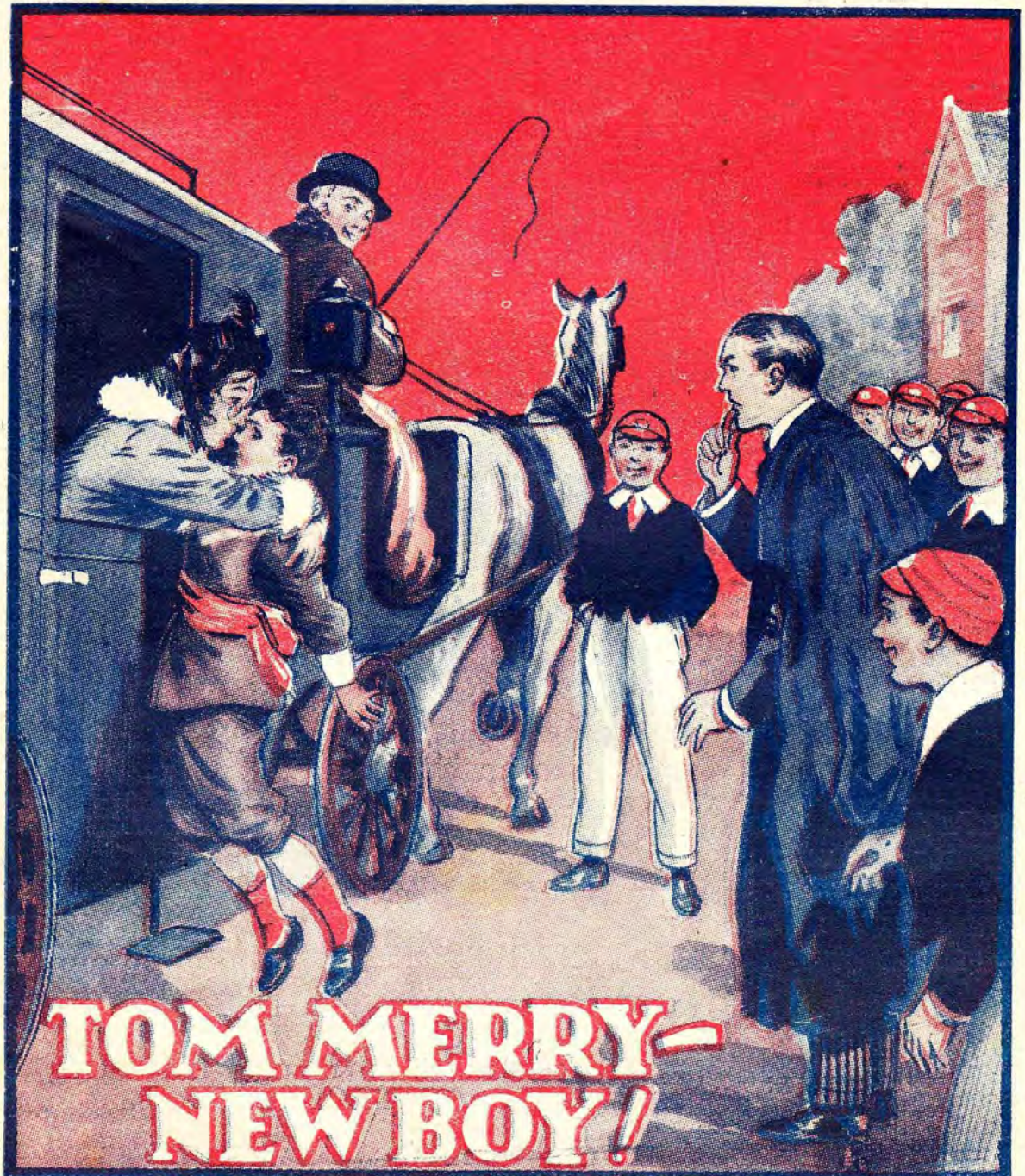


TOM MERRY GOES TO SCHOOL IN VELVETEENS! SEE
INSIDE!

The GEM 2^D



**TOM MERRY-
NEW BOY!**

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry Takes
French Leave.

"TOM—Tom!"
Tom Merry heard his name called and saw Miss Priscilla Fawcett looking excitedly up and down the platform, and he promptly dodged behind a pile of luggage.

