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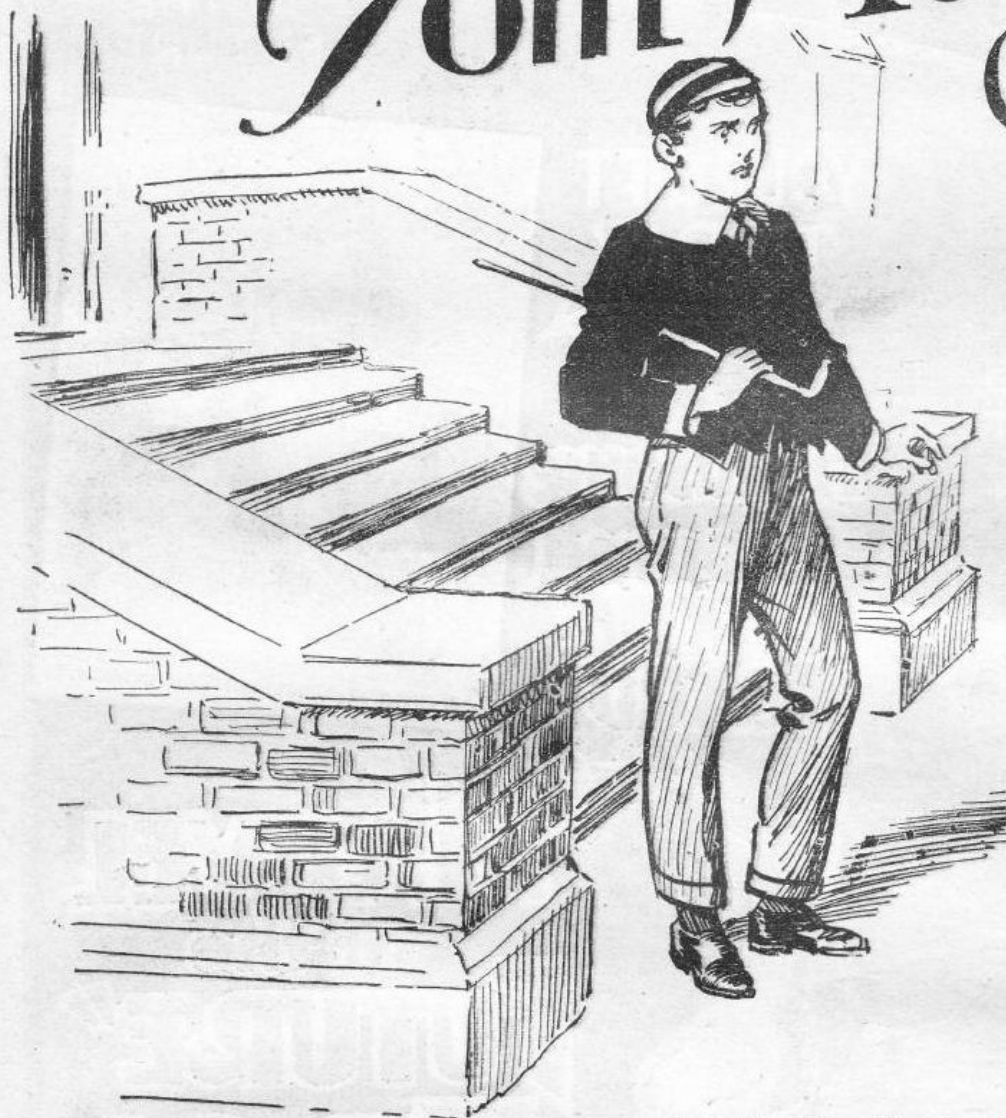


A TRANS-CONTINENTAL COACH.



A ROUSING LONG COMPLETE STORY—

Captain Tom Merry!



Like almost every other fellow at St. Jim's, Tom Merry has dreamed of filling the lordly position of captain of the school. And now, while he is still a youngster in the Lower School, his dream becomes a reality, and the hero of the Shell makes history. Well played, Tom!

CHAPTER 1.

The New Skipper!

CRASH! The door of the end study in the Sixth Form passage at St. Jim's fairly quivered beneath the blow that had been dealt it, by the hand of Jack Blake, of the Fourth.

Blake imagined that he was merely tapping upon the door. But his taps were inclined to be distinctly hefty. Blake was a great boxer, and he had "tapped" on the study door rather as if he were dealing a lusty upper-cut to an opponent in the boxing-ring.

But his methods were effective in announcing his arrival, anyway! From within the study, a voice invited him to enter. So Jack Blake opened the door—with another crash—and marched in, with his companions crowding on his heels.

"Hallo, hallo!" grinned Blake. "It's us!"
His three companions grinned cheerfully at the fellow
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seated at the table in his study—the fellow they had come to visit.

"Little us!" agreed Herries.

"You bet!" grinned Digby.

"Yaas, we've come to visit you, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!" nodded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the fourth member of the little party of Fourth-Formers. "We have the honah of comin' to visit the captain of St. Jim's!"

"Ahem!"

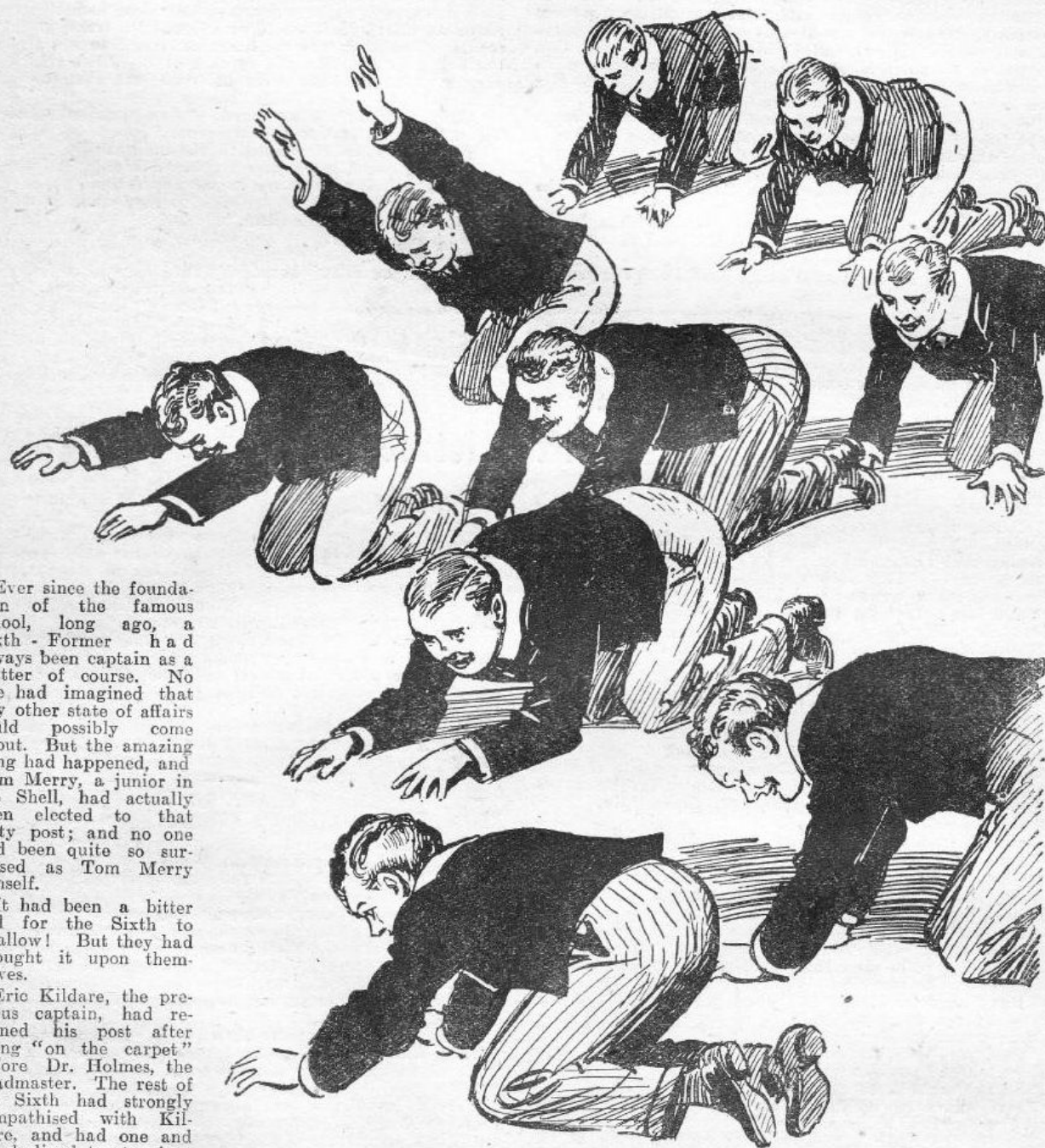
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry smiled.

Tom was a Shell fellow, and a junior. In the big Sixth-Form study, with the curtained alcove containing a bed, and the handsome furniture, he looked strangely youthful and out of place. And yet this cheery-faced youngster was indeed the captain of St. Jim's—the fellow whose word was law, even to the prefects and mighty men of the Sixth!

A short while ago, anyone who had suggested that it would have been even possible for Tom Merry to become captain of the school, would have been regarded more or less as a raving lunatic!

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD



Ever since the foundation of the famous school, long ago, a Sixth-Former had always been captain as a matter of course. No one had imagined that any other state of affairs could possibly come about. But the amazing thing had happened, and Tom Merry, a junior in the Shell, had actually been elected to that lofty post; and no one had been quite so surprised as Tom Merry himself.

It had been a bitter pill for the Sixth to swallow! But they had brought it upon themselves.

Eric Kildare, the previous captain, had resigned his post after being "on the carpet" before Dr. Holmes, the headmaster. The rest of the Sixth had strongly sympathised with Kildare, and had one and all declined to step into the vacancy—believing that by so doing they would force the Head to apologise to Kildare, and request the late skipper to withdraw his resignation.

But the Head had beaten the Sixth by a startling counter-move that had staggered the whole school. Dr. Holmes had grimly announced that, since the Sixth refused to accept the post of captain, the vacancy was open to any other fellow whom the school cared to elect. And St. Jim's had elected Tom Merry—to the amazement of Tom himself, and the utter consternation of the Sixth, and the secret discomfiture of the Head!

But Dr. Holmes had stuck to his guns. He had installed Tom Merry in the end study in the Sixth-Form passage, with all Kildare's old powers. Thus Tom found himself, while still a junior in the Shell, in the startling position of having St. Jim's to rule, with command over the very prefects who had frequently administered lines, and occasional "whackings," to him in the past!

"Well, what does it feel like to be captain of St. Jim's, old boss?" inquired Blake cheerily, as he closed the door.

Tom grinned.

"I've not had much chance of judging yet," he chuckled. "Hang it all I was only elected last night!"

"If I were you, I'd start off by tanning Knox," said Herries firmly.

"Heah, hear!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Gerald Knox, of the Sixth, was the most unpopular prefect at St. Jim's, and something of a tyrant. Many a time in the past had Jack Blake & Co. suffered at his hands—as had Tom himself.

But Tom shook his head with a grin.

"Sorry," he said cheerily, "but we prefects have to stick together, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake & Co. laughed. Somehow, the idea of Tom and Knox, being fellow prefects who had to "hang together," seemed rather funny. It needed getting used to!

The four chums of the Fourth stared round the big room enviously. They could not feel at home here—it reminded them far too much of painful visits to prefects! For that matter, even Tom was by no means feeling at home in his new sanctum. Even yet, he could scarcely credit the fact that he was actually captain of St. Jim's.

"Ahem!" Herries coughed, breaking what was quite an awkward silence. Though they were old friends of Tom's, his election to the captaincy seemed somehow to have put an odd barrier between them. They all felt it!

"Rummy, isn't it," said Blake, "that you're now the giddy captain?"

"To tell you the truth," Tom admitted, with a laugh, "I can hardly believe it myself!" He broke off as there was a tap at the door. "Come in!"

The door opened, and two grinning Shell fellows appeared. They were Manners and Lowther, Tom's old study-mates.

Monty Lowther closed the door. Then he and Manners gravely approached the table, and bowed before it.

"Hail, great panjandrum!" said Monty Lowther.

"Hail, your giddy Greatness!" murmured Harry Manners.

Tom went pink.

"Chuck it, you asses!" he grinned.

Harry and Monty did not seem to hear. They knelt solemnly on the carpet and touched the floor with their foreheads, three times.

"Hail, great Sheikh!" they chorused.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hail, mighty Bumblebumble!"

"Oh, chuck rotting!" exclaimed Tom, with a laugh. "Get up, you idiots—Oh! Yarooooop!"

For suddenly Manners and Lowther had reached forward and grabbed the legs of his chair, upsetting it before Tom had time to avoid disaster. There was a crash and a yell as the youthful captain of St. Jim's landed on the carpet. There was a yell of laughter from Jack Blake & Co.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom scrambled up and glared at his grinning chums.

"Ow! You fatheads!"

Monty Lowther pretended to look shocked.

"Oh, hush! That's not a word the captain of the school ought to use, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"Look here!" said Tom, with a snort. "If you chaps keep rubbing it in about me being the blessed captain I'll punch your silly noses!"

"Pax!" grinned Manners. "I say, what does it feel like being captain, anyway?"

Tom glared at him.

"Shut up!" he hooted. "That's what Blake's been asking! Can't you chuck it?"

"Sorry!" said Manners hastily.

There was a tap on the door. It opened, to reveal the tall figure of Eric Kildare.

Though the Sixth had been filled with dismay at the prospect of having a junior in the post of captain, they had one and all agreed to back up Tom Merry—largely thanks to Kildare's persuasion. There was a friendly smile on the late captain's handsome face as he stepped into the study.

"I just looked in to ask you about the Fifth Form match, Merry," said Kildare. "They've got a match on this afternoon against Mallingham. I understand that you haven't yet appointed a referee."

"Oh crumbs!"

Tom went a trifle red. It had not occurred to him that

he, as captain, had to appoint the referee for the Fifth Form match.

"I was going to say I would referee the game, if you're willing," went on Kildare.

"Thanks awfully!" exclaimed Tom. "I wish you would." Kildare nodded, and left the study. Blake whistled.

"Whew!" He stared at Tom oddly. "Fancy having old Kildare coming to you to ask things!"

"It'll take some getting used to," nodded Tom.

"Well, what about this afternoon?" put in Manners.

"We're all going over to Spalding Hall to tea. We looked in to know if you're coming with us?"

Tom's face fell. He shook his head.

Spalding Hall was the school near Wayland where Ethel Cleveland, D'Arcy's pretty cousin, and Doris Levison, sister of Levison of the Fourth, were pupils. A visit to Spalding Hall was always a pleasant prospect; and on such a glorious Saturday afternoon it would be a delightful tramp over the moors to Spalding, into the bargain. But Tom was already beginning to find that the captain of St. Jim's could not always do as he liked with his time—not even on half-holidays!

"Can't be did!" he answered. "I've promised to see a Third Form deputation this afternoon."

"Blow the Third!" growled Blake indignantly.

"I wish I could, but I can't!" grinned Tom. "As captain of the school, it's up to me to see deputations, even from the fags! I dunno what the dickens they want to see me about, but I can't refuse them."

"Botha the fags!"

Tom laughed.

"I'll tell you what," he said. "I'll bike over to Spalding to meet you after tea."

"Good!" exclaimed Manners. "That's better than nothing!" He glanced at his watch. "Come on, you chaps, we must be buzzing off!"

Manners and Lowther and Blake & Co. left the study. As the door closed, Tom Merry sat down, with a faint sigh. It would have been very jolly to accompany his chums to Spalding Hall, and have tea with Ethel and Doris. But it was impossible. It was not all honey being captain of St. Jim's. As Tom had discovered, the job

had its drawbacks as well as its advantages.

And while his six chums swung out through the gates of the school into the sunny countryside, the fellow whose election as captain had caused such excitement at St. Jim's sat alone in his big new study to await the deputation from the Third.

"Captain of St. Jim's!" muttered Tom Merry slowly, in the silent room. "My hat! I can hardly believe it, even yet!"

CHAPTER 2.

Knox is Annoyed!

"COME on, asses!"

"Ass yourself, young Wally!"

"Do you want a thick ear, young Gibson?"

"Bow-wow!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp!

With tramping feet, the swarm of fags went crowding up the stairs towards the Sixth Form passage.

The Third Form deputation to the new captain of the school was on its way to Tom's study. Whatever their mission was, it was an important one, judging from the looks on their faces.

Wally D'Arcy, younger brother of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, was the leader of the procession. But some of the procession did not seem quite to realise that fact.

"You'd best leave the talking to me, young Wally," declared Curly Gibson firmly, as he marched on up the stairs in the forefront of the fags' procession. "You'll only make a mess of it, you know—"

"Why, of all the blessed cheek!" gasped Wally, glaring at Curly. "Do you want a prize thick ear, young Gibson?"

"Who from?" roared Curly, coming to a halt.

Wally fixed him with a withering glare.

"Don't you know any blessed grammar?" he sniffed.

"You ought to say 'from whom!'"

"Rats!" growled Curly. "I tell you—"

"Oh, give us a rest!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

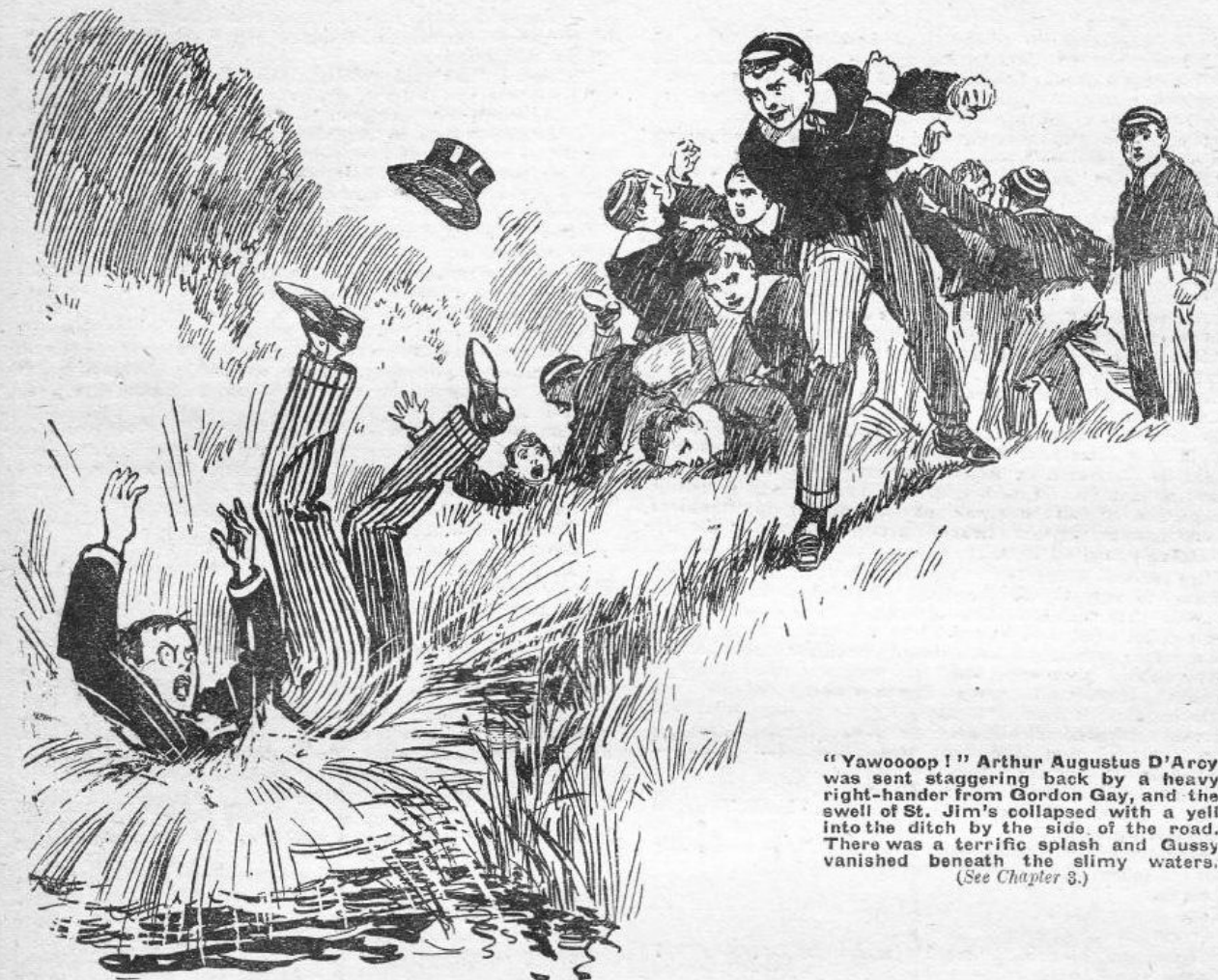
The deputation—which seemed to consist of every member

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Our Second

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"A Trans-Continental Coach!"



"Yawooooop!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sent staggering back by a heavy right-hander from Gordon Gay, and the swell of St. Jim's collapsed with a yell into the ditch by the side of the road. There was a terrific splash and Gussy vanished beneath the slimy waters.
(See Chapter 3.)

of the Third Form—moved on up the stairs again as the two leaders resumed their march, still glaring at one another.

"I tell you," said Curly hotly, "I'm the chap to put it to Tom Merry—"

"Br-r-r!" from Wally.

"Chuck rowing, you asses!" cut in Frank Levison warmly. "You'd better leave it to me, both of you. You're both asses who'd muck it up—"

"What?" howled Wally.

