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The Inseparable Three!
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A SENSATIONAL STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO., AT ST. JIM'S—

The INSEPARABLE

Of all the new boys who have made their appearance at St. Jim's, surely few have created such a sensation as the Three Trouncers! This cheery trio mean to make their mark in the school, and they set about the job in no half-hearted fashion!

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



CHAPTER 1. To Meet the New Boys!

CRASH!

The door of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage at St. Jim's was sent flying open.

Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, and his two chums, Monty Lowther and Harry Manners, emerged from the study and set off along the passage arm in arm. They had caps on their heads and were whistling cheerily.

The Terrible Three were going out!

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It was a Wednesday afternoon—a half-holiday at St. Jim's. Outside the sun was shining in a cheery way that matched Tom Merry & Co.'s cheery mood. Tom and his chums were off to Rylecombe to meet the two-thirty train. By that train three fellows were arriving whom the Terrible Three were interested to see.

Their names were Wallace, Willis and Woolley, and they were coming to St. Jim's.

Wallace, Willis and Woolley—so Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, had told Tom Merry—had been together at a school named Ramhurst. But apparently their

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—INTRODUCING THREE NEW BOYS—THE "TROUNCER" TRIO!

THREE!



respective parents had been dissatisfied with Ramhurst—unless, as Monty Lowther had suggested, Ramhurst had been dissatisfied with Wallace, Willis and Woolley! At all events, the three newcomers had been taken from Ramhurst by their parents, and were arriving at St. Jim's that afternoon.

Wallace and Willis were destined for the School House, whereas Woolley—unluckily for him, in the opinion of Tom Merry & Co.—was due to become a "New House bouncer!" And the Terrible Three were off to meet them, and to welcome them to St. Jim's.

Arm in arm, Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther strolled briskly along the passage and down the stairs and out into the quad.

A fat figure was standing at the bottom of the steps of the School House as the Terrible Three emerged into the sunshine. Baggy Trimble, the fattest junior who had ever managed to squeeze himself into an Eton jacket, was propping his fat frame against the stonework of the balustrade with a very disconsolate look upon his podgy face.

He glanced up as the Terrible Three appeared. His face brightened.

Baggy had been wondering very hard how to spend the

half-holiday. He had twopence and a halfpenny stamp in his pockets, and so he could not visit the Wayland cinema as he had wished to do. For somehow nobody at St. Jim's seemed to have the slightest desire to lend Baggy further funds—in spite of his assurance that he was expecting a postal-order from a titled relation in a few days at the most!

But the sight of the Terrible Three had given Baggy a fresh idea.

It was clear that they were off out somewhere. There would no doubt be tea going at tea-time in their company. So there and then Baggy made up his mind to tack himself on.

With an ingratiating smirk that was supposed to be a charming smile, Baggy rolled in front of the three chums of the Shell. Tom Merry & Co. halted.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry in apparent astonishment. He stared at Baggy's smirking face closely. "What have you done to your face, Baggy?"

"My face?" echoed Baggy in bewilderment, still smirking.

"That is your face, of course?" inquired Monty Lowther gravely.

"Oh, really, Lowther, old chap!" Baggy grinned feebly. "I say, I—"

"If that is his face, there's something wrong with it," agreed Manners, shaking his head.

"There's an awful slit in it," said Tom Merry.

"Looks to me as if someone's hit it with a hatchet," remarked Manners thoughtfully.

"No. I think it's more likely the result of a railway accident," suggested Monty Lowther. "Have you been in a railway accident lately, Baggy?"

Baggy's extensive smile—the cause of the Terrible Three's puzzlement—died away abruptly. He glared at the three chums of the Shell.

"Look here—" roared Baggy.

"Sorry, can't be did. It's painful to the eyes," grinned Manners.

And with soft chuckles the Terrible Three strolled on.

Baggy stood by the foot of the steps snorting with wrath.

"Beasts!" he ejaculated. "I—I do believe they're going off without me!"

He scuttled rapidly in pursuit, and caught up with Tom Merry & Co. as they were passing the porter's lodge. He plucked at Manners' sleeve with fat fingers.

"I say, where are you going?" gasped Baggy.

"Out!" said Manners.

"I—I know—but where to, old chap?"

"To our destination," explained Tom Merry.

"Oh, really, Merry! I mean, where is your destination, you know?"

"Why, where we are going to, of course," said Monty Lowther innocently. "So long!"

And once more Baggy Trimble found himself left standing, blinking after the retreating backs of the Terrible Three.

"The rotters!" gasped Baggy. "I—I do believe they don't want me to go with them!"

That anyone could wish to avoid his charming company was amazing to Baggy. Undoubtedly there must be some particular reason for it, he felt sure. Suddenly a gleam of understanding came into his pasty face.

"I know!" he snorted. "The beasts are off to Spalding Hall. And they think I'd cut 'em out with the girls if I was with them!"

Spalding Hall was a school for girls near Wayland, where Ethel Cleveland and Doris Levison, two girl chums of Tom Merry & Co., were pupils.

"That's what it is!" muttered Baggy excitedly. "They're off to have tea at Spalding!"

On one or two occasions Baggy, with his amazing thickness of skin, which was absolutely impervious to snubs, had managed to force his unwanted company upon juniors visiting Spalding Hall. And the fat Fourth-Former had very agreeable memories of the ripping teas provided on those occasions by the juniors' girl chums.

In a moment Baggy was once more scuttling in pursuit of the Terrible Three.

He caught them up as they were passing out of the gateway into the road, and grabbed Tom Merry's arm, with a return of his ingratiating smirk.

That Tom Merry & Co. were off to Spalding Hall for tea, Baggy had not now the slightest doubt. And he meant to join them whether they wanted him or not.

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"Wait for me!" gasped Baggy breathlessly. "I'm coming with you, you know!"

The Terrible Three grinned. They guessed that Baggy imagined they were off to have a feed somewhere. Baggy could not imagine any fellows going off on a half-holiday for any other purpose. Had Baggy known that they were off to the station to meet the three new chaps, he would certainly have been the last person in the world to wish to accompany them.

"That's jolly kind of you, Baggy," said Tom gravely.

"Ripping of you, old man," nodded Manners.

"Not at all," smirked Baggy, scuttling along beside them.

"I—I say, don't go so fast! I'm always glad to go about with you chaps. We leading lights of the School House ought to stick together, you know."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Monty Lowther.

"It's entirely for the pleasure of your company I want to go with you, of course," went on Baggy, deeming it wise to use a little soft sawder.

"Nice to hear you say so," murmured Manners.

"But, of course, the girls will be glad to see me," smirked Baggy. "Girls always fall for me somehow."

"Girls?" echoed Tom Merry.

"Rather! Not that I'd think of using my natural charm to cut you out with Miss Cleveland or Levison's sister," added Baggy hastily.

The Terrible Three glanced at one another. Now they understood. They strode on, hiding their grins.

"I say, don't go so beastly fast!" gasped Baggy, his fat little legs going like clockwork.

The Terrible Three seemed, if anything, to quicken their walk, however, striding along the lane at a brisk, swinging pace that brought the perspiration streaming from Baggy's fat, scarlet countenance.

"Oh, dear! Slow down a bit, for goodness' sake!" puffed Baggy.

"Sorry," said Tom Merry gravely, "but it wouldn't do to be late, you see."

"Oh, nunno—rather not!" panted Baggy, mopping his forehead with his handkerchief as he scuttled along. He smirked again. "It'll be a surprise for the girls to see me, won't it?"

"A frightful surprise!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Frightful!"

Baggy blinked at Lowther suspiciously, but Monty's face was perfectly grave.

"Yes, it'll be a great treat for them," went on Baggy. "Ethel always likes to see me—ow! Yaroooooop!"

Tom Merry's foot had come down heavily on Baggy's toe as he strode along. Baggy danced, holding his injured foot and glaring at Tom Merry.

"Ow! Yaroooooop! You clumsy ass—"

"You were saying Miss Cleveland likes to see you?" murmured Tom blandly. There was a distinct accent on the "Miss Cleveland" that even Baggy could not fail to notice.

He blinked at Tom wrathfully and scuttled round to the other side of the trio.

"Yes, she does!" he exclaimed defiantly. "So does Doris—Ow! Yaroooooop!"

Manners' foot, apparently quite accidentally, had come down on Baggy's other toe. He hopped on one foot, roaring:

"Yow! Oh! Whooooop! Manners, you clumsy ass, you trod on my foot—"

"Did I?" exclaimed Manners, apparently greatly astonished. "What were you saying about Miss Doris, by the way?"

But Baggy did not continue the conversation! Blinking wrathfully at Manners, he scuttled along on painful feet beside the Terrible Three in silence.

Baggy meant to hang on like grim death!

A little distance farther on, the road forked. The left-hand fork led to Rycombe village, the other to Wayland. As they approached it, Tom Merry halted and glanced at Baggy.

"Puffed?" he inquired in apparent concern.

"Yes!" growled Baggy. "You chaps walk so beastly fast!"

"Hard luck!" said Tom. "Well, let us help you."

He took hold of one of Baggy's arms, and Monty Lowther took hold of the other. They resumed their march with Baggy panting along breathlessly between them. He was hot and panting, but he was full of inward satisfaction.

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Evidently the Terrible Three were going to take him with them! His perseverance was to be rewarded.

But at the fork, as Tom Merry & Co. took the left-hand road, Baggy gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Hi! This isn't the way!"

"Not the way?" echoed Tom Merry, in seeming bewilderment.

"No!" hooted Baggy impatiently. "This isn't the way to Spalding Hall!"

The firm hold upon his arms was not relaxed, however—and the Terrible Three were striding on even faster.

"Stop, you asses!" roared Baggy. "We're not going to Spalding Hall this way—"

"Go hon!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

Manners glanced at his watch.

"I think we ought to hurry up," he remarked cheerfully.

He broke into a trot, and so did Tom Merry and Monty Lowther—and Baggy Trimble, held fast between them, was compelled to break into a trot, too! His fat little legs fairly twinkled as they covered the ground.

"Ow!" he gasped. "What's the idea? Leggo!"

"But you wanted to come with us!" grinned Monty.

"But this isn't the way to Spalding Hall!" howled Baggy.

"We know that," chuckled Tom Merry. "But, then, we aren't going to Spalding Hall!"

For a moment, as he was whirled along at a brisk run, Baggy Trimble's face went blank with bewilderment. Then, as he realised that he had been "had," it went red with wrath—an even deeper shade than it already was with his unaccustomed exertions!

"You rotten spoofers!" he panted. "Ow! Groo! Beasts! leggo! You said you were going to Spalding—"

"You mean you did!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"We're off to the station, to meet those new chaps!"

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. His face was a picture as he was whirled along the lane.

"And you said you wanted to come with us," added Monty.

"I don't!" shrieked Baggy.

"I thought you were going to Spalding—"

"But you said you only wanted the pleasure of our

company!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in seeming astonishment. The Terrible Three were racing hard now—and Baggy raced with them, panting and blowing and aching from the unaccustomed exercise in every muscle of his fat little legs.

"Lemme go!" he gasped furiously. "I won't go to the beastly station! I won't—"

Tom Merry shook his head gravely as he ran.

"No, Baggy," he said solemnly, "you've promised us the pleasure of your company, and we couldn't bear to be disappointed now. We know you like being with us—just for the pleasure of our company. You said so!"

Baggy was wishing now from the bottom of his heart that he had never said so. But it was too late now.

Down the lane he was rushed, at a faster speed than he had ever accomplished before! He was too breathless by this time even to tell his captors what he thought of them.

The Terrible Three were athletes, and Baggy was not. They were enjoying the run, and were prepared to keep it up all the way to the station! But the prospect of being forced to run all that distance filled Baggy's mind with horror.

But there was no help for him. As long as Tom Merry and Monty Lowther ran, he had to run, even if it killed him. And he felt that it was killing him already.

"Grooooooh!" gasped Baggy.

He was travelling now at break-neck speed. His little eyes were almost popping from his head with the exertion, and his face was the colour of a newly boiled lobster. But still he had to keep going.

It was very certain that by the time he reached the railway station, Baggy Trimble would be in a state of collapse!

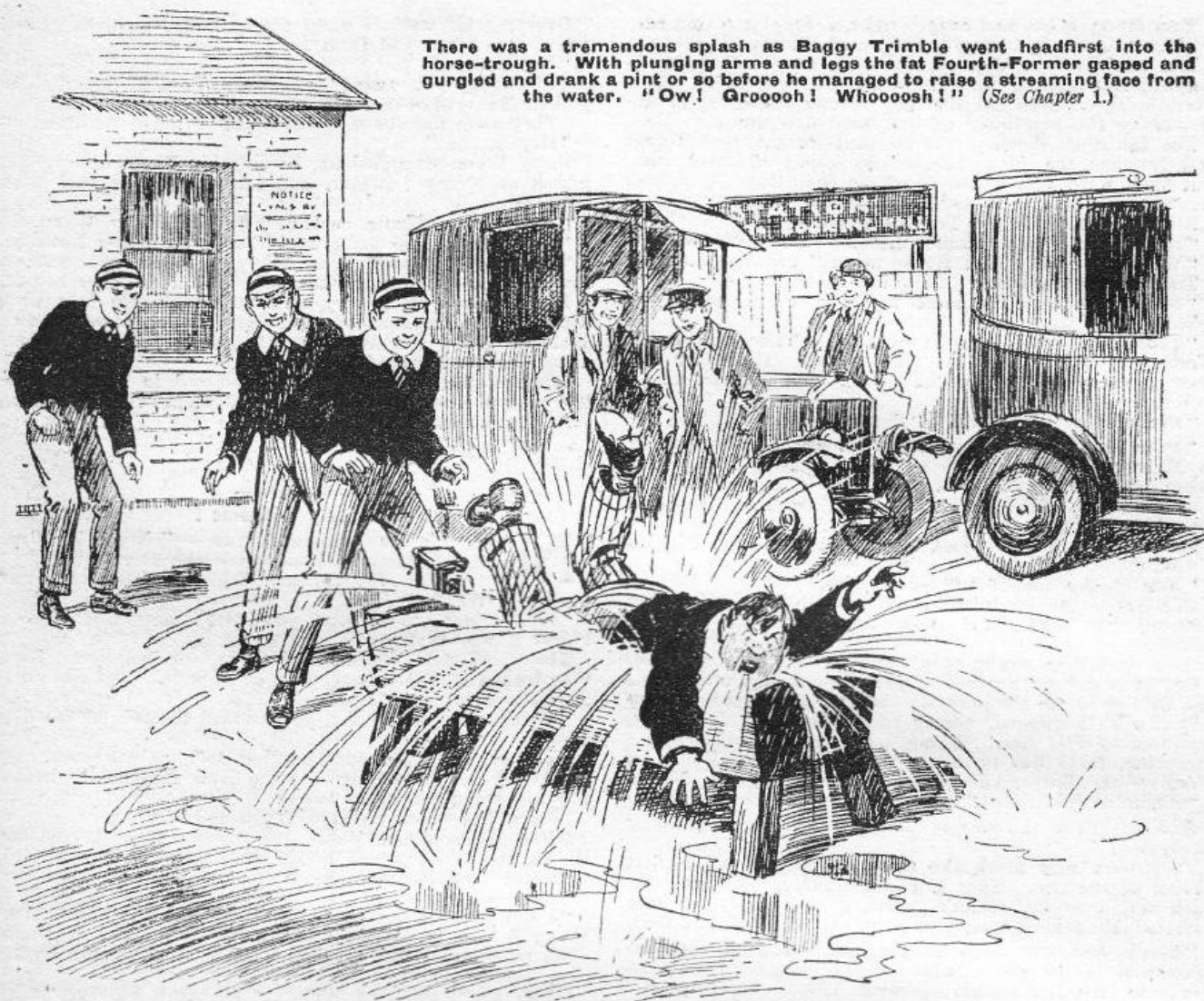
With his fat little legs moving at lightning speed, he raced on. His eyes had a glassy stare, his cap had gone, and his tie was flying in the wind. Tom and Monty, on either side of him, were still perfectly cool, and grinning cheerfully—as was Manners, racing close behind. But Baggy looked as though he had been running in a Marathon—utterly done!

By the time the village came in sight, Baggy was nearly dropping. His legs were aching, his knees were

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to come, Boys!

There was a tremendous splash as Baggy Trimble went headfirst into the horse-trough. With plunging arms and legs the fat Fourth-Former gasped and gurgled and drank a pint or so before he managed to raise a streaming face from the water. "Ow! Grooooooh! Whooooosh!" (See Chapter 1.)



sagging and his feet were blistered and sore. But still he raced on. He had to!

Down the village street Tom Merry and Monty Lowther rushed him, and then into the station yard.

"Here we are!" grinned Tom breathlessly. "Awfully nice of you to come with us, Baggy!"

"Grooooooh!"

Tom released his hold of the fat Fourth-Former, and so did Monty Lowther. But although he was no longer compelled to run, Baggy went on running!

He couldn't help it. His momentum was too great for his wobbling legs to be able to control his fat frame from hurtling on.

It was unfortunate for Baggy Trimble that there was a low horse-trough in the station yard.

Floundering helplessly across the cobbles, Baggy was headed straight for the trough—and his terrific impetus carried him towards it at a tremendous rate. He tried to stop, but couldn't.

The next moment Baggy had arrived at the horse-trough. There was a tremendous splash.

"Yooooosh!"

Baggy Trimble was in the horse-trough. And the water flew in all directions!

Splashing and gurgling, the fat Fourth-Former floundered like an elephant having a bath, as Monty Lowther put it later. He was right in, full length. With plunging arms and legs, he gasped and gurgled and drank a pint or so in his excitement. But at last he managed to raise a streaming face from the water, and a breathless howl came from him.

"Ow! Grooooooh! Whooooosh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three were doubled up with mirth. They shrieked. So did several cabbies, and half a dozen village youngsters and a porter. The only one who did not seem to be enjoying the joke was Baggy Trimble.

"Oh! Yow! I'm soaked!" gasped Baggy miserably.

"Go hon!" chuckled Manners.

"What's the idea?" asked Monty Lowther. "Practising for a Channel swim, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy crawled out of the trough, looking something like a drowned hippopotamus, according to Monty Lowther. He stood there dripping with water and glaring in speechless fury at the Terrible Three.

"Beasts!" howled Baggy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the "beasts!"

"I—I shall catch my d-death of c-c-c-cold!" wailed Baggy. "I—I say, I think you ought to stand me a hot meal! I shall probably get pneumonia—"

"Good!" said Manners.

"Oh, really, Manners—"

"Better run home, Baggy," laughed Tom Merry. "You'll be in good training for the sprint, anyway!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was clear that there was no sympathy to be had from Tom Merry & Co. As a matter of fact, the afternoon was hot, and Baggy stood little chance of any ill-effects from his involuntary ducking. With a speechless glare at the grinning faces of the Terrible Three, Baggy squelched miserably from the station yard, a figure of dripping fury, and turned in the direction of St. Jim's.

Baggy Trimble was wishing very, very heartily that he had never insisted on accompanying the Terrible Three!

And Tom Merry & Co., still chuckling, strolled into the station, to wait for the arrival of the two-thirty that was to bring with it Wallace, Willis and Woolley.

CHAPTER 2.

Wallace, Willis and Woolley!

"GREAT pip!"

George Figgins, of the New House, gave that exclamation.

Figgins, accompanied by his two chums, Kerr and Fatty Wynn, had just entered the station.

It was the sight of Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther, strolling at the far end of the platform, that had caused Figgy to give his ejaculation of surprise.

"School House bounders!" remarked David Llewellyn Wynn.

Tom Merry & Co. had caught sight of Figgins & Co., too. "New House bounders!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

The two rival Co.'s stood surveying one another doubtfully. Each realised why the other Co. was there. The Terrible Three were not the only fellows interested in the arrival by the two-thirty of the three new chaps.

The fact that Woolley was destined for the New House had brought the New House trio along to meet him. But they were very taken aback to find that the School House trio had come to meet Wallace and Willis.

Figgins nodded to the Terrible Three.

"Hallo, you School House wasters!" he remarked.

"Why, you cheeky New House worm!" growled Manners. Tom Merry laughed.

"So you've come to meet the new chaps, too?" he asked.

"That's it," said Figgins cheerily. "The one called Woolley is coming into the New House. The other two poor chaps are going into the School House, aren't they? Rotten luck for 'em."

"Rather!" nodded Kerr. "Beastly rotten luck!"