"Tom—Tom!"
But Tom was not forthcoming. He was quietly making his way to the exit from the platform; so he had no time to attend to Miss Priscilla.

There had been a smash at Westholm. The train had run into a stationary engine with a terrific crash. Nobody was hurt, but everybody was greatly alarmed. The train was damaged, and the line was blocked.

The passengers crowded the platform, talking excitedly and all at once. Tom Merry had slipped away in the confusion. It was his first opportunity of escaping the eagle eye of Miss Priscilla, and he had not been slow to take advantage of it, for Tom was in a mischievous mood.

Tom was an orphan, and Miss Priscilla had had charge of him since he was a baby. Tom had grown up since then, but Miss Priscilla did not seem to have realised that fact. She had the kindest heart in the world, and she was devoted to Tom; but she drew the rein a little too tight sometimes. Tom was getting on for fifteen. Miss Priscilla seemed to think that he was still six or seven.

Tom was very fond of his old nurse; but he was very fond of having his own way, too. He had developed an independence of mind that was a sore trial to Miss Priscilla. To-day he was bound for Clavering College, to enter the, as yet, unknown world of Public school life.

Miss Priscilla had watched him all the way as a hen watches a favourite chicken. She had been afraid that he would fall out of the train. She had bought him sweets and made him eat them; she had called him "Tommy" before the other passengers. Tom had resolved that he would not be marched into Clavering College under the wing of Miss Priscilla. He had determined to bolt at the first chance. Now the chance had come, and he had taken it.

"Tom—Tom!"

In the shock and confusion of the accident Miss Priscilla had had to take her eyes off her charge. Now he was gone from her gaze like a beautiful dream.

"Oh dear! Where is Tommy? Dear Tommy is lost! He is certainly killed! Tom—Tom—Tom!"

Miss Priscilla's voice rose crescendo.

"Tom—Tom—Tom!"

TOM MERRY—



But still no answer came. Miss Priscilla rushed up to the stationmaster and in her excitement threw her arms round the neck of the astonished official.

"Where is he? Oh, where is he?"

"Why—what the—who the—how the—"

"Where is my darling boy?"

"How on earth should I know? Madam, please release me! I—"

"He is gone! Tommy is gone! I thought I saw him safe on the platform, but he must have been crushed under that dreadful train!"

"Utter nonsense, madam! Nobody has been hurt. If you have lost a boy, he's on the platform somewhere, and you'd better go and look for him and leave me to attend to my duties!" snapped the stationmaster, wriggling in the embrace of Miss Priscilla and growing very red in the face.

"You are sure—you are quite sure he is not killed?"

"Of course I am! Can't you see for yourself?" It had not occurred to the excited lady to see for herself. The stationmaster jerked himself free and proceeded to address some strong remarks to the porters, who were grinning as if they found something amusing in the scene.

"Tom—Tom—Tom!"

The passengers were smiling; but their smiles were lost upon Miss Priscilla.

"Tom, my darling boy, where are you? Has anyone seen Tommy?"

TOM MERRY COMES TO SCHOOL.

He's an absolute scream! They call him "Mamma's Pet"! He's never seen a cricket bat! He can't use his fists! He's a wow! Read now this enthralling story of how Tom Merry first came to school!

IS WHAT TOM WEARS IN THIS YARN OF HIS EARLY SCHOOL DAYS!

NEW BOY!

By
Martin Clifford.



"What is he like?" asked a sympathetic passenger.
"A dear little boy, in a sweet, velvet suit!" gasped Miss Priscilla. "With the sweetest blue eyes and curly hair!"
"Ah, a little chap of six, I suppose?"

"N-no; he's fifteen, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sir!"

"Has anybody seen a boy of fifteen, in a sweet velvet suit, with the sweetest blue eyes and curly hair?" the sympathetic passenger demanded in a loud voice.

"Tom—Tom—Tom!"

"Perhaps he's left the platform," the passenger suggested, calming down somewhat. "He may have wandered off, ma'am."

Miss Priscilla took the hint and hurried to the exit.

"Has a little boy passed you?" she demanded of the ticket-collector.

"No, ma'am."