"Idiots, are we?" roared Curly.

Biff! Biff!

There was a yell from Levison minor as Wally smote him on the nose, almost at the exact instant that Curly Gibson smote him on the ear. Frank Levison sat down on the stairs with a bump, and did not argue further.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

They swarmed into the Sixth Form passage, and Wally halted outside the end study and knocked upon it. In answer to a call from within, the leader of the fag fraternity swung the door open with a crash and marched into the study.

"My hat!"

Tom Merry, seated at the table, stared blankly at the crowd. Though he was expecting the deputation, he had not realised that the Third Form's idea of a deputation was to send along everybody available, to lend weight to their case. He had expected two or three Third-Formers only.

With tramping feet, the crowd of fags poured into the study. But, large though the study was, it was not large enough to hold them all! Those who could not squeeze in were forced to remain outside in the passage.

Tom Merry grinned.

"So this is the deputation?" he exclaimed dryly.

"Rather!" nodded Wally.

"You bet!" agreed Curly. "We've come to—"

"Shut up, Curly!" roared Wally. "It's like this, Tom Merry. We want—"

"You see," cut in Frank Levison eagerly, "we Third Form chaps feel that—"

Tom raised his hand.

"Shut up!" he shouted. "Silence! I can't listen to you all at once!"

"Rather not!" exclaimed Wally. "You listen to me, not these asses!" He glared at Curly. "Chuck it, idiot!"

Biff!

Curly Gibson, thoroughly exasperated, hit out for Wally's nose, and landed a bullseye. Wally sat down on the study carpet with a thud, and gave a gasp.

"My hat!" cried Tom. "How dare you kids—"

But his voice was not heeded. Wally, roused to fury, scrambled up and threw himself at Curly Gibson. The next moment a wild and whirling fight was raging in the new captain's room.

Biff! Bang! Thud!

"Take that!"

"And take that!"

"Yarooooogh!"

"Grooooooh!"

Tom Merry had jumped to his feet. But the fags were taking no notice of him now. The new captain was still utterly ignorant of the purpose of the Third Form deputation. And the rest of the Third seemed far more intent upon urging on their respective favourites than upon getting on with the business that had brought them to Tom's study.

"Go it, Wally!"

"Give him socks, Curly!"

The swarm of fags yelled and howled their approval as either Wally or Curly landed a damaging punch.

With collars half torn off, and with their faces rapidly turning crimson from their exertions, Wally D'Arcy and Curly Gibson struggled and fought. There was not much science in their efforts, but they were both working with a will.

Tom Merry felt that the situation was getting a little out of hand. He stepped quickly round the table and grasped the two fighting fags by their coat-collars, and there was a crack as he banged their heads together.

"Yarooooop!"

Curly and Wally yelled in unison.

"There!" panted Tom. "Chuck it, you little bounders, or I'll bash your nappers together again!"

Wally and Curly eyed him through rapidly closing optics. They blinked at one another, and then at Tom again. Tom, trying hard not to smile, frowned severely.

"Shake hands!"

Wally and Curly sheepishly shook hands.

"Now," went on Tom, resuming his seat, "what's this deputation all about, Levison minor?"

Levison minor, delighted to have been picked on for a spokesman, stepped forward, blushing.

"It's this way," he said eagerly, "the Third think fagging is a rotten shame—"

"Hear, hear!" yelled the rest of the deputation to a man.

"Fagging ought not to be allowed!" went on Frank Levison impressively. "It ought to be thumping well stopped!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well?" said Tom, concealing a twitching smile in the nick of time.

"And—and so," continued Frank Levison breathlessly, "we've come to ask you to have fagging abolished!"

"Hear, hear!" mumbled Wally, dabbing at a cut lip.

"Rather!"

Breathless with excitement, the fags waited for the new captain's answer.

As Levison minor had said, the Third had thought for a long, long time that fagging was one of the things that should be forbidden by Act of Parliament! They strongly disapproved of it, on principle. At Third Form meetings it was the custom to speak of fagging as a tyrannical system invented by hard-hearted prefects especially for the torture of martyred fags.

They would never have dared, however, to approach Kildare to suggest its abolition. They had known only too well that Kildare's answer would have been a very curt refusal. But now things were different. Tom Merry was a junior who might be willing to back up fellow-juniors—even though they were only fags—against the tyrants of the Sixth. Especially since all the fags had voted for Tom at the election, it seemed to the stalwarts of the Third that the new skipper should be on their side.

In the opinion of the fags, one good turn deserved another.

"Is it a go?" demanded Curly Gibson.

"We juniors must stick together, you know," urged Reggie Manners, eyeing Tom hopefully.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "You—you really want me to abolish fagging?"

"Rather!" chorused the fags.

Tom Merry smiled. He could not help it. Then he shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I am afraid I can't see my way to doing that."

The fags stared at him in dismay.

"You—you won't do it?" exclaimed Hobbs.

"No!" Tom shook his head. "Fagging is a good system, in my opinion."

"Great Scott!" gasped Joe Frayne.

"He—he thinks it's a good system!" stuttered Jameson.

The fags looked as though they could scarcely believe their ears. That anyone could have the cheek to declare in cold blood that he thought fagging was a good system astounded them. It seemed too impossible to be true.

"You can cut now, kids," said Tom.

"But—but look here," snorted Wally, "we voted for you in the election!"

"What of that?" asked Tom quietly.

"Well, dash it all; one good turn deserves another!" roared Wally.

Tom went a trifle red; he frowned.

"You can give up the idea that I'm rewarding fellows for their votes, kid!" he said sharply. "No more cheek! Scat!"

Wally breathed hard. Before he could speak there was a step in the passage. The big figure of Gerald Knox appeared behind the swarm of fags.

At sight of the most feared prefect at St. Jim's there were one or two squeaks of dismay from some of the smaller fags. Knox stared into the study, with a queer look on his face.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "What's all this?"

"We—we've come to ask Tom Merry to abolish fagging!" stammered one of the fags, as he caught Knox's eye.

Knox jumped.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated again.

He pushed his way roughly into the study. His eyes were gleaming as he turned to Tom Merry.

Gerald Knox, more than anyone else in the Sixth, had been chagrined at Tom Merry's election as captain of the school. He imagined that Tom would be sure to make full use of his position to make things as unpleasant as possible for the prefects who had punished him for various junior offences in the past. Unlike the majority of the Sixth, Knox had not the slightest intention of trying to make things easier for the junior who had become captain.

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"These kids have had the cheek to ask you to abolish fagging?" he exclaimed harshly.

Tom nodded.

"That's it," he said quietly.

"I suppose you'll do it, eh?" sneered Knox.

"I have already declined to do so," Tom answered in level tones. "But, in any case, I'll be glad if you will leave this to me."

Knox breathed hard. It was a direct snub. He had asked for a snub, but now that he had got it he did not like it.

"If I were you I should give them all a good licking for their confounded impudence!" he exclaimed.

"I shall do nothing of the kind!" said Tom shortly. "As I've said once already, please leave this to me!"

There was a delighted titter from the fags.

For the moment they had forgotten their disappointment at Tom's refusal of their request in their joy at seeing Knox being taken down a peg. There was no doubt at all that the new captain was not going to stand interference from Gerald Knox!

Knox went crimson.

"I've had more experience of managing cheeky fags than you have, Merry!" he said venomously. "I advise you to lick the lot of 'em!"

"Thanks for the advice," said Tom calmly.

"You'll follow it?"

"No."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wally D'Arcy, at the look on Knox's face.

Knox gave the leader of the fags a look that would have stretched Wally D'Arcy lifeless on the carpet could looks have killed! But he did not stay to receive any more snubs. He pushed his way out of the study and stamped off down the passage to his own study, followed by delighted titters.

"Silence!" cried Tom sharply. "That's enough! Scat, you kids! And don't let me hear any more nonsense about abolishing fagging while I'm captain!"

The fags trooped from the study with disappointment writ large on their faces. The door closed behind them. Tom sat with a frown upon his usually cheery face. A few moments later there was a knock on the door, and Knox appeared again.

"I'll thank you in future not to speak to me like that in front of the fags!" he said bitterly. "It seems to me, Merry, that you've already got a bit big for your boots, although you've only been captain for one day!"

Tom grinned.

"Thanks!" he said dryly. "And in future, Knox, I hope you will try to remember that I am captain of St. Jim's now, and not interfere with me in my job!"

Knox glared at him.

"You'll have to learn to support your prefects, not encourage fags to jeer at them!" he snapped.

"I fancy it will be for you to learn to support me," said Tom coolly.

Knox was about to speak, but he did not. He banged the door as he vanished. Tom chuckled.

Already he was beginning to feel his feet. And he was certainly going to stand no nonsense from Gerald Knox!

CHAPTER 3.

Awkward for Tom Merry!

"WELL, good-bye, Miss Ethel!"

"Good-bye, deah gals!"

The St. Jim's juniors were saying good-bye to Ethel Cleveland and Doris Levison at the gates of Spalding Hall after tea.

Levison and Clive of the Fourth and Talbot of the Shell had joined Blake & Co. and Manners and Lowther in their visit to Spalding Hall that afternoon. The party from St. Jim's had had a very cheery tea in company with their girl chums, and a few other Spaldingites whom Ethel and Doris had invited to meet them. But the time had come to return to St. Jim's.

The late afternoon sunlight was streaming down pleasantly as the juniors tramped off in the direction of Wayland.

"A pity Tom Mewwy wasn't with us this aftahnoon, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the party passed out of Wayland High Street and took the road across the moor.

"Rather!" agreed Blake. "But he said he'd come to meet us, anyway."

"Talk of angels!" grinned Manners. "There he is!"

The figure of a junior could be seen coming towards them over the rim of the moor. It was Tom Merry, and a minute later he had come up with them, and turned to accompany them back towards St. Jim's.

"Well how's the giddy captain?" grinned Talbot.

(Continued on page 8.)

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Boys! Here's a Black and White Reproduction of NEXT WEEK'S SUPERB FREE GIFT. THIS CARD IS PRINTED IN FULL COLOURS, AND WILL MAKE A WORTHY ADDITION TO YOUR SET.



MARVELS of the FUTURE!

No. 3.—A DESERT LINER.

ADVENTUROUS motorists have once or twice recently flung out a challenge to the forbidding desert regions of the world. In powerful motor-cars they have crossed the dreary wastes of waterless and treeless sand, proving that at last the camel—the "ship of the desert"—no longer holds complete ascendancy over parts of the world where once white men simply could not go without relying entirely on those animals.

The desert-going motor-cars are the thin end of the wedge! Their progress is necessarily slow, and it is a great gamble whether or not the driver and passengers add their whitening bones to the myriads already scattered over the burnt sands. Now there is arriving a mighty vehicle most fittingly described as a desert liner.

Except that it runs on wheels over the desert sand, its passengers—when the great mechanical contrivance really gets going—might imagine themselves to be enjoying all the luxuries of ocean travel. Roomy, comfortable cabins, with an upper deck from which to take the air, a big hold to contain merchandise, and in the passengers' pockets a return ticket of the usefulness of whose second half they can hold no possible doubts!

Aboard one of these desert liners you will be absolutely safe for the complete trip across even the trackless Sahara. And there are 3,500,000 square miles of that ghastly region, until the arrival of this great new invention, given over mostly to wild camels and carrion birds and infrequent camel caravans in the charge of wild Arabs.

The desert liners will be prepared for the risks of war with marauding desert tribesmen. Machine-guns will see to that. And breakdowns will be rendered far less unpleasant than they might be by the wireless broadcasting apparatus with which the

skipper of this enormous sand-craft will be able to get into touch with aeroplanes able to drop victuals and water, if necessary, to the stranded passengers!

How big these craft will become no one can yet foresee. The one being built is 130 ft. long, 42 ft. from the base of the enormous wheels to the upper deck, 26 ft. wide, and with ample accommodation for 150 passengers and the crew.

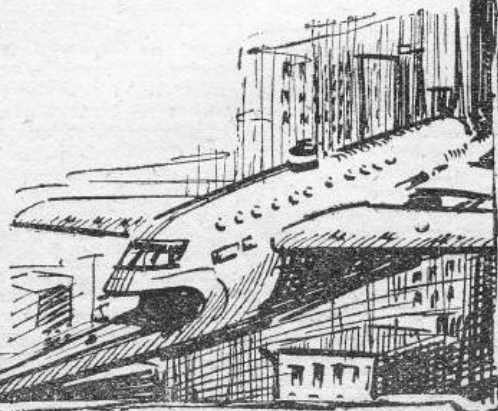
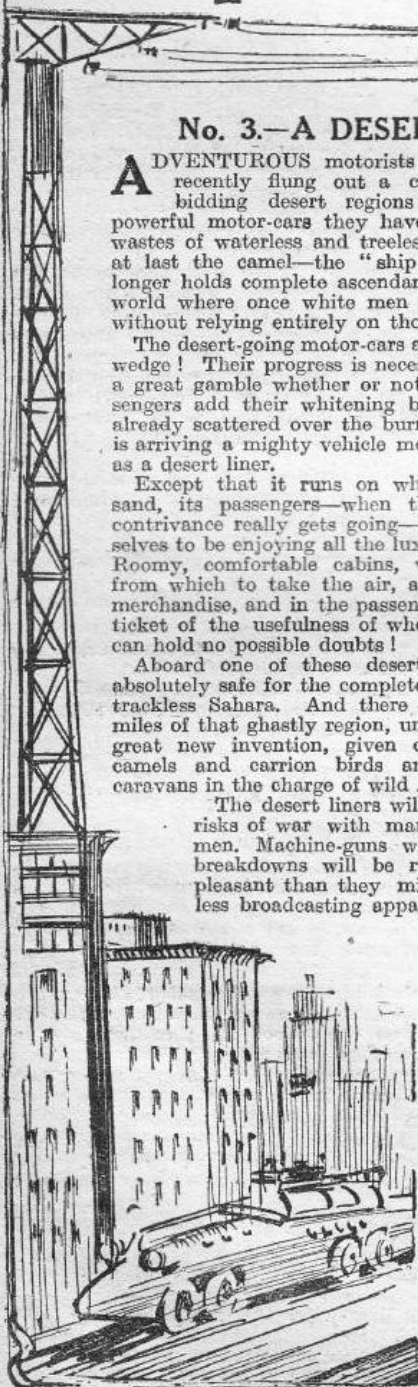
They will knock the old camel caravans sideways, for they will be able to carry enormous loads of goods—plus the passengers—at a far greater speed than any camels could possibly do. Naturally, to drive such a colossal "bus," weighing well over 350 tons, running on two pairs of ridged wheels some 40 ft. in diameter, mighty machinery is required.

For the desert liner whose trial trip is coming shortly two Diesel motors have been provided. But only one will function at a time, the other being held in reserve in case of accidents or the need of increased power when it comes to breasting a sandy hill.

There are hills, of course, even in the Sahara Desert, and the desert liner will be able to mount these quite comfortably even though they are as steep as thirty degrees! So far as can be foreseen at the moment, the establishment of petrol and oil refilling stations in the Sahara is scarcely practicable, so the desert liner will carry enough fuel to keep it going without a halt for some 12,000 miles!

Fares will not be low, at first, for one of these desert liners will cost at the lowest about £26,000 to build and equip. But nothing will be omitted in the way of provision for passengers' comfort. With a specially cooled room for a retreat when the temperature mounts insufferably high, and four decks—including wash-rooms, dining-rooms, sleeping cabins, wireless cabin, kitchen, reading and smoking rooms—a holiday voyaging across the mysterious Sahara Desert in an up-to-the-moment sand-liner will be, indeed, something to write home about!

Next week's article deals with "A Submarine Battleship," another dream of the future, which is the subject of the **FOURTH** Free Gift Picture Card.



"CAPTAIN TOM MERRY!"

(Continued from page 6.)

"Given anyone any lines yet?" chuckled Ernest Levison.

"No," smiled Tom; "not yet."

"It's rummy, you being captain," said Clive. "I can't somehow swallow it, even now—"

"Shut up!" roared Tom. "Every ass I meet says that! I'm sick of hearing it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

His chums chuckled.

"What did the fags want to see you about?" asked Monty Lowther.

"They wanted me to abolish fagging!" chuckled Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther.

The juniors tramped on cheerily. Though, as Clive had just remarked, none of them could quite realise yet that their chum was actually captain of St. Jim's, they were all in high spirits over his election.

It was from Talbot that there broke a sudden warning exclamation.

"Look out! Grammar School!"

The St. Jim's party was passing a small copse, and a figure among the trees had caught Talbot's attention—a figure wearing a Grammar School cap. A few moments later several other Grammarians were to be seen, and the St. Jim's fellows came to a sudden halt, as the Grammarians emerged from the trees on to the road in front of their rivals.

"St. Jim's wasters!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, the leader of the Grammarians.

"St. Jim's worms!" nodded Frank Monk cheerfully.

"Don't they look a collection of duds?"

Rivalry between St. Jim's and Rylcombe Grammar School was very keen, both on the footer field and off! Encounters off the footer field had rather a habit of ending in trouble, with black eyes and swollen noses for most of those concerned.

The grinning group of Grammarians barred the road without making any attempt to move. They were in force. Wootton major and Wootton minor were there, and Carboy and Lane and several others, so that the odds were slightly in favour of the Grammar School if the encounter ended in a scrap.

And from the looks on the faces of Gordon Gay & Co. it looked as though those cheery youths had every intention of scrapping.

"Back up, you chaps!" muttered Herries, pushing back his sleeves.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his monocle and surveyed the group of Grammarians with great interest.

"What an extraordinary looking crowd of wuffians!" he exclaimed loudly. "I wonder who they are?"

"Looks to me like a beanfeast from a workhouse," said Blake solemnly.

"No," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "I fancy they are not human. Almost, but not quite. There must be a circus somewhere about, and these are the performing gorillas. They've got away from their keeper."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, of all the blessed cheek!" roared Gordon Gay, going very red. "Pile in, you chaps!"

And with a rush the Grammarians hurled themselves at the St. Jim's party.

In a moment a surging, trampling battle was in progress. Biff!

"Yarooooooh!"

Blake went down with a yell as Gordon Gay landed a fist on his nose. Frank Monk went spinning before a hearty biff from Herries, and in falling clutched wildly at Wootton major, and dragged him down with him. Carboy had got Clive down on the grass by the roadside, and was busily stuffing dead leaves down his victim's neck. Clive yelled and struggled.

"Grooooooo!"

Monty Lowther and Digby darted to Clive's rescue, however, and Carboy was dragged off. Frank Monk went to Carboy's aid, and the struggle waxed fast and furious. Saints and Grammarians reeled and rolled in one another's grip, and gasps and yells in plenty rent the air.

One fellow only had failed to join in the fray.

Tom Merry had put up his fists with the others at the Grammarians' first rush. He had turned to fling himself cheerfully at Gordon Gay, as the leader of the Grammar School party had rolled Blake in the road with a hefty

punch on the nose. But then Tom had halted, with a sudden odd expression on his face.

"My hat!" he breathed.

There was dismay in his muttered expression.

Though in the past he had often enjoyed a vigorous brush with the Grammarians, and would have enjoyed one now, circumstances forbade him.

He was a prefect now—captain of St. Jim's. And the captain of St. Jim's could not possibly start scrapping with Gordon Gay & Co. And, further, it was his duty to stop his chums from doing so.

"Oh dear!" gasped Tom Merry in consternation.

He stood staring, with dismayed face, at the fierce struggle raging round him.

Kildare, when he had been captain, would soon have put a stop to an affair of this nature, and would have distributed lines lavishly among the offenders from St. Jim's. And Kildare was the model which Tom had resolved to copy.

"Yawoooooop!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sent staggering back by a heavy right-hander from Gordon Gay, and the swell of St. Jim's collapsed, with a yell, into the ditch at the side of the road. There was a terrific splash, and Gussy vanished beneath the slimy waters—to appear again a moment later covered with water-weed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Gordon Gay.

"Bai Jove! Grooooo! I—I will administah a feaful thwashin'!"

Arthur Augustus, looking very much like a drowned rat—as Wootton minor observed, between laughs—hailed himself out of the ditch and hurled himself at Gordon Gay. Gay tried to avoid him; for Arthur Augustus was not, in his present condition, a fellow one wished to be near. But the swell of St. Jim's was too quick for the Grammarian leader, and a few moments later Arthur Augustus had Gordon Gay's head in chancery and was battering away at it, with grim resolve.

"Take that, you wottah!"

"Ow! Yooooop!"

Blake was at grips with Carboy; Levison and Clive and Talbot were struggling dangerously near the ditch with the two Woottons and Lane; and Manners was sitting astride Oliver, of the Grammar School, and rubbing his face in the grass. The others were all busy, too, and there was no doubt that St. Jim's was getting the best of things, when there was a sudden, authoritative shout:

"Stop this!"

It was the voice of Tom Merry, stern and grim.

"Wh-what?" gasped Manners, staring at his chum as if he could not believe his ears.

"M-m-my hat!" panted Blake, also staring at Tom in wonderment. "S-s-stop it!"

Biff!

Blake, utterly taken aback by Tom's sudden command, had let his fists fall, and Carboy had not missed his chance. Blake crashed over on to the grass at the roadside, with a breathless grunt, and Carboy pounced upon him.

"Stop it!" yelled Tom Merry, shouting to make his voice heard above the din. "Stop scrapping, you fellows!"

The St. Jim's fellows were staggered.

Tom Merry had always been as willing as anyone to enjoy a scrap with Gordon Gay & Co. It was a shock to them to find that he had not only joined in the fray this time, but was actually trying to stop it!