"Poor old Woolley!" remarked Monty Lowther loudly to Manners. "He's got to go into the New House, you know. We'll have to break it to him gently, or he'll do something desperate—chuck himself on the line, or drown himself in the horse-trough, I dare say."

Tom Merry & Co. shook their heads sadly. Figgins & Co. glared at them.

"You cheeky asses!" snorted Figgins.

But before the argument could develop, the train came snorting into sight, and drew to a standstill in the station.

A carriage door swung open right opposite Figgins & Co.

Out of it stepped a grinning youngster of about the same age as the St. Jim's juniors. He was an athletic-looking fellow, with a rugged, cheery face and bright blue eyes, and tousled fair hair. Though he was not particularly handsome, there was no doubt that Wallace, or Willis, or Woolley—or whoever he was—looked a thorough good sort.

"Come on, you chaps!" he sang out. "We've arrived!"

And out from the carriage stepped two more grinning youngsters.

They were very much the same to look at as the first edition of the trio. They might well have been brothers. Each had a stocky, athletic frame, a rugged, cheery face with twinkling blue eyes, and a tousled head of fair hair.

"You'll find our traps in the van," one of the trio announced to the porter who hurried up. He pressed a coin into the man's palm. "Send 'em all along to St. Jim's, will you?"

Then the three new arrivals turned to Figgins & Co. They knew from their caps that Figgins and his chums were St. Jim's fellows. The three newcomers grinned broad and cheery grins.

"Hallo!" exclaimed one of them. "We're Wallace, Willis and Woolley!"

"Good!" grinned Figgins, stepping forward and holding out his hand. "Which is which?"

"Oh, that doesn't matter!" came the surprising answer. "We're always together, you know."

Tom Merry & Co. had hurried up. Tom grinned.

"It matters now," he remarked with a chuckle. "You see, Wallace and Willis are coming into the School House—"

"And what about me?" cried one of the trio—evidently Woolley.

"You're all right," said Figgins kindly. "You're the lucky one. You see, you're coming into the New House."

"Yes, you can thank your stars for that," nodded Fatty Wynn, glancing darkly at the Terrible Three. "New House is cock House, you see."

"What?" roared Manners.

Monty Lowther tapped his forehead significantly, and glanced at Fatty Wynn.

"Don't listen to that fat ass," he said in audible undertone. "He's a bit potty. Bats in the belfry, and owls in the attic, you know. It's all through being in the New House, I believe. They're all a bit queer."

"You—you cheeky rotter!" roared Fatty Wynn. "I'll show you if I'm queer!"

And with a grim face, the Falstaff of the New House planted a fist on Monty Lowther's nose.

"Ow!" gasped Monty Lowther. "You fat clam—"

He broke off, clapping his injured nose, then hurled himself at Fatty Wynn. A moment later the two were rolling on the platform in a struggling heap.

Sitting astride his fat antagonist, Monty Lowther dabbed at his nose with a handkerchief with one hand, while he grasped Fatty Wynn's nose with the other.

"I'll teach you to punch me on the nose!" gasped Monty Lowther indignantly.

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Grasping his victim's nasal organ firmly, he pulled hard, and there was a yell from Fatty Wynn.

"Yaroooooop!"

"Chuck it, you asses!" exclaimed Tom Merry, and he pulled Monty Lowther off. "You can't scrap here!"

"They seem to have been doing it!" grinned Wallace.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn struggled up, holding his nose tenderly. He glared at Monty Lowther, and Lowther glared back with interest.

"You School House cuckoo!" growled Fatty Wynn.

"You New House jabberwock!" retorted Monty Lowther.

"Chuck it!" roared Tom Merry, who did not want a row in front of the three new fellows if it could be helped.

But it was with a very strained atmosphere that Tom Merry & Co. accompanied by Figgins & Co., together with Wallace, Willis and Woolley, left the station and set off along the road towards the school.

Whether the rival Co.'s would succeed in escorting the trio of new boys to St. Jim's without further trouble seemed really rather doubtful.

CHAPTER 3.

A Stormy Welcome!

"**N**OW, this bizney about Houses—" began Woolley, as the party of juniors left the High Street.

"Rather!" chimed Wallace—unless it was Willis.

"What's going to be done, you lads?" murmured Willis—unless it was Wallace.

The three new arrivals looked at one another. Then they looked at Tom Merry, then at Figgins. Together they all three shook their heads.

"We're not splitting up, you know," announced Woolley firmly.

"Rather not!" agreed the other two, as one man.

"But Woolley's coming into the New House—" began Figgins, "and the other two—"

"Rats!" repeated Woolley, Willis and Wallace.

"But Wallace and Willis are coming into the School House, and Woolley—" began Tom Merry.

"Rats!" repeated Woolley Willis and Wallace.

"But—"

"I tell you, we don't split up!" said the one whom Tom Merry & Co. found out later to be Wallace. "At Ramhurst we were always together. Same House, same form, same everything!"

"You bet!" chuckled Willis. "We can't split up."

"Couldn't be did!" agreed Woolley cheerfully.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, in that case you'll have to see the Head and get him to change Woolley into the School House," he grinned.

He liked the looks of the three new fellows, and felt that they would be undoubtedly an acquisition for the House. But Figgins, who felt the same with regard to the New House, tapped Wallace on the shoulder.

"Tom Merry's right," he exclaimed, "in one thing—you'll have to see the Head to get him to alter his idea of splitting you. But what you'll have to do is to get him to put all three of you in the New House."

"He means School House," explained Manners.

"Rats!" roared Figgins. "You see, New House is cock House, so you'll do better to be in the New House—"

"New House is cock House, is it?" asked Willis, chuckling.

"No, it jolly well isn't!" snorted Monty Lowther.

"School House is cock House, all along the line!"

Figgins & Co. halted. They eyed Tom Merry & Co. darkly.

"You know jolly well New House is cock House!" roared David Llewellyn Wynn.

"Ha, ha!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Do you know any more jokes like that?"

"Well, there's always your face," said Fatty Wynn politely. "That's the biggest joke I know."

Monty Lowther went very red.

"Look here—"

"Now look here," interrupted Wallace briskly, "don't you chaps start rowing over us, for goodness' sake!"

"Come on, you idiots!" growled Tom Merry.

The party resumed their progress towards St. Jim's.

"Play cricket?" inquired Tom Merry of the new arrivals.

"You bet we do!" grinned Wallace, Willis and Woolley in chorus.

"Good!" said Figgins briskly. "You'll get some jolly good cricket in the New House."

"Yes, they would—playing against the School House," grinned Manners. "But since they're coming into the School House, they'll have to play against the New House; and I admit that's not much fun. Too easy."

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

Once more Figgins & Co. halted.
"Look here, you silly jabberwocks—" grunted Figgins, very red in the face.

"For goodness' sake chuck rowing and come along!" grinned Tom Merry.

Wallace, Willis and Woolley were grinning, too, as the little procession went on again. The keen rivalry that so evidently existed between the School House and the New House tickled them.

At last the gates of St. Jim's came into sight, and the three new arrivals stared ahead eagerly at the handsome old grey buildings. That they were not disappointed in their first view of the famous old school to which they now belonged was evident from their faces as they accompanied Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. through the gates into the quad.

"Now," said Tom Merry cheerily, "what about tea?"

"Good wheeze!" nodded Willis.

"That's fine!" exclaimed Figgins. "Come along! This way!"

With a glare at Tom Merry & Co., he turned off towards the New House. The new boys were about to follow him when Manners touched Wallace on the arm.

it hammer-and-tongs. One of Monty Lowther's wildly brandished fists accidentally caught Kerr on the side of the head, and Kerr joined in the fray. Manners and Tom Merry both went to their chum's aid, and Fatty Wynn hurled himself joyfully into the middle of things.

"Oh! Yarooooop!"

Smack!

"Grooooo! Oh, crumbs—"

Biff!

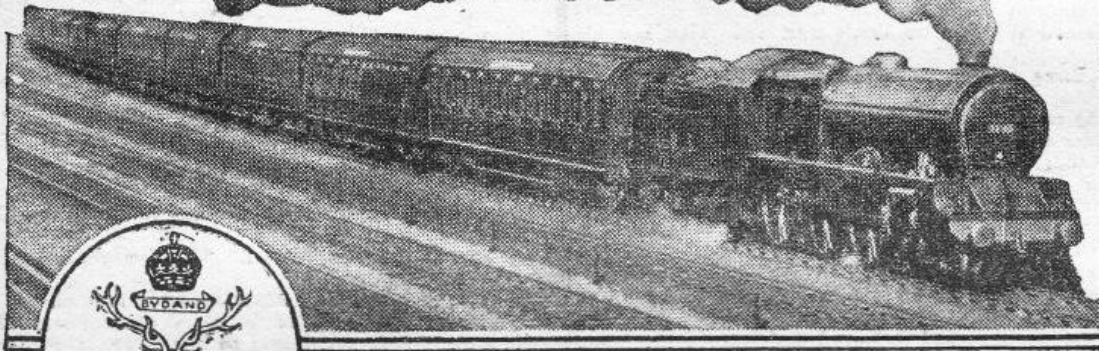
"Wow!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. battled with a will. Figgins went down before an upper-cut from Manners, Tom Merry stopped a hot one from Kerr on the chin, and almost went down, too. Monty Lowther and Fatty Wynn were repeating their great rolling human ball act, as performed on the station platform at Rylcombe. Biffs and thuds, gasps and yells, trampling feet and wildly flying fists seemed to fill the air.

Manners was sitting astride Figgins now, rubbing that hapless youth's head in the gravel. Fatty Wynn was gasping from the seat of honour on Monty Lowther's chest—and Monty Lowther was gasping even more than Fatty Wynn, with that terrific weight squashing him! Tom Merry

REGIMENTAL "ROYAL SCOTS!"

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That may have been the reason, but it is more likely that the Gordon Highlander was awarded this nickname because of his bright, gay uniform with the white, nodding plume and the five tails on his ostrich feather bonnet.

In any case, Locomotive 6106 of the "Royal Scot" class, is named after one of the finest units in the British Army.

As you will see from the illustration of its coat-of-arms, the regiment has for its motto the word, "Bydand," which means "Watchful." And this motto is just as applicable to the magnificent engine which daily covers the distance of 300 miles between London and Carlisle with admirable ease and rapidity.

The 1st Battalion of the Gordon Highlanders was founded in 1787 as the 75th

Foot, and fought with distinction in India both at Seringapatam, and, in the next century, at the Relief of Lucknow.

The 2nd Battalion was raised in 1794. Both added considerable lustre to their fame at Vittoria, Waterloo, and at Quatre Bras, where they saved Wellington's life.

Locomotive 6106 of the "Royal Scot" class may well be proud to bear the name of "Gordon Highlander."

(Next week's interesting railway article deals with L.M.S. Locomotive No. 6107.)

"Half a jiff!" he grinned. "You're going the wrong way! This way!"

He nodded towards the School House. Wallace halted.

"Well, hang it, which way?" he exclaimed.

"This way!" roared Figgins.

"Rats!" growled Monty Lowther. "This way! Come and have a decent tea in the School House. You don't want a New House meal—half a whiffy sardine, and stale bread-and-butter—"

That was too much for Figgins. He pushed up his sleeves in a very business-like way.

"Where will you have it?" he inquired grimly. "On the boko, or on one of those sticking-out ears?"

Biff!

Before Monty Lowther could choose for himself, Figgins chose for him. He chose the nose, and registered a bull's-eye on that already painful organ. Monty Lowther gave a yell. He recovered his balance, and planted a fist on Figgins' left eye. When Figgins went to sleep that night, he would only have the trouble of shutting one eye—that was certain!

"Yooooooop!"

The next moment Figgins and Monty Lowther were at

and Kerr were doing what looked like a ballet dance close by, with their arms around each other.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, ye cripples!" chuckled Wallace.

"On the ball, everybody!" grinned Willis.

"Is this a private scrap—or can we join in?" inquired Woolley blandly.

No one answered him. The rival Co. were far too busily engaged!

Figgins, throwing Manners off, was struggling to his feet. Fatty Wynn had been dislodged by Monty Lowther, and that pair, too, were once more trying to damage one another's noses beyond repair. Tom Merry and Kerr were still interlocked and struggling.

But though Wallace, Willis, and Woolley did not join in, someone else did!

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had appeared from the School House, and there was a dark frown on his face, and—even more to the point—an ashplant in his hand.

"Cave!" exclaimed Wallace sharply. "Looks like a prefect!"

It not only looked like a prefect! To the rival Co.'s it THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,111.

felt like a prefect, as their struggles were suddenly interrupted by that stinging ashplant.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh! Ow! Yarooooop!"

The battling trios ended their affray abruptly as they danced and yelled from the stinging cuts of Kildare's weapon.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yooooop!"

"Ow!"

"Oh, crumbs! Stoppit!"

"There!" panted Kildare angrily. "Let that be a lesson to you! How dare you behave like this in the quad!"

"Dunno!" growled Figgins, squirming with a stinging hand under one armpit. "Can't think!"

"Take a hundred fines, Figgins, for cheek!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Figgins & Co. and Tom Merry & Co. squirmed and wriggled, and eyed Kildare's ashplant very warily. But the captain turned to the three new boys.

"Are you the three new kids?" he asked.

"We are!" chorused Wallace, Willis, and Woolley, with cheery grins.

"You'd better get along and see your Housemasters, then," said the captain tersely. "Wallace and Willis are in the School House, and Woolley is to go to the New House."

The three newcomers shook their heads.

"Nothing doing," murmured Willis.

"Sorry, and all that," said Wallace.

"But we don't split up!" finished Woolley cheerily.

Eric Kildare stared.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"You see," explained Willis, "we don't split up! That's all!"

"You mean, all three of you want to go into the same House?"

"Just what we do mean," chuckled Woolley.

"Well, you'd better see the Head about it, if you're really keen on being together," said Kildare. "I can understand, since you all come from the same school. Come along! I'll take you to the Head now. And you kids," he added sharply, turning to the six disconsolate and dishevelled rivals, "get into your Houses!"

With parting glares, Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. turned and trudged away. Wallace, Willis, and Woolley grinned after them and followed Kildare.

The Terrible Three, feeling both battered and sore, went up to their study, and attended to their honourable wounds. Tom Merry had an eye that was turning a beautiful colour already, Manners had another, and Monty Lowther's nose would look out of shape for several days at least. But they had the satisfaction of knowing, at any rate, that Figgins & Co. were just as badly off.

Tom Merry, busy on his black eye with a piece of raw beef, a little time later, turned his head from the mirror, which he was sharing with Manners and Lowther. There had been a knock on the door.

"Come in!" he yelled.

The door opened. The grinning face of Willis appeared. He entered the study, followed by Woolley and Wallace.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" grinned Willis. "My hat, your faces are in a mess! But here we are!"

"Here we are!" agreed Wallace and Woolley.

Tom grinned. He laid down his piece of beef.

"You mean—"

"That the Head's agreed for us all three to come into the School House," chuckled Woolley. "The way you merchants waded into that other lot—Figgins & Co., wasn't it?—made us feel it was the School House for us!"

"So we asked for School House," grinned Willis.

"Good!" cried Tom Merry cordially. "Ripping! You'll never feel sorry, I can tell you, to be in the School House. It's cock House, every time!"

"It will be now we are in it," said Woolley calmly.

"Eh?" Tom Merry stared at Woolley, considerably taken aback.

Woolley's remark seemed rather too big for a new boy. New boys at St. Jim's were expected to be seen and not heard to some extent at first.

"It'll be cock House now we're in it," repeated Woolley blandly. "We've been put in that empty study at the end of the passage. Take it from us, the end study will be cock study."

"Absolutely," nodded Wallace.

"Without a doubt," agreed Willis.

"M-my hat!"

Tom Merry stared at the three new boys, with very mixed feelings. In the opinion of Tom Merry & Co., Study No. 10 was cock study, and was going to remain so in the Shell passage.

The Terrible Three looked at one another. It was quite THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,111.

clear that Wallace, Willis, and Woolley would need taking down a peg or two!

But at present they were guests, and so nothing could be done in that direction for the moment. Tom turned and jammed the kettle on the fire.

"Tea'll be ready in a jiff!" he exclaimed. "You'll stay and have it with us?"

"Thanks," nodded Willis. He glanced round the study with an approving eye. "You chaps seem pretty cosy in here!"

"Rather!" grinned Manners. "You see, this is cock study!"

The three new fellows glanced at him. The Terrible Three chuckled.

"It won't be for long!" grinned Woolley serenely.

"Why, you cheeky rotter!" burst out Monty Lowther.

Wallace tapped Lowther on the shoulder in a business-like way.

"Do you know what our nickname was at Ramhurst?" he remarked. "They used to call us the Three Trouncers. We could lick any other three chaps at anything."

"My hat!"

The Terrible Three breathed hard.

It was beginning to look as if the arrival in the School House of Wallace, Willis, and Woolley was going to lead to lively times if they intended to live up to their Ramhurst nickname at St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 4.

A Little Fun with Knox!

"THE Three Trouncers, eh?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Absolutely!" nodded Wallace.

"Oh!"

"Cricket—football—boxing—swimming—anything you like," grinned Willis calmly. "We used to trounce everybody!"

"You're not at Ramhurst now, though," said Manners, eyeing him.

"Oh, it'll be just the same," said Willis airily.

"Absolutely," agreed Wallace.

Manners breathed hard. But before he could speak, Willis stepped forward.

"Half a minute!" he exclaimed. "You've got something in your ear, old man!"

He put a hand quickly to Manners' ear, and pulled. A long red streamer came out of Manners' ear—or seemed to come out of it. Willis continued to pull. Yards and yards of paper streamer coiled on the floor at his feet. Manners gasped.

"You ought to wash your ears now and then, you know," said Willis kindly.

"M-m-m-my hat!" panted Manners, staring dazedly at the mass of red paper that had apparently come out of his ear.

"How the dickens—"

He felt his ear gingerly. There was a roar of laughter from Wallace, Woolley, and Willis. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther chuckled, too.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Woolley. Manners' face was a picture, and it evidently amused the Three Trouncers.

"It's all right—Willis is a bit of a conjurer, you see—"

"Oh!" gasped Manners. He grinned feebly. "I see!"

"Well, tea's ready," exclaimed Tom Merry, filling the teapot. "Make yourselves at home, you chaps!"

Wallace, Willis, and Woolley, still chuckling, sat down at the table with the Terrible Three, and tackled the toast and sardines with gusto. But they had hardly started the meal before the door crashed open, and the fat figure of Baggy Trimble appeared, breathless and scared.

Without a word to anyone, Baggy glanced wildly round the room, slammed the door behind him, and dived under the table.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Willis in astonishment. "Is this your pet elephant, or what?"

Tom Merry & Co. were just as astonished as their guests. Tom Merry reached under the table and grasped Baggy by the ear.

"What's the game?" he demanded.

"Yow! Leggo!" wailed Baggy. "Help! S-save me! It's Knox—he's after me! I—I happened to polish off a cake I found lying about, and it was his! Don't let him find me—"

The next moment the door crashed open again. The gleaming eyes of Knox, of the Sixth, glared into the study.

Knox was a prefect, and something of a tyrant—the most unpopular senior at St. Jim's! His face was not a pleasant picture now by any means, and he was swishing an ashplant in his hand.

In this case, perhaps, Knox had a right to be annoyed! It was evident to Tom Merry & Co. that Baggy had raided Knox's cupboard in the prefect's absence—and Knox was on the warpath with a vengeance! But they did not intend to deliver Baggy over to the tender mercies of the bully

"Look out!" yelled Willis suddenly. He jumped forward quickly, and, thrusting a hand down Gerald Knox's collar, pulled out something green and wriggling—a lizard! Knox gave a howl. "Ow! Urrrrrgh!" (See Chapter 4.)



of the Sixth, all the same. Knox was not a favourite of theirs.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry blandly. "Don't bother to knock, please!"

Knox glared at him.

"Did that fat cad Trimble come in here?" he demanded, entering the study.

"Trimble?" echoed Tom innocently. "In here?" He stared round the study. "No, I don't see him."

"Can't see him anywhere," chimed in Monty Lowther, glancing under his plate, and under the jam-pot, and under the milk-jug. "No—can't see him, Knox."

"I believe he's hiding somewhere in here," growled Knox, breathing hard, and peering round the room.

"Look in the waste-paper basket," suggested Manners.