"My goodness gracious!" wailed Miss Priscilla. "My dearest Tommy! Where can he be?"

"Oh, is it Tom Merry you mean?"

"Yes—yes! Have you seen him?"

"Yes!" growled the man. "A young chap passed me five minutes ago, and he says, says he, 'If anybody inquires for Tom Merry, tell 'em he's gone on to Clavering,' says he."

"And you said he had not passed you!"

"I said a little boy hadn't passed me, ma'am. He was a strapping lad of fifteen, I should say; but his clothes—well, his clothes—"

The man burst into a chuckle. Miss Priscilla gave him an indignant look and hurried from the station. She wanted to get on the track of Tom Merry.

"Wilful Tommy!" she murmured. "How like him to take this wild idea into his head, and how thoughtful of him to leave word so that I should not be anxious. But I must find him; the reckless child will never succeed in reaching the college unprotected."

As it was only five miles from Westholm to Clavering, and as Tom Merry was fifteen years old and had plenty of money in his pocket, it might have been supposed that

he was capable of getting to the school without any very dreadful calamity happening.

But Miss Priscilla thought otherwise. She wouldn't be satisfied to leave Tom until she had placed him in the very hands of the Head of Clavering. Even then it was probable that she would have a lingering uneasiness about him. But though Miss Priscilla looked this way and that way, there was no Tommy to be seen. He had made the most of his opportunity. He had expected pursuit, and he was already too far away for recapture.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Meets with an Adventure.

TOM MERRY was Merry by name and merry by nature. No matter what happened to Tom, his high spirits could never be damped for long. He always came up smiling. There was always a gleam of fun in his bright blue eyes. He frequently got into scrapes, but as he had an equal facility for getting out of them again that did not trouble him very much.

It was late in the afternoon when Tom Merry walked out of Westholm Railway Station. He had left word that he was going on to the school, and that was his intention; but he had not the faintest idea where it was, or whether it was distant five miles or fifty.

Tom's appearance was certainly somewhat striking. He was an active and well-formed lad, but, as has been indicated, Miss Priscilla did not realise that he was growing up. He was dressed in a suit of dark blue velvet, which was certainly pretty, and would have looked charming on a boy of eight. Upon the growing form of a boy of fifteen it was calculated to cause smiles; so was the big bow he wore. Tom's face was very smooth and handsome, and he looked younger than he really was. But he could not possibly look young enough for those clothes and that bow.

Miss Priscilla expended a great deal of time and attention upon the adornment of Tom's person. Tom had hitherto led a very quiet life at Huckleberry Heath, where Miss Priscilla resided. His tutor had been more careful to keep in Miss Fawcett's good graces than to bring Tom up in the way that he should go. Neither Tom Merry nor Miss Priscilla foresaw what a sensation his appearance was likely to create at Clavering.

"Can you tell me the way to Clavering?"

Tom took off his cap and bowed politely as he asked that question of a stout policeman who was standing at the corner of the street. Tom had been carefully trained to the most exquisite politeness by Miss Priscilla, and Lord Chesterfield was simply "not in it" with Tom Merry.

The policeman looked at Tom, and grinned. He did not seem to think it necessary to answer Tom's question, but just looked him over and grinned.

"Pardon me!" exclaimed Tom, with unabated politeness.

"I asked you a question."

"He, he, he!"

"Dear me!" remarked Tom aloud. "I wonder whether the man is deaf, or only silly?"

The policeman's merriment ceased, and he frowned portentously.

"Or perhaps he has been drinking?" murmured Tom. "His nose is certainly very red, and—"

The policeman's face became as red as his nose, and he reached out at Tom.

"You cheeky young hump!"

Tom Merry promptly dodged.

"Don't lose your temper, my good man. Take it calmly. You must not get excited. Sudden excitement is bad for fat people, and—"

"I—I'll—"

The guardian of the law looked really angry. Tom thought it wiser to beat a retreat, and he promptly fled. The policeman was making a rush after him, and Tom turned round the first corner he came to and ran for his life.

"You clumsy ass! Where are you going to?"

Tom felt himself clutched by the collar, and stopped. He had run right into a youth of about his own age, dressed in Etous. The boy had promptly collared him, and was shaking him violently.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Tom. "I really did not see you. I—"

He was interrupted by a roar of laughter from the boy in Etons. He held Tom at arm's length, staring at him.