"He's gone dotty!" exclaimed Blake, as he staggered painfully to his feet.

Blake, at any rate, was not feeling disposed to accede to Tom's request. His ear had received the full benefit of Carboy's punch, and he meant to get some of his own back. He rushed at Carboy, and the two fell together in a struggling heap.

Whether it was that his chums did not realise that he really meant it, or whether they chose to ignore the new captain's command, no one knew but themselves. They did not heed it, anyway. A moment later the struggle was raging as fiercely as ever, while Tom Merry stood by with a helpless expression on his face.

He had foreseen various difficulties as captain of St. Jim's. But he had not expected that it would be his own chums who would be the first to start his difficulties.

His face set with resolve. He was captain of the school, and he meant to do his duty. Fighting with Grammarians was one of the things which was decidedly not allowed, and Tom Merry was, therefore, going to stop it.

He jumped forward and thrust himself between Blake and Carboy.

"Chuck it!" he said angrily. "I won't have— Ow! Yoooooop!"

Carboy, incensed by Tom's interference—which to him was utterly inexplicable—turned his attentions momentarily from Blake to Tom. He knocked Tom spinning, and the

youthful captain of St. Jim's sat down in the road with an exceedingly painful bump.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom. "Yow!"

Already Blake and Carboy were at it again hammer and tongs.

Tom rose painfully to his feet. Gordon Gay had just fought free from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the two were struggling together again in a fierce embrace. They staggered into Tom Merry, pommelling one another, and Tom sat down on the hard, unsympathetic road again with another bump and another painful gasp.

"Owch! Oh, my hat!"

Again he limped to his feet and stepped hastily aside to

quell the battle now raging between the chums of St. Jim's and Gordon Gay & Co.

Only for a moment did Tom hesitate. It went against the grain to league himself with Knox; but he was captain of St. Jim's, and he had his duty. Duty first was Tom's motto—and, whatever his chums might think of it, he meant to carry through with his job.

"Knox!" he called sharply. "Lend me a hand!"

Knox was grinning queerly as he dismounted from his machine and leaned it against a tree. Tom hurried towards him.

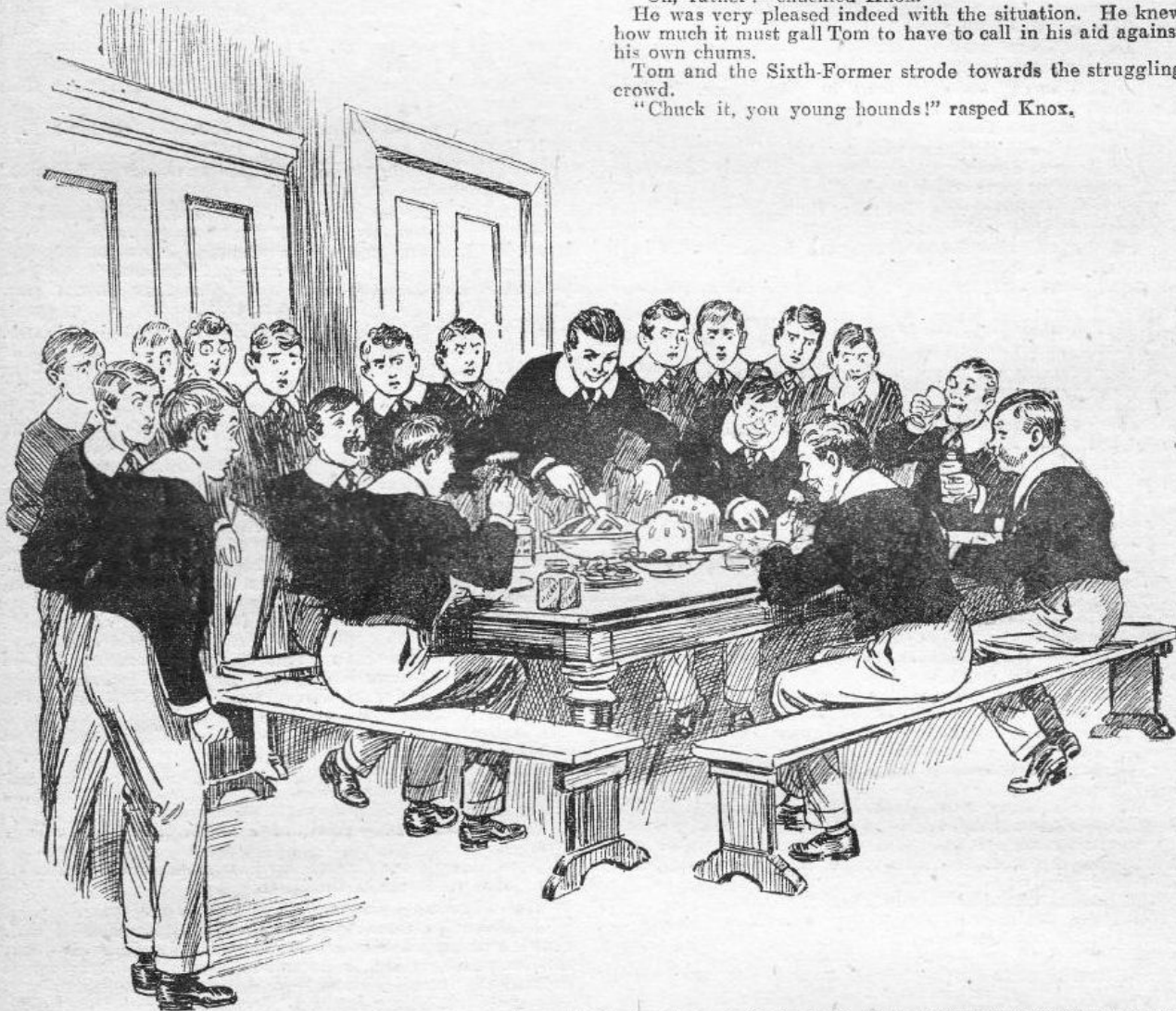
"I—I want your help here," he said quietly. "We've got to stop this!"

"Oh, rather!" chuckled Knox.

He was very pleased indeed with the situation. He knew how much it must gall Tom to have to call in his aid against his own chums.

Tom and the Sixth-Former strode towards the struggling crowd.

"Chuck it, you young hounds!" rasped Knox.



The crowd of Third-Formers stood speechless with wrath and dismay as Aubrey Racke & Co. drew plates before them and began to help themselves cheerfully to the good things. "You rotters!" panted Wally D'Arcy. "Clear out!" (See Chapter 7.)

avoid Frank Monk and Monty Lowther as they surged by in an anything but brotherly grasp.

But Tom was not done yet. Again he raised his voice angrily; and just at that moment a figure on a bicycle turned the bend by the copse.

"Knox!" breathed Tom Merry.

It was Gerald Knox of the Sixth. Knox's eyes were gleaming as they took in the scene before him.

CHAPTER 4.

Allied With Knox!

TOM MERRY was the only one who had seen Knox; the others were all too busy scrapping to have noticed anything in the world but the job immediately on hand.

There was a queer look in Tom Merry's face as Knox came pedalling rapidly towards him.

He did not like Knox. But Knox was a prefect. And although in the past Tom had always been allied with his chums of the Shell and Fourth against the bullying Sixth-Former, it was his duty now to call on Knox to help to

At sound of Knox's voice dismay leapt into the faces of the St. Jim's party. They turned their heads, and their jaws dropped at sight of Knox's tall figure.

"Knox!" breathed Monty Lowther. "Oh snakes!"

The Grammarians knew Knox, too; and, although he had no power over them, of course, they had no wish to get their rivals and friends at St. Jim's into trouble with a prefect. In a few moments Gordon Gay & Co. had hastily vanished, leaving nine battered, breathless, and bruised juniors dabbling at streaming noses and blackening eyes—and looking very sheepish into the bargain.

But the most uncomfortable-looking fellow of the lot was Tom Merry.

Knox was enjoying the situation immensely, however. He turned to Tom with an ironical gleam in his eyes.

"So these young ruffians refused to obey your command to stop their hooliganism?" he exclaimed in pretended sympathy. But there was a mocking smile at the corners of his mouth.

Tom went red. But before he could speak Monty Lowther cut in.

"Yes," he said slowly. "I—I'm afraid we did."

Monty Lowther was now wishing heartily, for Tom's sake, that he and the others had taken notice of the new captain's command. He realised, as did the rest, that by ignoring Tom in their excitement, they had put their chum into a very awkward position. It seemed to Lowther that the only way to make amends now was to make a clean breast of it before Knox.

"I—I'm afraid we were a bit excited, you know," he said apologetically to Tom. "That's why we didn't chuck scrapping when you told us to."

"Heah, heah!"

"That's all right," said Tom awkwardly. "At least—"

He broke off. He loathed the whole situation. But he had to remember that he was captain! In his position Kildare would have administered heavy punishments to the juniors who had defied him.

Knox's face was clear evidence of his inward delight over Tom Merry's predicament.

"Well, Merry?" he murmured in silky tones. "These kids must be punished, of course—"

"Y-yes," agreed Tom.

"Severely," added Knox, with a scowl. "In my opinion they all deserve a severe licking for this ruffianly behaviour, and for defying your order to stop."

Tom was wishing very heartily that Knox had never appeared at that unfortunate moment. But it was clear enough that this time Knox was right. Kildare would have administered a sound licking to any juniors who had behaved like this.

And it was his duty to do as Kildare would have done!

Tom wished that the earth could open and swallow him. But he had to face the facts. All eyes—except those that were too blackened to be open at all—were on him. He pulled himself together.

"All you chaps will get a licking," he said steadily. "Come to my study after call-over-to-night."

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus faintly.

"Whew!" breathed Manners.

There was an exclamation of satisfaction from Knox.

"Good!" he said. "That's the way to treat the young blackguards!"

And there was a grin on the face of the Sixth-Former as he turned away, mounted his cycle and rode off.

"I'm frightfully sorry, you chaps," said Tom uncomfortably. "But—well, I've got to do it, you know!"

"I—I suppose you have," said Talbot, dabbing at a cut lip.

"We don't blame you, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You've got to do your duty, of course."

"Next time, if you asses will only try to remember that I'm a blessed prefect now, this sort of thing won't happen!" said Tom grimly.

The juniors stared at him in gloomy silence.

"I—I say, you're not going to lay it on thick, old hoss?" murmured Monty Lowther.

"N-no," said Tom doubtfully. "Of course, I can't show favouritism to your chaps, though, because you are pals of mine."

"I—I suppose not!"

There were some queer expressions in the faces of the St. Jim's party as they turned and tramped off towards the school.

Tom's chums were beginning to realise what had been brought home to Tom already—that there were disadvantages in his being captain of St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 5. Lickings for Nine!

"HE, he, he!"
Baggy Trimble of the Fourth gave an explosive chortle.

The fat junior had just entered his study—Study No. 2 in the Fourth Form passage, which he shared with Percy Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth, and Kit Wildrake, the boy from British Columbia. His chortle as he entered caused both Mellish and Wildrake to glance up from their prep, which they had just started, on their return from call-over.

"What's up with you, fat man?" demanded Wildrake.

"He, he, he!" Heard Tom Merry's latest?" sniggered Baggy excitedly.

"What's that?" asked Mellish, with interest.

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"He's going to lick all his pals!" cried Trimble, with another breathless snigger. "He, he, he! Manners and Lowther and Blake & Co. and Talbot and Levison and Clive—he's going to give them all a whacking! Isn't it rich?"

"Great pip!" ejaculated Kit Wildrake. He stared at Baggy wonderingly. "Is this one of your yarns, you fat—"

"Ask Gussy!" chortled Baggy. "I heard him talking about it to Blake! They're looking pretty sick—"

"What for?" broke in Mellish.

"For scrapping with Gordon Gay & Co.," explained Baggy. "They met 'em on the moor, and started to scrap, and Tom Merry told them to stop, but they wouldn't, so he's going to lick them!"

"My hat!" grinned Mellish. A sneer appeared on his face. "Tom Merry's out to show what a wonderful big noise he is now," he added, with a sniff. "Wants to show his power! I knew he'd get swelled head, but I didn't think he'd start chucking his weight about as soon as this, I must say!"

"Rats!" grunted Wildrake. "Tom Merry's not that sort!"

"What's he going to lick all his own pals for, then?" grinned Mellish.

"Sounds to me as if he couldn't do anything else," retorted Wildrake sagely. "If he's captain, he can't let chaps scrap in the road, any more than old Kildare could! And he's not the chap to let off his chums from favouritism, either."

"Rats!" sniffed Mellish. "It's swank, that's all it is!"

"I'm going up to the Sixth Form passage!" chuckled Trimble. "He, he, he! It'll be fun to watch 'em coming out of Merry's study—licked by their own blessed chum! He, he, he!"

Baggy scuttled away, and Mellish and Wildrake followed him. As Baggy had said, it would certainly be amusing to see Manners and Lowther and the rest going to Tom Merry for a licking!

They were not the only ones who thought so, either.

The news of the new captain's firm handling of the situation on the moor had spread like wildfire through the school, and by the time Wildrake arrived at the end of the Sixth Form passage, a big crowd had collected.

Grinning faces and chuckles were to be seen and heard on all sides. St. Jim's found the situation very entertaining indeed!

Fourth Form fellows, Shell chaps, fags, and even some of the Fifth were there to watch the fun.

"What a scream!" exclaimed Cutts of the Fifth, with a grin.

"Tom Merry's showing off his power, of course—that's all it is," sneered Racke of the Shell.

"Rats!" growled Kangaroo, the Australian junior.

"I think it's a shame!" piped Frank Levison of the Third. Frank worshipped the ground that his major walked on, and he was horrified to know that Ernest Levison was to be made to "touch his toes"—and that by Tom Merry!

"Don't blub, young Levison," jeered Hankey of the Third. "Your blessed major deserves it, if you ask me."

Frank Levison glared at him and clenched his fists. But Cardew of the Fourth gripped the two fags by their collars and brought their heads together with a crack.

"Don't start rowing, my children," he drawled.

And young Levison and Hankey, rubbing their heads, glared at the slacker of the Fourth, but kept silent after that.

There was a sudden abrupt silence. All talk died away in an instant as the door of Tom Merry's study opened and the youthful captain of St. Jim's appeared.

Tom Merry jumped and looked thoroughly taken aback at seeing the large crowd gathered at the head of the stairs. He coloured slightly.

"Fag!" he called, and some of the Third-Formers pushed Joe Frayne forward. "Trot along to Kildare's study, please, and ask him to lend me an ashplant."

"Right-ho!" grinned Frayne, and scuttled off along the passage to Kildare's study.

Tom Merry vanished and closed the door.

Instantly there was an excited buzz of talk.

"He, he, he!" tittered Baggy Trimble. "Tom Merry means business all right!"

A few moments later, Frayne reappeared from Kildare's study and hurried back to Tom Merry with an ashplant clutched in his hand. He tapped on Tom Merry's door, to

the accompaniment of a fire of chaff from his fellow fags, and vanished into the new captain's study. When he reappeared to join the crowd, he had left the ashplant behind him.

"About time the blessed sheep arrived for the jolly old slaughter!" murmured Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pr'aps they won't turn up!" chuckled Gore.

But even as he spoke, there was a sound of feet on the stairs.

"Here they come!"

"Here's the giddy culprits!"

All eyes were turned to the stairs.

Headed by Manners and Blake, the nine culprits were ascending the stairs. A chorus of chuckles greeted them.

"Step lively, there!" sang out Hammond.

"Got plenty of blotting-paper in your bags, naughty boys?" inquired Glyn.

"Don't keep the great man waiting!" grinned Crooke. "He'll lay it on thick if you do!"

With faces the colour of beetroots, the nine juniors filed through the chaffing crowd. They were not feeling happy. Though they all agreed that they could not blame Tom Merry, they felt that they were being made to look thoroughly ridiculous, and they did not like it.

"Left, right; left, right!" bawled Dick Julian.

"Chuck it, you asses!" snapped Blake, with a face the colour of a pillar-box.

Kerruish, the boy from the Isle of Man, was bending over, and by his face was conveying the feelings of a fellow receiving a hard whacking. His contortions amused the crowd. The crowd roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The unhappy procession halted outside Tom Merry's study. Manners tapped on the door.

"Come in!"

Manners, with a disconsolate glance at Monty Lowther, opened the door and entered, with the other eight trailing behind him. There was a rush on the part of the crowd to see in, but Levison, the last to enter, closed the door abruptly.

"They needn't worry!" scoffed Racke. "Tom Merry will let 'em off lightly enough; he'll scarcely touch his blessed pals! If it had been some of us—"

"Shut up!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "And listen!"

In grinning silence, the crowd of excited fellows strained their ears to catch the sounds of all that went on within the new captain's study.

CHAPTER 6.

Whacked!

TOM MERRY was standing on the hearthrug when the nine culprits filed in.

If they were looking uncomfortable, Tom Merry was looking doubly so. He did not relish the job on hand at all.

Levison closed the door. There was an awkward silence for a moment or so.

"Ahem!" coughed Monty Lowther.

"Er—here we are," murmured Blake.

"Yaas, heah we are, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

Tom shifted from one foot to the other. He coloured.

"Hem! Thanks for coming," he said awkwardly. "That is, I should say—er—so here you are!"

Talbot smiled. He was the coolest of the party.

"Hang it," he exclaimed cheerfully, "you look a jolly sight more worried than we do! Cheer up, old man!"

"And—er—if you don't mind, what about getting on with the job and getting it over?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Hear, hear!" grinned Herries.

Tom smiled faintly.

"Oh, certainly!" He crossed to the table, where the ashplant was lying, and picked it up doubtfully. Nine pairs of eyes were fixed on it uneasily.

"You've not had much practice, old boss," murmured Manners. "Don't lay it on thicker than you think, or anything like that, will you? You don't mind my mentioning it?"

Tom grasped the ashplant gingerly. He glanced at the culprits. Talbot was smiling. Suddenly Tom's awkwardness vanished.

"Look here, you chaps," he said frankly, "you know as well as I do that I hate having to do this—"

"So do we," said Digby, with a wry grin.

"But I've got to do it," went on Tom candidly, "Duty before friendship, and all that sort of thing! If you chaps weren't my pals, I shouldn't worry so much. But as it is, I can't favour you, even to the extent of laying it on lightly. Scrapping with Grammarians is barred—although I've done it myself often enough in the past. In fact, I've been licked for it myself by old Kildare. I'm in his shoes now, so must carry out my duties as if I were Kildare. There'll be no ill-feeling, I hope—"

"Oh, no, deah boy! Wathah not!"

"Good! Now, who's first?"

There was no eagerness displayed. But after a moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped forward.

"Cawwy on, deah boy!" he said uneasily.

"Touch your toes, Gussy!"

Very gingerly Arthur Augustus touched his patent-leather toes.

"I'm weawin' wathah a toppin' pair of bags, deah boy!" he exclaimed anxiously. "You won't be weckless with them, I twust!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other culprits roared. The sound of their laughter penetrated the door, and Racke gave a sneer.

"Listen to 'em laughing!" he grunted. "What did I tell you? Tom Merry's letting them off altogether, if you ask me—"

But the next sound that issued from the study, breaking in on the cad of the Shell's words, soon showed the listening crowd that Racke was wrong!

"Yawooooooooop!"

It was a fiendish yell, and it was clearly in the voice of the swell of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry, as Manners had pointed out, was not at all expert in the use of the ashplant. A seasoned prefect knew exactly how hard to strike to inflict the requisite punishment; but Tom Merry did not and he had "laid it on" a good deal harder than he had intended.

Arthur Augustus was a fellow who knew how to take his medicine under ordinary circumstances; but as the ashplant fell across his tightly-stretched and elegant trousers, he gave a wild yell and straightened himself with a jerk.

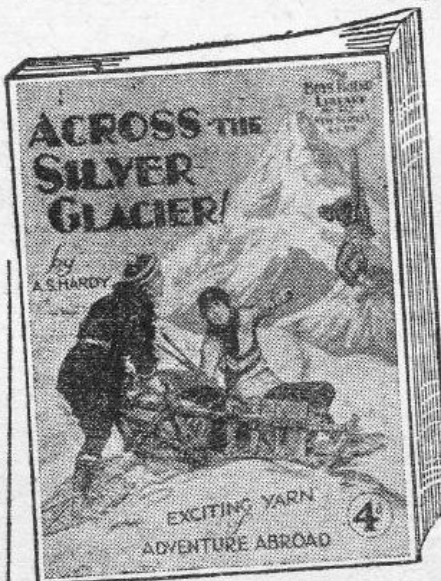
The swell of St. Jim's danced wildly.

Tom Merry stared at him in dismay.

"I—I'm awfully sorry, Gussy, old man!" gasped Tom.

(Continued on next page.)

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"I'd no idea I'd hit as hard as that!"

"Well, you did, deah boy! Oh! I fancy my twousahs must be neahly wuined, too! Hewwies, old man, pway have a look and see if my twousahs are tewwibly damaged!"

But there were distinctly uneasy looks on the faces of the juniors now.

"I say, Tom, you wouldn't like a bit of practice on a cushion before you start on us?" suggested Monty Lowther anxiously.

"It's all right," said Tom. "I've got the idea of it now, I think. I shan't hit so hard next time."

"Suah, deah boy?"

"Oh, quite!"

But it was very nervously that Arthur Augustus again touched his toes.

Swish, swish!

"That better, Gussy?" inquired Tom.

"Ow! Y-yaas! Bettah; but pwetty wotten, deah boy! I twust that is all!"