"No cheek!" roared Knox savagely. He stepped forward quickly, and glanced under the table. "I thought so! Come out of there, you fat little toad!"

Baggy gave a despairing howl as he felt Knox's finger and thumb close upon his ear. The prefect jerked him out from his hiding-place, and Baggy grovelled on the floor in terror. The Terrible Three jumped to their feet.

"Now!" roared Knox. "I'll teach you to raid my grub, you fat thief!"

"Yow!" gasped Baggy. "I never knew it was your cake, really I didn't! And anyway, I never took it, of course!"

"Stop lying!" snarled Knox. "I'm going to give you the licking of your life!"

Transferring his grasp from Baggy's ear to the fat junior's collar, he twisted Baggy over a vacant chair and raised the ashpant.

Before he could bring it swishing down on Trimble's light trousers, Tom Merry jumped forward.

"You can chuck that, Knox!" he said grimly. "You're not going to lick Trimble in here! Let him go!"

Knox glared at Tom Merry speechlessly. As a prefect, he was not used to being told by juniors what he might or might not do. But before he could speak, Willis had risen from his chair.

"Half a minute!" he exclaimed in apparent alarm. "There's something crawling up your sleeve!"

He jumped forward quickly and caught hold of Knox's arm. Before Knox could prevent him, the new boy had thrust a hand up the prefect's sleeve almost to the elbow. He withdrew it triumphantly, with something wriggling in his hand—a white mouse!

Knox stared at the mouse in dazed horror. Then he gave a yell, and shook his sleeve frantically. A quantity of torn paper and straw came dropping out on to the floor.

Willis shook his head gravely.

"It must have been making its nest up there," he remarked reprovingly. "You really ought to take more care."

Knox stared at Willis dumbly. He shuddered. Knox loathed mice, and the thought of the animal having been up his sleeve made his flesh creep, though how it had managed to be up there was utterly past his comprehension!

Tom Merry & Co., who knew now of Willis' amazing powers as a conjurer, chuckled.

"G-g-great Scott!" panted Knox.

Suddenly Willis started.

"Look out!" he yelled. "There's something else—"

Knox went pale, and shook his sleeves frantically. But it was to his neck that Willis darted. Thrusting a hand down the prefect's collar, he pulled out something green and wriggling—a lizard. Knox gave a howl.

"Ow! Urrrrrgh!"

He began to tear madly at his collar. Willis, slipping the lizard into his pocket with the white mouse—he had evidently come to Study No. 10 prepared for a display!—picked another lizard from Knox's side-pocket, with an air of great astonishment.

"Great snakes!" he ejaculated. "You seem fond of animals! You must be a giddy naturalist!"

Wallace and Woolley chuckled softly. The Terrible Three were struggling desperately to keep in their merriment. The sight of Knox's face, green with horror, struck them as being the funniest thing they had seen for a long time.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,111.

"I—I can't understand it!" panted Knox. "Ugh! Where did the beastly things come from?"

"You ought to know," observed Willis. "Why, spiders, too! Fancy being so fond of spiders as to keep 'em in your pockets!"

"Spiders?" shrieked Knox in panic. He began to dance wildly, slapping at his pockets in utter horror.

Willis stepped forward again.

"Allow me!"

He picked a large, hairy spider from Knox's breast-pocket. It wriggled hideously. Knox stared at it with open mouth. His face was putty-coloured.

"What a curious chap you are!" exclaimed Willis. He hastily popped the spider into a pill-box, unseen by Knox, and hid it in his pocket. Again he put a hand to the prefect's sleeve, and pulled out a long, wriggling earth-worm.

Knox was past astonishment now. He passed a hand dazedly across his forehead. It was all like a nightmare to him.

He had forgotten Baggy Trimble; and Baggy had long ago taken his chance, and scuttled from the study, to make himself very scarce for the rest of that evening.

Willis laid the worm on the palm of his hand.

"A pet of yours, I suppose?" he murmured. "Well, there's no accounting for tastes."

Knox stared round dazedly at the grinning faces of the juniors, and gradually it penetrated his whirling mind that he was having his leg pulled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wallace and Woolley and the Terrible Three could contain their mirth no longer. They shrieked. Knox's face went pink, then crimson, then purple.

"You—you young hound!"

He glared at Willis, beside himself with rage.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors.

Knox gave them all a look that, could looks have killed, would have stretched them lifeless on the study floor. But he realised that the joke was very much against him! The sooner he got away, the better for his dignity. He snatched up his ashplant and turned on Willis, struggling for words.

"You'll do me five hundred lines, by to-morrow evening!" he ground out between his teeth. "If they're not done, I'll thrash you!"

He opened the door and stamped out of the study, and closed the door with a crash. Weak with merriment, the Terrible Three and the Three Trouncers staggered to chairs and collapsed, quaking with mirth.

"His—his face!" stuttered Monty Lowther feebly. "Oh, his face!"

"Worth a term's pocket money!" gasped Tom Merry tearfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The shrieks of mirth in Study No. 10 continued for a long time. There was no doubt but that the arrival at St. Jim's of Wallace, Willis, and Woolley promised fun for the future!

CHAPTER 5.

A Startling Challenge!

THE fame of the Three Trouncers did not take long to spread through the junior school.

The story of Knox's discomfiture in Study No. 10 was common property next day, and the grins that welcomed Gerald Knox wherever he went did nothing towards putting him in a good temper.

The fact that Wallace, Willis and Woolley called themselves the Three Trouncers was another matter of great interest. It was quite clear to the School House juniors that the three new fellows were by no means ordinary new boys. They had cheek galore, evidently—and would have to be put in their place before long! But no one could help but like them, despite their terrific nerve in declaring that their study—No. 12, at the end of the passage—was going to be cock study.

As Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth—the swell of St. Jim's—remarked, "They may call themselves the Thwee Twouncahs; but they will pwobably get a twouncin' themselves if they twy to live up to it! Howevah, they are undoubtedly a vewy cheewy twio!"

Arthur Augustus made that remark in the junior Common-room after dinner. The swell of St. Jim's was standing by the window with his three chums, Blake, Herries and Digby. The Terrible Three were also there, and so were Talbot and Kangaroo of the Shell, and Bernard Glyn. Cardew, Levison and Clive of the Fourth, and one or two others, had also joined the group that was discussing the new arrivals.

"Knox looked as if he was going to expire, when that lizard came out of his collar!" chortled Monty Lowther.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,111.

"Don't I wish I'd been there!" sighed Jack Blake.

"It must have been most amusin'," drawled Cardew. He glanced at Tom Merry & Co. with a quizzical grin on his handsome face. "So Study No. 12 is goin' to be cock study in the Shell, I hear?"

"Rats!" growled Manners. "That's their blest cheek!"

"If they were really called the Three Trouncers at Ramhurst, they must have something in them," chuckled Talbot. "You'll have to look to your laurels!"

Tom Merry smiled. The captain of the Shell did not take very seriously the assertion of Wallace, Willis and Woolley that they meant to become cocks of the Lower School.

There was a knock on the door, and Toby Marsh, the School House page, appeared. The group by the window glanced at him in surprise, as he approached with grinning face.

"Which I was hasked to give you this, Master Merry!" announced Toby. He handed a large envelope to the captain of the Shell. "With the compliments of Masters Woolley, Wallace and Willis!"

"My hat!" Tom took the envelope in bewilderment. "They gave you this for me, Toby?"

"That's it," nodded Toby. "Very generous young gents, too—they gave me half-a-crown to be sure to deliver it safe!"

And Toby departed cheerfully, leaving Tom scratching his head, very puzzled, as he stared at the envelope in his hand.

He saw now that it was addressed to himself in a bold handwriting. But why Wallace, Willis and Woolley should send him a letter when they could easily have seen him in person was a problem.

He tore open the envelope, and took out the contents. The other juniors crowded round curiously as Tom unfolded a large sheet of paper.

"My hat!"

Tom stared down at the paper in astonishment.

In large handwriting, the communication from Study No. 12 fairly hit him in the eye. It was worded in semi-legal phrases, and boldly headed:

"CHALLENGE!"

"We, the undersigned, understanding that the three merry men known as the Terrible Three—namely, Merry, Manners and Lowther of the Shell Form, at St. Jim's—are considered to be the cocks of the Lower School at the above-mentioned seat of learning, we hereby challenge them to any three-a-side sporting contest that they may choose to decide upon, the said contest to take place on Saturday of this week. The purpose of the aforesaid contest being to prove to St. Jim's that we are better men any day than the Terrible Three.

"(Signed) THE THREE TROUNCERS."

In utter astonishment, Tom Merry & Co. stared at the amazing communication.

"My only Aunt Sempronia!" gasped Monty Lowther.

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, I'm blessed," stuttered Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Talbot and Glyn, Levison, Clive and Kangaroo. Blake & Co. joined in their laughter.

Cardew touched Tom Merry on the shoulder. The slacker of the Fourth was grinning.

"Well?" he drawled. "There's a sportin' challenge! You'll have to take it up."

"Oh, we'll take it up all right!" said Tom Merry grimly. "These new kids will have to be jolly well put in their place!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Manners warmly.

Tom folded the challenge carefully, and put it into his pocket. He was grinning now. At any rate, the Three Trouncers had come into the open, and laid their cards right on the table! There was to be no hole-in-the-corner business with them—they had issued a fair challenge, and would no doubt be ready to stand by their guns.

Tom Merry glanced at his watch.

"Time we were getting our books, you chaps," he said. Arm-in-arm, the Terrible Three strolled from the Common-room, followed by the other juniors. Afternoon classes were due to begin in five minutes. The matter of the challenge from Wallace, Willis and Woolley would have to wait for the time being.

The Three Trouncers grinned at Tom Merry & Co. as they crowded into Mr. Linton's class-room with the rest of the Shell. The Terrible Three grinned back cheerily.

Willis touched Tom on the arm.

"You got our message?"

"We did!" nodded Tom. "Of course we take you on. We'll decide the test later."

"Good!"

(Continued on page 12.)

NOW LOOK AT THIS PICTURE!

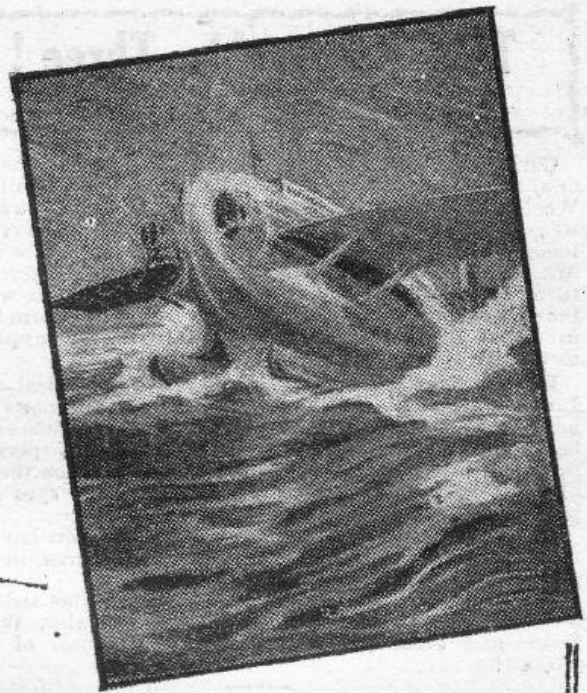
It's a black and white reproduction of next Wednesday's superb coloured picture card.

AND WHAT DOES THE PICTURE DEPICT?

Why, the Ocean Greyhound, half ship, half aeroplane, that will speed over the Atlantic to America in sixty hours carrying a full load of passengers and merchandise. SEE THAT YOU ADD this topping card to your growing set!



MARVELS of the FUTURE!



No. 8.—A Greyhound of the Sea.

THE romantic old windjammers had their day. Enormous greyhounds of the sea began to tear across the face of the waters. The leisured ships that carried incredible areas of canvas flapped their sails in vain. The pace was far too hot for them, and the great floating towns that carried in vast holds merchandise that would strain the storage capacity of a big warehouse, with several decks to accommodate hundreds of passengers, drove them in time into oblivion.

Are these mighty vessels of pleasure and commerce to follow the windjammers into the limbo of the past? It is staggering to think of these colossal triumphs of scientific engineering as back numbers. Yet the threat has been delivered. An entirely new craft may presently wrest from the great liners the title of ocean greyhound—a craft as dissimilar from a present-day liner as the latter is from the windjammer of old!

Half ship, half aeroplane it will be, and if the results of the inventor who has been working assiduously for several years past on this startlingly novel idea prove as successful as he hopes we shall presently be crossing the Atlantic in sixty hours! The great liners that now regularly do that trip from Europe to New York make their fastest time when the voyage is completed in five days!

This new vessel, which is creating such a stir in the big shipyards of the world, will skim over the waves on mighty floats or skids instead of cleaving a passage through the waters. Her propeller,

situated in the nose of the hull, well clear of the water, will be responsible for the surprising speed of fifty miles an hour, and steering will be effected by means of a rudder working in the air, additional to another operating in the more usual way in the water!

As for fuel—why, the old coal bunkers of the big ships of to-day will be laughed at by this half ship,

half aeroplane. In place of a vast stokehold—in which men labour in an atmosphere resembling a sweating inferno—there will be neat, clean quarters, occupying not a tithe of the space at present taken up by all the complicated modern machinery depending for power on coal or oil, where motors will work on gas extracted from the sea!

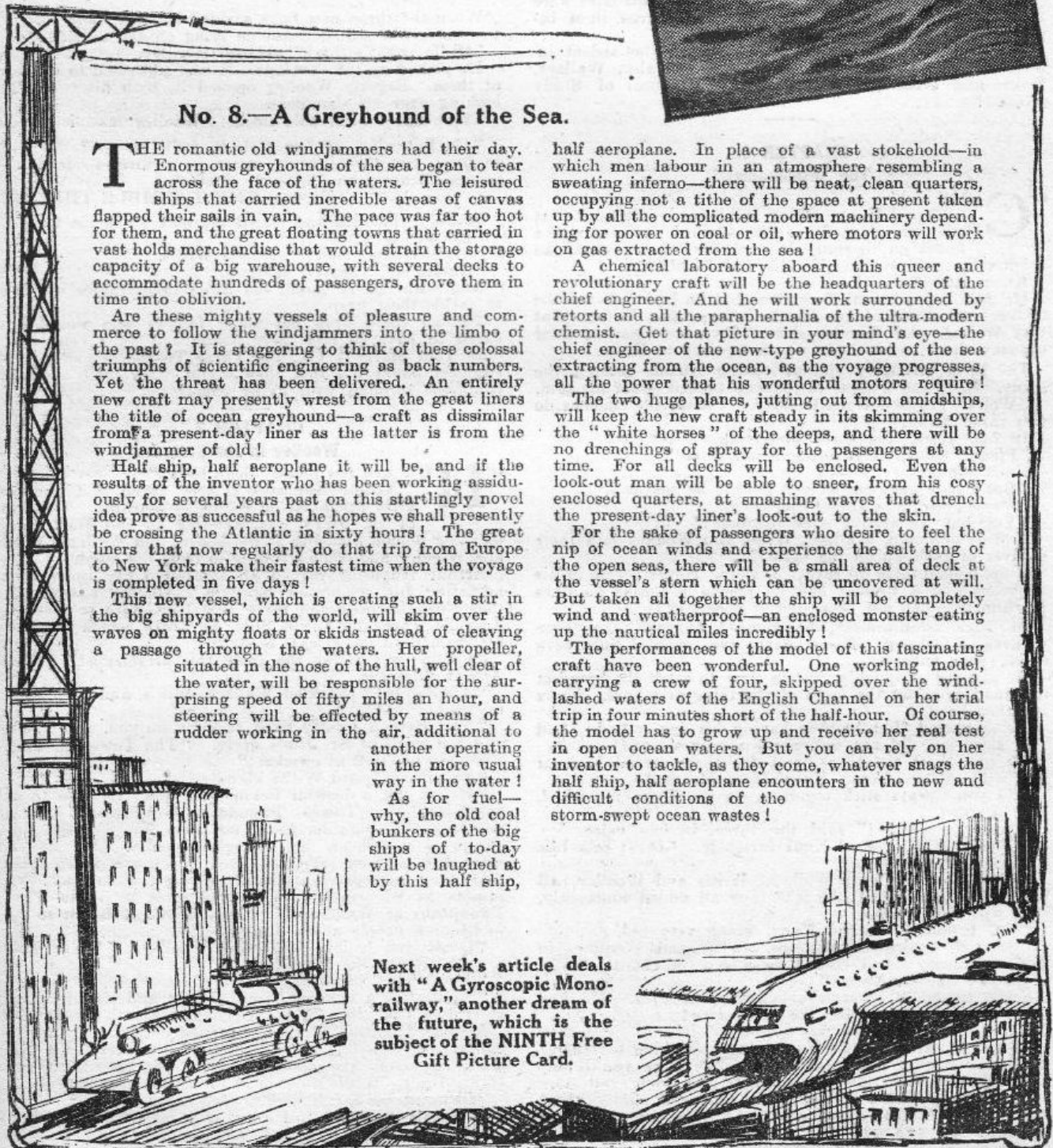
A chemical laboratory aboard this queer and revolutionary craft will be the headquarters of the chief engineer. And he will work surrounded by retorts and all the paraphernalia of the ultra-modern chemist. Get that picture in your mind's eye—the chief engineer of the new-type greyhound of the sea extracting from the ocean, as the voyage progresses, all the power that his wonderful motors require!

The two huge planes, jutting out from amidships, will keep the new craft steady in its skimming over the "white horses" of the deeps, and there will be no drenchings of spray for the passengers at any time. For all decks will be enclosed. Even the look-out man will be able to sneer, from his cosy enclosed quarters, at smashing waves that drench the present-day liner's look-out to the skin.

For the sake of passengers who desire to feel the nip of ocean winds and experience the salt tang of the open seas, there will be a small area of deck at the vessel's stern which can be uncovered at will. But taken all together the ship will be completely wind and weatherproof—an enclosed monster eating up the nautical miles incredibly!

The performances of the model of this fascinating craft have been wonderful. One working model, carrying a crew of four, skipped over the wind-lashed waters of the English Channel on her trial trip in four minutes short of the half-hour. Of course, the model has to grow up and receive her real test in open ocean waters. But you can rely on her inventor to tackle, as they come, whatever snags the half ship, half aeroplane encounters in the new and difficult conditions of the storm-swept ocean wastes!

Next week's article deals with "A Gyroscopic Monorailway," another dream of the future, which is the subject of the NINTH Free Gift Picture Card.



The Inseparable Three!

(Continued from page 10.)

Curious eyes were turned in the direction of the three new boys during afternoon lessons. Wallace, Willis and Woolley had three desks together in the fourth row—they were living up to their boast that they always stuck together, apparently. It being their first day at the school, Mr. Linton did not trouble them very much, however, and there was no chance for the rest of the Shell to see whether the newcomers were likely to trounce their Form-fellows in school work, in the same way that they apparently meant to trounce everyone at athletics!

But the other Shell fellows received a good deal of Mr. Linton's attentions during the afternoon! The news of the audacious challenge issued by the Three Trouncers was being spread through the Form in excited whispers; and lines fell thicker than leaves in Vallombrosa upon the heads of those unfortunates whom Mr. Linton's eagle eyes caught passing the news along.

By the time the final bell went, the three new boys were indirectly responsible for a good many hundred lines bestowed upon their Form-fellows!

But even lines galore could not quench the ardent interest of the Shell in the bold challenge that Wallace, Willis and Woolley had issued to the chums of Study No. 10!

CHAPTER 6.

The Inseparables!

"COME in!"

Gerald Knox, sitting in his study after tea that evening, glanced up with a scowl as there was a knock on his study door. It opened—to reveal the solemn faces of Wallace, Willis and Woolley.

Knox stared.

He had by no means forgotten that he had inflicted the heavy punishment of five hundred lines upon Willis. But why Wallace and Woolley should have accompanied their unlucky chum to his study was a mystery to Knox.

The three strangely similar-looking friends entered the study. Each had a sheaf of foolscap tucked under his arm. "Well?" growled Knox sharply. "What the dickens do you three want?"

In one voice, the three answered,

"Please, Knox, we've brought our lines!"

Knox jumped.

"But I only gave one of you lines!" he snapped.

In one voice, the three chorussed,

"Yes, but we always stick together!"

And as one man, Wallace, Willis and Woolley laid their sheaves of foolscap on the table.