"Hallo! What do you call yourself?"

"My name is Tom Merry."

"Tom Fool would be a better name, I fancy. Manners, old man, come and look at this funny merchant!"

Another lad in Etons, who was lounging in the doorway of a confectioner's shop, came out and joined the boy who had caught hold of Tom. He also burst into a roar of laughter at the sight of the boy in the velvet suit.

"Oh, chase me!" he exclaimed. "Where did you pick that up, Monty?"

"It ran into me," said Monty. "Funny animal, ain't it?"

"Please release my collar," said Tom meekly.

"Rats! I'll do as I like, baby! How did you get out of the nursery?"

Tom jerked himself free.

"You are very rude," he said, with offended dignity, smoothing his ruffled collar. "You have made my collar quite crumpled and dirty. Miss Priscilla would be very angry if she saw it."

Manners stared at Monty, and Monty stared at Manners. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Manners. "Where did it come from? Did it leave its ickle feeding-bottle at home, then?"

"We want that chap at Clavering," giggled Monty. "We would put him through something—eh, Manners, old boy?"

"Rather!" said Manners.

Tom Merry caught the word. He looked at the boys curiously.

"Do you belong to Clavering College?" he exclaimed.

"Can't you see our caps, fathead?" said Manners disdainfully, as if he thought all the world ought to know the Clavering cap.

"I am going to Clavering," said Tom.

"You are going to Clavering?" gasped the two together.

"Yes; will you show me the way? I will walk with you if you like, as I wish to be on friendly terms with all the boys."

Manners staggered against the confectioner's doorway as if overcome.

"This is coming to Clavering—" he said faintly. "Do you hear, Monty? Take it away somewhere and kill it, quick!"

"Oh, don't be ungrateful, Manners!" said the other. "He offers to walk home with us. That's really kind of him, and you can't deny it. We should make a giddy sensation, I fancy, going in with this merchant."

"He must be joking. Kid, you're not really going to Clavering?"

"Yes, I am," said Tom. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Why, you'll be killed. In that rig! Oh my!" Manners went off into a fit of laughter. "My giddy Aunt Matilda Ann! What are we coming to?"

"If you do not desire my company," said Tom, with great dignity. "I will not walk with you. But I shall be obliged if you will tell me the way to the school."

Manners winked at Monty Lowther.

"Certainly," he said blandly. "Go along that street, and it'll take you into the High Road, turn to the left, and keep on till you get to Clavering. You've only got to keep straight on long enough, and you'll come to the school."

"Thank you!" said Tom.

And he started off. Manners giggled.

"Nothing like telling the exact truth," he said to Monty. "If he keeps on long enough that way he'll get to Clavering. He'll have to keep on for about twenty-five thousand miles, that's all. He may find a few oceans and continents in the way, but if he keeps right on he'll get to Clavering, won't he?"

"He will," said Monty. "Now let's go in and have that feed."

And these two charming youths disappeared into the confectioner's shop. Quite unsuspecting of the little joke perpetrated by the humorous Manners, Tom Merry followed his directions faithfully. He reached the High Road, and turned to the left. Then he stepped out briskly, little dreaming that his back was towards the good old school of Clavering.

As Manners said, the directions were all right, if he went right round the world. Otherwise he would not get to the college.

The dusk of evening was falling, and Tom was getting hungry. He was still cheerful, however. He came to cross-roads and halted in doubt. There was a signboard at the top of the post, but the weather had long obliterated whatever had been written on it. A man was squatting at the bottom of the post, smoking a dirty, black pipe. He looked up at Tom.

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He was about the most villainous-looking fellow Tom Merry had ever seen. He was thick-set and bull-necked, with a rough face and a straggling beard. He was ragged and dirty and unkempt; but Tom, with never-failing politeness, took off his cap as he addressed him.

"Please can you tell me the right way to Clavering?"

The tramp—for such the man evidently was—looked at him curiously.

"Whatcher want at Clavering?" he asked.

"I am going to school there," said Tom. "I have just walked from Westholm. I should be extremely obliged to you if you could tell me which road to take."

The tramp grinned.

"What's it worth to you?" he asked.

Tom looked puzzled.