"Yes, I think that'll do," nodded Tom. "Next, please!"

Talbot stepped forward, and touched his toes.

Swish, swish, swish!

They were not light blows. Tom was grim in his resolve not to favour the culprits because they were his friends. He had a strict sense of duty—rather too strict, in the opinion of his chums just now! But Talbot took his medicine without flinching, and grinned as he straightened himself.

"Good!" he said critically. "Just about Kildare's strength."

"That's fine!" said Tom. "At least—er——"

"Don't trouble to apologise, old hoss!" chuckled Talbot. And Manners stepped forward for his turn.

One after another the remainder touched their toes in front of the new captain. Tom heaved a sigh of relief when at last he had finished. He tossed the ashplant into a corner.

"Thank goodness that's over!"

"Hear, hear!" growled Blake. "Ow!"

"No ill-feeling, of course, you chaps?" exclaimed Tom.

"Oh, rather not!"

Arthur Augustus adjusted his celebrated eyeglass gravely.

"No ill-feeling whatevah, deah boy!" he said earnestly.

"It has been wathah a painful visit for us, of course; but dutay is dutay, we all wealise. But I must congwatulate you on your biceps, Tom Mewwy. That first pwactise stwoke could only have been administahed by a vewy fine set of biceps."

The swell of St. Jim's turned to the door and limped out into the passage, followed by the rest. He limped down the stairs, with the other eight juniors trailing after him through the crowd of onlookers. A great shout of laughter rang out. Along the passage Knox could be seen, a wide grin on his sallow face.

"They've been licked all right!" gasped Hammond. "Oh, what a scream! Licked by their own giddy chum!"

"Shut up!" roared Blake, glaring at Hammond fiercely.

"It's not funny!"

"Sorry! Our mistake!" chuckled Hammond.

The unhappy nine tramped down the stairs, with the laughter of their schoolfellows ringing in their ears.

It would certainly be a long while before they heard the last of their licking at the hands of the youthful new captain of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7. The Uninvited Guests!

"SUPPER!"

It was Aubrey Racke who gave that exclamation. And there was a very thoughtful look upon the face of the cad of the Shell as he made it.

Racke and Crooke and Mellish were seated in Study No. 7 in the Shell passage. The three had just returned from watching the ignominious exit from Tom Merry's study of the unfortunate nine who had been the first to fall a victim to the new captain's authority.

Racke & Co. had been very much amused by that little entertainment. But now their smiles had gone, and were replaced by frowns.

It was supper time. They were feeling hungry. They loathed the idea of cocoa and "doorsteps" in Hall for supper. But they had no cash to purchase anything more palatable from Dame Taggles' little shop under the elms.

Hence their thoughtful frowns.

"Supper!" repeated Racke. He jingled threepence in his pocket gloomily. Threepence would not go very far!

As a rule, Racke was very plentifully supplied with funds. But he was reckless with his money, too, and so even the son of the War-time profiteer sometimes found

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himself on the rocks, in the same way as less wealthy fellows.

"My hat!" It was Crooke who gave that sudden ejaculation. His face had lit up. "I've got a wheeze!"

"To scrounge a decent supper?" inquired Mellish eagerly.

Crooke nodded.

"Yes; I heard the fags talking on the stairs just now. It's young Frayne's birthday, or something, and the kids are celebrating it with a spread in the Third Form-room. Let's invite ourselves."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Racke. The idea of "inviting" himself and his friends to the fags' feast tickled his fancy.

"Good! We'll join the giddy feast!"

He jumped to his feet, and Mellish and Crooke, both grinning, followed suit.

"We'll want a few more," said Racke thoughtfully. "The kids are sure to cut up rough, and there are too many of 'em for us three to keep in their place. Let's collect some of the other chaps."

"He, he, he! That's the ticket!" sniggered Mellish.

Five minutes later Racke & Co. were heading for the fags' quarters. They were not alone. With them were Gore and Lennox and Scrope. Baggy Trimble, having heard what was in the wind, had also tacked himself on to the party. There was a gleeful look on the face of the fat Fourth-Former as he scuttled at Racke's heels. The prospect of forcing the fags to stand treat was one that appealed to Baggy's particular style of humour—as it did to the rest of the precious party.

The seven uninvited guests halted, grinning, outside the Third Form-room, and Racke kicked open the door without the formality of a knock.

"What the dickens—"

The exclamation was in Wally D'Arcy's voice.

The room was filled with fags, most of them gathered round the table, which was piled with delicacies. All the funds of the Third had been pooled to provide the spread in honour of Joe Frayne's birthday, and it was a really noble feast that was spread out before the greedy eyes of Racke and his cronies.

Racke strode into the room, with the other grinning Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows at his heels. Gore closed the door and turned the key.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Reggie Manners.

The fags had been gathering round the festive board, about to tackle the feast. But at this startling intrusion they jumped to their feet, with indignation and dismay upon their faces.

"What do you want?" demanded Wally D'Arcy wrathfully, glaring at Racke & Co.

"Clear out!" squeaked several of the fags together.

Racke chuckled.

"It's all right, kids!" he grinned. "Nothing to get worried about!"

"We've come to join the giddy birthday party, that's all," explained Mellish blandly.

"We knew you'd be glad to see us," added Crooke, with a chuckle. "You are, aren't you? You know, it's a bit of an honour for a lot of grubby little bounders like you to have Shell and Fourth chaps at your spread."

"Hear, hear!" sniggered Trimble.

But though Baggy agreed that it was an honour he and his companions were bestowing upon the Third, the Third-Formers did not seem to see the point at all. Wally's face went red and wrathful.

"Well, of all the cheek!" he panted. "You rotters! Clear out!"

"That's not the way to talk to your guests, young Wally!" said Scrope reprovingly.

"Ha, ha, ha! No!" chuckled Racke.

"But you aren't our guests!" shrieked Joe Frayne. "We never asked you to come!"

"Well, we've come, anyway!" said Mellish blandly.

"Oh crumbs!" muttered Hobbs unhappily. "I—I say, somebody go and fetch a prefect and have 'em turned out!"

One of the fags darted for the door. He pulled at the handle, and Gore chuckled. He had the key in his pocket, and at sight of the fag's face, when he found that the door was locked, the burly bully broke into a roar of laughter. He gripped the squealing Third-Former by the collar and swung him away from the door.

"Bad luck, kid!" he grinned. "No exit!"

"Come on and make yourselves at home, you chaps!" exclaimed Racke. "Sit down and pile in. We're the guests of honour, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the seven uninvited guests drew up chairs to the table, with grinning faces.

"You cads!" roared Wally.

The leader of the Third had clenched his fists, as had some of the others. But, though Wally had plenty of spirit, he knew that it was useless to attempt to eject the new

arrivals by force. Seven big fellows were more than a match for a score of fags, even though one of them was Baggy Trimble.

The faces of the fags were a picture of consternation and fury and dismay. But they were helpless. They stood speechless with wrath as Racke & Co. drew plates before them and began to help themselves cheerfully to the good things.

"I think I'll sample that rabbit-pie," remarked Racke. "It looks good!"

"Pass the sardines, Gore, old man!" chuckled Crooke.

"After you with those kippers, Mellish, old chap!" exclaimed Baggy Trimble, his fat face wreathed in smiles and his mouth fairly watering.

"You—you cads!" panted Curly Gibson.

Racke turned a bland face to the infuriated Third-Formers.

"Sit down, kids!" he said hospitably, with a wave of his hand. "Make yourselves at home! As long as you don't eat too much, there'll be enough for you all, I dare say. We don't mind sitting down with fags, do we, you chaps?"

"Oh, no!" said Gore gravely, helping himself to a liberal helping of apple-tart. "We're not proud. Let the kids join us."

"But it's our feed!" howled Joe Frayne.

"Chuck the rotters out!" gasped Wally D'Arcy, his wrath surging over, causing him to forget discretion for the moment.

He clenched his fists and hurled himself at Racke.

The cad of the Shell grinned, and reached out a long arm, grasping the infuriated fag by the collar. With his other

hand he dealt Wally a stinging box on the ear, that sent the leader of the Third spinning against the wall.

"That'll teach you to be polite to guests, kid," said Racke calmly.

Wally, nursing his injured ear, glared at Racke, with speechless fury. But he did not renew the attack, and the other fags, who had looked for a moment as though they would back up their leader, fell back. Racke & Co. were too strong to be attacked by their unwilling hosts.

"After you with the pickles!" sniggered Baggy Trimble.

"These sardines are good!" exclaimed Mellish. "Try 'em, Racke, old man!"

"I will!" said Racke, and helped himself to a dozen.

With a rattle of knives and forks the invaders got to work on the delicacies, while the furious, helpless fags watched their feast vanishing beneath their very eyes.

"Don't you kids want any grub?" asked Crooke, in affected surprise.

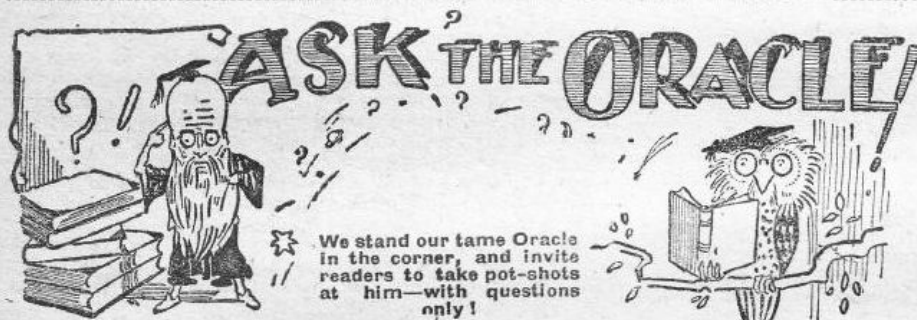
"On second thoughts," cut in Racke, glancing over the rapidly vanishing feast, "I think the kids ought to wait till we've finished. It's only polite of them. And it seems to me that the grub won't last long if they start tackling it. They can wait."

"But you won't leave us anything!" wailed one of the fags, very near to tears.

"Oh, we shall," said Racke carelessly. "A little, anyway. Enough to be good for you; it's not good for kids like you to tuck in just before going to bed!"

"Rather not!" sniggered Baggy Trimble, helping himself to the last kipper.

(Continued on next page.)

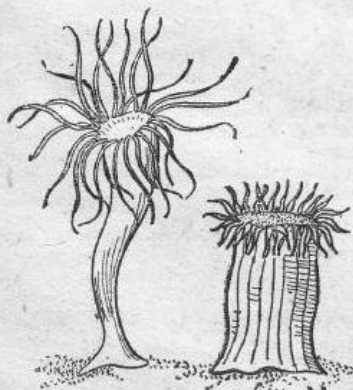


Q. What is a sea-anemone?

A. One might describe it as a living sea-flower, Stanley Cutler. The anemone—pronounced an-em-on-e, in four syllables—is found in many seas and reaches its most beautiful form in tropic waters. It is a living creature, and in some species can move slowly from place to place on the seabed. Invariably the anemone lives where strong currents bear along to it the food it needs; some kinds of sea-flowers can actually suck down oysters and mussels, so strong are they. Various sea-anemones are fitted with stinging cells, and some attach themselves to hermit crabs and other creatures instead of to rocks or coral.

Q. Where is Wimpole Street?

A. In the West End of London. Like Harley Street, it is noted for the residence there of fashionable doctors and the



Flowers that bloom on the bed of the ocean—sea-anemones.

highly trained specialists of the medical and surgical professions.

Q. What is "en famille"?

A. This is French, "Top of Second Form," and not Greek as you appear to suppose. It means at home, or among one's family. No doubt your uncle was trying to play up to your school knowledge when he told you to drift along one night when he would be dining *en famille*. Sorry to hear he gave you no "pease" pudding with the "roast veal." Oh, and by the way, "Top of Second Form," what's the chap who sits in the last place of your class like, anyway?

Q. What is the Dundreary?

A. Long side whiskers, G. C. B., worn without a beard. The name was derived from a character in an old comedy by Taylor, entitled: "Our American Cousin." These kind of whiskers became very popular in Victorian times and were worn to the side of the face. No doubt, if they were allowed to grow long enough, this species of facial spinach came in useful for wear as a scarf, or for tying on the merry old "boater" in windy weather. It was as well to shake the whiskers out before going to bed lest any impudent sparrows had nested in them during the day!

Q. Where do fishermen wear red?

A. At Volendam, a fishing village in Holland.

Q. What is Burlington House?

A. This, "Two Brothers," is a building in London used for the Royal Academy's annual exhibition of paintings, sculptures, etc. In winter there is usually an exhibition of "old masters," and last winter Dutch paintings were shown there. Burlington House is also the headquarters of the British Academy and British Association.

Q. What is a Mongoose?

A. An animal common in the East and often about the size of a household cat and with the body of a weasel. Many of the species live on eggs, rats, snakes, mice and lizards, and do not object to birds and other diet when available. A post-mortem held on one mongoose that met an untimely end on an Indian railway line, revealed that it had made a very hearty supper off a wasp's nest! Many a time on my travels during the last seventy years or so, I have seen

snake-charmers produce a tame mongoose and set it to attack a serpent. In my experience, the mongoose has always won the battle by its lightning speed and dexterity in getting its teeth into the snake's skull. A mongoose is protected against snake bite by this quickness and its unusually thick hair and skin. But there is no truth in the old travellers' tale that when bitten, it hurries away to some jungle herb that it knows about, which it eats as an antidote to the poison.

I hope the above answers your question, Walter Geo; and please don't trouble to send the gift of dormice as you threaten.

Q. What is the Occident?

A. A term applied to the West, "Old Reader," in the same way as Orient is used to refer to the East.

Q. What is a warming-pan?

A. It is a flat receptacle with a lid, usually made of brass, and with a long wooden handle. Its use in days gone by was to warm a bed before it was occupied.

To do this, live coals were put in the brass pan and the lid closed down; then the pan was moved about in the bed by means of the handle. Nowadays warming-pans are still popular as ornaments, and you may often see one hanging up in the hall of a house.



Dundrearies—long side-whiskers that were popular in Victorian days.

Wally and Curly, who had lovingly cooked those kippers, watched the last of them vanish with looks of utter anguish. "These kippers are prime, kids!" said Baggy loftily. "You'd better cook me some more!"

"Go and eat coke, you—you fat beast!" hooted Curly, beside himself with rage.

Baggy frowned majestically, and rose to his feet. He made a grab at Curly, but the Third-Former eluded him. "You little boulder!" growled Baggy. "I've a good mind to wallop you!" He made a clumsy rush at Curly. "I'm going to teach you manners, young Gibson!"

But Curly-Gibson was far too quick on his feet for the fat Fourth-Former. Curly sprang aside again as Baggy's fat hand clutched at him, and the Third-Former put out a nimble foot.

The next moment Baggy Trimble had tripped over it and gone flying. He crashed on the floor, with a howl, and the whole room seemed fairly to shake under the terrific impact.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke & Co. roared. Baggy limped painfully to his feet, bursting with fury.

"Oh, really, you chaps, it's nothing to laugh at!" he panted hotly. "I say, catch that little beast for me someone!"

"Anything to oblige!" sniggered Mellish, and jumped to his feet.

There was a look of alarm on Curly's face. He retreated against the wall and put up his fists pluckily. Mellish, grinning, caught hold of the fag's shoulder and held him at arm's length.

"Let him go!" shouted Wally desperately. "Buck up, you chaps! Don't let the cads—"

At that moment there was a knock on the door.

"Bed-time, you kids!"

It was the voice of Tom Merry.

The handle rattled as the new captain of St. Jim's tried to open the door. He banged upon it sharply.

"Open this door!"

Aubrey Racke's face had gone a peculiar colour. There was dismay on the faces of the invaders as they jumped nervously to their feet.

"Oh crumbs!" muttered Racke. "It's Tom Merry!"

CHAPTER 8. Paying The Piper!

"OPEN this door!"

"I—I say," stammered Baggy Trimble, "better open it, you know!"

"It's only Tom Merry, anyway!" muttered Crooke. But his face wore an uneasy look.

Tom Merry had not been captain long. But he had already shown himself a stern disciplinarian, if the whacking of his own chums was anything to go by! Though he was only a junior like themselves, he had been invested with the powers of a prefect, and Racke & Co. knew that under the present circumstances he would use those powers to the limit!

"Open this door!" cried Tom again angrily.

There was a triumphant exclamation from Wally.

"Now what about it, you beasts?" he hooted.

Gore took the key from his pocket and glanced at Racke.

"Better open it, I suppose!" muttered Racke.

The raiders were caught—there was no doubt about that. And the best they could do was to put a bold front on it, and trust to Tom Merry's lack of experience as a prefect to pull them through. Gore crossed to the door and unlocked it. It swung open, and the figure of Tom Merry appeared in the doorway.

"Why did you kids have this door locked?" he demanded. Then he gave an exclamation as he saw Racke & Co.

"Great pip! What the dickens—"

"Hallo!" remarked Racke coolly. "We've just been joining a fags' party!" He turned to his companions. "Come on, you chaps! The kids have got to go to bed now, so we'd better go."

Thrusting his hands into his pockets, Racke sauntered towards the door, and his companions, taking their cue from him, followed. At the door Racke turned.

"Thanks awfully for the supper, kids!"

There was a puzzled look on Tom's face.

He could not credit that the Third-Formers had willingly invited Racke & Co. to their party. That there was something "fishy" afoot he felt convinced. He knew Aubrey Racke!

"Half a minute, Racke!" he said sharply. "Is everything all right, you kids?" he added, turning to the fags.

"No, it's not!" roared Wally.

Racke gave Wally a look that was intended to frighten the fag into silence. But it failed in its purpose.

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"They came here—we never asked them—and bagged a lot of our grub!" went on Wally hotly. "They—"

"Shut up, you little sneak!" hissed Crooke.

"Sneak be blown!" snorted D'Arcy minor. "They jolly well raided our spread, that's what they did, the rotten cads!"

Tom Merry's face had gone dark.

"What have you got to say to that, Racke?" he demanded sternly.

Racke tried to feign surprise.



"Well, I'm blessed!" he ejaculated. "The little fibber! He knows jolly well we were invited!"

"Fibber yourself!" panted Wally.

Tom turned to the fags.

"Did any of you kids invite these chaps to your spread?"

"No!" howled the fags in unison.

Racke shrugged.

"My mistake, I suppose, then," he said calmly. "I thought we were invited."

Tom smiled dryly.

"You are invited now, anyway," he said curtly, "to step upstairs to my study!"

"What for?" demanded Racke.

"For a licking!" said Tom Merry grimly.

Racke tried to bluster, but Tom cut him short.

"Come on, all of you!" he said. "Upstairs! This sort of thing is going to be stopped now I'm captain!"

He turned and strode from the room.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Mellish.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wally. "Serve you jolly well right!"
 Racke & Co. glared at him. Then they glanced at one another.

They were furious, but there was no help for it. It was maddening to them to be summoned for a licking by a fellow junior, but they dared not attempt to defy Tom Merry. He might be only a junior, but his powers were those of the captain of St. Jim's, and if they attempted to

For nearly a minute the onlookers could scarcely glimpse the ball among the swarm of footballers near the goal-mouth. Then it came shooting straight up over the heads of the players within the penalty area. A lithe figure sprang high—and the next moment the ball had shot into the net from the head of Harry Wharton (See Chapter 12.)



refuse to be licked, it would only mean being brought up for judgment before the prefects, in which case a far worse licking would be the result.

"Hang Tom Merry!" muttered Racke venomously. "The silly, swanking ass! He's out to show his power now, hang him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the delighted fags.

"Come on," said Mellish uneasily. "Better not keep the cad waiting!"

The invaders left the Third Form room looking furious and wearing hangdog expressions, and the jeers and derisive laughter of Wally & Co. added considerably to their discomfiture. As they vanished, Wally turned to the remains of the feast.

There was quite a lot left, thanks to the timely arrival of Tom Merry. There was no time for the fags to enjoy their interrupted feed now, but the good things they had laid in would taste just as good on the following evening.

"Just time for a tart or two each, though," chuckled Wally. "I wonder how those beasts are feeling now?"

The "beasts" were not feeling at all happy.

Racke was looking decidedly sickly as he tapped on Tom Merry's door. It was not only the prospect of the coming licking that was worrying him. The story was sure to spread through the school, and Racke felt that it was terribly ignominious to be licked by Tom Merry, a fellow junior. He had laughed at Blake & Co. for having gone through just what was in store for him now.

"Come in!"

Tom Merry's voice was decidedly grim as he bade the seven supper-raiders enter. They filed in, Baggy Trimble bringing up the rear, and fairly quaking.

"I—I say, Tom Merry, old chap!" squeaked Baggy, blinking at the youthful captain nervously. "Don't be a beast, you know! We juniors ought to hang together, if you ask me—"

"I didn't ask you," said Tom curtly. He went to the cupboard and took out the ashplant. "Yo' first, Racke. Bend over!"

"Look here!" said Racke, with a sickly grin. "I know you're skipper now, but, hang it all, a joke's only a joke, and you're only a junior yourself really. You've been in lots of rags yourself—"

"Bend over!"

Aubrey Racke gave Tom a venomous look, and bent over. Swish!

"Yarooooop!"

Swish, swish, swish!

"Oh! Ow! Yoop!"

At each swish of the ashplant, the dust rose from Racke's trousers, and the cad of the Shell gave a painful yelp.

Tom Merry was not sparing the rod by any means. He was laying it on hard, and gave six of the best to each of the offenders. When at last he came to Baggy Trimble, Baggy gave a gasp of fear.