Knox picked them up rather dazedly. Never before in his experience as a prefect had he known a junior do lines for him that had not been strictly necessary!

In utter astonishment, he glanced through the three sheaves of foolscap. Three lots of five hundred lines were there, sure enough.

He glanced up quickly, just in time to catch the broadest of broad grins on the faces of the three new boys. Knox breathed hard.

He suspected that he was having his leg pulled. And that suspicion did not improve his sour temper!

He glared at the three, and the three stared back at him with solemn faces. Knox's eyes gleamed.

"So you always stick together, do you?" he remarked, with a scowl.

"You bet we do!" said the three, in one voice.

"Chuck that!" roared Knox furiously. "Don't talk like a blessed Greek chorus!"

"Sorry, Knox!" said Wallace, Willis and Woolley, all together. "Don't you like it?" they all added innocently, still with one voice.

"No, I don't!" roared Knox, going very red.

"Sorry!" apologised Wallace, Willis and Woolley, in perfect unison. And then they added in chorus, "Why don't you like it, Knox?"

Knox passed a hand feebly across his eyes. He had never met anything quite like this before!

He rose, and his face was grim.

"Since you are all so keen on doing everything together," he said, with an unpleasant smile, "perhaps you'll help each other to fetch me that ashplant!"

Not by the flicker of an eyelid did one of the three betray the fact that apparently their little joke had gone too far! As one man they turned and marched to the corner where the ashplant was leaning against the wall.

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As one man they stooped over it and picked it up. As one man they returned with it to Knox, and together they all held it out to him.

Knox snatched it with an angry exclamation. He felt that he was being made a fool of—but he grinned at the thought that he was going to have the last laugh!

"Willis, bend over!" he commanded bitingly.

Willis bent over promptly enough—as did Wallace and Woolley! Knox said no more. He raised the ashplant, and six of the best was the lot of each of the Three Trouncers. But they had at any rate taken them together!

"Now clear out!" snapped the Sixth-Former.

"Very well, Knox!" chorused the three in perfect unison, and arm in arm Wallace, Willis, and Woolley left the study, apparently as cheerful as ever. Knox sank into a chair and gasped.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "They're like blessed Siamese twins!"

And despite the fact that he had licked them for their pains, Knox had the uneasy feeling that the three amazing new fellows had had the laugh over him.

Gerald Knox had been one of the first to discover that though glue sticks, it didn't stick any more firmly than did Wallace, Willis, and Woolley to one another!

When the three new boys arrived back in their study, it was to find a sealed envelope lying on the table.

"Hallo, what's this?" grinned Woolley.

He picked up the envelope. It was addressed to all three of them. Eagerly Woolley opened it, with his two chums looking over his shoulders.

There was a brief note inside. Woolley read it aloud:

"On Saturday, at two o'clock, we'll be on Little Side, to meet you three cheeky asses in a three-a-side cricket match, in acceptance of your challenge.

"(Signed) THE TERRIBLE THREE."

Woolley chuckled and tossed the note on to the table.

"Good!" he said.

"We'll trounce 'em!" grinned Willis.

"Absolutely," agreed Wallace.

And with cheery faces, the three inseparables sat down to tackle their prep.

Though there were not many fellows who would have cared to have to risk their reputations on a cricket test with Tom Merry & Co., the Three Trouncers had not the slightest doubt but that they would carry their audacious challenge through with flying colours!

CHAPTER 7.

Woolley in the Soup!

"HOW are you feelin', deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked that question, after breakfast on Saturday morning. The swell of St. Jim's was standing in the Hall before morning school, glancing at the board, and Wallace, Willis, and Woolley had come strolling in from the quad.

Arthur Augustus turned an interested eye upon them, adjusting his celebrated monocle. All the school knew that this afternoon the three new boys were to meet the Terrible Three on Little Side, to prove which were the better men on the cricket field.

"Feelin' weady for the fway this aftahnoon?" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Absolutely!" chuckled Wallace, Willis, and Woolley, in unison.

"You have a pwetty hard task before you, you know," said the swell of St. Jim's dryly. "The Tewwible Thwee are vewy hot stuff at ewicket!"

"So are we," said Willis blandly.

"If you get a feahful lickin' you won't be able to call yourselves the Thwee Twouncahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. Though he could not help but like the three cheery new fellows, he strongly resented what he considered to be their frightful cheek in announcing so calmly that they considered themselves better than any three juniors at St. Jim's. "You may have been the Thwee Twouncahs at Wamhurst, but you'll find it is not so easy to twounce people at St. Jim's!"

"Don't you believe it!" said Woolley. "We're going to make Study No. 12 cock study."

"Absolutely!" nodded Wallace.

"Excuse me a moment," said Willis, and stared intently at D'Arcy's mouth. "I say, open your mouth a jiff!"

Arthur Augustus was so surprised that he opened his mouth. With a finger and thumb Willis extracted a large hen's egg from the open mouth of the astonished swell of St. Jim's. Willis glanced at his chums gravely.

"He must be a hen in disguise," he murmured. "This is evidently new laid." He put it in his pocket. "Do for tea!"

With a nod to Arthur Augustus, Willis strolled on, leaving the aristocratic junior of St. Jim's staring after

him in dazed bewilderment. For the moment Arthur Augustus had forgotten Willis' extraordinary powers as a conjurer. He felt his mouth in astonishment.

"Bai Jove! That egg came out of my mouth!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "But weally, it can't have done! I must have been dweamin'!"

The sound of a bell turned him in the direction of the Fourth Form-room. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still looking puzzled as he entered for morning lessons.

The Shell filing into Mr. Linton's room, eyed the Three Trouncers and the Terrible Three with great interest.

The Three Trouncers were grinning and looking very pleased with themselves. They were evidently quite confident that the trial of strength on Little Side that afternoon would end in a victory for them! The Terrible Three were looking equally confident, however, and as they took their places, they grinned across at their challengers significantly.

"Ready for a trouncing?" Glyn asked Tom Merry & Co. loudly. "You're up against Hobbs, Hammond, and Hendren, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In the opinion of the Shell, it was going to be a question of the Trouncers trouncing! But Wallace, Willis, and Woolley did not mind the laugh, apparently. They grinned cheerily, and the entrance of Mr. Linton at that moment prevented further witticisms at their expense.

It was soon evident that Mr. Linton was not in a very bright humour that morning. Talbot, whispering to

Manners that the Form-master seemed to have got out of bed on the wrong side, was dropped on with a hundred lines with dangerous promptness.

"Look out for squalls, you chaps!" breathed Monty Lowther.

"You were talking, Lowther!" Mr. Linton's eyes were suddenly directed upon the unfortunate Monty.

"Oh, crumbs! Y-yes, sir!"

"Take a hundred lines!"

The Shell glanced sympathetically at Monty Lowther; then, as Mr. Linton's glittering eyes swept their ranks, they glued their eyes hastily to their books.

The subject that morning, for first lesson, was English history. The Shell were dealing with the early periods, from the Roman occupation to the landing of William the Conqueror. At any rate, Mr. Linton was dealing with it, and that more or less came to the same thing!

"Close your books!"

"Now for trouble," murmured Clifton Dane, the Canadian junior.

Mr. Linton's eyes roamed over the class. Everyone tried hard to avoid his gaze. At last his glance came to rest on the cheerful face of Woolley.

In his present acid mood, it occurred to Mr. Linton that it was about time he put the three new boys through their paces. He pointed a bony forefinger at Woolley.

"Woolley! What great event happened in England in 1066?"

(Continued on next page.)



If our Office Oracle earned a pound for every question he's answered since he began growing whiskers he'd want seven wagons to cart the notes to the bank, and then some!

Q. What is the Portland Vase?

A. Many thanks for your letter, "Lover of School." It is quite a treat to hear from a fellow who gets up half an hour before the school bell to swot up history, and does extra prep. for the sheer joy of learning. And how jolly to have such interesting hobbies as anthropology, political economy and the microscopical observation of working ants. But to come to your question, my unique young pippin. The Portland Vase is a beautiful blue and white ornament which belonged to the Duke of Portland and was exhibited for many years in the British Museum. It is believed that the vase was made in the first century of the Roman Empire, and an authority as long ago as 1642 suggested that once it had contained the ashes of Alexander Severus. Years ago a drunken man smashed the priceless vase to fragments, but the bits were so skilfully assembled that it is hard to tell that it was ever broken.



The famous Portland Vase, which was fashioned over 2,000 years ago.

Q. What was the Thundering Legion?

A. A difficult question this, Bobby Blythe, for any Third-Former to be set in exam. This was the name given to a body of soldiers under Marcus Aurelius whose prayers for rain (so the legend runs) brought down a thunderstorm and destroyed the enemy. In ancient Rome, a legion was any body of soldiers from 3 to 600.

Q. What do these abbreviations stand for: E.N.E.; E. & O. E.; F.R.C.S.; L.B.W.; N.Z.; and S. P. & O.?

A. Here they are in order, my cluums: East-north-east; errors and omissions excepted (which is put on some business communications); Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons; leg - before - wicket; New Zealand; and sausage, potatoes and onions.

Q. What is a leveret?

A. A young hare, Charlie Woosnam, of Wanstead; actually one in its first year.

Q. Has the Calcutta Sweep got anything to do with the Calcutta Cup?

A. This query was sent in to me from a West of England chum who modestly signs himself "Safty." The Calcutta Sweep—as I thought everyone knew—is a great sweepstake organised in India by the Calcutta Turf Club on the Derby, which runs at Epsom. The Calcutta Cup, however, has nothing to do with this sweep or with horse racing at all. It is the trophy which is played for annually in the Rugby football matches between England and Scotland.

Q. Is there an easy way to train the voice?

A. The question has arrived on a post-card from Willie Harris, of Seven Dials, who wants to be a hawker when he grows

up, like his father. He states that he has heard that singing in the bath develops the voice, but that unfortunately the bath at home is used for storing the coal. A pal told him to buy a packet of canary seed, but this made him cough, and he fails to see how another suggested means—sandpaper—can be used with advantage. Well, Willie, as you have no intention of trying to develop into an operatic tenor, as I had feared at first sight of your question, my task of answering you is made the easier. To

develop a fine, resonant, vibrant and penetrating voice that will convey your cries of "prime bloaters" or "fresh spinach" over several streets, you need firstly to develop lung power. This is the secret of the bellowing of bulls, the trumpeting of elephants and roaring of sea-lions. To develop



The young hare is called a leveret, "Hare's" two of 'em.

lung power there is nothing like deep breaths, Willie. You might try a few vocal notes in various keys, desisting on the arrival of the first stale cabbage from the street below.

Q. Who first appeared with an umbrella in the London streets?

A. A hero named Jonas Hanway who lived between 1712 and 1786. It is believed however, that umbrellas in a form were known in England as far back as Anglo-Saxon days.

Q. What is the difference between table d'hôte and a la carte?

A. These French terms, George Sparrow, will often be observed on restaurant bills of fare. Table d'hôte means the host's table, or common table, and intimates that the price is fixed for the whole meal—the four courses for 3s., for instance. A la carte means by the bill of fare, and you pay for each item of food separately.

From the look on his face, it was quite clear that Woolley hadn't the faintest idea. But he evidently thought it better to make a shot at the right answer, than to say nothing at all!

"That—hem—that was the date when—er—Julius Caesar burnt the cakes, sir!" ventured Woolley bravely.

Mr. Linton jumped. The Shell held their breath. They felt sorry for Woolley!

But apparently Mr. Linton was not going to fall upon his victim straight away like a ton of bricks. A grim smile flickered at the corners of the Form master's mouth.

"I see!" he said icily. "And can you tell me why Julius Caesar should be indulging in cookery?"

Crooke chuckled, apparently much amused, and Mr. Linton did not reprove him. He liked his little jokes to be appreciated. So Crooke chuckled again.

"Shut up, you cad!" breathed Monty Lowther.

"Well, Woolley?" inquired Mr. Linton, with gleaming eyes.

"B—because he was peckish, I s'pose, sir," said Woolley doubtfully. "He'd been doing a lot of scrapping with the Saxons, and Normans, and all those chaps, and he must have got frightfully peckish now and again, just like any one else—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell roared. They felt sorry for Woolley, but they couldn't help it. They shrieked.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Linton, and the laughter died away abruptly.

The Form master turned again to Woolley. His eyes were gleaming dangerously.

"I have no doubt but that Julius Caesar felt—as you put it—'peckish' on occasion!" barked Mr. Linton, with a glare. "Unfortunately, that has nothing to do with the matter, since Julius Caesar had been dead many hundred years by 1066!"

Woolley seemed interested.

"Had he really, now?" he remarked, with a kind of "Well, we live and learn!" expression.

"You actually cannot tell me what occurred in 1066?" snapped Mr. Linton.

"Norman Conquest," breathed Willis, at his chum's side.

Fortunately for Willis, Mr. Linton did not hear that helpful whisper. But, unfortunately for Woolley, neither did he. He sat serenely silent. Mr. Linton continued to glare at him. Had Woolley not been a new boy, there would without a doubt have been a punishment forthcoming for him. As it was, the Form master turned glittering eyes upon Willis.

"Can you inform us, Willis, of the importance of that date?" he barked.

A moment ago, Willis had whispered the answer to that question to his chum. But now he looked completely wooden.

"Was that the date of Alfred the Great, sir?" he inquired innocently.

Mr. Linton looked daggers at him. And Kangaroo, the Australian junior, who was sitting immediately behind Willis, jumped, for he had heard Willis' whisper to Woolley. He knew that Willis could have answered the question if he liked.

"The potty ass!" muttered Harry Noble in astonishment. Then he grinned to himself. He realised the reason of Willis' silence.

Evidently the three inseparables stuck to one another in the Form-room as much as they did outside it! Willis was standing heroically by his chum in trouble, and refused to answer what his chum could not. And Wallace, also, was standing by Woolley, apparently, for he, too, when asked, appeared to possess an abysmal ignorance of anything connected with the date 1066.

Mr. Linton surveyed the Three Trouncers anything but kindly. They returned his gaze quite happily, however, and finally the Form master turned to Skimpole.

Skimpole, of the bulging forehead and bursting brain, knew all about 1066, of course, and was able to pacify Mr. Linton for the time being with the information he required. The lesson proceeded, and for some time the Form master took no further notice of the three inseparables.

But at last he turned to Woolley again.

"Now, Woolley," snapped Mr. Linton grimly, "let us see if your appalling ignorance is extended to King Alfred the Great! Let us hear what you know about him."

Woolley knew nothing at all about King Alfred the Great.

He glanced at the floor and at the window, at a fly on the ceiling, and back to Mr. Linton.

"Well?" barked Mr. Linton.

Woolley thought he'd chance it.

"Oh, I know, sir!"

"I am glad to hear that," said Mr. Linton dryly. "Well, who was Alfred the Great?"

"Why, sir," beamed Woolley, "he was the chap that sat on a chair on the seashore, sir, and told the waves to

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roll back. But they rolled up instead, and he had to swim for it, and he never smiled again!"

Mr. Linton breathed very hard.

Woolley surveyed him hopefully. But his hopes were short-lived. From the look on Mr. Linton's face, it was evident to Woolley that he had missed the mark.

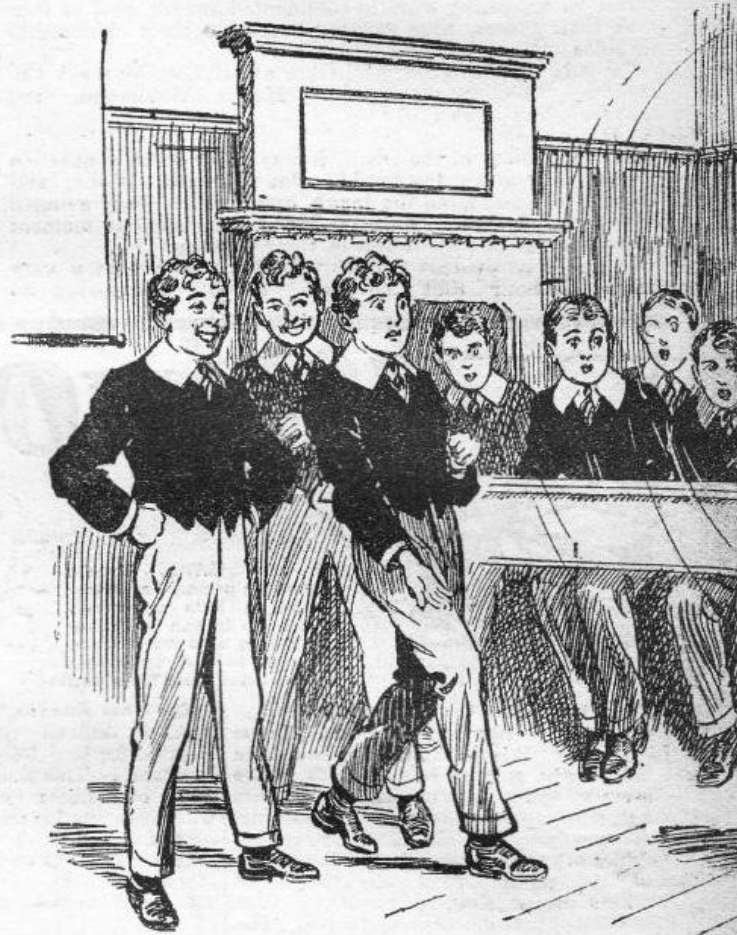
"He—he wasn't that chap, sir?" ventured Woolley.

"No, sir!" thundered Mr. Linton. "He was not!"

The Shell grinned. Suddenly Woolley brightened. Evidently an inspiration had come to him.

"Why, of course, I know, sir—"

"Then let us hear what you know of King Alfred!" glared Mr. Linton. "I begin to think you are nothing but a dunce, sir!" He opened his desk and took out a pointer. Evidently his patience was almost exhausted. "Well?"



As Mr. Linton's pointer whistled down, Woolley failed to resist the yell rang through the Form-room. "Yarooooogh!"

"Ahem! Alfred the Great!" coughed Woolley, eyeing the pointer doubtfully. "Lemme see! Wasn't he the fellow who was playing bowls at the battle of Waterloo, and when Cromwell's Ironsides came in sight said 'England expects this day that every man will do his duty'?"

The unfortunate Woolley was getting very mixed up indeed!

Mr. Linton stood up and picked up the pointer from his desk. He surveyed Woolley like a lion surveying its prey—as Monty Lowther remarked under his breath to Bernard Glyn.

"Woolley! Come here!"

Very red in the face, Woolley rose and left his seat.

One, at least, of the Three Trouncers was in for trouble!

CHAPTER 8.

Detention For Three!

"HARD luck!" whispered Tom Merry as Woolley passed his desk on his way to the front of the class.

Everyone felt sorry for Woolley. Mr. Linton was in a bad temper, and the fact that Woolley was a new boy was not going to save him, it seemed, from what promised to be a really unpleasant minute or two!

Woolley halted in front of the angry Form master, and glanced at the pointer without enthusiasm. Mr. Linton

pushed back the sleeve of his gown, with the obvious intention of freeing the movement of his arm. That action did not seem to reassure Woolley in the least, judging by his face.

"You are a dunce, sir!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"Oh, I hope not, sir!" answered Woolley earnestly.

as the Form master shot an angry glance in his direction.

There was a snigger from Racke, instantly suppressed. Mr. Linton turned again to Woolley.

"Hold out your hand!"

Woolley obeyed gingerly enough.

But before the pointer could fall, there was a sudden stir in the fourth row. Everyone glanced round, and found, to their astonishment, that Willis and Wallace were both on their feet.



temptation to snatch his hand away. The next moment a fiendish n was dancing wildly, clasping his knee. (See Chapter 8.)

"One moment, please, sir!" exclaimed Willis.

Mr. Linton was so taken aback that he lowered the pointer and gazed at the other two new boys in bewilderment. Willis and Wallace left their desks and came out in front. They fell in on either side of Woolley.

Mr. Linton found his voice with an effort.

"What does this mean?" he gasped, astonishment and anger struggling for the upper hand. "How dare you leave your seats without permission?"

In breathless eagerness, the Shell waited for Wallace and Willis to answer.

The two looked very cool.

"You see, sir," explained Willis, "we always stick together."

"Absolutely," nodded Wallace.

"So if you lick Woolley, we'd like you to lick us as well, sir," added Willis genially.

There was a tense silence in the Form-room following that startling announcement.

