a helping hand?

Mornington's eyes were opened now. He stood trembling, deep crimson staining his face. In that moment all that was best—and there was much—in his wayward nature surged to the surface. That blow had done it—had made him realise the truth as nothing else could have done.

For another moment Mornington stared up the lane, and the next he was tearing for the cycle-shed. He had his machine out in a flash and then he jumped on it, speeding for the gates.

It had suddenly occurred to him that Erroll would make for the station, and would undoubtedly be too late. It had occurred to him also that if he raced hard for Latcham he himself would be in time—in time to stop Albert Biggs from going.

Mornington was a fellow who always did the unexpected, and he was doing the unexpected now. For weeks he had fought and schemed to get Biggs ousted from Rookwood and he had succeeded.

At least, Erroll should not lose both his chums through his folly and rascality! Morny knew he himself was lost to Erroll. That blow had ended all. But Erroll should not lose Biggs—not if he could prevent it now!

At the stile Mornington sprang from his machine and lifted it over. Then he was mounted again, tearing along the woodland pathway, heedless of hollows and rutty channels and dangerous, tree-hung corners.

He was out of the woods at last, racing along a rutty cart-track and then along a field-path—a short cut to Latcham. The old wooden footbridge over the river came in sight at last, the swollen, wintry torrent swirling and tearing round the rotting uprightness of the bridge.

Mornington intended to take the bridge at full speed, but in the nick of time he glimpsed a lounging figure on the bridge, leaning on the rails, a cigarette between his thick lips. It was Butcher Bagnall, the hulking bully whom Morny had bribed to attack and kidnap Biggs to keep him from the fight.

"Out of the way, Bagnall!" shouted Morny. He clapped on his brakes and pulled up, springing savagely from his bike before crossing the bridge. He ran his machine along over the planks.

Bagnall turned slowly and looked at him. Then, as he

recognised Mornington, he grinned and lurched away from the rails.

"Let me pass!" snapped Morny. "I'm in a dashed hurry!"

"Old on, young gent!" said Bagnall. "You're jest the feller I wants. I was just thinkin' I'd come up to the school to see you!"

"Out of the way!" snapped Morny savagely. "I'll see you some other time."

"But some other time won't do!" said Bagnall, resting a beefy hand on the saddle and gripping it fast. "'Old on, Master Mornington! I want a word with you!"

"I'm in a hurry, you fool!" shouted Mornington. "Get aside!"

"I won't keep you a minute, Master Mornington!" grinned Butcher Bagnall. "I jest wants the loan of a quid!"

"You'll not get a penny from me!"

"Oh, all right!" said Bagnall, his small eyes glinting. "You'd like me to go to the school, I s'pose, an' tell 'em what you got me to do! I want a quid from you! And, what's more, I mean to get it!"

Mornington drew a deep breath.

It was blackmail, of course—he might have known what to expect from Butcher Bagnall. And he was helpless—it would be the sack for him if a hint of the affair came to the Head's ears. And Bagnall himself had nothing to fear.

It was out of the question for Mornington to rush past, just as it was out of the question for him to hope to overpower the burly villager. And Mornington had no money on him, though he wasn't the fellow to have handed it over in such a case had he possessed any.

"You—you blackmailing rotter!" snapped Mornington, seething with fury as he realised that he was wasting precious moments. "If you don't stand aside—"

"When you've handed that there quid over!" grinned Bagnall.

"I haven't a penny on me, you rascal!"

"Then you're not passing—you can come along back with me to the school!" said Bagnall, scowling. "I'm 'ard up—desperate for a quid! I've got to hand Bill Higgs from the Bird-in-And three quid to-day. I got two, but he won't take that! I've owed it the 'ound—Here—"

Bagnall's remarks ended in a savage splutter as Mornington, losing patience, crashed his fist into the villager's face, and made a rush to get past.

He was not quite quick enough, though, for Bagnall ceased nursing his jaw, made a swift spring, and grabbed the dandy of the Fourth and held him.

"You young hound—"

Crash!

Again Mornington's fist connected with the villager's chin, and the next moment the two were fighting furiously on the rickety bridge. But it was hopeless from the start. Mornington fought like a wild-cat in his fury, but the other fellow was a head taller and twice as strong.

The end would have come very quickly in any case, but just as Morny was being pressed back against the rail with vicious force, a shout rang out. Then came the pelting of feet on the planks of the bridge, and a lithe, active figure burst upon them.

A brown fist, hard as iron, took Butcher Bagnall under his left ear, and he staggered back. Then he belched and, rushing forward, hit out at the newcomer savagely.

But the latter dodged with amazing swiftness, and another slam took Bagnall, sending him this time crashing against the staggering Mornington, who was just pulling himself together to join in again.

The next moment it happened—too swiftly for anyone to help or aid Mornington.

As he crashed back there came another sound—a splintering crash of rotten wood—and the next moment Mornington, with one wild cry, was gone.

Splash!

(Look out for the concluding chapters next week.)

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