"I—I say, Tom Merry, be a pal, you know! You know I've always been a good pal to you—"

"Bend over!"

Baggy bent over. He saw that argument was useless. Whack, whack, whack!

The ashplant descended with relentless force. Baggy jumped and roared, but Tom did not toss the ashplant aside until he had laid on the appointed six. Then he crossed to the door and flung it open.

"You can clear!" he said curtly.

With venomous looks and painful gasps, the unhappy seven filed from Tom's study, and along the Sixth Form passage to the stairs.

"Ow! The cad!" gasped Gore.

"Groooooh! I'm hurt!" wailed Baggy.

"Oh, shut up, you fat toad!" snapped Racke. "D'you think you're the only one?"

"Oh, really, Racke!"

At the end of the Shell passage Racke halted. A sour grin appeared on his face.

"I know how we can get our own back!" he muttered vindictively.

"I say, that's a bit risky, isn't it—to try anything?" said Mellish uneasily.

"Rats! Not the way I mean! Look here, you chaps, the election is on Monday for the new captain of the junior school!"

Tom Merry had been captain of the junior school. But now that he had been promoted to the captaincy of St. Jim's, the junior post was vacant.

"Well?" growled Crooke.

"Talbot is putting up for it, and so is Figgins of the New House," grinned Racke. "It will be a pretty close thing! But if all of us vote for Figgins, and get all our pals to do the same, it's pretty certain to mean a victory for Figgins!"

"But why do we want Figgins in—a New House rotter?" exclaimed Gore, mystified.

Racke made an impatient gesture.

"Ass! Who cares two hoots about Figgins? But it will make Tom Merry and his pals wild at having a New House man as junior captain. See?"

"Rather!" chuckled Mellish. "Tom Merry & Co. would simply rave!"

"And I bet we can get Figgins in as junior skipper, all right, too," agreed Crooke thoughtfully. "Good!"

And Racke & Co. managed to summon rather twisted grins at the thought of their scheme for levelling the scores against Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 9.

The Junior Election!

GEORGE FIGGINS of the New House glanced at his watch.

"Election in ten minutes!" he remarked.

Figgins was seated in his study, together with his two chums, George Francis Kerr, the Scottish junior, and David Llewellyn Wynn, the Falstaff of the Fourth. It was Monday, and tea was just finished in Figgy's study.

The New House trio were not looking very cheerful.

The vacancy for junior captain caused by Tom Merry's election to the school captaincy, had once again brought hope to Figgins & Co. that the New House might at last come into its own, and provide the junior skipper. Figgins had many times made a bid for that post in the past, loyally supported by the New House. But the New House was a good deal smaller than the School House, and it was not often that anyone but a School House fellow had reigned as junior captain at St. Jim's.

But here was another chance for the New House!

It was unlike Figgins to be pessimistic, as a rule. But both he and his chums had to admit that Talbot of the Shell, supported by the School House voters, seemed to stand a far better chance of being elected to Tom Merry's old post than did George Figgins, even though the New House were solidly behind their candidate.

"Well, you never know, anyway," said Kerr, trying to appear hopeful. "I saw Grundy and Gunn and Wilkins going out of gates just now, so that's three School House votes wasted!"

"Oh, good!" said Figgins.

But Fatty Wynn shook his head.

"That's not a good sign, if you ask me," he remarked sagely. "Grundy is frightfully hot on his House; if he isn't bothering to vote, it's because he feels so jolly sure that Talbot is bound to win the election!"

"I s'pose you're right," grunted Figgy.

"We'd better get along now, hadn't we?" suggested Kerr; and the New House skipper nodded.

Figgins & Co. left the study and went downstairs and out into the quad. A crowd of New House fellows were crossing towards Big Hall, and there was a cheer at sight of George Figgins. That the New House voters were, at any rate, enthusiastic over their candidate could not be doubted! But whether their numbers would be sufficient to ensure his election was a very different matter!

The juniors crowded into Big Hall. Figgins caught sight of Manners and Lowther, and grinned.

"Able to sit down yet?" he inquired cheerfully; and Manners and Lowther went decidedly pink. Their whacking at the hands of Tom Merry was as well known in the New House as in the School House, apparently!

A hum of talk filled Big Hall. Then, as the notes of the school clock came chiming across the quad, three figures stepped on to the dais at the far end of the Hall.

They were Tom Merry, Kildare, and North.

Even now St. Jim's was not quite used to the fact that Tom Merry was a prefect, and there were curious grins on the faces of many of the juniors as he stepped forward and raised his hand for silence.

"Close the doors!" commanded the new school captain; and the doors were shut.

"Now," went on Tom, "as you know, you have to elect a junior skipper. The candidates are Talbot, of the School House, and Figgins, of the New House. Those voting for Talbot raise their hands!"

A forest of hands rose from the crowd, and Kildare and North began the count.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his arm stretched high, glanced round confidently. Among the School House fellows no one doubted that Talbot's victory was assured.

Then D'Arcy's jaw dropped.

A number of School House fellows were standing close by him. And their hands were not raised.

Arthur Augustus could not believe his eyes.

It was inconceivable to the swell of St. Jim's that a School House fellow could be intending to vote for Figgins. He dug one of the non-voters in the ribs.

"Gore, you uttah ass!" whispered Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Put up your hand, you fwabjous idiot! We are voting for Talbot now!"

Gore appeared to be deaf. Breathing hard, the swell of St. Jim's tapped Racke on the shoulder.

"Wacke, put up your hand, you boundah!"

Racke glanced at Arthur Augustus and grinned, and shook his head.

Arthur Augustus gave a gasp.

"Bai Jove! You uttah boundah! You are goin' to vote for Figgay?"

Again Racke grinned. Kildare, from the platform, glanced sharply in the direction of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Silence, there!"

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Arthur Augustus relapsed into an indignant silence. Racke, Crooke, Gore, and Mellish chuckled. Not one of them was voting for the School House candidate—and neither were Baggy Trimble or Scrope or James Lennox. There were several other School House fellows of like kidney who were all grinning at Blake & Co.'s indignant glances, but were obstinately abstaining from registering a vote on behalf of Reginald Talbot.

"The rotters!" gasped Blake.

He realised with dismay that the renegades might be sufficient to turn the tables as regards the result of the election.

Kildare and North spoke to Tom Merry. Evidently they had agreed on the number of votes registered for Talbot of the Shell. Tom Merry stepped forward.

"Hands up, those voting for Figgins!"

"Here goes!" muttered Fatty Wynn, and shot a fat palm into the air.

There was a low exclamation from Figgins.

Figgins & Co. had not noticed that a number of School House fellows had abstained from voting for Talbot. It was with a shock of surprise that Figgins now saw Racke and his cronies raise their hands high on his behalf.

"Great pip!" gasped Figgins. "Look at those merchants! They're voting for me!"

"Great Scott!" A sudden delighted grin spread over Fatty Wynn's ample features. "Hurrah! Looks to me as if they'll win the election for us!"

Despite the glaring faces of their fellow School House juniors, Racke & Co. and their friends kept their hands high, and glared back defiantly at Blake & Co. and the rest of the School House voters.

Kildare and North began to count.

Not a sound was to be heard in Big Hall.

On the platform Tom Merry had been quick to notice the way that Racke and his companions were voting. His face betrayed nothing; but he saw Racke's eyes on him, triumphantly and mocking, and Tom Merry understood. This, clearly, was Racke & Co.'s revenge for their whacking on Saturday!

As captain of St. Jim's, Tom had to be strictly impartial between School House and New House. But as a junior of the School House—which he still was—he could not help but wish eagerly for a School House victory.

But it looked to Tom very much as though a New House victory would result as a consequence of Racke & Co.'s treachery.

Kildare and North finished counting. The two prefects turned to Tom to tell him the result.

"Oh, deah!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced at Monty Lowther unhappily. "I am howwibly afwaid Figgins is goin' to win! Wacke and those othah cads—"

"Silence!" exclaimed Tom Merry, stepping forward to the front of the platform again.

Arthur Augustus broke off. All eyes were turned to Tom Merry.

"I believe we've pulled it off!" breathed Fatty Wynn excitedly to Kerr and Figgins.

"Stop talking, Wynn!" said Tom Merry sharply. Fatty Wynn reddened and lapsed into silence. Tom glanced at the paper on which Kildare had jotted down the figures. "The result of the election," he announced steadily, "is that Figgins is elected junior captain by a majority of five votes."

"Oh crumbs!" muttered Jack Blake in utter dismay.

"Oh deah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I considah—"

But what the swell of St. Jim's considered was unheard. His voice was drowned in the excited, deafening cheer of triumph that echoed to the roof of Big Hall from the joyful New House supporters.

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

"New House for ever!"

The School House fellows listened glumly to the joyful cheers. Blake & Co. glared at Racke & Co. and Racke & Co. grinned back cheerfully. And the New House cheering rose and fell.

Figgins drew a deep breath. His face was radiant.

"Ripping!" he breathed. "Oh, ripping! New House at last! Now we'll show those School House bounders what's what!"

Again Tom Merry held up his hand for silence.

"Dismiss!" he called.

The doors were flung open, and the joyful New House fellows surged out into the quad with Figgins borne shoulder-high in their midst, followed by the disconsolate School House supporters.

"New House for ever!"

There was an odd look on Tom Merry's face as he turned to leave the platform with Kildare and North.

The New House had snatched victory by five votes only. Had Racke & Co. not voted for Figgins, Talbot would have won the election! And that Racke & Co. had voted for

Figgins because of their whacking at Tom's hands, the captain of St. Jim's knew.

Tom Merry had no regrets on that score, at any rate. Racke and his friends had richly deserved their punishment, and had he the power to have his time over again he would have done the same thing, regardless of the result. But there was no doubt that it had been an unfortunate affair from the School House point of view! Owing to that whacking, the New House had won the junior captaincy!

Tom nodded to Kildare and North and turned away up the stairs.

Through the windows as he went up to the Sixth Form passage he could hear faintly the distant shouts of jubilation as George Figgins was carried in triumphant procession across the quad to the New House.

CHAPTER 10.

Figgins' Footer Team!

TAP!

"Come in!"

Tom Merry glanced up from the papers on the table before him to answer the knock that had sounded upon his door. Wildrake of the Fourth entered the study.

It was Wednesday afternoon—two days after the election of Figgins of the New House to the post of junior captain. Wildrake crossed towards Tom Merry and laid a sheaf of foolscap on the table.

"My lines, old hoss," grinned Wildrake.

Tom Merry had been forced to give Wildrake a hundred lines for making too much noise in Hall on the previous day. It was evident from Wildrake's grinning face, however, that the junior from British Columbia bore no malice. On the other hand, Kit Wildrake seemed rather amused at doing lines for Tom Merry of the Shell.

"Thanks!"

Tom glanced casually at the lines and tossed them into the waste-paper basket beside him.

But Wildrake did not turn to go. Instead, he seated himself in a friendly way on the corner of the table. His grin had vanished, and was replaced by rather a grim look. "Seen the board this afternoon?" inquired Wildrake.

"No. What's up?"

"Figgins!" returned Wildrake darkly. "He's up—up the pole!"

Tom was well aware that the School House juniors were intensely chagrined at Figgins' election, so he was not surprised by Wildrake's cryptic remark. Apparently George Figgins had already begun his term of captaincy with some action that had annoyed the School House juniors.

"What's Figgy done?" asked Tom with interest.

"Why, he's stuck up the list of chaps to play against Greyfriars on Saturday," hooted Wildrake, "and there are only four School House men in the team!"

Tom jumped.

"Great pip! Only four?"

"Only four!" affirmed Wildrake, with a snort. "It—it's the giddy limit!" He jumped off the table and banged a fist upon it. "Only four! You're down to play, and Talbot and Gussy and Levison. That's all. All the rest are New House wasters!"

Tom whistled.

When he himself had been junior captain four was the average number of New House men in the junior team. Tom had always tried to be strictly impartial; and, in his opinion, the team had always been made up of the best fellows obtainable. The fact that about seven were usually School House men had nothing to do with it. Had Tom considered that a New House fellow was better than any of those seven he would have put the New House man into the team at the expense of a School House chap without the slightest hesitation.

But the New House had always been thoroughly disaffected with that selection. It was natural for them to be prejudiced in favour of their own men, perhaps, and to think that there were some New House men not usually included in the team who deserved a place in it regularly.

And now that Figgins was captain the New House were to have their way.

But it seemed to Tom that Figgins had been very drastic in cutting down the number of School House representatives to four fellows. Opinions naturally differed at St. Jim's regarding the relative merits of some of the footballers, and Tom would not have expected another fellow necessarily to choose the identical team that he himself would have selected. But how Figgins could imagine that there were only four School House footballers worthy of a place in the team to play Greyfriars on Saturday passed Tom Merry's comprehension.

(Continued on next page.)



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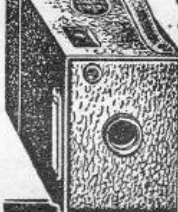
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"The fellows aren't half wild, too, I can tell you!" growled Wildrake disgustedly, and left the study, with gloom written large in his countenance.

Tom sat with a thoughtful frown on his face for some minutes; then he rose and left the study, turning in the direction of the stairs.

He intended to go down to the board and see which were the seven New House fellows Figgins had chosen for his team.

A big crowd was gathered round the board in the Hall.

As Tom approached fags made way for him with a new awe. To the fags particularly Tom Merry appeared a very mighty man indeed nowadays. Even Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows were beginning to realise that they could not afford to make fun of Tom's position as captain of the school, and the friendly chaff that had always greeted his appearance during the first two or three days of his captaincy was now absent.

Tom halted in front of the board. The footer notice in Figgins' sprawling handwriting caught his eyes at once.

Figgins, of course, was one of the New House members of the team. So was Fatty Wynn, the finest goalkeeper in the junior school. Redfern and Kerr, too, were well deserving of their places in the eleven, Tom Merry would have been the first to agree.

But the names of Lawrence and Owen and Pratt, which so disgusted the School House, were ones that Tom himself would never have dreamed of selecting—particularly against such a strong team as Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars.

A silence had fallen on the crowd at Tom's arrival. The chaps were watching him eagerly to see what he thought of Figgins' eleven.

"And he doesn't think much of it, if you ask me!" grunted Blake, who had joined the crowd, with Herries and Digby and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The leader of the Fourth was watching Tom's face.

"Rather not!" growled Dig.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Well, deah boy," exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly, "isn't it a wotten business? Figgay must be off his wockah!"

"I shouldn't have thought even a New House cad would have had the cheek to show such rotten favouritism!" snorted Clive.

"Rats!" said Tom, shaking his head. "Figgy isn't the chap to show favouritism—"

"Then what do you call that?" demanded Kerruish, pointing excitedly at the offending footer list.

Tom shrugged.

"Figgins thinks that's the best team," he said slowly. "I'm sure Figgy wouldn't be so unpatriotic as not to field the best team against Greyfriars—the best team, in his opinion, that is."

"Well, if that's his opinion of the best team, it's not mine!" roared Grundy of the Shell. "I spoke to Figgy yesterday and asked him to put me in; but I wouldn't mind the ass not putting me in if he was putting in a decent team otherwise. But that—that isn't a team! It's a New House circus troupe!"

"Hear, hear!"

It was not often that his fellow-juniors agreed with George Alfred Grundy. They certainly did not agree with his ideas of his own wonderful skill at the noble game of football, for example! But they agreed with him very heartily that Figgins' idea of a team was not theirs.

There was a yell of approval at Grundy's words.

"It's rotten!"

"Greyfriars will wipe up the ground with that team!"

"Absolutely!"

And then there was a sudden abrupt silence. The excited School House juniors turned and stared at the doorway.

Ascending the steps from the quad the lanky, grinning figure of George Figgins himself had come into sight.

CHAPTER 11.

Advice Not Wanted!

"HALLO, hallo!" chuckled Figgins.

The School House juniors glared back at him. Figgins did not seem in the least perturbed by their hostile looks, however. He grinned back at them cheerfully as he entered the Hall.

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"Here he is!" gasped Levison of the Fourth.

"The ass himself!" snorted Herries.

"Figgay, you boundah—"

There was a surge towards the leader of the New House. In a moment he was surrounded, and a look of alarm appeared in Figgins' rugged face. He put up his hands.

"Hands off, you asses!" he exclaimed.

"What about that rotten team?" yelled Bernard Glyn, pointing to the board. "Do you think that collection can lick Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars?"

Figgins nodded coolly.

"Rather!"

Again there was a hostile closing-in around the new junior captain. Tom Merry stepped quickly forward.

"Chuck that, you fellows!" he said sharply. "No ragging here!"

The fellows obeyed, falling back from Figgins sullenly. Clearly, it was in the minds of some of them to give Figgins a very rough handling; but Tom Merry's reputation for firm dealing with unruly individuals was too well known for any of them to risk the wrath of the new captain of St. Jim's.

Blake planted himself in front of Figgins.

"Look here," said Blake wrathfully, "honest, now! Do you really think that's the best team St. Jim's can put up?"

"Yes," said Figgins calmly.

"With Pratt in it?" shrieked Levison.

"Yes," repeated Figgins. "Pratt is on the top of his form. He's playing a great game. He's taking Lowther's place. Lowther's good as a rule, I know, but he's off form at present, in my opinion. So Pratt plays on Saturday!"

"What about Lawrence?" cried Manners wrathfully.

"You play Lawrence—and you've dropped Blake, and me, and—"

"I think Lawrence plays better footer, you see," said Figgins cheerfully. "He's never had much of a show till now, and you School House asses don't know his form."

"Rats!" growled Herries.

Figgy grinned calmly, and turned to Tom Merry.

"I came over to see you," he observed.

"Come upstairs," said Tom, and the new junior captain followed the new captain of St. Jim's up the

stairs, followed by angry glares and mutters.

In the Sixth Form passage Tom closed the door of his study, and turned to Figgins. Figgins chuckled.

"I seem to have offended the School House," he said cheerily, sitting down in the chair that Tom pushed forward.

"Yes," nodded Tom, with a faint smile, sitting down at the table, and tapping restless fingers on his blotting-pad.

"You wanted to see me? What's the trouble?"

"There are one or two chaps I want you to drop on for cutting footer practice this afternoon—School House men," Figgins explained. "I've put Monteith on to the New House absentees, of course. Here's the list. Trimble—Gore—"

"Don't bother to read it out," Tom took the list and laid it on the table. "I'll see to these chaps!"

Figgins rose. But Tom motioned him back into his seat.

"Half a minute! About this team to play Greyfriars. As you know, the School House fellows aren't very pleased with your selection."

"I rather thought they wouldn't be!" grinned Figgins.

"Of course," he added quickly, "as school captain, you are impartial—"

"Of course!" cut in Tom. "But, as captain of games—"

"I'm junior captain of games, old hoss!"

"But I'm school captain," Tom reminded him quietly.

"And as such I would like to discuss your team for Saturday with you. I'll tell you to begin with that I don't think for a moment that you have allowed favouritism to enter into it. I've no doubt at all that you consider that team on the board to be the best team possible."

"I do," rejoined Figgins, rather curtly.

"If so, then I shan't interfere," said Tom, with a worried frown. "But I've had a good deal more experience than you in spotting footer form, and candidly I don't think you have made the best possible selection."

Figgins went very red.

"Oh!"

"Blake and Lowther are both hot men, Figgy. And I candidly think that both Kangaroo and Clive deserve a

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While Tom Merry strained furiously at his bonds, George Figgins' Etons were unceremoniously removed and a set of ancient footer togs were substituted. Then, after one of the masked attackers had been to work with a paint-brush, a large fool's-cap was jammed on the hapless junior's head. (See Chapter 13.)

place against Greyfriars more than either Pratt or Owen." He glanced at Figgins quickly. "Mind you, this is only advice—"

"Thanks!" grinned Figgins.

"You don't agree with me?"

Figgins shook his head.

"Sorry, old hoss—no! I've thought it out jolly hard, and I like my selection better than yours. Pratt and Owen, for example, have never had much of a show, but they're hot men. Pratt's been playing a ripping game lately."

Tom shrugged.

"Very well. I don't interfere, if you are determined to stick to your team. Kildare never interfered with me when I was junior skipper, and so I shan't interfere with you. But I'll tell you that Kildare sometimes gave me useful advice—and I generally followed it."

"Sorry," repeated Figgins, "but I'm not altering that team. I know you mean well; but unless you absolutely order me, as skipper, to alter my selection, it stands."

"As I've said, I don't mean to interfere at all," said Tom shortly. "In junior games I play under you—"

Figgins grinned.

"That's fine!" He rose to his feet. "I wonder if you'd mind coming downstairs with me, by the way? I don't fancy getting mobbed, and it looks as if I might, without a blessed prefect by me!"

"Certainly," said Tom; and the two left the study together.

Figgins' fears were not without foundation. There were very dark looks cast in the direction of the New House leader as he descended to the hall. But the sight of Tom Merry accompanying him prevented any hostile demonstration. At the top of the steps leading to the quad Figgins nodded cheerily to Tom, and went off in the direction of the New House.

As Tom turned to go back to his study, Mannors and Lowther and Jack Blake & Co. hurried up to him.

"Well?" exclaimed Mannors. "What has Figgins got to say?"

"He won't alter the team, if that's what you mean," Tom answered. "I suggested an alteration; but he's standing by his guns."

"But you're captain of the school—you could make him change the team!" snorted Blake.

Tom shook his head.

"I'm not interfering! Kildare never interfered with me, and so it's not fair for me to interfere with Figgins."

"But in a mattah like this—"

"With a licking from Greyfriars a giddy cert—"

"No!" repeated Tom; and there was determination in his voice. "I'm not interfering!"