The Shell stared at the Three Trouncers with amazement, and with delighted grins of amusement stealing over their faces. Mr. Linton also stared at the three in amazement, but no delighted grin appeared on his face.

On the other hand, it went perfectly thunderous. He gasped for breath. He passed a hand across his forehead, as if wondering whether he was dreaming.

And in the silence Willis and Wallace, on either side of Woolley, held out their hands in unison with their chum.

"Carry on, sir!" suggested Willis.

"All ready!" agreed Woolley.

"Absolutely, sir!" nodded Wallace.

"Great pip!" breathed Talbot to Tom Merry. "They're off their rockers! Must be! Fancy asking for a licking!"

Tom chuckled. Talbot had gone rather far, perhaps, in giving it as his opinion that Wallace, Willis, and Woolley were "off their rockers!" But there was no doubt that the three inseparables were an extraordinary trio. St. Jim's had never seen anything like them.

Neither had Mr. Linton.

"You—you really mean that you wish me to chastise you two boys as well?" he exclaimed dazedly.

"That is the idea, if you don't mind," agreed Willis.

A very grim smile appeared on Mr. Linton's face.

He strongly suspected that this was some extraordinary joke on the part of the new boys. Where the joke came in for Willis and Wallace he could not quite see, but he felt sure that it was some new kind of "jape" that was being practised upon him.

"I take it that this is some strange kind of joke," rasped Mr. Linton at last. "Very well! I trust I can always see a joke. To show you that I can see this one—"

Again he pushed back the sleeve of his gown and raised the pointer.

"The silly asses!" muttered Aubrey Racke, the cad of the Shell. "They've asked for trouble—well, they're going to get it all right!"

"Rather!" grinned Crooke.

Swish!

It was a terrific swipe, and it fell across Wallace's hand with a sound like that of a boundary hit, as Kangaroo described it.

"Yow!"

A breathless exclamation escaped Wallace. Mr. Linton's eyes glinted. Again the pointer fell on Wallace's outstretched palm, and again, and again.

"Four of the best!" grinned Racke softly.

It was Willis' turn next. He, too, could not resist a painful gasp as the first stroke descended.

When he had finished with Willis, Mr. Linton turned to the original cause of the trouble.

"Woolley!"

Woolley held out his hand gingerly, and took the first tremendous swipe in silence. The next brought a faint gasp from him, and the third a yell.

"Yooooop!"

Mr. Linton raised the pointer for the fourth time. He brought it down harder than ever.

The swipe was intended for Woolley's tingling fingers. But it never reached its mark.

Woolley, seeing the pointer descending with whistling force, failed to resist the natural temptation to snatch his hand away at the last moment. The next moment a fiendish yell rang through the Form-room.

"Yarooooogh!"

Mr. Linton was dancing wildly, clasping his knee.

The pointer had whistled down through the spot where Woolley's hand should have been, but where it was not. With nothing to stop it, it carried on down—and Mr. Linton's knee took the shock. And Mr. Linton danced on one leg.

"Oh!" cried Mr. Linton. "Yooooch!"

The Shell dared not laugh, but it was all they could do to keep from doing so. A faint whisper of breathless chuckles ran round the Form-room. But, luckily, Mr. Linton was too engrossed with his troubles to hear it.

"Oh!" panted Mr. Linton. "Dear me! I had no idea I was striking so forcibly! Yow! Oh!"

He straightened his leg gingerly and glared at the grinning trio in front of him. Their faces went solemn in a moment. But Mr. Linton's brow was black.

"I am glad you are amused!" he observed with dangerous calm. "To help you to enjoy the joke still further, you will all three stay in detention this afternoon from half-past one till five, and copy out the account of the Norman Conquest in your history books. Go back to your places."

The Three Trouncers went back to their places. They were not smiling now.

Neither were the rest of the Shell!

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Manners. "Heard that?"

Tom Merry nodded. His face was filled with sudden dismay.

For, if the Three Trouncers had to be in the Form-room from half-past one, the three-a-side cricket match to decide their claim to being better men than the Terrible Three was "off"!

But there was a surprise waiting for Tom Merry & Co.

A few minutes later the bell went, and the Shell crowded out for the break. As Tom Merry was leaving the room with Manners and Lowther, Willis touched the captain of the Shell on the shoulder.

"You needn't worry about this afternoon," he said blandly.

"What do you mean, you ass?" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "The game's off now, thanks to you idiots playing the giddy goat—"

"Don't you believe it!" chuckled Willis.

The Terrible Three stared at him, and at Wallace and Woolley, who were with their chum. Other Shell fellows were crowding round with interest.

"What do you mean?" demanded Manners curiously.

"You accepted our challenge," grinned Wallace. "You said you'd be on Little Side at two o'clock for the game. You don't funk it?"

"Of course not!" roared Tom Merry. "But—"

"Then you'll have to turn up at two," grinned Woolley.

"But what's the good of that?" exclaimed Manners, exasperated.

"You've got to keep the fixture, or lose by default," said Willis calmly. "Because we shall be there."

"Rather!" nodded Woolley.

"Absolutely!" agreed Wallace.

And with grinning faces the Three Trouncers strolled away arm-in-arm, leaving Tom Merry & Co. and the rest of the Shell fellows staring after them in utter bewilderment.

"My hat!" breathed Manners. "Surely they're not meaning to break detention this afternoon?"

"Looks like it!" gasped Talbot.

"The hopeless asses!" exclaimed Tom Merry wonderingly.

Kangaroo chuckled.

"Anyway, that's not your bizney," he said. "All you have to do is to turn up on Little Side at two. If they don't appear, you claim a win by default, or postpone it. But if they turn up in spite of everything—though goodness knows how they can manage it—they can claim a win by default if you weren't there!"

"I suppose they could," admitted Tom Merry.

"But—"

"There are no 'buts' about it!" Kangaroo assured him. "You three have got to turn up at the appointed blessed spot at the appointed blessed giddy time—and see what happens!"

"I—I suppose we must!"

But there were very bewildered looks on the faces of the Terrible Three as they turned and strolled out thoughtfully into the quad.

The Three Trouncers were making it clearer than ever that they were an extraordinary trio!

CHAPTER 9.

The Detention Breakers!

"**F**IVE to two!"

Cardew, of the Fourth, glanced at his watch, and made that drawling observation.

Cardew was standing by the pavilion on Little Side, together with a huge crowd of other Fourth and Shell fellows. Tom Merry & Co. were there, sitting on the veranda rail. Tom was swinging a bat, Manners held a cricket ball, and Monty Lowther had some pads tucked under his arm. All three were wearing flannels—ready for the great three-a-side test.

But would their challengers arrive?

It seemed highly doubtful, in spite of their airy assurance that they would do so.

Talbot had seen Wallace, Willis and Woolley following Mr. Linton into the Shell Form-room half an hour ago, to begin their long detention task. Surely even the Three Trouncers would not have the terrific "nerve" to break detention as soon as their Form master had left them to their work?

"They won't turn up!" scoffed Racke.

"Shouldn't wonder if they do!" grinned Jack Blake.

"Bai Jove, neithab should I!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "They are most extwaordinawy fellows!"

"Rats! They'll never dare!" grunted Herries.

Opinions were various among the crowd that had collected to see if the three amazing new fellows would actually have the cheek to carry through their avowed intention of turning up on Little Side, despite their detention. But as the hands of the pavilion clock crawled nearer to the hour, the general opinion was that Wallace, Willis and Woolley would fail to put in an appearance.

Two o'clock chimed. Tom Merry jumped off the veranda rail.

"Nothing doing!" he said. "We've been spoofed—"

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A wild yell of excitement from Clive, the South African junior, interrupted him. Clive was pointing in the direction of the quad, where three running figures in white flannels had appeared, sprinting towards the pavilion.

"Here they come!"

"Bai Jove!"

"My only aunt!"

Wallace, Willis and Woolley came panting up, breathless and grinning. They nodded to the Terrible Three.

"I fancy we are just in time," exclaimed Willis calmly.

"Yes, you're in time all right," said Tom, staring at the trio curiously. "But what about Mr. Linton?"

"That's all right," chuckled Woolley. "As soon as he'd left us, we skipped out of the window!"

"And here we are," grinned Willis.

"Absolutely," chimed in Wallace.

The Terrible Three and the crowd of School House juniors stared at Wallace, Willis and Woolley blankly. It was not often that St. Jim's came across fellows like these!

But if the Three Trouncers cared to take the risk, it was their look-out, and no one else's. They would have to face the music if they were caught breaking their detention.

"But we shan't be caught," chuckled Willis, when Blake dryly reminded him of the fact. "As soon as this game's over, we shall get back into the Form-room!"

"You weally are queeah chaps!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy half-admiringly. "Extwaordinawy chaps!"

"We are!" agreed Woolley cheerfully. He produced a coin from a pocket of his flannels and spun it into the air. "Call, somebody!"

"Heads!" sang out Tom Merry.

But it was tails. Willis chuckled.

"We'll bat first!" he announced.

From the eagerness with which the crowd settled down round the pitch to watch the match, it might have been a St. Jim's v. Greyfriars match!

There was no doubt that the audacious challenge to the supremacy of the Terrible Three on the part of the three extraordinary new boys had created tremendous

interest throughout the junior school. There were New House fellows among the crowd, as well as the swarm of School House chaps. Figgins & Co. had arrived, and so had Redfern & Co. Even Wally D'Arcy & Co., of the Third, had patronised Little Side to witness the contest. Talbot had agreed to umpire the match, which was to be a single-wicket game.

A tremendous yell arose as Tom Merry & Co. took the field. Cheers and chuckles welcomed their appearance—but the chuckles were scarcely anything compared with those that greeted the appearance of Wallace, with pads and bat, as he strode out towards the crease.

"Here comes the first of the conquering heroes!" grinned Levison, of the Fourth.

"He'll be a conquering blessed hero all right, if Linton catches him out here!" put in Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

Wallace reached the crease with a cheery, confident smile on his face. Talbot gave him centre. Tom Merry, who was to do the bowling for the Terrible Three, grinned up at the wicket at the first of the Three Trouncers.

Monty Lowther was behind the wicket—a position in which he was a very useful man. Manners had the difficult task of fielding! With only one man in the field, his use would naturally depend largely on the bowler's skill in forcing the batsman to knock the ball in the right direction. But, in any case—though Tom Merry was a good bowler, and one of the change-bowlers of the junior eleven—Manners looked as though he was in for a warm time.

"Now we're off!" chuckled Herries.

Tom Merry had sent the first ball of that remarkable match flashing up the pitch.

Crack!

Wallace had jumped out at it, and opened his shoulders. There was the sweet sound of leather on willow—and the ball went soaring high over Manners' head.

"Boundary!" gasped Blake. "My hat!"

Tom Merry was not the least surprised of the spectators of that mighty hit. It had not been a loose ball by any means; evidently Wallace knew how to bat!

Tom Merry and Manners glanced at one another. With the ball returned to him, Tom Merry sent down another. It was a really fast one this time. But Wallace put it

through the slips—or where the slips would have been if they had existed—and ran three for it.

The next ball he took no liberties with. Tom had given it a dangerous break in from the leg. But the next ball Wallace flogged to the boundary cheerfully for a four—and off the next he ran three.

The faces of the crowd were even more excited now. Wallace was a batsman—there was no doubt about that. If he continued to pile up the runs at this rate, it looked as though there was quite a chance that the Three Trouncers might live up to their name and trounce the Terrible Three, after all!

The faces of Tom Merry & Co. were grim.

They realised that they were "up against it!" Evidently, as cricketers, Wallace, Willis, and Woolley were fellows very much to be reckoned with!

CHAPTER 10.

The Century Hitter!

"A HUNDRED!"
"Great pip!"

Wallace had just completed his century!

The first of the three challengers was certainly knocking them up in great style. He was a ripping batsman, with a big variety of strokes at his command, and however Tom Merry varied the bowling, Wallace seemed to have perfect command over it.

In rapid leaps the score had risen, passing the fifty mark at an astonishingly early stage in the proceedings. And now, and with a splendid square-leg hit that had flown past Manners like a shot from a cannon out to the boundary, the hundred had been reached. Tom Merry's friends were looking grave.

"Tom Merry's bowling good stuff, too!" remarked Blake.

"This chap Wallace knows how to bat, howevah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sagely.

"Go hon!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Crash!

The swell of St. Jim's broke off as that sudden sound came to his ears from the direction of the wicket. He jumped at what he saw. Wallace's wicket was spreadeagled, and the first of the Three Trouncers was tramping back towards the pavilion—out!

He had played a really great innings, and he was given a friendly yell as he approached the crowd by the pavilion. He grinned cheerily.

"A hundred and three!" sang out Kangaroo, who was keeping the score.

"Oh, good!" grinned Wallace. "We'll lick these chaps," he added brightly.

Woolley went out to bat.

It was soon evident that Woolley was by no means the stylist that his chum was. But he was a strong, forceful bat, and when he opened his shoulders to a ball, it travelled!

His score reached twenty after a while. And then, in flashing out at what looked a "sitter," Woolley fell into a trap neatly set by Tom Merry. The ball soared away—to drop neatly into the hands of Harry Manners.

Tom Merry chuckled, as Woolley turned rather disconsolately towards the pavilion, with the challengers' total now at a hundred and twenty-three.

Willis came out and took his stand at the crease.

Willis, like Woolley, was not in the same class as Wallace when it came to batting. But he, too, was no dunce at the wicket.

He was playing cautiously. Evidently the Three Trouncers felt that their score was by no means high enough to ensure beating the Terrible Three yet awhile. With the fielding practically negligible, large scores were likely to be made, and the challengers had hoped to gather a total somewhere on the right side of two hundred!

But they were doomed to disappointment.

Willis' slow and sure methods resulted in the score creeping up to a hundred and thirty, then a hundred and forty, till at last a ball came curling trickily off the crease in an unexpected way. He felt it graze his bat—then heard the smart sound of a batting-glove. There was a yell of excitement.

"How's that?" sang out Monty Lowther, holding the ball up in the hand that had caught it.

"Out!" grinned Talbot.

The Three Trouncers' innings was at an end, for a score of a hundred and forty! It was a useful total, without a doubt. But unless the challengers produced some extraordinary bowling, the Terrible Three felt that they ought to be able at any rate to equal it.

"I vote Harry goes in first," Monty Lowther suggested to his two chums. "He's a bit of a stone-waller, and he'll help to tire 'em out for you, Tommy!"

"Yes, Tommy's the man!" chuckled Manners. "We've

got to give him all the rest he can get, after his bowling! We're expecting you to knock up a couple of hundred, at least!"

Tom Merry laughed. He and Talbot were generally admitted to be the two best batsmen in the junior school. But, even so, two hundred sounded rather a tall order for the captain of the Shell!

"I won't promise that!"

"Oh, we'll show these giddy Trouncers what a trouncing is!" chuckled Monty Lowther, as Manners picked up his bat and strode out to the crease. "We'll show 'em!"

And, with a yell from the crowd, the first representative of the Terrible Three began his innings.

CHAPTER 11:

The Interrupted Match!

"OUT!"

Talbot gave that decision promptly, as the ball, flashing in from Woolley's hand, scattered the stumps just a moment before Manners' bat touched the crease.

Manners, run out when snatching a couple off what seemed a fairly safe hit, had reckoned without the excellent fielding of Woolley, and had been run out by inches.

With his score at seventeen, Manners turned gloomily towards the pavilion, leaving the three jubilant-looking new boys waiting for next man.

But, though he had scored only seventeen, Manners had done valuable work. He had been in a long time, scoring with intentional slowness in order to rest his chums after their exertions in the field. Manners, fagged out himself, had sacrificed himself with his usual unselfishness for the sake of his side—and his two chums thumped him on the back warmly as he reached them.

"Good man!" exclaimed Tom. "You've taken the edge off the bowling all right!"

Monty Lowther, fastening his pads, chuckled.

"Now for it!" he murmured cheerily. "To do or die!"

Tom Merry and Harry Manners watched Monty Lowther take up his position at the wicket rather anxiously.

Monty was a dashing, reckless bat, who sometimes put up a huge score, but not infrequently failed even to get into double figures. He was a good batsman when he took care, however; and Tom had impressed him with the necessity of taking care on this occasion.

It would never do for the Terrible Three to fail to beat the Three Trouncers! Their prestige in the School House would suffer a severe blow if that happened.

Willis was the bowler of the rival trio. He bowled a medium-paced ball, but it was inclined to be tricky—and Willis varied his tricks with a skill that was at times very bewildering to the batsmen.

For the first half-dozen balls, Monty Lowther played as if he meant to copy Manners' stonewalling tactics. But then he began to hit out more freely.

His first boundary was hailed with yells from the crowd by the pavilion. He planted the next ball right under Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's chair, causing the swell of St. Jim's to lift his elegant legs hastily—a little too hastily, perhaps. The next moment, with a wild yell, Arthur Augustus and the chair had toppled over backwards.

"Yawooooop!"

"You clumsy ass!" howled Herries, dancing wildly, clapping a shin that had suffered from the collapse of the swell of St. Jim's on top of it. "You—you burbling jabberwock! What did you want to do that for?"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Hewwies—"

Arthur Augustus scrambled up very indignantly, and glared at Herries.

"I wefuse to be called a jabbahwock!" snorted Arthur
(Continued on next page.)



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Augustus, rolling up his sleeves in a businesslike way. "I shall be compelled to administrah a feahful thwashin'— Oh! Yooooop!"

The exasperated Herries had reached out and jammed the elegant straw hat that graced D'Arcy's aristocratic brow over its wearer's eyes. Arthur Augustus, struggling wildly, and quite unable to see where he was going, floundered over the recumbent figure of Digby, lying on the grass, and pitched full length.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody yelled with laughter, except Digby. He wriggled out from under his aristocratic chum with a snort. "You silly jay!" howled Digby.

Arthur Augustus sat up dazedly, and surveyed the now ruined headgear in his hand. His face went red with wrath.

"Bai Jove! I shall administrah a feahful thwashin'—"

"Don't talk so much!" roared Jack Blake. "Watch the game! It's exciting!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Bow-wow!" grunted Blake.

With an indignant snort, Arthur Augustus lapsed into a wrathful silence.

Monty Lowther was hitting out very freely now. He was setting the unfortunate Woolley leather-hunting with a vengeance, and the runs were coming thick and fast.

But the three challengers were doing all they knew to get him out, and when Monty's score stood at forty-four, they succeeded. A well-placed ball from Willis' hand picked his leg stump clean out of the ground. With the satisfaction of knowing that he had brought the total score up to sixty-one, Monty Lowther returned to the pavilion.

"Now for some fun!" observed Jack Blake eagerly, as Tom Merry strode out to the wicket.

"He wants to get eighty for a win," said Julian of the Fourth.

"He'll get it with one hand!" chuckled Blake.

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But the Jewish junior looked less confident. Though he knew well enough what a splendid batsman Tom Merry was, he realised, too, that there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip in cricket!

"You never know!" he remarked sagely. "Any old thing might happen!"

But Tom Merry, fresh and cheerful, settled down to knocking up runs in a way that seemed to justify Blake's confidence in his ability to make certain of getting together the necessary total.

Despite all Willis' wiles, despite the smart wicket-keeping of Wallace, who never missed an opportunity, despite the dogged leather-hunting of Woolley, Tom Merry fairly piled up the runs in a way that was an unpleasant shock to the Three Trouncers! The spectators' excitement grew to fever pitch.

Slamming the ball here, there and everywhere, the junior cricket skipper made hay of Willis' bowling—to the delight of most of the juniors watching the proceedings, who thought that the "cheek" of Wallace, Willis and Woolley needed a lesson. The score soared to ninety in no time—and only four balls later it touched the hundred.

And then, snatching a couple of runs for a ball he had deflected into the slips, Tom Merry suddenly realised that his wicket was in deadly danger.

Wallace, sprinting back from his place at the wicket, had collared the ball, and was turning with it in his hand. And Tom Merry still had a good many yards to cover before his bat would reach the safety of the crease.

"Great pip!" gasped Manners, from the pavilion.

There was a breathless silence from the onlookers as they, too, saw Tom Merry's danger.

Tom spurred desperately, and fairly flew over the ground, his bat outstretched. Wallace flung the ball.

If it had been a straight throw-in, it might possibly have taken Tom's wicket. But it was not.

Tom Merry reached the crease in safety—and the ball went whizzing past the wicket with a yard to spare. Tom drew a sigh of relief. And then he jumped.

A yell of anguish had come to his ears. He turned hastily, and gave a gasp.