"But Tom Mewwy, deah boy—"

Tom cut him short with a gesture. He was not disposed to argue the point.

A couple of Third-Formers were passing in from the quad. Tom called to them. They hurried up.

"Buzz up to my study, kids, and get tea ready for seven," he said. "You'll find some eggs in the cupboard. You can cook a couple each for yourselves while you're about it."

The fags vanished gleefully up the stairs. Tom took the swell of St. Jim's by the arm.

"Don't look so worried, Gussy!" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "Figgins is junior skipper now, and he's got to have a fair deal! And we may lick Greyfriars on Saturday even now. Come on upstairs and have tea with me, you chaps."

Mannors and Lowther and Blake & Co. were only too ready to accept the invitation. But there were rather gloomy looks upon the faces of the captain's guests as they ascended the stairs.

They had feared from the first that Figgins of the New House would make anything but a good skipper from their point of view! And their fears were being realised very soon.

Could they have chosen Figgins' fate just then it would have been something lingering, with boiling oil in it!

CHAPTER 12.

The Greyfriars Match!

DURING the next few days, George Figgins took care to keep clear of the School House!

He realised only too well that a visit there might not have been exactly healthy! Though he was convinced that the team he had selected to play Greyfriars was the best he could have chosen, he realised that the School House disagreed so strongly that they would have been only too glad of a chance to argue the point—with fists!

The New House fellows, on the other hand, were jubilant. They considered that the chance had at last come for them to prove their worth! That they would be capable of showing themselves better men than their School House rivals, they never doubted.

Meetings between New House and School House juniors were liable to become very heated during the days between Wednesday and Saturday! Scraps between the rival factions grew increasingly frequent, and it was seldom that Tom Merry, or Kildare, or North, or any of the other prefects, went into the quad without having to scatter a few lines among warlike juniors.

Saturday came, crisp and fine. The Greyfriars team arrived by motor-coach before lunch, and all looked very fit and cheery, and dangerous, too!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" boomed Bob Cherry, as the Saints shook hands with their visitors. "Here we are again!"

Harry Wharton and Tom Merry exchanged a hearty grip. "All your chaps fit?" asked the Greyfriars skipper. "We happen to be bang on top of our form, so I warn you you'd better look out!"

Tom Merry grinned. "I dare say we'll manage to give you a good run for your money," he retorted. "You know things have been happening here lately. For one thing, we've got a new junior skipper."

"My hat!" exclaimed Wharton. "Who is it?" "Figgins," replied Tom. He coloured slightly as he went on. "You see, I—er—well, it's like this. I've been made captain of the school."

"Wha-a-at?" The gasps of incredulity that arose from the Greyfriars footballers brought grins to the faces of the Saints.

St. Jim's, by this time, was getting almost accustomed to the novelty of Tom Merry's position. At the first time of hearing, however, that piece of information was startling, and it had fairly taken Harry Wharton & Co.'s breath away.

"G—great pip!" stammered Bob Cherry, when he had recovered his voice. "Did my aged ears deceive me, or—"

"It's quite true, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a chuckle. And the swell of St. Jim's proceeded to recount the sensational events of the past few days that had led to his being elected captain of the school.

Even when he had finished the almost incredulous looks on the faces of the Greyfriars fellows had not entirely disappeared. The idea took some getting used to!

"Well, my only Aunt Sempronia!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Congrattlers, Merry, old man! How does it feel to be lord of all you survey?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Tom Merry's face was scarlet as the Greyfriars men pressed round him to offer him their congratulations.

"My hat!" remarked Sampson Quincy Ifley Field, otherwise known as Squiff, as the party moved towards the School House. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to make the same suggestion to our jolly old Head when we get back?"

Whereat there were many chuckles.

In the afternoon, when Harry Wharton & Co. took the field, there was a springy confidence in their manner that caused the faces of the juniors at St. Jim's to grow longer still with forebodings of disaster.

But the New House fellows were in high spirits. With a team that contained no less than seven New House men, how could St. Jim's help but win, they asked.

"They'll be grinning on the other side of their faces before this match is over!" growled Manners gloomily, watching a cheery group of New House men on the touchline.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warmly. "Oh deah! I am afwaid St. Jim's is in for a fearful twouncin'!"

Kildare was refereeing the match. He sounded his whistle, calling the players to their positions, and Arthur Augustus moved away from the point on the touchline where Manners and Lowther were standing with their chums, and took up his position for the kick-off.

Pheeeep! The whistle shrilled sharply. The match had begun!

"Goal!" "Hurrah!" Greyfriars had scored, and the little group of supporters

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of the visiting team, who had come over with the eleven in the motor-coach, yelled delightedly.

It was Bob Cherry, of Greyfriars, who had planted a cannon-ball into the net—it seemed like a cannon-ball, at any rate, to Fatty Wynn in goal. The fat New House goalie scooped the ball disconsolately out of the net, and returned it to midfield.

The game had been in progress for a quarter of an hour, and already the New House fellows watching the game were looking considerably less confident. For most of the play had been in the St. Jim's half of the field—in fact, it was only by the wonderful goal-keeping of David Llewellyn Wynn that St. Jim's had been saved from having half a dozen goals scored against them already.

Pheeeep! The whistle sounded, and Tom Merry, at centre-forward, tapped the ball across to Figgins.

There was no doubt that Figgins was playing a good game that afternoon. He got away with the leather at his toes, dancing round the Greyfriars forward who tackled him, and flashed down the field with the St. Jim's forward line in perfect formation. A half rushed to tackle him, and Figgins slipped the ball across to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, on the wing. But the swell of St. Jim's, though he took the pass neatly in his stride, was forced over the touchline by the Greyfriars left-back. The throw-in gave the ball to Greyfriars, and Harry Wharton, the greyfriars skipper, took a flashing pass from Frank Nugent, and raced off into the St. Jim's half with the ball at his toes.

Lawrence, at right-half, tackled Wharton, but was left standing. The Greyfriars captain passed to Nugent, who dribbled smartly round Kerr and flashed the ball back to Harry Wharton.

"Buck up, St. Jim's!" "On the ball, Greyfriars!"

Talbot, whom Figgins had put at right-back, tried gallantly to stem the Greyfriars rush, but he was only able to get the ball out of play for a corner kick.

St. Jim's held its breath as the ball went whizzing in towards the crowd at the goalmouth.

Fatty Wynn, every nerve and muscle on the alert, got a fist to the ball and punched it far out, and there was a yell of approval from the St. Jim's fellows on the touchline. But a Greyfriars half got possession, and once more the ball was sent crashing into the swarm of footballers near the goalmouth.

For nearly a minute the onlookers could scarcely glimpse the ball. Then it came shooting straight up over the heads of the footballers within the penalty area. A lithe figure sprang high, and the next moment the ball shot into the net from the head of Harry Wharton.

Another goal within five minutes of the first!

There was a burst of clapping and cheering from the group of Greyfriars supporters, and the St. Jim's fellows themselves could not resist a murmur of applause, for it had been a cleverly worked goal. But faces were glum as Tom Merry kicked off again.

"Come on, you chaps!" muttered Figgins, as he started forward.

He took Tom's pass, and flashed the ball back again to Tom as he was tackled. Tom was tackled smartly in his turn, and passed across to Pratt, at inside-left, who took it a few yards up-field, then slipped it across to Redfern, on the wing.

"Go it, St. Jim's!" "On the ball, Saints!" "Come on, Reddy!"

Redfern, with the ball in splendid control, flashed up the edge of the field. He danced round the Greyfriars half-back who opposed him, and after a few yards, sent the ball across to the centre. Tom Merry took the pass in his stride, and raced on.

One of the Greyfriars backs was marking him, however. Tom feinted, as if to pass to Figgins, on his right, and the back swerved towards Figgy for a moment, and in that moment Tom slipped the ball to Pratt, on his other side.

It was cleverly done, and there was a yell of approval from the onlookers. But the shouting died away almost instantly, as attention was focused upon Pratt.

The New House inside-left was flying for the goal with the ball at his feet. A Greyfriars back was racing across to intercept him.

"Shoot!" panted Monty Lowther, from the touchline.

And Pratt shot. Swift and low, the ball went speeding for the goalmouth. The Greyfriars custodian flung himself full-length in his effort to save. But he was too late. The ball grazed his finger-tips, and came to a standstill in the back of the net.

"Goal!"

A terrific yell from all round the field caused the rooks to fly out of the old elms in alarm.

St. Jim's had scored! And it was a New House man who had scored—Pratt, one of Figgy's "finds!" The New

House fellows fairly let themselves go. They cheered and yelled till they were hoarse.

Within a few minutes of the kick-off Greyfriars had scored again, Harry Wharton again getting his head to the ball at an awkward moment for St. Jim's. Half-time came with the score still three—one, in favour of Greyfriars.

But Greyfriars were destined to lengthen their lead yet before the match was over.

Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars scored in the second half. And when at last a long note of Kildare's whistle announced that the game was over, Greyfriars had beaten St. Jim's by a clear margin of three goals; a four—one victory!

As the St. Jim's team left the field, Kangaroo of the Shell gripped Figgins roughly by the arm.

"There, you ass!" muttered the Australian junior fiercely. "What did we tell you?"

Figgins glared at him, and shook his arm free.

"Our goal was scored by Pratt, anyway—the chap you asses wanted me to drop!" he said grimly.

"Rot!" hooted Herries. "Pratt couldn't have helped scoring after Tom Merry's pass! It was Tom Merry who really got us that goal!"

Figgins stared at him.

"You're talking through your hat!" he exclaimed, and turned away abruptly towards the dressing-rooms.

CHAPTER 13.

The Masked Attackers!

"GENTLEMEN—Greyfriars!"

George Figgins was on his feet, announcing a toast.

The St. Jim's team was entertaining the Greyfriars eleven to tea in the junior Common-room, and it was

a very cheery meal, despite St. Jim's chagrin at their bad beating. The toast of Greyfriars was drunk with a will—in steaming cups of tea and cocoa. And Harry Wharton & Co. responded, and gave a rousing cheer for their old friends and rivals.

"Master Merry!"

Toby, the School House page, was at Tom Merry's elbow.

"Hallo!" asked Tom, in surprise. "What's up, Toby?"

"The driver of the Greyfriars motor-coach 'as harked me to inform his young gentlemen that his engine has gone wonky!" announced Toby solemnly.

"Gone wonky?" echoed Tom. "What on earth—"

"It won't go!" grinned Toby. "An' which the driver 'as harked me to inform the young gentlemen that he can't take 'em back to Greyfriars to-night!"

"My hat! Thanks, Toby!"

Tom turned to Bob Cherry of Greyfriars, who was seated beside him, and passed on the news.

Bob Cherry whistled.

"That's awkward! We must be back at Greyfriars to-night. Can we hire another coach in the village here?"

"You might," said Tom doubtfully. "But if I were you I should go back by train. You'll find it easier, I think."

"Good!" Bob Cherry turned to Harry Wharton. "Harry, old scout, the giddy charry has gone wonky—in the words of the poet. We shall have to train it back to Greyfriars!"

"Oh blow!" said Wharton.

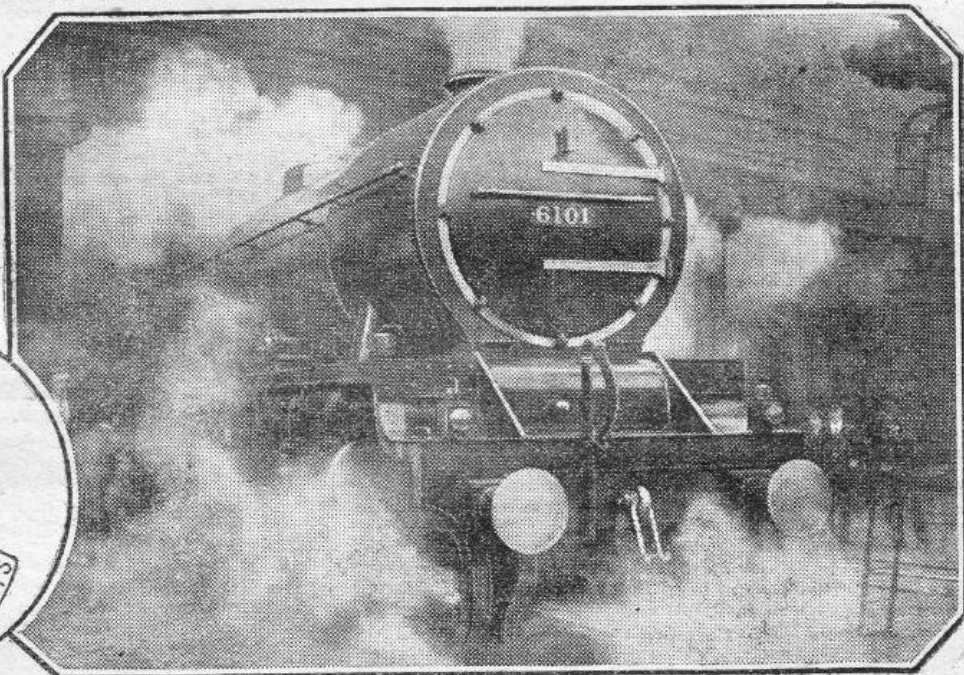
But, on consulting a time-table, it was found that there was no suitable train from Rylcombe till late that evening.

In the meantime, the St. Jim's fellows showed their

(Continued on next page.)

THE SECOND OF AN INTERESTING SERIES OF "RAILWAY" ARTICLES! REGIMENTAL "ROYAL SCOTS"

Express engines of the famous "Royal Scot" class, on the L.M.S. Railway, are named after famous Regiments of the British Army. This week our contributor tells you why the L.M.S. Locomotive No. 6101 well deserves the motto of "Second to None."



WHY is an engine called "she," and not "he"?

The answer to that question may be found in Locomotive No. 6101, of the "Royal Scot" class, named after the famous Royal Scots Greys or 2nd Dragoons.

When the Royal Scots Greys fought at Ramillies they were honoured by the presence of the "pretty dragoon," a Mrs. Christian Davies, who donned man's attire, and became a trooper in order to be near her husband, who was a private in the 1st Foot. The two passed as brothers until Mrs. Davies was severely wounded in the head.

When she returned to England she

was granted a pension of one shilling a day, and on her death in 1839, was buried at Chelsea with military honours.

Something of her gallantry has been handed down to the proud locomotive which bears the name of "Royal Scots Grey," and she, in her turn, well deserves the regimental motto of "Second to None" as day after day the indomitable engine draws her 400 tons up the steep pass of Shap Fell, without faltering, without dismay.

The first colonel of the Royal Scots Greys was General Dalziel, merciless in the suppression of rebellion. So ardent a Royalist was he, that it is said he never shaved his beard after the execution of Charles I. by Cromwell's Roundheads,

No one is ever likely to forget that memorable charge of the "bubbly Jocks" (Turkeycocks) at Waterloo, when they gave their immortal shout of "Scotland for ever," and in addition to putting the French opposition to rout, captured an eagle.

To watch Locomotive No. 6101 steam majestically out of Euston Station on its magnificent non-stop journey to Scotland is to realise that this mighty red and black monster is well fitted to share the motto of the Royal Scots Greys of "Second to None."

(Next week's article deals with the L.M.S. Locomotive No. 6102.)

visitors over the old school, and Mrs. Taggles' tuckshop in particular! After a while most of the St. Jim's fellows had to go to do their prep. But Tom Merry and Figgins, who, as senior and junior captains, would be excused prep in the circumstances, stayed with the Greyfriars fellows till the time came to see them to the station.

Taxicabs had been ordered by telephone, and Tom and Figgins accompanied their visitors to the station. When they had watched the train glide away with Harry Wharton & Co. on board, they left the platform to tramp back through the dark to St. Jim's.

"Well," said Figgins abruptly, as he strode along at Tom Merry's side, "what do you think about the match this afternoon?"

Tom shrugged.

"They were too hot for our team," he answered.

"I know they were!" growled Figgins defiantly. "But I jolly well still consider that they would have been too hot for any team I could have picked. Greyfriars were on form, and we were unlucky."

Tom did not answer. He did not agree with Figgins in the least. Tom felt sure that had he had the choice of the team that afternoon Greyfriars would not have gone away victorious. But he had already told Figgins he did not mean to interfere in junior footer matters, and so he did not intend to begin an argument with Figgins now.

"You don't agree?" grunted Figgins.

"No—since you ask me," Tom answered, after a moment's hesitation.

"Well, there's a match on next week against Gordon Gay & Co.," said Figgins, after a long silence, while the two tramped on. "I mean to stand by this afternoon's team. I shall field the same eleven against the Grammar School, and I feel as sure as eggs we'll wipe up the ground with them."

"Let's hope so!" said Tom Merry politely.

Figgins glared at him.

"Look here, if you think it's favouritism on my part——"

"I don't think that!" said Tom shortly. "But I do think you're all wrong——"

He got no further.

A group of shadowy figures had loomed up in the dark lane in front of them. Tom gave a sudden, sharp exclamation as he saw that the dim shapes ahead all wore black cloths tied round their faces, with holes for the eyes. Above these cloths St. Jim's caps showed that the group of half a dozen sinister-looking figures were St. Jim's juniors.

"Great pip!" cried Figgins. "Look out——"

He broke off as the shadowy figures leapt forward, and put up his hands.

Tom Merry, too, put up his hands in alarm as he realised with a sense of amazement and shock that the masked juniors were attacking them. He hit out, and one of the mysterious figures went reeling into the road. But the next moment two of the attackers had seized Tom Merry, and held him helpless in an iron grasp.

"Help!"

The cry came from Figgins.

Figgins was battling gamely in the midst of four or five of the masked juniors. But a moment or two later he, like Tom Merry, was seized and held helplessly in his captors' powerful grip.

Tom, struggling vainly to free himself from the two fellows who held him, had scarcely time to wonder who the masked attackers could be before he was dragged to a tree at the side of the road and fastened swiftly to it with a length of thick cord. A handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth, and fastened by another.

No sound had come from the mysterious juniors. They were acting in perfect unison, without uttering a word, for fear that their voices might betray their identity. Evidently the attack was well planned!

Figgins, too, had been gagged, stifling his shouts for help. He, too, was dragged to a tree and fastened to it.

It was soon seen that Figgins, not Tom Merry, was the object of the attack. The mysterious masked figures paid no more attention to Tom. They were clustering round Figgins, and Tom, watching with furious eyes as he strained at his bonds, saw that one of the unknown assailants had brought a large bundle from a hiding-place among the bushes at the roadside.

The bundle was opened, revealing a set of ancient footer togs, and what looked like a tin of paint. Figg's eyes goggled in horror at sight of it.

When the masked figures had made their preparations the New House leader was released from the tree; but he was held firmly by several pairs of hands, and his struggles were useless.

"Gug-gug-gug!" Behind the gag Figgins gurgled weirdly.

It was soon clear what his captors intended to do with him! Figgins' Etons were stripped from him unceremoniously, and the ancient footer kit was substituted upon

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his wriggling form. Then one of the masked attackers got to work with the paint-brush, and began ornamenting the unhappy Figgins' face and bare knees.

Spots and stripes and circles soon transformed Figg's furious face to the likeness of a Christie minstrel.

Then a large fool's-cap was jammed down upon his head over his ears. Upon it was painted the derisive legend:

"OUR RAG-TIME FOOTER CAPTAIN!"

Still no sound had come from the strange, eerie figures in the masks. Tom Merry, watching intently, could not even hazard a guess as to the identity of Figgins' assailants. But of one thing he was now very certain. The unknown fellows were a party of School House juniors!

Furious with Figgins for what they considered his throwing away of the Greyfriars match, they had planned to avenge themselves upon the New House skipper.

It was a daring plan, for it was after the time at which the school gates were closed. Clearly the School House mystery-men had left the school premises by way of the wall. It was risky for them, too, in that Tom Merry was captain of St. Jim's. Had he succeeded in snatching off one of the concealing cloths that hid their faces, and so learned the identity of the attackers, Tom would have had to report the School House party for breaking bounds.

But so far, at any rate, the School House party had carried out their scheme for venting their wrath on Figgins without a hitch.

At a gesture from one of their number, who seemed to be the leading spirit, Figgins' arms were bound tightly behind him, and his ankles were fastened securely. Five of the masked figures hoisted him into the air, and vanished with him up the dark lane.

The other two turned to Tom Merry.

One of them took out a pencil and a sheet of paper, and in an obviously disguised writing scribbled something, which he held up before Tom's eyes.

"Sorry, old scout," ran the written words. "We had to truss you up, so that you wouldn't interfere. But we School House chaps aren't going to stand Figgins' rotten footer methods any longer."

Tom read the message, and wondered desperately who it could be who had written it. The shadowy figure might be one of his own chums, for all he knew. But he could not even guess with any conviction as to the identity of his captor.

Again the masked junior scribbled a message for Tom to read.

"Sorry to keep you here like this," it ran. "But we can't let you go till we've finished with Figg. It won't be long!"

Abruptly the two mysterious juniors vanished, leaving Tom Merry struggling vainly against the cords that bound him to the tree.

But he knew that escape was useless.

Not till the School House mystery-men had finished their plans would the youthful new captain of St. Jim's be released from his captivity!

CHAPTER 14.

New House v. School House!

"GROOOH! Gug-gug-gug!"

Behind the gag Figgins gurgled feebly.

The attack had taken place less than a mile from the gates of St. Jim's, and it was not long before the fellows carrying him had reached a deserted spot by the school wall.