Dancing on the grass, clasping his ankle, with the cricket-ball at his feet showing what it was that had hit him, was a figure that caused Tom Merry's heart to sink. Not for his own sake, but for the sake of the Three Trouncers.

For the newcomer who had stopped Wallace's wildly flung ball with his ankle, was none other than Mr. Linton, the master for whom Wallace, Willis and Woolley were supposed at that moment to be toiling in durance vile in the Shell Form-room!

The Three Trouncers were staring at Mr. Linton with glassy-eyed horror.

"Oh, snakes!" gasped Woolley.

"We're done!" breathed Willis.

"Absolutely!" groaned Wallace.

"Oh!" yelled Mr. Linton, still dancing. "Yowp!"

But even while he danced and gasped, Mr. Linton's eyes were fixed upon Wallace and Willis and Woolley. And the look in them showed that when he had finished gasping and dancing, there was trouble in store for the inseparables.

Lots and lots of trouble!

CHAPTER 12.

The Trouncers Trounced!

"B AI Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in dismay, adjusting his celebrated monocle to survey the dancing figure on the grass. "It's Linton! Oh deah!"

"Now for squalls!" chuckled Racke.

"Just when the giddy match was getting really exciting!" groaned Jack Blake. "Oh, blow!"

Mr. Linton ceased his contortions at last. There was no doubt that the Form-master was thoroughly in the wars that day! His knee was still very sore from the application of his own cane—thanks to Woolley that morning. And now his ankle ached from a stinging crack from a cricket ball—thanks to Wallace!

Taking one thing with another, Mr. Linton was not in such a sunny frame of mind as he might have been, and his present feelings regarding Wallace, Willis and Woolley were bordering on the homicidal!

"Can I really believe my eyes?" shouted Mr. Linton in what Monty Lowther, by the pavilion, described as a tigerish howl. "Wallace! Woolley! Willis! Why are you not in the Form-room?"

"Can't play cricket in a Form-room, sir," mumbled Woolley.

"So—so we had to tear ourselves away," stammered Willis.

"Absolutely!" agreed Wallace nervously. "Oh, absolutely."

With a mighty hit Monty Lowther sent the ball flying towards the pavilion, planting the ball right under Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's chair. The swell of St. Jim's lifted his elegant legs hastily—a little too hastily—and the next moment he and the chair had toppled over backwards. "Yawooooop!" (See Chapter 11.)



Mr. Linton glared at the three occupants of Study No. 12 with feelings almost too deep for words—almost, but not quite.

"So you had the insolence to defy my orders, and leave the Form-room to play cricket?"

Mr. Linton's voice seemed almost to freeze the air around. Again he stooped to caress his ill-treated ankle.

"Ye-e-es, I suppose that is one way of putting it," admitted Willis nervously.

"No insolence!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"Sorry, sir—didn't mean to be insolent, you know," Willis assured him. "I was simply admitting that we aren't in the Form-room, as you say, sir."

"I can see that for myself!" rasped Mr. Linton acidly.

"That's the trouble," murmured Woolley.

Mr. Linton's eyes glinted very dangerously as he glanced from Willis to Woolley, and then from Woolley to Wallace. He controlled his feelings with an effort.

"You will follow me to the headmaster!"

Mr. Linton swung on his heel and marched off—limping slightly. The Three Trouncers looked at one another in dismay.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Woolley.

"Hard luck!" murmured Tom Merry sympathetically.

It was no good telling the three inseparables that they had asked for it! There would not be much comfort in that. With glum faces, the Terrible Three watched Wallace, Willis and Woolley trail off the field behind Mr. Linton, and vanish in the direction of the quad.

"Blow Linton!" growled Manners, as Tom Merry joined the crowd by the pavilion. "Just when you were piling up the runs, and we'd have licked the asses hollow!"

"They'll catch it!" sniggered Baggy Trimble. "He, he, he!"

Baggy was always amused by the sight of other people in trouble. It was one of his charming ways. But he did not snigger for long.

"You fat reptile!" roared Blake, grasping Baggy by the ear. "I s'pose it means nothing to you that a jolly exciting match like this is knocked on the head?"

And the leader of the Fourth, thoroughly exasperated, banged Baggy's head on the rail of the pavilion veranda, till Baggy howled and howled again.

"There!" gasped Blake, releasing him. "Scat!"

He planted a boot on the seat of Baggy's tight trousers, and Baggy shot away with a pig-like squeal.

"Yaroooooop! Yah! Beast!" Baggy picked himself up off the grass and glared at Blake. "Yah! I'm glad the rotten match is dished, so there!"

And then Baggy scuttled away hastily.

Tom Merry slipped on his blazer.

"Well, I s'pose we might as well be getting along," he remarked with a shrug. "The match is off!"

The Terrible Three strolled off thoughtfully in the direction of the quad, accompanied by Blake & Co. and Talbot. The great crowd that had collected for the amazing game dispersed with disappointment on their faces. It was sickening that Mr. Linton had happened to take it into his head to stroll round by Little Side that afternoon!

But in the opinion of the crowd, there was little doubt but that the Terrible Three would have beaten their opponents to a frazzle had the match continued. Tom Merry had been thoroughly "set," and was good for dozens and dozens more runs, when the unfortunate interruption had happened!

But it was all very unsatisfactory—and it was not likely that the Three Trouncers would for a moment share the opinion of the other juniors that they would have been licked to the wide.

That this was so, was not long in doubt.

A big crowd had gathered at the end of the passage leading to the Head's study ten minutes after the disappearance of Mr. Linton and his victims from Little Side, to greet the Three Trouncers when they should emerge from their interview with Dr. Holmes. That it was an unpleasant and painful interview for Wallace, Willis and Woolley was plain enough, judging from the strange swishing sounds that came to the ears of the waiting crowd, through the closed door of the Head's dreaded sanctum.

And at last, when that door opened and the Three Trouncers emerged, it was plainer than ever that they had not been the trouncers on this occasion, but the trounced! They were wriggling and gasping, and squirming and blinking, with their hands held to the seats of their trousers as if they were glued in that position.

"Yow-ow-ow!" panted Willis. "Oh, my hat! What a giddy athlete the Head must have been in his young days!"

"Must have been a champion batsman!" groaned Woolley.

"Absolutely!" gasped Wallace.

They blinked dismally at the grinning faces of the other juniors. Kangaroo chuckled.

"Trowned?" he grinned.

"Yow! Yes!"

"Hard luck!" said Talbot sympathetically. "But, anyway, it's saved you from getting a trouncing on Little Side!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Rather!" chortled Herries.

Wallace, Willis, and Woolley glared at Talbot and Herries.

"What do you mean, you idiots?" hooted Woolley.

"Trowned—us?" snorted Wallace. "Rats!"

"We'd have had Tom Merry out at any blessed moment," nodded Willis. "He didn't stand an earthly of making any more runs! We'd have trounced 'em all right!"

"Rather!" chorused Woolley and Wallace.

The crowd of juniors stared at them in astonishment.

"What?" roared Blake. "Why, you silly asses, you'd have been licked to a frazzle! Tom Merry was good for a couple of hundred off you chaps."

"Gammon!" sniffed Willis.

"Bunkum!" ejaculated Woolley.

"Absolute rot!" agreed Wallace.

And with those expressions of their amazing confidence in the prowess of Wallace, Willis, and Woolley, the three inseparables limped off arm-in-arm towards the Shell passage.

The Three Trouncers' enthusiasm for cricket might be feeling a trifle damped at the moment. But evidently their belief in themselves was as great as ever!

CHAPTER 13.

All or None!

"ABBOTSFORD!" said Tom Merry.

The three chums of Study No. 10 were having tea. It was the following Monday, and Blake & Co. of the Fourth had looked in to have tea with Tom Merry & Co.

"Abbotsford!" repeated Tom Merry. "It's the Abbotsford match on Saturday."

"Rather!" nodded Blake. "Good bizney! It's to be played over at Abbotsford, isn't it?"

"That's right," said Tom Merry. "I want to put up the team this evening." He helped himself to another slice of toast. "I've got ten of 'em settled in my mind. I'm wondering about the eleventh."

He took a slip of paper from his pocket, on which were written a number of names. Blake, seated beside him, peered eagerly over his arm.

"You're in all right, of course!" smiled Tom Merry.

"Good!" grinned Blake.

"These are the others," announced Tom. "Talbot, Kangaroo, Figgy and Fatty Wynn and Kerr, and Redfern; Gussy and you, Monty."

"Ahem!" Herries coughed.

Herries considered that he would be quite an asset to the team himself, though he did not like to say so. Tom glanced at him, and shook his head.

"Sorry, old man! I'm afraid you won't be playing."

Manners looked at his plate. His own name had not been mentioned. His steady batting was always very useful, and when at the top of his form, his claim to a place in the cricket eleven could not be overlooked. But he sometimes had to stand down in favour of a promising recruit from the reserves, and apparently he was in danger of having to do so this time.

"Who are the candidates for eleventh place, then?" asked Digby hopefully.

"Well, there's old Manners," said Tom. Manners brightened. "And there's that chap Wallace!"

"Wallace, eh?" said Blake thoughtfully.

"Wallace is good," said Manners generously.

"Wattlin' good, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He knocked up a hundred on Saturday, in that three-aside match. You could see he is a born battah!"

"I think he's shown he deserves a place in the Abbotsford match," nodded Tom Merry. "Yes, I think I must put him in." He glanced across at Manners. "Sorry, old hoss!"

"Oh, that's all right!" protested Manners, colouring a trifle.

Tom Merry took out a pencil and wrote in Wallace's name.

"I'll put the team up after tea," he remarked. "I fancy Abbotsford will give us a stiff game—I hear they are rather hot this season. But they'll find we shall need some licking, all the same!"

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

"What-ho!"

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As Tom had said, even though Abbotsford might be an exceptionally red-hot team this season, they would still find that St. Jim's were foemen worthy of their steel—or rather, of their willow!

In Tom Merry himself, Talbot and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Figgins and Redfern of the New House, the eleven good men and true visiting Abbotsford on Saturday would possess five first-class batsmen, who could be depended upon to look after that department of the game unaided, if needs be. But they would have strong support in Kangaroo, the Australian junior, and in the dashing batting of Monty Lowther, and in the stubborn, steady performance that Jack Blake was sure to put up.

And the bowling was likely to be dangerous enough, with Fatty Wynn, the wizard bowler from the New House, and Kangaroo; while Kerr and Tom Merry and Redfern were all useful change-bowlers. The team had a first-class wicket-keeper in Blake, and the fielding left nothing to be desired this season, as practice games had already shown.

On top of all this, the addition of Wallace to the team looked like assuring Abbotsford a very stiff task indeed, if they were to save themselves from a beating at the hands of their visitors! If Wallace showed the same form next Saturday as he had shown on the last, St. Jim's would be very unlucky indeed if he did not join with the other star batsmen in piling up a big score for his side.

"Well, I'll go and stick up the notice," remarked Tom when the cheery meal was finished.

He rose and left the study, returning a few minutes later, having pinned up the names of the eleven to travel over to Abbotsford for the big match. Soon afterwards, Blake & Co. took their leave, and the Terrible Three pulled out their books and settled down to prep.

But they had not been at work long before there came an interruption.

There was a bang on the door, and in answer to Tom Merry's invitation the door swung open. Three cheerful faces gazed into the study—the faces of Wallace, Willis, and Woolley.

"Hallo!" said Tom cheerily. "Come in."

The Three Trouncers entered the study. Wallace closed the door behind him. There were very determined looks upon the faces of the trio from Study No. 12.

"Seen the board, Wallace?" asked Tom.

"Absolutely!" nodded Wallace.

"Good man. We're glad to have you in the team!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Monty Lowther. "If you knock 'em up against Abbotsford in the same style as you were knocking 'em up on Saturday, you'll be worth your giddy weight in gold."

"Thanks!" said Wallace. "But—"

"Yes, but!" chuckled Willis and Woolley.

"What do you mean—'but'?" asked Tom, puzzled.

"We always stick together," answered Wallace calmly. "Oh, absolutely."

The Terrible Three glanced at one another. They had taken it for granted that the arrival in their study of the Three Trouncers meant that Wallace, delighted at his name being down in the team, had strolled along to thank the junior cricket captain! They had been a trifle puzzled to know why Willis and Woolley should have come along, too.

And now it seemed that though Wallace had come along it was not entirely to thank Tom Merry for Tom's recognition of his batting abilities. There was something else in the wind.

It seemed that there was a "but" in it somewhere!

"Yes, we always stick together," repeated Wallace.

"What on earth are you driving at?" demanded Tom Merry sharply. A vague suspicion of the truth was beginning to fill his mind.

"Well," said Wallace gently, "since we always stick together, it's a case of all three or none—at Abbotsford just as much as anywhere else!"

"My hat!" gasped the captain of the Shell.

The Terrible Three stared at Wallace, Willis, and Woolley in utter astonishment. The Three Trouncers stared back at them with cheery confidence.

"We can't possibly be split up like that," Willis assured Tom Merry.

"We couldn't stand for it!" agreed Woolley.

"Absolutely not!" nodded Wallace. "It's all or none! So you'll have to find places for Willis and Woolley, too!"

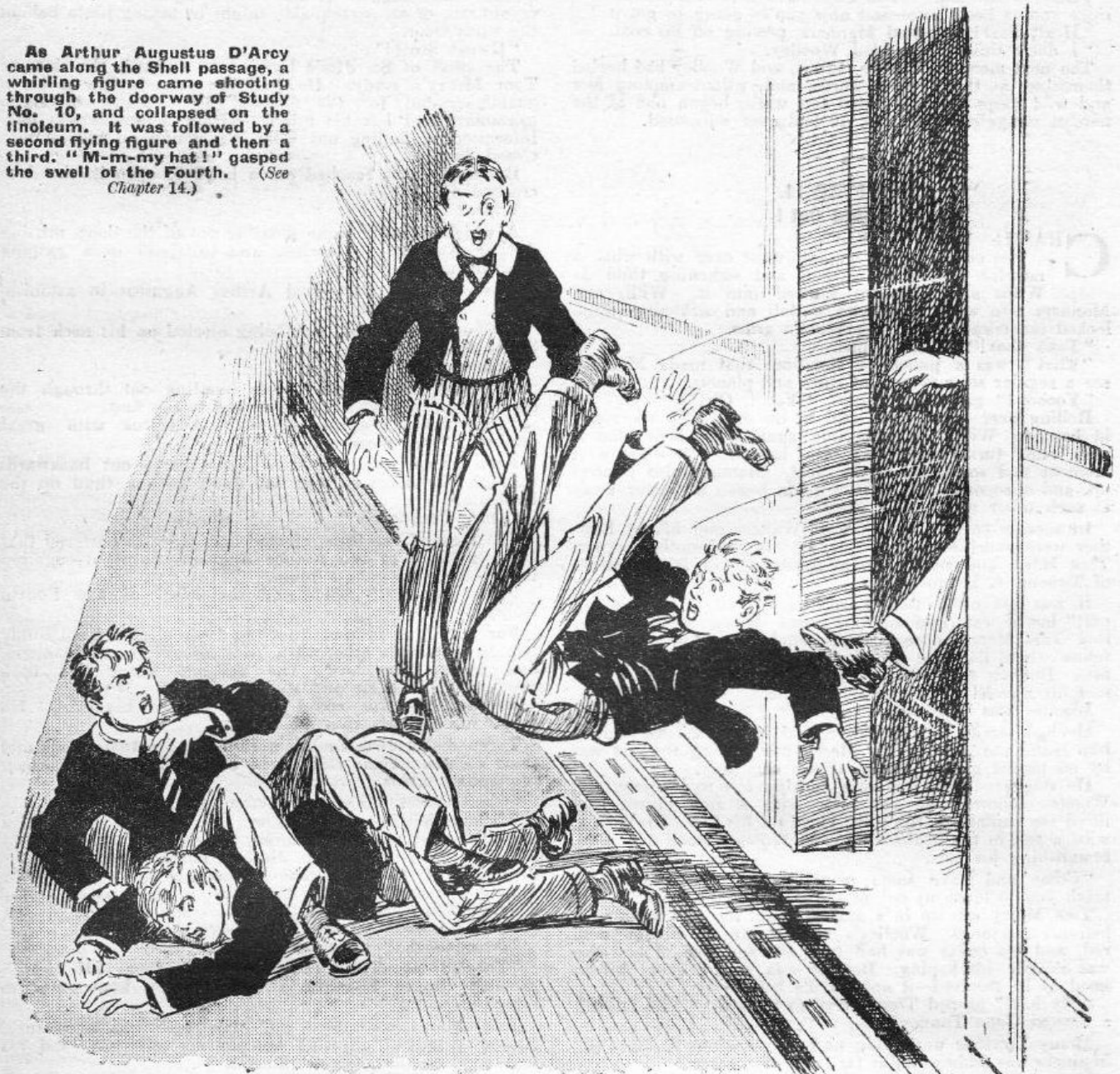
Tom Merry gasped. He was flabbergasted.

He knew that Willis and Woolley were both quite good cricketers; he had seen that for himself. But there were other fellows in the junior school who had a far better claim than they to playing against Abbotsford.

He wanted Wallace in the team, but he certainly did not want Willis and Woolley. Their cool statement that they all three wanted places—that Tom must play all or none—left the junior cricket skipper gasping.

"Well?" murmured Wallace hopefully. "What about it?"

As Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came along the Shell passage, a whirling figure came shooting through the doorway of Study No. 10, and collapsed on the linoleum. It was followed by a second flying figure and then a third. "M-m-my hat!" gasped the swell of the Fourth. (See Chapter 14.)



The calm "cheek" of it was too much for Manners. He had been dropped from the team in order to give a place to Wallace, and it was adding insult to injury for the other two of the inseparable trio to demand places also on the strength of it!

"Well, of all the blessed nerve!" roared Manners hotly. "You cheeky rotters!"

Tom stared at Wallace grimly.

"Don't you want to play against Abbotsford?" he demanded.

"Of course I do!" nodded Wallace. "Absolutely! But we can't split up. Ain't possible!"

"We all want to play against Abbotsford," chuckled Willis.

"And it's all or none!"

"Rather!" agreed Woolley.

Tom Merry smiled grimly.

"Right you are," he said. "If it's all or none—"

"You'll play all of us?" cried Wallace eagerly.

"Wrong!" snapped Tom Merry. "I play none!"

The Three Trouncers looked at one another. That they were very disappointed was obvious. But it was quite clear that Tom Merry's curt decision in no way affected their own. They stuck together. They could not split.

"Is that flat?" asked Willis.

"Flat and final," Tom Merry assured him.

Tom Merry was feeling thoroughly exasperated. A fellow who was offered a place in the team should have been only too delighted to grab his chance. Nearly every other fellow in the junior school would have given his ears for Wallace's opportunity.

But Wallace coolly demanded places in the team for his two chums as well as himself—otherwise he would not play!

It seemed to Tom Merry that this time the Three Trouncers had just about reached the limit.

He rose and swung open the door.

"Thanks for looking in," he said dryly. "But I'm afraid we're busy now."

"But look here—" snorted Wallace.

"Rats!" growled Tom impatiently. "Manners plays now in your place. I'm not going to argue about it. You've had your chance, and you've turned it down."

Wallace, Willis, and Woolley glared at Tom Merry.

"Why, you fathead," roared Wallace, "you're missing the chance of having three real cricketers in your team! You know how we play. We were trouncing you and your two pals on Saturday when Linton barged in and stopped things!"

"What!" hooted Monty Lowther. "We were giving you the trouncing of your lives, you mean!"

"Why, you silly jay—"

"You cheeky ass—"

Biff!

Wallace's fist landed on Monty Lowther's eye, and that junior sat down on the floor with more abruptness than grace. Wallace pushed up his sleeves. Willis and Woolley followed suit.

"Come on, you poor wasters!" snorted Wallace grimly. "We'll show you we're the Three Trouncers! We'll trounce the lot of you!"

Tom Merry closed the door without a word, and pushed up his own sleeves. The captain of the Shell was feeling thoroughly exasperated. There was a war-like gleam in his eyes.

"Good!" he said. "You asses have needed a lesson ever since you've been here—and now you're going to get it."

"Hear, hear!" growled Manners, peeling off his coat.

"I don't think!" chuckled Woolley.

The next moment Wallace, Willis, and Woolley had hurled themselves at the Terrible Three, and, with trampling feet and wild gasps echoing round the walls, began one of the fiercest struggles Study No. 10 had ever witnessed.

CHAPTER 14.

Chucked Out!

CRASH! Bang! Wallop!

The chair by the window went over with what a novelist would call a dull and sickening thud as Willis and Manners hurtled into it. Willis and Manners also went over with a dull and sickening thud, locked inextricably in one another's arms.

"Take that!" panted Willis.

"That" was a punch on the nose that made Manners see a regular solar system of stars and planets.

"Yooooop!" gasped Manners. "Yow! Oh!"

Rolling over with Willis still in his grasp, he succeeded in banging Willis' head forcibly against the floor, and it was Willis' turn to see stars. But he fought free the next moment and scrambled to his feet. Manners also jumped up, and once more the pair of them began to batter away at each other merrily.

In another corner of the room, Wallace and Monty Lowther were punching and struggling. In yet another corner, Tom Merry and Woolley were giving a very fair imitation of Tunney v. Dempsey.

It was not often that Tom Merry really "got his rag out," but it was right out this time! It was still less often that Tom Merry, once roused, found himself up against a fellow whom he could not master when it came to using his fists. But on this occasion the captain of the Shell had met his match!

Woolley was a fighter.

He had terrific hitting power, and lots of science to help him make use of it. Tom Merry was finding that he was by no means getting things all his own way.

He staggered back before a flashing left to the jaw, and Woolley followed up the blow with a right hook that lifted the captain of the Shell clean off his feet. He landed with a yell in the coal-scuttle, and Woolley stood over him, brandishing his fists.

"Come and have some more!" roared Woolley. "I'll teach you to leave us out of the Abbotsford match!"

Tom Merry was up in a moment, and the two went at it hammer-and-tongs. Woolley's nose began to stream with red, and his collar was half torn off, and one of his eyes was rapidly blackening. But he was giving every bit as good as he received—if not a trifle better!

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry to himself. "The fellow's a blessed Gene Tunney!"

Monty Lowther was faring no better against Wallace, and Manners was finding Willis far from easy game.

In fact, for once, the Terrible Three had met their match when it came to scrapping! The Three Trouncers might not have looked much like defeating them on the cricket field, but there seemed to be some solid foundation for their nickname, nevertheless.

But the Terrible Three were by no means beaten yet.

"Back up, you chaps!" panted Tom Merry. "Chuck the blighters out!"

"You bet!" panted Manners.

But at the moment the Three Trouncers certainly did not look like being chucked out! Wallace, Willis, and Woolley drew back to back, hitting out lustily.

"Come on, then!" grinned Woolley. "Chuck us out!"

It was a lop-sided grin, for one corner of his mouth was a little out of shape, as the result of contact with Tom Merry's fist! But there was was no denying the grimness of it.

Without a doubt, the three unruly visitors to Study No. 10 would take a good deal of chucking out.

Faster and more furious yet the struggle raged. A dozen fists returned every blow with interest. Half a dozen noses were looking sadly battered and bruised. Half a dozen collars were torn adrift—hanging on by their back studs.

The struggle raged on!

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, strolling elegantly along the Shell passage in the direction of Study No. 10, paused, listening.

Strange sounds were issuing from that apartment! **THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,111.**

Sounds that suggested that a bull-fight, or a Mexican revolution, or an earthquake, might be taking place behind the study door.

"Gweat Scott!"

The swell of St. Jim's hurried on towards the door of Tom Merry's study. He had come to borrow a Latin grammar, but for the moment all thoughts of Latin grammars had left his mind. Arthur Augustus was only interested in finding out what was going on behind that closed door.

But even as he reached out a hand to open it, the door crashed open.

Whizz!

A whirling figure came shooting out of the door, missing Arthur Augustus by inches, and collapsed in a gasping heap on the linoleum.

"Gweat pip!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

Someone, it seemed, was being ejected on his neck from Study No. 10!

"Yaroooooop!"

A second flying figure came hurtling out through the open doorway, and sat dazedly beside the first.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus with great interest. "Any more comin'?"

Even as he spoke, a third figure came out backwards through the doorway, and sat down with a thud on the linoleum.

"Oh! Grooooooh!"

The faces of the three ejected ones were so battered that for a moment or two Arthur Augustus hardly recognised them. Then he gave a jump.

"M-m-my hat!" ejaculated the swell of the Fourth feebly.

For the three fellows who had been ejected from Study No. 10 were none other than Tom Merry, Harry Manners, and Monty Lowther! The Terrible Three had been chucked out of their own study.

Arthur Augustus could hardly believe his eyes. He gazed wonderingly into the study.

Three dishevelled figures were fastening their coats and their collars. Their faces were battered, but bore broad, triumphant grins.

"Gweat Scott!" stuttered Arthur Augustus.

Wallace, Willis, and Woolley linked arms and strolled from the study, and away along the passage, with a cheery nod to the swell of St. Jim's. They vanished in the direction of the bath-rooms—evidently to repair their damaged features! On the floor of the passage, the Terrible Three dabbed at their noses and groaned.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Grooooooh!" mumbled Manners.

"They're the Three Trouncers this time, all right," groaned Monty Lowther. "Yow! They know how to scrap, anyway!"

Tom Merry scrambled up. His face was a picture. Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and surveyed his features with the greatest interest.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy! That is a vewy choice black eye!" observed the swell of St. Jim's kindly.

"Woolley did it!" groaned Tom Merry, ruefully.

"And—excuse my wemarkin' on it—I have nevah seen a bettah thick ear in my life!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with genuine admiration.

"Wallace did it!" mumbled Tom Merry.

"And only a mastahly hand could have made your nose look like that!" added Arthur Augustus critically.

"Willis!" sighed Tom.

Manners and Lowther were on their feet now, blinking owlishly, and tenderly feeling their noses and ears. Tom Merry grinned ruefully.

"Yes," he said, "I take off my hat to 'em as scrappers! I'd no idea they were blessed champions! But—well, they still don't play against Abbotsford on Saturday."

And with that, Tom Merry set off painfully for the bath-rooms, followed by Manners and Lowther.

There was no doubt that the three amazing new fellows in Study No. 12 had proved their mettle! They had shown definitely that they could live up to their name.

In scrapping, the Terrible Three ruefully admitted that they had to give Wallace, Willis, and Woolley best. But cricket was a very different matter. In cricket, Tom Merry's word was law, and he was quite determined that the Three Trouncers were not going to be numbered among the eleven to play against Abbotsford.

But the question was, would the Three Trouncers accept that decision without a struggle?

Now that he knew them, Tom Merry hardly thought that Wallace, Willis, and Woolley would!

CHAPTER 15.

Cricketers v. Trouncers!

NEXT day, St. Jim's was buzzing with the news! Wallace would not play, after all! His name had been crossed out, and that of Manners substituted. And all because the Three Trouncers would not split! If one played against Abbotsford, they all had to play—all or none.

And Tom Merry had naturally answered "None!" St. Jim's chuckled.

They chuckled, too, when Tom Merry & Co. were seen strolling in the quad after breakfast. The faces of the Terrible Three still had a very lop-sided look, after their tussle with the Three Trouncers.

The vast majority of the juniors agreed with Tom Merry—the Three Trouncers' demand was amazing cheek. But then, they had proved themselves amazingly cheeky in more ways than one!

"The silly asses!" snorted Talbot of the Shell. "It's all very well for chaps to stick together, but when it comes to cricket—"

But apparently Wallace, Willis, and Woolley considered that cricket should be no exception to their rule.

Heedless of the chaff that was showered upon them, they went their way serenely. But though they were chaffed, the Three Trouncers were treated now with a new respect! The account of how they had chucked Tom Merry & Co. out of their own study made St. Jim's roar—but it made them feel that the fellows who were capable of doing it had to be respected.

The Terrible Three came in for their share of chaff. They took it good-naturedly enough. But as the day wore on, they got rather tired of being asked the price of black eyes; and when Grundy of the Shell asked them, at tea-time, whether they were allowed to have tea in their own study now, they fell upon George Alfred Grundy, and whirled him into the air, and bumped him. They bumped him half a dozen times, and felt rather better.

After tea, Tom Merry & Co. changed into their flannels to go out for a knock-up at the nets.

As they were crossing the Hall towards the doorway leading to the quad, a big crowd round the letter-rack drew their attention. Evidently the postman had just arrived.

"Let's see if there's anything for us," exclaimed Tom Merry.

There was. Three letters, one for each of them, were waiting on the rack. Each was addressed in the same handwriting, oddly enough. The Terrible Three picked them up with puzzled faces.

Kangaroo came up, accompanied by Reginald Talbot. "Good!" exclaimed the Australian. "Letter for each of us!"

Blake & Co. were in the Hall, and it seemed that there was a letter for Blake and a letter for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Oddly enough, each member of the cricket eleven present had received a letter, though no one else had by that post.

Tom Merry ripped open the envelope. As he did so, there was a sudden yell from Jack Blake.

"Great pip!"

He was staring in astonishment at the contents of his letter. Even as his yell caused fellows to turn their heads with interest, there was an exclamation from Talbot—and another from Monty Lowther.

"M-my hat!"

"Jumping jabberwocks!"

"What the merry dickens—" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Look!" Jack Blake was waving a sheet of paper excitedly in the air. "Of all the cheek! Listen to this!" And Blake read aloud his communication:

"Dear Blake,—As a member of the cricket team to play against Abbotsford on Saturday, we wish to inform you that we are open to play any three members of that team in a three-a-side match on Little Side, and lick them to a frazzle. Having done so, our intention is to claim, as a consequent right, the places in the team of the three chaps we have licked. Fellows declining will obviously be funky to meet us.—Yours, the THREE TROUNCERS."

Blake glared round at his listeners with feelings too deep for words.

"But that's just the letter I've got!" howled Talbot.

"So've I!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Same here!" gasped Kangaroo.

"Bai Jove! They've written to me, too, dear boys!" put in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy excitedly.

(Continued on next page.)

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Tom Merry hastily opened the contents of his missive. With the exception that it began "Dear Merry," his was the same letter, word for word, as that read out by Blake.

Manners also had been written to. And even as the seven cricketers stared at one another, four figures came hurrying up the steps and into the Hall. They were Figgins & Co., of the New House, and Dick Redfern.

All four were waving opened letters in their hands. "Listen!" hooted Figgins. "Listen to this! 'Dear Figgins,—As a member of the cricket team—'"

"It's all right," interrupted Talbot with a chuckle. "Don't bother to read it out! We know what it says."

"We've all had one, too," grinned Tom Merry. "You have?" stuttered Redfern. "What do you think of it?" roared Fatty Wynn, with an indignant snort. "Isn't it the giddy limit?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" The crowd of juniors gathered round the eleven wrathful cricketers gave a yell of laughter. The latest stunt of the Three Trouncers seemed to amuse them.

"The cheek of 'em!" gasped Talbot. With their letter in their hands, the cricket team glared at one another. It seemed to them to be the last word in nerve on the part of the three new fellows.

Tom Merry's suspicions had been more than justified! The Three Trouncers were not by any means agreeable to accepting his decision. They still meant to win places in the team for the Abbotsford match—places for all!

All or none! Tom Merry had said "None!" But Wallace, Willis and Woolley were out to force him to change his answer to "All!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the rest of the juniors. Ralph Reckness Cardew tapped Tom Merry on the arm. "Seems to me it's a smart move on the part of our three trouncin' friends!" drawled the slacker of the Fourth.

"They've got you in a jolly old cleft stick, Thomas." "Oh, rats!" snorted Tom. "It's simply infernal cheek—"

"It may be cheek," agreed Cardew with an amused shrug. "But don't you see, dear man, if Wallace, Willis and Woolley lick three of your team, it'll prove the team would

benefit by having them in place of three fellows they can lick! Q.E.D., as Mr. Euclid says. You, as captain, are bound to put the best team in the field, so there you are!"

And Cardew chuckled. "But I offered Wallace a place in the team!" hooted Tom.

"Yes, and he turned it down," chuckled Cardew, "because you wouldn't play his pals, too—bein' such inseparables! But he's out to prove that it'll be worth while your playin' his pals, after all. And if he does, it seems to me it's your job to play Wallace an' Co.!"

"Absolutely!" chuckled a voice behind him. Tom Merry glanced up quickly. Wallace was standing there, grinning.

"Cardew's got a lot of sense!" declared Wallace airily. "He's hit the nail on the head. If we three can lick three of your giddy team at cricket, it's up to you to put us in the team in their places!"

"Of course!" chuckled Willis.

"Your duty to the team," nodded Woolley. "Absolutely!" agreed Wallace. "However, we won't worry you chaps for your answer now. We'll leave you to think it over!"

And with cheery nods the Three Trouncers strolled on out through the doorway arm-in-arm, and vanished into the quad., leaving eleven astonished cricketers to stare blankly after them.

Without a doubt, Wallace, Willis and Woolley were three of the most extraordinary new fellows who had ever arrived at St. Jim's!

Whether or not they would eventually play in the Abbotsford match—and they were quite clearly determined to do so—there was no doubt that their arrival was causing more than a stir at St. Jim's!

They had flabbergasted Knox, and the prefects. They had flabbergasted their Form-master, and they had probably flabbergasted the Head as well. They had flabbergasted the Terrible Three—as three black eyes still witnessed.

But no one had been more flabbergasted than were the St. Jim's junior cricket eleven by the extraordinary ways of the Inseparable Three!

THE END.

YOUR EDITOR SAYS—

HALF-WAY!

YOU can take it from me, chums, that the FREE GIFT you're looking forward to next week will be something really extra-special. In the first place this addition to the wonderful Picture Gallery of the Future which you are building up is sure to appeal to you as one of the most fascinating of your collection. This "GREYHOUND OF THE SEA" as it is called, is an amazing marine craft—a veritable flying ship capable of taking you for a "flip" across the Atlantic in sixty hours! And, needless to say this picture card has been carried out in the superb style which our wonderful FREE GIFTS have maintained right from the start.

As a final word, let me remind you that No. 8 brings us to half-way in the series. Nos. 9 to 16 are every whit as good as their predecessors, so
PLACE A STANDING ORDER FOR THE "GEM" TO-DAY!

What do you think of the THREE TROUNCERS—that cheery, cheeky trio of new boys who have made St. Jim's sit up and take notice with a vengeance? Aren't they the goods! You bet! Well, Wallace, Willis and Woolley are going strong again in next Wednesday's great yarn of Tom Merry & Co. entitled:

"THE TROUNCERS' TRIUMPH!"

How the three inseparables bring about their great triumph you'll discover for yourselves when you read next week's spanking yarn. Suffice it to say that it is one of Martin Clifford's best!

Other "star" attractions are a further full-of-thrills instalment of serial,

"THE FLYING FISH!" another entertaining set of replies from our wiseacre, the ORACLE, winding up with a special article dealing with the L.M.S. "Royal Scot" Locomotive, No. 6107.

BIRTHDAY PRESENTS FOR YOU!

All my readers have birthdays, and all enjoy receiving presents on these anniversaries. Now I can put you on to a scheme whereby you can satisfy your desires in this direction.

Have you heard of the Birthday Gift Club that has been running in our grand Companion Paper, the "Popular" for many months? Some of you may have, and again some of you may be members of this Club. So it is to the chaps who are ignorant of this novel club that I'm writing this paragraph.

The Birthday Club, open to readers of the "Gem" and "Popular," has been enjoying an amazing popularity for quite a long time. Its membership goes into thousands. It is also a boast of this club that it has sent well over a thousand birthday gifts to members already, and many hundreds are waiting to be despatched as soon as they are claimed.

It is important to remember that there is no limit to the number of gifts available for members. It rests with you chaps. The more that join the club, the more presents given away. And these gifts are really handsome, and well worth the little effort of becoming eligible for one. I'm afraid I can't give you the list of gifts here, but if you get hold of a copy of the "Popular," you'll find full particulars and entrance forms inside.

Now, what about it?

BUCK UP, YOU CHAPS!

I've just had a serious complaint brought to my notice. A long-whiskered figure rushed into the office the other day, and fairly hurled himself into the chair standing by my desk, specially provided for visitors.

The next moment I was subjected to a shower of words that almost stunned me, and it was quite a long time before I knew what my visitor was talking about.

I must explain, first of all, that the visitor was none other than the Oracle, and what he had come to me for was this. Why weren't the readers of the "Gem" bucking up with their queries. "What am I employed for, my dear Ed? To count the ink smudges the office boy daubs on the wall? No! No! I'm here to answer questions, and I'm not getting enough. I'm not earning my keep. I shall be owing you my salary soon, if those chaps don't send along more questions to be answered."

You see what it all means? The old Oracle must have more letters, far more letters than he gets. He's like a hungry lion. There's no appeasing his appetite, and I'm making this appeal on his behalf. Do write more often when you're in a fix. And let our tame Oracle give you the helping hand. There's good chaps!

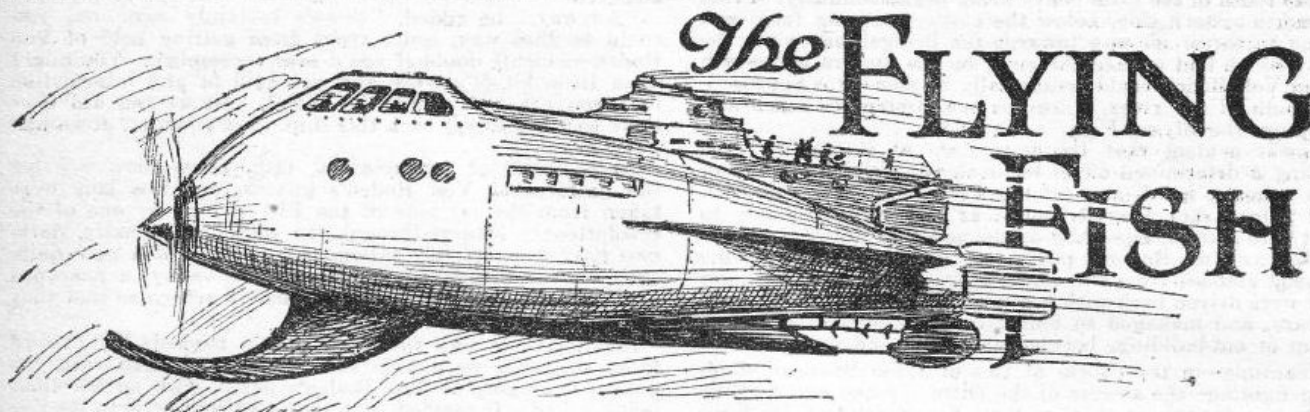
TIPS FOR CAMPERS!

I get a shoal of questions about camping. There is never any difficulty about getting permission to camp—not in a suitable place. The spot must be left tidy, all rubbish burnt or buried. The camper must be wary about the cook. Choose a fellow who thoroughly understands the difference between an egg and a potato. Don't be put off at each meal with a vague stew. More often than not a stew means nothing at all.

YOUR EDITOR.
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A THRILLING TALE OF TWO BRITISH BOYS' ADVENTURES ABROAD!

By Leslie Beresford.



It is a well-known saying that "Where there's a will there's a way"! Young Rodney and his pal certainly have the will to win through the terrible revolution that's raging over the Valley of No Escape—but they are finding it very difficult to discover a way to freedom!

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

RODNEY BLAKE, a stocky youngster, whose one ambition is to follow in the footsteps of his father, **Adrian Blake**—a news correspondent now out of England on business for his paper—is strolling along Littleworth Cove in company with his chum,

DAN LEA, when he sees a strange-looking craft resembling in shape an airship and a boat combined.

PRINCE ALEXIS KARAGENSKI, the ship's commander, informs Rodney that there is a serious case of illness aboard, and in consequence succeeds in getting Dr. Fraser, the youngster's guardian, to go aboard. Some time later Rodney and Dan are captured by KaragenSKI's men and taken on to the ship as prisoners. The strange craft then rises after the fashion of an airship and speeds them away to the "Valley of No Escape," where, in the charge of Wummburg, an obnoxious, one-eyed giant, and a host of armed guards, are thousands of prisoners building at desperate speed a fleet of Flying Fish. With this formidable fleet the heads of the conspiracy hope to conquer the whole world. Following a rumpus with Wummburg, Rodney, to his amazement, comes face to face with his father. **Adrian Blake** hurriedly explains that, in the guise of a Russian expert in poison gas, he has gained access to the conspirators' stronghold with a view to encouraging the half-starved slaves to revolt against their taskmasters. The deception is discovered almost as soon as the revolution begins, and Rodney is hurrying off to warn his father when he overhears **Von Roden**, a leader of the conspirators, planning to use the Flying Fish to fly over the town and bomb the revolutionists into submission.