A tree grew close by the wall just there, and two of the masked figures swarmed up on to the wall. Figgins was passed up to them, none too gently, and hoisted on to the top of the wall. A few moments later the mysterious party, with the bound figure of Figgins in their midst, had gained the school premises.

Figgins understood the idea of bringing him back to St. Jim's only too well.

His attackers did not mean him to go unseen by the school in his present state.

Cautiously he was carried past the chapel and towards the lighted steps of the New House.

Late though it was, the Shell and Fourth Form fellows had not yet gone to bed. There was no one about in the quad; but Figgins would be found before long.

"All clear!" hissed one of his captors, in a voice that Figgins recognised as being vaguely familiar, though he could not place it.

With a quick run, they bore their prisoner to the steps of the New House, and deposited him there. Then the masked figures vanished into the shadows, leaving the junior captain of St. Jim's wriggling helplessly in his bonds on the steps of his own House.

"Grooooooh!" gurgled Figgins. "Mum-mum-mum!"

"Great Scott!"

A sudden ejaculation of amazement rang out in the quietness of the quad.

A fellow had appeared at the top of the steps. Figgins twisted his head, and saw that it was Redfern.

Redfern was gazing at the decorated figure of Figgins as though he could not believe his eyes. Then he gave an excited shout, and came hurrying down the steps. From the Hall of the New House other figures came hurrying in surprise. There were gasps and startled exclamations at sight of the New House leader.

"Great pip!"

"Our rag-time footer captain!" gasped Owen, as he read the jeering inscription on the fool's-cap that was crammed down over Figgins' ears.

"A School House rag!" yelled Fatty Wynn excitedly. "The rotters!"

He rolled hastily down the steps. But already Redfern and Lawrence and Kerr were busily releasing Figgins.

The New House fellows crowded round excitedly. But at realisation that it must be a School House rag—and by no means a friendly one, at that—their faces went dark and wrathful!

Though they still believed that Figgins' team had been a good one, it had been a bitter pill for the New House to watch its overwhelming defeat at the hands of Greyfriars. They knew that the School House were declaring emphatically that the licking of the St. Jim's team was entirely due to the fact that more than half of the footballers had been New House chaps. It was an opinion which they resented strongly—and the sight of their captain, made to look a fool by the School House, was the last straw!

"The cads!" roared Pratt.

From the shadows near the steps there was a sudden yell of laughter.

A big crowd of School House juniors had come into view, and were enjoying the sight of the New House fellows' discomfort to the full.

"Stop this fighting!" shouted Tom sternly. His face was set in grim lines.

The combatants fell back from one another sullenly. School House fellows glared at Tom as much as did the New House men. His intervention was popular with neither side.

"Oh, go to the dickens!" snarled Lawrence savagely.

"Hear, hear!" growled Herries.

"Lawrence and Herries, do me a couple of hundred lines each!" rapped out Tom.

He stood staring round searchingly into the faces of the crowd in the light of the New House doorway.

"You all must know what has happened in Rylcombe Lane to-night," he went on steadily. "Who were the School House chaps who attacked Figgins?"

There was no answer.

"Echo answers who!" murmured Cardew of the Fourth at last.

"Shut up, Cardew!"

"Sorry, dear man!"

There was a dark frown on Tom's face.

"Very well," he said quietly. "I shall investigate this matter in the morning. Go back to your Houses, all of you!"

With black and bitter looks the New House fellows crowded into the New House doorway, while the School House juniors turned and tramped off towards their own building.

Their faces were as dark as were those of their rivals!

CHAPTER 15.

Up Against It!

TOM MERRY crossed towards the School House in the wake of the crowd, with a heavy heart.

It was clear to him that there was going to be trouble.

Despite numerous rags, School House and New House managed to rub along together pretty well as a rule. But

GOING STRONG!

There's no earthly doubt about it! Our grand series of FREE GIFTS is causing a sensation! No. 1 set the ball rolling, and now comes No. 2 to carry on the good work. Perhaps some of my readers thought that the high standard set by the first of the magnificent picture-cards depicting MARVELS OF THE FUTURE was a bit too high for its successors to live up to. But now the "Trans-Continental Coach" is in their hands I know their minds are set at rest. This picture, with the vivid peep into the future that it gives us, forms a fascinating part of that magic looking-glass that every one of my readers will possess when the

whole collection of cards is in their possession. I was going to weigh in here with an urgent piece of advice, chums. But on second thoughts I know it won't be necessary. I know that, now you've seen the first two of the FREE GIFTS that have brought your favourite paper even more to the forefront, you won't risk missing the rest. 'Nuff said!

Next week's issue contains—besides the spanking FREE GIFT—a list of attractions that is one of the "best ever." For a kick-off there is a magnificent yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's in Martin Clifford's best vein, entitled:

"FRIENDSHIP OR DUTY?"

Then there is another fine instalment of our new serial, and, of course, a brilliant set of "Oracle" replies. And last, but not least, another interesting article dealing with the

famous "Royal Scot" locomotives of the L.M.S. Order early.

YOUR EDITOR.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That howl of derisive laughter was more than the New House fellows could stand. There was a rush.

"Back up, New House!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"New House for ever!"

Hot to avenge their unhappy leader, the New House juniors rushed upon their rivals.

The New House fellows were angry and bitter. But the School House juniors were equally so. They came to meet their old rivals with fists up.

"Come on, you chaps!" roared Jack Blake hotly.

"Wade into the wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"We'll teach the rag-time footballers!"

"Hurrah!"

The next moment the shouting died away, as the two groups met, with flying fists. The juniors had no further time to waste on words.

But before the fight could develop, a sudden sharp voice rang out above the trampling of feet.

"Stop this!"

Tom had just entered at the gates. Now that he was captain of St. Jim's, he could stay out late if he wanted to, and so had been able to ring up Taggles, the porter, to open the gates, instead of having to climb in secretly by way of the wall, like the masked unknown who had released him a short while before, and had vanished before Tom could kick loose his cut bonds and tackle him.

sometimes feeling flared up between the rivals, and just now it was flaring up very bitterly!

Figgins might be junior skipper. But he was not going to be allowed to have things all his own way evidently! The School House were almost in open revolt against him.

There was a deep frown on Tom's face as he mounted the School House steps.

He had to back up Figgins! Figgins had been duly elected junior captain, and it was the job of the captain of St. Jim's to support him all along the line. Kildare had always backed up Tom Merry, and Tom meant to back up Figgins in the same way. The question of rival Houses did not count.

In the hall of the School House, an excited crowd was discussing the situation. As Tom appeared in the doorway all eyes were turned upon the youthful captain of St. Jim's. An abrupt silence fell.

Tom halted and surveyed the crowd steadily.

"I am going to find out who those chaps were who ragged Figgins," he said. "If they don't own up it'll be the worse for them when I do find out."

No one spoke. Most of the fellows looked uncomfortable.

"I suppose you all know who it was?" exclaimed Tom, rather bitterly. His eyes fell on Manners, who looked the other way.

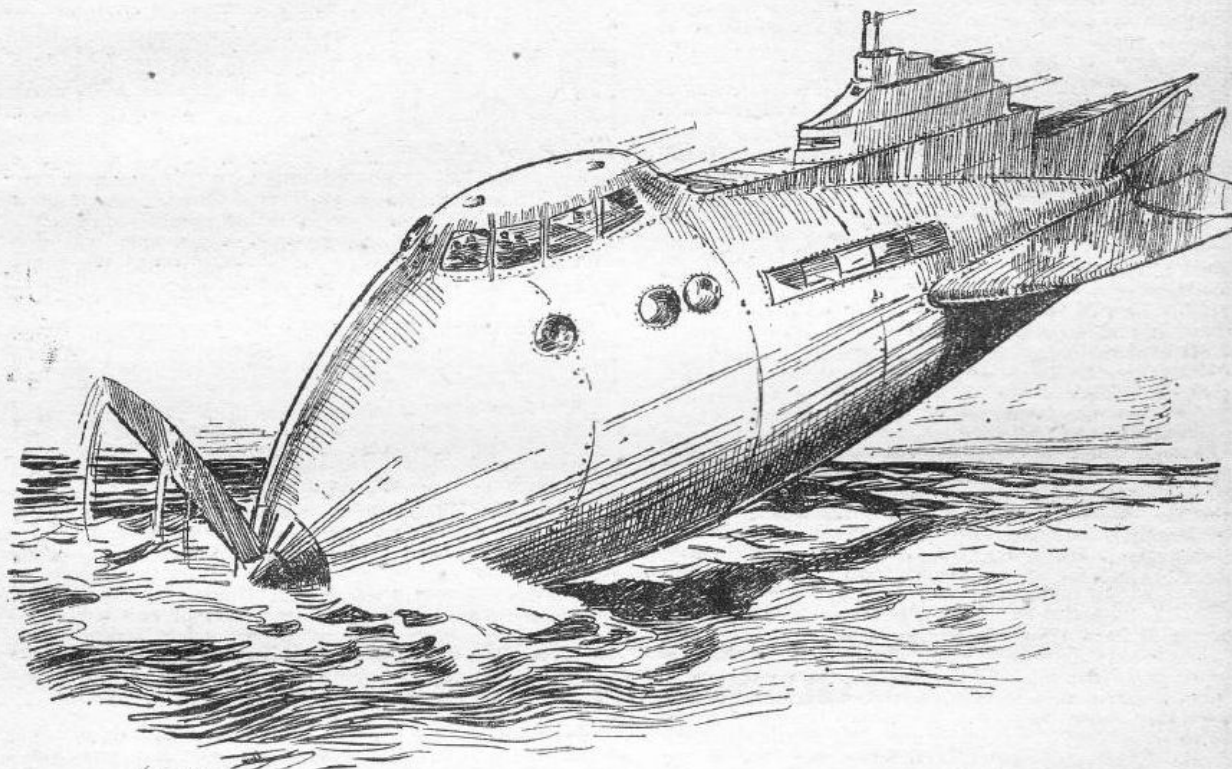
"Yes, we all know!" drawled Cardew. "But we aren't sneakin', dear man."

"I don't want anyone to sneak," snapped Tom. "I want the chaps themselves to come forward."

(Continued on page 23.)

To be master of the world—to destroy at will whole races of mankind—to cow the fierce British Lion. This is the ambition of the commander of the "Flying Fish"—an ambition that seems likely to come to pass!

THE FLYING FISH!



A REMARKABLE NEW SERIAL OF ADVENTURE ON LAND AND SEA. BY LESLIE BERESFORD.

A Friend in Need!

NOT much chance of stepping out again, either, Mister Rodney!" said Dan Lea.

"I don't know that we want to do that, either, Dan. Not, anyhow, till we know what the whole business means. That sick man, with his talk of a threat to the world, and Britain being swept away—"

"That be easier said than done, as has been proved more than once."

"True. But there are people who still believe it possible, Dan. And it might be more possible, too, than we're inclined to believe, for all the past. It's not a matter of men to-day, but inventions. Put two and two together, Dan. Take this craft we're on. Able to travel either by sea or air. There's no other ship in the world able to do that. It could be tremendously dangerous. Imagine a whole fleet of them in the hands of people hating Britain—"

"I think, mein young shentlemans, you better imagine yourselves having something to eat and going to bed!" intervened here caustically the guttural voice of Von Roden, whom the noiseless door in the panelling had opened to admit unnoticed by them. "You seem to have a great deal too much of imaginations!"

"Meaning that you overheard what I said, and you admit I'm right?" retorted Rodney.

"Supposing you vas?" leered the other, showing ratlike white teeth. "What could you do about it?"

"One never knows!" said Rodney.

"Better not to know than to know too much, mein young rooster!" chuckled Von Roden. "I shall tell you some things vhat might be of interest to you. There vas an Englishmans vhat had as much imaginations as you. He vas vant to know too much. He vas mix himself up too interestedly in this business. Vell, joost because ve did not vish him to go away and think ve vas not friendly, ve let him interest himself and his imaginations, and then—"

"Ve joost remember your English proverb that dead shentlemans tell no truths!" he shrugged eloquently. "He vas of your London newspapers. The same name as yourself, by the vay, mein young friendt. Mr. Blake—Mr. Adrian Blake. Perhaps you have heard of him?"

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"You mean—not—" Rodney started forward.

And at that tense moment the Greek and Prince Karagonski came in, and called Von Roden away. Rodney was left standing staring in front of him, his face white as death, and his limbs trembling.

"Dead! Oh, dad!" He fell, rather than sat, in a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"Mister Rodney—they don't mean they've killed—" began Dan Lea, staring at his grief-stricken pal.

Rodney turned a tear-stained face to his chum.

"The hounds—the murderous fiends!" he choked. "They've killed the finest man on earth! Old dad dead!" He sprang to his feet, eyes flashing, and fist clenched. "This, then, was the dad's secret mission!" he cried. "This—this! Dan—he swung round on his pal—"Dan, it's up to me now—up to me to avenge my poor old guv'nor—and carry on his work!"

Before Rodney and Dan Lea finally went to sleep that night in the cabin for two to which they were shown, the two lads talked the whole thing over, trying vainly to solve the riddle as to how that object was ever going to be accomplished under the circumstances in which they were placed.

Talking, of course, took them no way at all; though early morning showed them that the amazing aircraft in which they were enforced passengers had made considerable way on her journey into the unknown.

The two boys wakened to find, after looking through the porthole of their cabin, that they were moving swiftly and at no great height over a vast stretch of yellow sand, dotted here and there at distances with clumps of green palms.

"It must be Africa—the Sahara desert!" exclaimed Rodney. "That's pretty quick work, Dan! Neither of us imagined yesterday at this time we should be as far away from home as we are, and in such queer circumstances."

"And not likely to be seeing home again in a hurry, either!" muttered Dan in his slow way, staring out at the waste of sand spread endlessly in the many-coloured dawn of the desert. Then he spoke eagerly: "Seems as if we be going to land hereabouts, Mister Rodney—"

"Not so much of the 'Mister,' Dan!" said the other,

laying a hand on his companion's shoulder. "You and I are the same as two pins on a stunt like this. Brothers-in-arms, as they used to say in the old days of knights and squires. Good lor', Dan, how the world's changed since then! The horse was the quickest thing they knew in the way of travel, jogging along a few miles a day. And here we are, jumping off from glorious old Devon before ten o'clock at night, and landing in the Sahara with daylight.

"No!" he added, after a moment's pause, studying through the portal the evolutions of the vessel. "I don't believe we are landing, after all. We're not. Look! We're leaving land and making for the sea!"

It was true. The prow of the vessel had evidently veered round suddenly; for now they could see that, flying very low, they were crossing a rocky coastline devoid of any large town, though here and there they could see clumped together what looked like small villages built of mud. These gradually receded from sight in the wake of the vessel, until finally only the blue-green, foam-flecked sea was visible below them. And this, suddenly seemed to be coming directly up to meet them.

They were, of course, actually descending straight down towards it. Faintly in the vessel the sharp repeated clanging of electric bells began to stab the comparative silence. The downward movement of the ship slackened till presently it almost ceased as it seemed to be hovering over the seethe of the waves. And then the two lads realised that they were about to witness a most astounding feat of inventive genius—the submersion of an airship.

It happened, after a distant metallic clanging and a repeated ringing of bells in spasms like the signals of a ship's telegraph. One moment the dawn and the desert shore and the sea's surface were all visible; in the next, swiftly and inexorably, the blue-green waters had risen to the port-hole and above it till it was covered. The sea had blotted out the day, and for an instant the cabin was steeped in darkness; then the radiance of electric bulbs flooded it.

"Well, I'm blown!" exclaimed Rodney under his breath. "Who would have believed it? No wonder these people have gone to any extremes to keep their secret! Think of a fleet of craft like this! Travelling in the air by night, with little or no chance of being seen; getting away under water by day, when they could be seen. Nothing else in the world to get anywhere near them. They could be over places like London and New York before anyone knew it, blowing them to blazes, Dan!"

"All the more reason why you and me have got to think out some way by which they people here can be downed before they can do so much harm. Yet how you and me, just two lads, be going to do that has me beat!" said Dan.

"Something will happen. We're bound to find a way!" retorted Rodney, with a confidence he somehow felt, despite the fact that he was still badly knocked up by the terrible news he had received the previous night. "We'll talk to the doc. about it when we get a chance. There's one thing, Dan. Having got us safely here, as they think, these people won't worry much about our doing them any harm. They'll put it right past us, and that may prove just our chance in the end."

Certainly it did seem that Rodney was right in one respect.

After they had left their cabin and had breakfast they were free to wander about the vessel as they wished and to do what they liked. Nobody seemed to know that they existed. Prince Karaginski and the other two were not visible. Dr. Fraser, they were told by the bullying, fair-haired German who over-night had helped to secure the demented Englishman, Ashton, was with his patient and could not be seen.

The fair-haired German, whose name they discovered to be Kraft, seemed a person of some authority on board—a fact which he lost no time in trying to impress on the two lads when Rodney had sharply insisted on seeing the doctor.

"You run away and play!" he said contemptuously. "I tell you that the Herr Doctor is not to be seen. You don't need to waste my time with talking. You are here to do what you are told. If you want troubles, I shall soon make some for you."

Rodney shrugged his shoulders.

It was not at all in his mind to make any trouble. On the contrary, as he and Dan had agreed over-night, their best plan was to assume an appearance of innocence and to convey the impression that they were quite harmless. So the former swallowed his pride and reassured Kraft that they had no intention of arguing with him, and then set out to see all that was possible of the strange craft in which they found themselves.

This craft was certainly full of surprises and mysteries. The main upper portion contained amidships the handsomely furnished saloons and cabins they had already seen. In the room which they had first noticed when they came aboard—a room looking like a glorified signal-cabin—a uniformed ship's officer was on duty, watching various gauges, or poring over a chart on a table. This was evidently the control cabin. Next to it was another, which Rodney recognised at once to contain the wireless apparatus.

For'ard, down a hatchway, were clearly the quarters occupied by the crew, which seemed to number some thirty or forty, mostly squat and grimy blue-clad men, who jabbered together in Russian and other language as they moved to and fro about the ship. This was evidently well supplied with oxygen, for the air was cool and plentiful—more so than Rodney had expected to find in an under-water vessel. Apparently the oxygen supply was created somewhere in the complicated mass of compartments and glimpses of mechanical contrivances aft, the only part to which the lads could find no way.

It was below, down a steel stairway amidships, that they came upon the engine-house which gave life to this amazing craft. Here was an eternal movement, strangely silent—a maze of pistons and revolving discs, only dimly to be seen by occasional electric bulbs, pulsing and whirring softly and evenly. Against the yellow glow of these sparse lights immense motors bulked, with a human figure or two passing among them along steel gangways, watching and regulating them as they throbbed.

Here, on a brass plate close to where the two lads stood looking down, were words which seemed to indicate that this vessel was the first of its class. Rodney noticed the plate at once, engraved with German words:

"FLIEGENDE FISCHE. No. 1."

"Flying Fish, that means!" he explained to Dan, pointing at the words. "Not a bad name, either. But, from what little we know, a nasty kind of fish. I wonder if there are any more like it built already?"

"Not yet!" answered for him a voice behind them, causing the boys to turn in surprise, to find a man in blue overalls standing there. He had a comically screwed-up face, with small glinting eyes, and he was little in build. With his head on one side, in the dim light, he looked curiously like a monkey.

"You're English?" gasped Rodney, amazed to find a fellow-countryman a member of such a crew.

The other laughed dryly.

"Am I English? Is it after insulting me that you are?" he demanded, with a brogue which at once explained Rodney's mistake. "It's good Irish I am, and bad cess to the creature that calls me anything else! English? Sure, it's a fine healthy hatred of England that I've cultivated all my life! But maybe you'll oblige me by saying what the likes of yourselves are doing here at all, at all?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know?" asked Rodney.

"Begad, and should I be after asking, if I did? It would be an Englishman to be asking a fool's question like that. It's with his own business that Larry O'Hagan concerns himself, let me tell you—the ould ingines down there. But when I see a couple of young spalpeens like yourselves walking round as if you was royal dukes, and talking my own language without the brogue that makes it the only decent language in the world—well, I'm asking the question, how do you come here at all?"

Rodney proceeded to explain briefly how they had seen the submarine in Littleworth Cove, taken the prince to the doctor, and all the other events of that sensational night. The other listened, his glinting eyes fixed on them both, his head on one side, his wizened face puckered with laughter.

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THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

RODNEY BLAKE, a stocky youngster of seventeen, whose one ambition is to follow in the footsteps of his father, **Adrian Blake**—a special news correspondent now out of England on business for his paper—is spending a few days with

DR. FRASER, prior to joining the staff of the "Sun."

Together with his chum,

DAN LEA, a stalwart son of Devon, Rodney is strolling along Littleworth Cove when he sees a strange-looking craft in the cove, manned by foreigners, which resembles an airship and a boat combined.

PRINCE ALEXIS KARAGENSKI, the ship's commander, informs Rodney that there is a serious case of illness on board and asks for the services of Dr. Fraser. The doctor goes aboard and some time later Rodney and Dan are captured by Prince Karaginski's men and taken on to the ship as prisoners. The strange craft, to the amazement of the two lads, then rises from the sea and, after the fashion of an airship, speeds them away into the clouds. Rodney turns delightedly to his chum. "Dan," he says, "although the 'Sun' have lost their new reporter, they little know that he's stepped right into the biggest news story ever!"

(Now read on.)

"So that's it?" he said, when Rodney had finished. "And it's prisoners ye are, not royal dukes. Begorra, and it's in fine company ye've landed yourselves, and all. Though maybe ye're after knowing that?"

"We know very little," replied Rodney. "But what little we do know makes me wonder how you—an Irishman—come to be in the same company and mixed up with a business like this seems to be."