"In that case," says Larry O'Hagan, who is with Rodney, "we'll get busy seeing that **Von Roden's** kept conveniently distant from the Flying Fish, whatever else happens!"

(Now read on.)

A Desperate Venture!

AN anxious day began in a brooding silence, broken only occasionally by the spasmodic firing of snipers, with the fitful rattle of machine-guns when the guards saw anything at which to fire.

The revolutionary workers, fired with their momentary success, had to be restrained by Larry O'Hagan and their section leaders from spoiling all the work done at night. It was with difficulty that they were held in some check, and persuaded to lie low and hold their gains till the enemy showed his hand. Rodney and his friend were now not only able to mix freely with them, but found themselves looked upon as heroes in a small way. The bombing incident of over-night had not passed without notice, happening as it had at a critical moment, and wherever they went during the morning they found themselves acclaimed and tremendously popular.

O'Hagan, meantime, warned of the attempt to recapture the Flying Fish, whose shining silver shape lay outside the main gates of the works, had laid his plans accordingly, and when, in the late afternoon, the armed guards, in considerable force, made a determined push to take the bridge, at the same time crossing in numbers at the eastern lock, he had made ready to meet the attack with a surprise fire from men hidden behind the walls of the works, just at the moment when the enemy imagined they were succeeding.

At the time when this attack was made, he and the two lads were in the Flying Fish, which was now the revolutionary headquarters. Rodney could not get it out of his mind that, somehow or other, it should be possible for the vessel to be worked, despite the fact that only **Von Roden** and the inventor, **Ashton**, had so far handled her.

All the morning he had been worrying as to what was happening to his father. He had discovered from Larry O'Hagan that the purpose with which **Adrian Blake** had gone to the castle, ignorant that his identity had already been discovered, was to obtain possession of the blue prints from which the Flying Fish had been constructed.

"You see," said Larry O'Hagan, "it wasn't any good our creating all this flare-up and winning the day, if there was a chance of **Boronov** and the others maybe escaping through the northern pass into Russia, with the plans from which they could build another of these craft. So your father—counting on being one of the least-suspected people—went up there to pinch the plans."

"So that, in any case, that's got to be done even now," nodded Rodney.

"If this job's going to be finished properly. You can be after betting they've not let him lay his hands on them."

Rodney said no more, feeling still more firmly that the only way to obtain those plans, save his father, and completely beat the people in the castle, was to make use of the Flying Fish. Dan and he spent a long time exploring every corner of the great craft. It was, they discovered, armed with aerial torpedoes, and fitted with a contrivance for their discharge from the hull of the vessel, as well as from fore and aft.

The important problem to be solved was its handling, and the more Dan and he studied the control-cabin, with its complicated levers and shining gadgets, the more they realised that Larry O'Hagan was right in doubting if the proposition was possible. Rodney himself had begun to admit this just as the attack on the bridge and eastern locks began, at which moment he was standing at the open door of the Flying Fish watching the distantly advancing line of uniformed figures, which O'Hagan was allowing to move forward without interruption till they were near enough for the ambush he had prepared.

Suddenly Rodney gripped Dan by the arm, his eyes on one of the distant figures.

"I think I've found a way for us to get this old vessel moving, Dan," he said, under his breath.

"And have ye now?" intervened the voice of Larry, who had overheard Rodney's remark. "Maybe you'll be after telling me the secret—how you're going to get this vessel moving—"

"Like this," replied Rodney. "You say there are only two people who know enough about the mechanism of this ship to handle her safely. One is **Mr. Ashton**. He's mad, and doesn't count. The other's **Von Roden**—"

"He's on the other side, and doesn't count, either!" said the Irishman dryly.

But Rodney turned round on him.

"He might be made to count, **Mr. O'Hagan**," he urged. "He's on the other side at the minute, it's true. As a matter of fact, I just noticed him away yonder with the attack, and that put the thought into my head. What we want to do is to get him over here, in this ship. We must make him handle it for us, with an automatic muzzle against the back of his head to persuade him, if he won't do what we want any other way."

"Not such a very bad notion, if it can only be worked," agreed the Irishman, with a little chuckle. "But it's a question of catching one's fish, first of all. **Von Roden** may not oblige. He's not very likely to plant himself in the fighting line. However, I'll have the word passed round for our side to try and get hold of his body, alive and kicking."

It was impossible just then to discuss the matter further, for the violent outbreak of the attack required immediate

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attention. It developed quickly in three separate directions. On the north of the town heavy firing began suddenly. From the north-eastern side, below the castle, a strong force was trying to thrust its way towards the bridgehead, while the party which had crossed the river by the eastern lock—with whom Von Roden could occasionally be seen—was approaching south of the river in an obvious attempt to reach and recapture the Flying Fish.

It was evident that the people up at the castle were making a determined effort to break the rising before dark with a heavy hand, and all the strength at their disposal. And before very long it looked as if they were likely to meet with success, especially on the northern side of the town. So far as Von Roden's party was concerned as well, the planned ambush from the works only partly succeeded, and they were driven back with heavy losses, but cleverly avoided capture, and managed to find a covered position among a group of out-buildings between the river and works.

Meantime—in the course of two or three hours of ding-dong fighting—the success of the enemy on the north of the town brought about a threat to the revolutionary force holding the bridgehead. It looked as if this would have to be abandoned and the town lost. However, the revolutionaries held on stubbornly, and by the time dusk began to settle over the valley there was still no sign of the enemy succeeding before night.

All this time Rodney had been chafing over the delay in achieving the plan he had conceived. Occasionally, in the ebb and flow of the fighting south of the river, he could catch a glimpse of Von Roden by the group of out-buildings, studying the situation, and especially the Flying Fish, through a pair of binoculars. It was clear that he was arrogantly impatient because he and his men could make no headway towards the capture of the vessel.

But neither did there seem to be the slightest hope of him being captured, alive and kicking, as Larry O'Hagan had said; and with darkness falling swiftly hope seemed to vanish more and more from Rodney's mind. Added to this came news from the bridgehead that it had been captured by the guards. The urgency of doing something set Rodney puzzling the thing out, when Dan made a suggestion which sounded helpful.

At the moment they were looking out from the windows of the Flying Fish on to the darkening river and town with the flashing pin-pricks of light where sniping was going on. Suddenly Dan turned and pointed to a bundle lying in the corner, reminding Rodney how—after their meeting with Larry O'Hagan and Dr. Fraser—Dan had carried with him their dropped uniforms and arms in which they had escaped from the enemy. At the time, without asking any question, Rodney had wondered why Dan should be burdening himself with these no longer needed garments.

But now the wisdom of Dan's forethought was more apparent.

"Seemed to me we might be finding these useful later on, Mister Rodney," Dan was saying, as he pointed to the bundle. "They got us nicely away from those people when we wanted, and maybe they'd be just as useful to get us back among them."

"Back among them?" questioned Rodney, puzzled for the minute.

"Why, yes!" nodded Dan. "They do say, I've heard, how the mountain wouldn't come to Mahomet, and so he went to the mountain. If Mister Von Roden can't be got to come to us—"

"We go for him! Why, that's the scheme, Dan," laughed Rodney. "It'll be risky, but that can't be helped. We've got to have control of this ship, and we can only do that through Von Roden, it seems. In the darkness, taking us for some of his own men, that might just be possible. Anyhow, we'll have a good try."

Larry O'Hagan was at first altogether against the scheme when they approached him and told him of it.

"Is it gone stark, raving mad that ye have?" he demanded ironically. "Are ye asking to find yourselves up at the castle with Adrian Blake and Lord Braxton? Haven't I said to ye, that there's only the three of us left to see this thing through? And now you're talking about leaving me in the lurch?"

"Nothing of the sort," retorted Rodney, already impatient all the afternoon because O'Hagan had insisted that they must remain in the Flying Fish with him instead of taking any actual part in the fighting. "We're doing nothing helpful here, anyhow, are we?"

"Yes, you are!" said the Irishman; and suddenly began to laugh. "If ever there was a pair of young rascals that couldn't keep still for five minutes, it's you two. Regular Jack-in-the-boxes! And I'll admit your plan's just after my own heart. So far as that goes, if you want to put

your necks in the noose, it's not Larry O'Hagan that can stop you."

"Anyway," he added, "there's certainly some use you could be that way, quite apart from getting hold of Von Roden—which I doubt if you'd ever accomplish. You might do a little bit of spying and get hold of any information that you can that would be useful, just as you did over their wanting to get back this ship. Let's just sit down and work it out."

As a result of ten minutes' talk, once more wearing the uniform of Von Roden's guards, the two lads were taken from the far side of the Flying Fish by one of the revolutionary leaders through the works, and finally, darkness having completely fallen, were let out of a gate quite close to the hillside on the east of the valley, a password having been arranged when they should return so that they would be recognised.

Making their way round cautiously towards the eastern locks the pals were able to mingle eventually with the guards belonging to Von Roden's party, with no questions being asked. It seemed that they had managed to do this in the nick of time, for the party was actually then retreating from their position among the group of outbuildings, and were returning to the town side by way of the eastern lock.

It seemed that the position by the group of outbuildings had become too hot for them, and they had been forced to vacate it through their heavy losses. Also, although the bridgehead had been momentarily captured by the guards, the revolutionaries were proving more obstinate than had been apparently thought likely. Indeed, a force of them, attacking the guards at the bridge unexpectedly from the castle side of the town, was threatening to cut off Von Roden and his comparatively small party.

All this Rodney discovered from the lips of Von Roden himself, cursing furiously in German the more because his arrogant idea of capturing the Flying Fish quite easily had proved an entire illusion. Forewarned by Rodney and Dan, this plan had been completely upset by Larry O'Hagan's arrangements. Von Roden, with his tail between his legs, was beating a hurried retreat in what was beginning to look like a forlorn hope to save himself and his men.

A few paces behind him in the darkness, Rodney and Dan were watching an opportunity to prevent that from happening, so far as he was concerned. But they were so surrounded by guards, and Von Roden so obstinately refused to separate himself from his men, that their chances were smaller with every hundred yards they were forced to march behind him.

And then, as though finally to banish that project from their minds, the town ahead was lit by a gigantic flame, and shaken by a tremendous explosion. What had happened the pals discovered a few minutes later when a straggling mob of stampeding guards swept on them from the front, with Colonel Stangerfeld and Wummburg among them. Rodney's knowledge of German helped him to understand that the revolutionaries had evidently mined the bridge at some points with a time-fuse near it before being driven off.

The bridge had been blown sky high with a considerable force of the guards on and near it. A few, with Colonel Stangerfeld, had escaped, and the latter was frank in his statement of the situation.

"It is a case of saving all that is left," he glowered as he reached Von Roden, gesticulating in wild impotence. "They have fairly cornered us, those pigs. It's quite useless to fight on. There's only one thing to be done, Von Roden—we must make for the castle with the few men left to us and hold it till the reinforcements arrive from Moscow."

If that was to be done successfully, immediate flight was necessary. It seemed that something must have happened in the town to have made the victory of the revolutionaries more swift and complete than even Larry O'Hagan had hoped when the two lads had left him. For Colonel Stangerfeld had scarcely staggered up with his news than the revolutionary fire began to spit from the darkness ahead.

Rodney and Dan were borne back with the hurried retreat which began at once. Separated momentarily from each other in the panic, they could not discuss their own action. In any case, Rodney decided in his own mind they would have to take the castle road and trust to what happened afterwards. There was no longer any need to trouble about Von Roden so far as the Flying Fish was concerned. Nor did Larry O'Hagan any longer need them to return to him with information about the enemy.

On the other hand, up at the castle Rodney would be near his father. That was the eager thought with which he allowed himself willingly to be carried upwards from the town.

At the Castle Once More.

RODNEY did not forget that arrival at the castle might easily mean the discovery of Dan and himself when they came out of the darkness into light. And it was with some satisfaction that, looking up at the great grey pile when it came eventually into sight, the windows were only faintly lit. And then he remembered that the destruction of the power house by the revolutionaries would have cut off the electric supply.

From the courtyard where he stood with the other guards, while Von Roden with Colonel Stangerfeld and Wummburg went inside, he could see that the only light came from candles. He caught a glimpse of the vulturelike Boronov, the Greek Mirapoulis, Abbas Fazil, in his tarboosh, and the rest of the conspirators, in an agitated group.

It was evident that they were startled by the news which was brought them by Roden and Stangerfeld, but Boronov's evil smile seemed to suggest that all hope was not yet lost. He had a message in his hand which had evidently just come by wireless, for, so far as Rodney understood, the wireless station near the northern pass still remained in the hands of the guards. The message seemingly contained good news because of the expression on Von Roden's face after he had read it.

The purport of it presently reached Rodney through Wummburg, who informed the waiting and dispirited party in the courtyard that the reinforcements were only a few hours away from the valley, and should be available in the early part of next day.

"Our duty is to hold out till then, and that will be easy," he said. "If they attempt to take this castle, our machine-guns and bombs will mow them down, the pigs! At the northern pass our invincible comrades are holding the enemy at bay. They have not yet gained any real victory. To-morrow will see them utterly beaten and at our mercy."

It was very unlikely, Rodney told himself, that any mercy would have been shown in that case. Meantime, Wummburg was busying himself arranging for the defence of the castle in case of attack, dividing the men into parties and detailing them off to various points on the battlements. But Rodney, who by this time had found Dan again, had no intention of coming under Wummburg's eye, so he and Dan took advantage of the darkness to slip away out of sight for the moment.

Fortunately, the revolutionaries were wasting no time in attacking the castle, as the sound of their firing proved, while Wummburg had only just begun to settle his arrangements. So, in the confusion and haste, Rodney and Dan were able to make themselves scarce without any notice being paid to them, joining a party under a corporal sent by Wummburg on some errand, though what might be they did not know nor care.

This party made its way through an arch leading beyond the first courtyard into a second one, and here the two lads dropped out of the little squad from the rear as unobtrusively as they had joined it. Rodney drew Dan back by the arm into the black darkness of a colonnade which ran all round the great empty space. Crossing to the far side of this, the corporal and his squad vanished from sight; and, making sure no one was near enough to have noticed, or to overhear them, Rodney explained to Dan in rapid undertones what the situation was.

The latter, though he had not understood a word of what had been said around him in German, had already formed a shrewd idea of how the land lay.

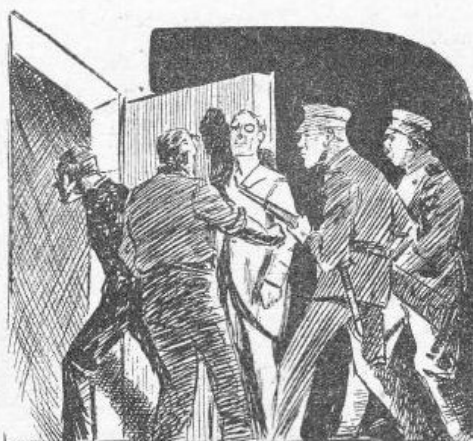
"This be a queer way of things, Mister Rodney," he calculated in his slow manner. "There be Mister O'Hagan outside, wanting to get in. There be us in here, like enough to be caught anywhen. There be your father in here—"

"If he hasn't been killed already," muttered Rodney moodily.

"I don't think that, any more than Mister O'Hagan did," Dan tried to reassure the other. "But he will be killed, and so will Lord Braxton and we two and Mister O'Hagan when they catch him, if these people here are still safe when their reinforcements come to-morrow."

"That's right!" nodded Rodney. "If only we could come by some way of getting dad and Lord Braxton and ourselves out to join up with Mr. O'Hagan! But it seems hopeless. Even then—with no one able to handle the Flying Fish—we'd be little better off, if any, once those reinforcements arrived. And, now I come to think of it, I don't believe I mentioned to Mr. O'Hagan that they were to be expected. He may not be suspecting any danger from that northern pass."

"Somehow," pondered Dan, as Rodney stumbled to a gloomy silence, "we've got to help the outside people in, seeing that we can't get out ourselves. That's the answer to it."



From their hiding place in the shadows near the steps Rodney and Dan saw the group of men moving towards the open doorway. And in that group they recognised Adrian Blake, wounded and tattered, the Prince, and Lord Braxton, prisoners of Boronov, the tyrant! (See page 28).

"But how? There's that secret way, it's true; though we've no earthly chance of getting up to our old room; and might not discover the secret if we did," retorted Rodney.

"Nor would we likely be finding Mr. O'Hagan if we did and got to the other end. But there's more than one way in and out of this castle, Mister Rodney, as you know, that anyone can use in the ordinary way. They may not all be guarded, though they may be fastened with locks and bolts. And locks and bolts can be made to open conveniently if no one happens to be by. Then one of us could go down and lead our friends up that way. There's one at the end of this courtyard and down some steps to the left, if I remember."

"It sounds simple enough," said Rodney under his breath. "At any rate, it seems the only possible way with any hope attached to it. Let's make our way along to that gate."

There was, he remembered, a little postern gate which led out of one of the turrets at an end of the castle above the winding road. It was towards the back of the castle, and so might not be at present guarded, especially as the sound of firing from the revolutionaries outside suggested that they were attacking the castle from the front. Ordinarily, Rodney had noticed a big iron key had stuck out of its ponderous lock on the inside, so safe had the occupants of the castle always imagined themselves.

But to-night, when the two lads had descended the steps quite unobserved, and were congratulating themselves that this frail plan might safely succeed, the key was not in the lock. Apparently, with the revolution, someone had gone round and taken precautions. Further, as though to add to their disappointment, they turned, to hear the sound

footsteps approaching towards the spot above where they were standing at the bottom of the steps.

Crouching back motionless in the blackness, they waited, peering up the steps, at the top of which there swung to and fro a lantern carried by someone. With every moment they expected that the lantern-light would fling its rays on them and discover them, a possibility full of danger, since one of the voices talking above was that of Wummberg, while another one indicated that the bullying Kraft was a member of the party.

Neither Rodney nor Dan wanted to be noticed by either of these, and perhaps called into the light to be questioned, and unquestionably discovered. They both slipped into a broad stone embrasure in the battlement wall behind them, keeping very still. Meantime, at the top of the steps, the lantern-light disclosed to them a small group of guards, one of whom unlocked a heavy door.

Then, with a great shock, Rodney recognised the foremost of the three men being brutally bundled through the open doorway to be no one less than his father. Adrian Blake was in his shirt-sleeves, with streaks of blood on his face, and with his clothes torn to shreds, evidence of how he had struggled and fought against capture, or been roughly handled.

Behind Adrian Blake there walked the bulkier and more immaculate figure of Lord Braxton, and behind him came yet another figure, at sight of which the two lads gripped each other in blank astonishment, asking each other in undertones what it could mean. For the third figure—erect, monocolled, contemptuous—was that of Prince Karagenski.

"Why, I thought he was one of the other side?" muttered Dan.

"Turned against them, I suppose!" whispered back Rodney. "Somehow, from what he said to me on the Flying Fish, I never did think he felt quite keen on their game. And you remember the way Sacha talked? I suppose he's quarrelled with Boronov and the rest. Anyway, there he is. And there's the poor old gov'nor and Lord Braxton being locked in!"

As soon as Prince Karagenski had disappeared from sight the heavy door was closed with a crash, and a key was turned in the lock by the guard who had opened it. Once again the swinging hand-lantern flung its perilous rays down the steps and flooded the battlement wall and the embrasure in which the two friends lurked, and they feared discovery by Wummberg.

But, fortunately, he was too busy making sure that the door had been safely locked and handing the key over to Kraft; and a minute later the whole party turned about and marched away again out of sight across the courtyard, so that the two lads could safely emerge again from their hiding-place.

"Anyhow," said Rodney eagerly, "We do know now that, as Larry O'Hagan said, they haven't had time to trouble about shooting the gov'nor. And we know where he and the others are. But we're as far off as ever from our idea of getting our outside friends into here. What are we going to do about that, Dan?"

(What chances have the two boys in escaping from the closely guarded castle, and bringing in the revolutionaries? The odds are all against them. But Rodney and Dan are determined to attempt the seemingly impossible. You will learn in next week's instalment what happens to the two pals.)

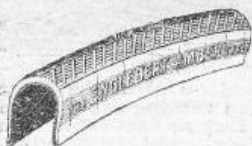
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