"Sure, and it does, does it?" grinned the other. "Well, I'll be after telling ye that Larry O'Hagan has a mighty good reason for everything that he does, and he's not in the habit of explaining the same to the first person that asks him. And he's not after explaining it to you young spalpeens, either, at the minute. Are ye thinking he wants to put his head in the noose as easily as you've been doing?"

"You needn't think my friend and I are a bit afraid of the noose!" said Rodney. "Neither Dan nor I are sorry we're where we are, as especially if—so far as we know—this business and these people are up against England."

"And are ye thinking—that being the case—that ye can prevent the same?" chuckled the Irishman.

"Certainly it doesn't seem very possible, but we can only do our best."

"Begorra, and you're a broth of a lad! It's a pity your hopes aren't so likely as your spirit. Listen! You were asking yourselves just now if there were any more craft built like this, and I told you there wasn't. And that's true. But they're being built—a round twenty of them—in a place we're after reaching come to-morrow at dawn. It's a place with a Russian name that means 'The Valley of No Escape.' A fine, healthy sort of spot, I'm telling ye, as you'll find out for yourselves. Unless—"

"Unless—what?" asked Rodney, as the other hesitated.

The Irishman glanced casually round him as though to make sure the only other man in the engine-room was not near enough to overhear.

"It's like this!" he replied, satisfied that this was not the case. "There might be a chance of your getting away before it's too late. We'll be after landing the night on one of the Greek islands, picking up one of the big bugs of this crew of blackguards. A couple of bright sparks like yourselves shouldn't have any difficulty in slipping away if I gave ye a helping hand."

"Nothing doing!" Rodney shook his head. "We've no wish to get away, thanks all the same! First of all, we're not here alone, Dan and I. There's Dr. Fraser, our friend, who's looking after a sick man on board—"

"That's Ashton the poor devil who invented this same Flying Fish," nodded the other. "I heard they'd gone ashore in England to fetch a doctor to him. Well, and you're friends of the doctor, you are? And its refusing to leave him here and look after yourselves, ye are?"

"Would we do anything else? Besides—"

Rodney hesitated.

"Well?" questioned the other, his monkey-like face screwed up, and his mouth parted in a grin.

"Perhaps we'd better not say any more," replied Rodney coldly. "You may be Irish, and you may be making us an apparently friendly offer to help us get away. But you're mixed up with these people and their game—for whatever reason you like. We don't want to know what it is, and the less we say to you about ourselves, perhaps, the better. We're here and we stay here!"

"And mighty independent, too!" chuckled the other. "And so you don't trust me? Begad, and it's not after blaming you that I am, at all! It's a pity you're not Irish, like myself. For a couple of young varmint, you're after my own heart. You stand by your friends, and you've got pluck. Begad, when I heard they'd had trouble with a couple of fellows in England, I'd no idea it was two kids like yourselves. It seems you put up a mighty good scrap. Well now, I'll tell you something, both of ye. Come a bit closer, seeing that it's more than possible walls have ears aboard this craft."

"I'm not after explaining to ye the reason why I'm mixed up with this business," he proceeded under his breath as they drew nearer to him; "but I'll tell you that I'm not here for the benefit of my health at all. And though I've a fine a hatred of your country as ever, I've a bigger hatred for some of these people, and what truck I'm having with them is to suit the purpose of myself—and others. So please be remembering that Larry O'Hagan is willing to be your friend, if indeed you're dead set on going to that devil of a valley and seeing things through—"

"We wouldn't miss that valley for the world!" said Rodney. "And if you really mean to be friendly—"

"It's not after doubting me you need to be!" interrupted the other. "But if we're going to be of use to

each other not a word nor a sign to a soul, either of ye! And when ye see me about, it's not after knowing me from Adam that ye are. Remember that. Leave things to me. And when the time comes, as it may—"

He broke off abruptly, interrupted by the violent clanging of an electric telegraph bell, which seemed to surprise him and caused him to move hurriedly away to the far end of the engine-room, where he disappeared from the sight of the two lads. These were left, despite the vagueness of the Irishman, with a sense of confidence in him and a sudden feeling that they were no longer so much alone as they had imagined.

"Looks as if we've fallen unexpectedly on a possible friend in need!" suggested Rodney, and Dan nodded in his slow way.

"Anyhow, we can't do much harm for ourselves listening to what he's been saying," he agreed, with his inborn caution. "If he did turn out to be speaking truth, and it certainly do sound like it—"

"He sort of hinted there were others concerned as well as himself, Dan. You heard that? If so, perhaps we may be nearer helping to smash these people and their plot—"

That something in the nature of a smash had, meantime, occurred to the vessel itself dawned suddenly upon them as, without warning, a harsh, grinding noise could be heard, the vessel seemed to have jerked to a standstill, and the deck on which the two lads were standing slanted steeply for a moment. Instinctively they turned and clambered their way hurriedly up on to the main deck to find the crew scurrying hither and thither. Von Roden was excitedly bellowing orders as he stood by the door of the control-cabin.

The grey light of day, showing through the portholes, indicated that the Flying Fish had risen to the surface. It showed the two lads, as well, that a faint white mist covered the waters, and wreaths of this came drifting down the presently opened hatchways to the upper-deck. On to this Von Roden and a number of sailors were making their way. It was Dan who, peering through a porthole in the smoking saloon, made a discovery.

"We be alongside a British ship!" he called out to Rodney, who sprang quickly to his side, and was able to make out the shapely white hull of what was obviously a fine yacht with the flag of the Royal Yacht Squadron floating lazily astern.

"Why," gasped Rodney, catching a glimpse of the name on one of the davit-hung ship's boats, "she's the Yolande! She belongs to Lord Braxton, who owns the Sun. We must have been travelling near the surface and collided with her. Lord Braxton will be aboard. If only I could get a word with him!"

He turned to rush out of the saloon, desperately intent on reaching the upper deck and achieving this object, when he found himself confronted by Prince Karagenski, quizzically smiling, his monocle gleaming in his right eye.

"No need to be in such a hurry, my young friend!" he said, laying a hand on Rodney's shoulder. "You will have an opportunity for more than a word with his lordship. We have certainly collided with his yacht, but not by accident. We reckoned on intercepting her about here. He happens to know too much for our liking, and we purpose to invite him on board as we did you. Of course, he may not like the idea, in which case—"

Distinctly, from the deck above, came the sound of shouting and revolver shots.

Pirate Power!

TO stand impotently by while a British yacht was forcibly boarded and an English peer abducted on the high seas was more than Rodney could do. He flung round at the cynically smiling prince.

"That's piracy!" he said. "And you're agreeing with it?"

"Circumstances necessitate the step, my young friend. As I said just now, Lord Braxton has—unfortunately for himself—made certain discoveries, as a result of which, for the safety to all concerned, his freedom must be curtailed. That is all."

"It's piracy, all the same. And you—went to an English school!" said Rodney scathingly, flinging off the Russian's detaining hold on his arm. "I'm sorry for the school. It didn't deserve the disgrace—"

"Young fellow"—the Russian's face had reddened, and he stiffened angrily—"you don't know what has happened to me since—those days—"

"I don't see that it matters. The thing is that you were at Holmhurst with the doc, and one wouldn't expect this

sort of thing from you. Though I suppose Russians are capable of anything—"

"What do you know about Russians?"

Rodney did not answer the angry question. The turmoil of strife, and the sounds of spasmodic shooting aboard the yacht had increased in violence. Rodney did not know how he and Dan could do anything to frustrate the diabolical plot now in progress, but nothing useful could be effected standing in the saloon discussing schools and Russians with the prince. He turned abruptly, and passed out into the corridor, followed by Dan.

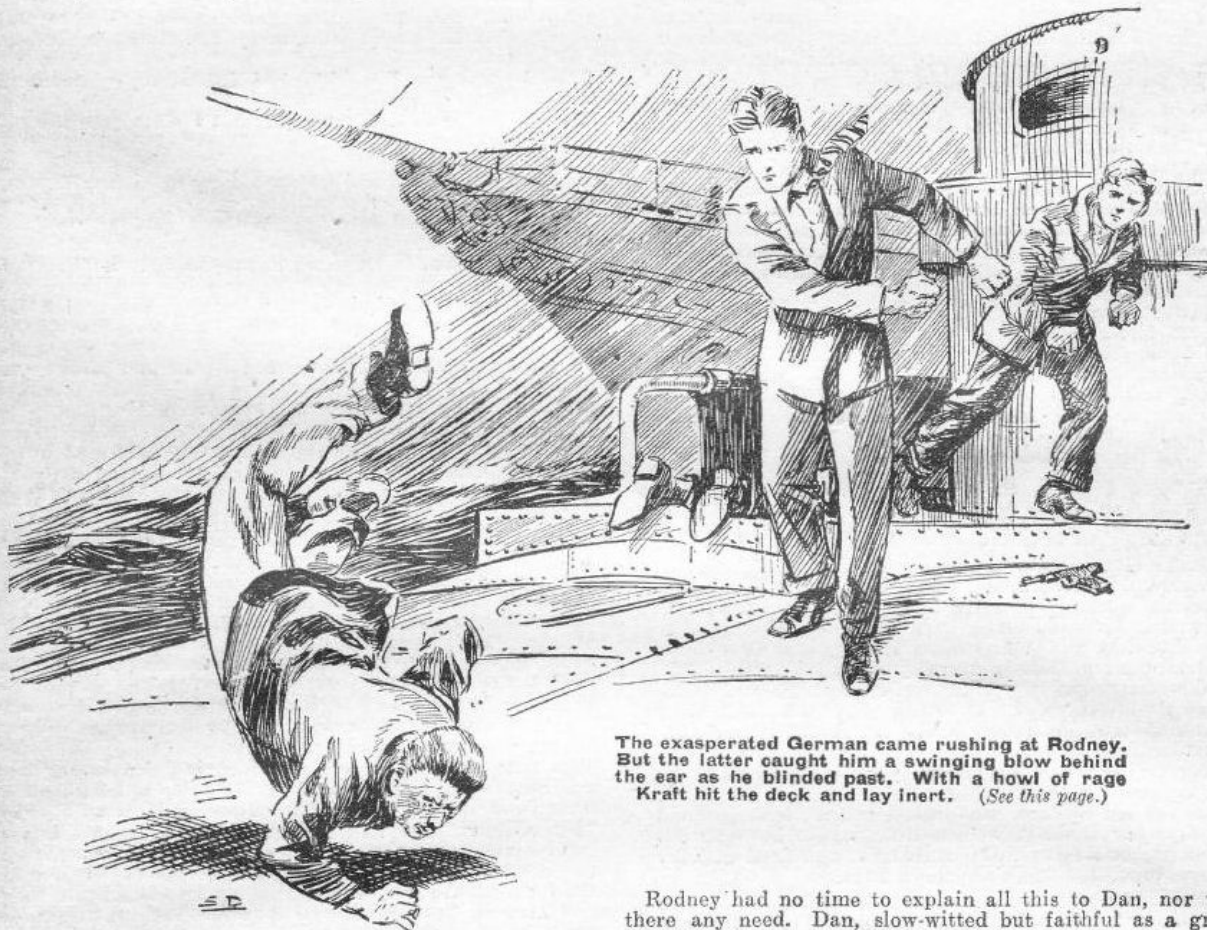
The prince made no attempt to interfere with them. His softly cynical laugh followed them derisively. But it was a broken laugh, that of a man ashamed of himself; and, though they did not know it, his eyes had followed their disappearing figures with a suddenly wistful expression. Meantime, they had made their way to the nearest hatchway, and reached the upper deck. Here Kraft and another sailor were in occupation, and swung round as the two lads appeared in view.

"What you want here, you two Spitsbuben? Get away

rushing in bull-like fashion head foremost upon Rodney, the latter had caught him a swinging blow behind the ear as he rushed blindly past, and he went crashing head-first down on to the metal deck, an inert and sprawling mass.

Rodney snatched Kraft's rescued automatic from Dan's fingers, and made for the companionway of the yacht, dimly to be seen in the mist. At top of this, as the lads mounted it, two sailors of the Flying Fish, with rifles, had been stationed, but fell back before the sudden appearance of Rodney and his companion out of the mist, with an automatic muzzle threatening them.

Rodney had no definite plan in his mind, though an idea had come to him. It was a wild and forlorn hope, no doubt, but even that was better than inactivity. It had struck him that, with Von Roden aboard the yacht, there was a chance of upsetting this piratical plot, as well as obtaining even more important results. Somehow, Rodney felt certain, Von Roden's presence on the Flying Fish was essential for its navigation. If therefore Von Roden could be captured and kept aboard the yacht, the capture of the Flying Fish itself might follow.



The exasperated German came rushing at Rodney. But the latter caught him a swinging blow behind the ear as he blinded past. With a howl of rage Kraft hit the deck and lay inert. (See this page.)

back into the ship!" yelled Kraft angrily at sight of them, thrusting out a hand to push Rodney roughly backward.

That gave the latter an excuse for the moment he had secretly itched to enjoy ever since he had first seen the smug white face of this Teuton bully, and been forced to listen to his insolent voice. Rodney did not answer. He merely sent a clenched fist crashing straight into that round, white face.

Kraft, evidently not expecting such a blow, staggered back, with a howl of rage and surprise, with Rodney well after him, his blood up, his fists getting in blow after blow on the man's body and face before he could recover, and forcing him always back.

Dan had closed with the other man, who was small-built and had neither the reach nor the agility of the Devon lad. Kraft, on the other hand, once he had recovered from his surprise, was a powerful man, and Rodney had all his work cut out to keep him at arm's length and to prevent him from reaching the automatic, which had fallen from his hand to the deck.

It was Dan who, having landed his sailor opponent a knock-out, which had sent him tumbling in an unconscious heap down the hatchway, came to Rodney's help by picking up the automatic. But by then, the exasperated German,

Rodney had no time to explain all this to Dan, nor was there any need. Dan, slow-witted but faithful as a great hound, was merely following his lead, having taken the precaution to wrest a rifle from one of the sailors stationed at the companionway. Distantly, the sound of a protesting voice brought Rodney on to the starboard promenade deck of the yacht. Here the tall figure of a man in spruce yachting rig—in whom Rodney immediately recognised the newspaper millionaire, Lord Braxton—was struggling in the clutches of three of Von Roden's men.

Upon these, without hesitation, the two lads swept like an avalanche, scattering them by mere advantage of surprise, and freeing the millionaire, who stared at his rescuers in blank amazement till Rodney spoke to him breathlessly.

"Where are your officers and crew, my lord?" he asked. "Surely they're putting up a show?"

"Show?" gasped the other. "They never had the chance. They're battened down below—all except those who mutinied. There's been treachery. This has evidently been well-planned. I don't know who the deuce you are—"

"You mean, you can't muster anyone to help? There's nothing to be done?" demanded Rodney, his wild hopes beginning to vanish.

"Absolutely nothing. When these people came alongside, half my crew turned on the rest and the officers. But where do you come from, lad?"

"From the boat alongside, to which they want to take

you, my lord. It—these people—belong to the story on which you sent my father for the 'Sun.' My name's Blake—"

"Heavens alive!" stared Lord Braxton. "Adrian Blake's son? And this ship—these people— I'm beginning to understand. Everything happened all in a minute."

"And there's no hope of turning the tables on them?" urged Rodney.

"Not the slightest, I'm afraid. Not by fighting, anyhow!" shrugged the other, studying Rodney thoughtfully. "And you're Adrian Blake's son? And you're on that craft alongside? That's queer. How do you come there?"

"Like yourself, my lord, we were forced—my friend and I."

"Well, well! Naturally, I'm the one person these people would want to get rid of."

"They say you know too much, my lord."

"So I do. Somehow, I never thought they'd make an attempt like this. However, here we are. At least, I'm not without a friend still. That's one satisfaction. And you came on board to see if you could give a hand?"

"And been able to do nothing!" said Rodney regretfully.

"I'm not so sure!" retorted the other suddenly, as upon a thought, thrusting a hand into an inner breast-pocket of his blue reefer coat, and bringing out a thickish envelope, which he pushed into Rodney's hand.

"Quickly!" he said. "Put that away and keep it safely. You can, at least, do that for me. If these people got hold of the contents of that packet everything would be lost. They might search me. They wouldn't think of you—"

At that moment, with Rodney barely having time to conceal the trust imposed on him, Von Roden and a number of his men made their appearance through the mist, led by the men whom the two lads had surprised and driven off. Von Roden was furious and foaming at the mouth as he caught sight of Rodney.

"You?" he spluttered. "What are you doing here? Where was Kraft that you got past him?"

"Asleep on the deck!" smiled Rodney, cool as a cucumber. Disappointed that he and Dan had been able to perform so little, but with the knowledge of the papers trusted to him, he was prepared for troublesome consequences, and faced them coolly.

"The last I saw of Kraft, he was having a good snooze."

"Snooze? Schleep? What do you mean?"

"Form of hypnotism," said Rodney. "Ask him, if he's wakened up already, Von Roden. He may have come to by now, though his head hit the deck pretty hard."

Just then Kraft, accompanied by the Greek, Mirapoulis, and more sailors from the Flying Fish, appeared on the deck, coming hurriedly towards them. His face was bruised and livid and his lip bleeding from a cut. After a word or two between him and Von Roden, Rodney and Dan found themselves unceremoniously dragged along the yacht's deck, down the companion-way, and bundled through the hatch-way into the Flying Fish. Here they were flung into their cabin, the door being locked outside by Kraft, with a final vicious threat.

"Presently ye shall see about you Schweinerin!" he rasped at them.

It was not till the door was locked and his footsteps had died away that Rodney, with a little laugh, brought out from one pocket Kraft's stolen automatic, and from another the packet entrusted to him by Lord Braxton.

"Anyhow," he said to Dan; "we've got something for our trouble that jolly old Kraft knows nothing about. He may know something about the gun yet. But this packet—I wonder what it contains? From what Lord Braxton said, it must be something very important."

And then, glancing more particularly at the address on the envelope—that of Lord Braxton at an hotel address in Cairo—Rodney gave an exclamation of surprise. The postal-mark indicated that the letter had been sent to Egypt from the new Turkish capital of Angora some three weeks since, and the handwriting was that of his father!

(The discovery staggered Rodney. Could it possibly be true that his father was alive despite what Von Roden had said? See next week's thrilling instalment, chums, and don't forget to order your Free Gift Number well in advance.)

"CAPTAIN TOM MERRY!"

(Continued from page 23.)

Levison stepped forward, nursing a bruised cheek—the result of a blow from Redfern before Tom Merry's arrival on the scene in the quad.

As a rule Levison was a good-tempered fellow, but now he was boiling. He spoke hotly, glaring at Tom.

"I'll tell you this," he said grimly. "I'm not playing in any of Figgins' rotten teams after to-day!"

"Hurrah!" yelled the crowd. "That's the stuff to give 'em!"

"I'm surprised to hear this from you, Levison," said Tom, quietly. "If Figgins puts you down to play, you should play. He is junior captain now—he was elected by the junior school. You fellows ought to forget your own feelings and back him up!"

"Rats!" sniffed Mylvaney.

Levison, still nursing his bruised cheek, turned abruptly and vanished up the stairs with Clive and Cardew.

Tom glanced round, almost pleadingly, for someone to support him. His eyes fell on Manners and Lowther. But Manners and Lowther turned away and followed Levison up the stairs.

"What about you, Blake?" asked Tom Merry, glancing at the four chums of Study No. 6.

"We're up against Figgins, if that's what you mean," retorted Blake.

"Yaas, bai Jove!"

Blake & Co. turned and tramped away up the stairs.

On all sides faces were hostile.

Tom Merry smiled bitterly. Without another word he pushed his way through the silent, sullen crowd and went up the stairs towards the Sixth Form passage. A faint hiss followed him.

For a moment Tom halted, with flaming cheeks. He was about to turn, but changed his mind, and went on up the stairs, the low hiss still in his ears.

In his study Tom sat down heavily in one of the big chairs.

He was feeling depressed—and lonely.

It was quite clear that the School House juniors were against him. Even his own chums were not backing him up or trying to help him; they were too bitter against Figgins.

Though the juniors were coming to accept the fact that Tom was captain of St. Jim's, they could not realise that in his new position it was absolutely essential for Tom to be utterly impartial between New House and School House. Though they would never have expected Kildare to show any partisanship in a House row, Tom Merry had been one of themselves too recently for them to allow him the same privilege. They regarded Tom as a School House fellow out-and-out—and the fact that he was backing up Figgins caused hot resentment.

Tom himself felt that Figgins was mistaken in his policy. But he felt, also, that it was not for him to interfere.

He was determined upon that point!

Tom rose to his feet and paced to and fro in the big Sixth Form study. He halted by the table and brought a clenched fist down upon it with a determined bang.

"I'm skipper!" he told himself grimly. "And I'll see the job through properly! I'm not standing any nonsense from School House or New House—even if my own blessed chums are out to give Figgins all the trouble they can. They've got to learn that while Figgins is junior captain, what Figgins says goes!"

He nodded with grim resolve.

"They may not like it, but if necessary I'll teach 'em that myself! It's my job, and I'm going to do it—with the giddy ashplant, if needs be!"

But, despite his grim resolve, Tom Merry knew that now the School House and the New House were at war there was going to be anything but an easy time ahead for him as captain of St. Jim's!

THE END.

(It's not all honey being captain of St. Jim's, is it, chums? But come what may Tom Merry is determined to prove his worth in his new role. Be sure you read: "FRIENDSHIP OR DUTY?" the next story in this magnificent new series of St. Jim's yarns.)



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