"I don't understand you, my good man!"

"I mean, wot will you stand for a straight tip?"

The words were Greek to Tom, but he guessed the man's meaning.

"Do you mean that you wish me to pay you for information?" he inquired.

"That's about the size of it, young gentleman."

"I consider the request most mercenary!" said Tom hotly. "However, I will give you a shilling."

"Don't believe you've got it about yer!"

"It is most impolite to express doubt of a gentleman's word," said Tom; "but perhaps that will convince you."

He drew out a handful of money and showed it. The tramp's eyes glinted evilly.

"Right-ho!" he said, getting up. "It's all right, young gentleman. I was only joking. I wouldn't take your money for nothing, I wouldn't. Come with me, and I'll show you the way to the school. It's t'other side of that there wood."

"How kind you are!" exclaimed Tom simply. "I shall be ever so much obliged."

"Oh, don't mention it, sir! Come along!"

The tramp led the way into a footpath through a dusky wood. Tom followed him without suspicion. He had not learned at Huckleberry Heath to be distrustful of too obliging strangers.

"I should like to know your name, my good man!" he exclaimed. "Miss Priscilla would like to see you, I am sure, and thank you for your kindness to me."

"I'm Jim Jones," said the tramp. "They called me Honest Jim. Honest Jim I am, and honest I always was, young sir!"

Tom thought how deceptive appearances might be. He would never have taken Honest Jim for an honest man, judging by his looks.

"Are you sure you are not leaving the path, Mr. Jones?" he exclaimed, as he noticed that the pathway had vanished and they were treading through grass and ferns.

Mr. Jones did not reply, but he stopped and listened. All was silent in the dusky wood. In the gloom, Honest Jim looked more villainous than ever, and the red glowed in the bowl of his foul-smelling pipe.

"What have you stopped for, Mr. Jones?" inquired Tom.

"I'll 'ave that shilling now," said Honest Jim, with a chuckle; "also any more you've got about yer, young shaver; also that watch and chain; also them studs. If they're the real thing, they're worth something, I s'pose. 'And 'em over!"

"Dear me!" said Tom in amazement. "The man must have been drinking. Why should I give you my money and my personal property?"

"Because I shall knock you silly if you don't!" snarled Honest Jim, seizing him by the collar. "'And 'em over, I say!"

"You—you ruffian! You are a thief!"

"Are you going to 'and 'em over?" roared Mr. Jones.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed. He was certainly a simple lad, for his education had made him so; but he was plucky, and he could be very determined.

"No!" he said firmly. "I consider you a great rascal, and I shall certainly not do anything of the kind. I should like to point out to you—"

What Tom would have liked to point out to Honest Jim was destined never to be pointed out to that gentleman. A swinging cuff on the head cut short the flow of Tom's eloquence, and it made his brain reel.

He saw a thousand lights dancing in the dusky wood. He came to himself to find that he was pinned against a tree, and that Honest Jim was going through his pockets with a scientific thoroughness which showed that this was not the first time the same trick had been performed by that honest man.

He evidently thought that Tom's resistance was at an end, for he was holding him very carelessly. Tom Merry drew

a deep breath. Tom very seldom got angry, but if anything roused his anger, it was meanness and treachery.

Honest Jim had taken him for a nincompoop from his attire. He was to find out his mistake.

Honest Jim was dragging off the gold watch-chain, when Tom, suddenly jerking his right arm free, gave him a terrific slap on the side of the head.

The unexpectedness of the blow, as much as its force, made Honest Jim reel, and before he could recover himself, Tom leapt forward and butted him over.

Honest Jim rolled on the grass with a loud grunt, and Tom sprang away and ran for his life. He went crashing through the brushwood. In a few moments the tramp was on his feet and pursuing him with savage imprecations.

Tom heard him in fierce pursuit, and he ran hard. In spite of his absurd get-up, Tom was strong, and a good runner. He went through the wood, reeling and stumbling continually, but always picking himself up again, and the less active ruffian dropped behind.

At last, panting and exhausted, Tom stopped to take breath. His clothes and face were torn by the brambles, and his heart thumping against his ribs. He listened intently, but could hear no sound of Honest Jim. The tramp had quite lost the track.

Tom was in a bad plight. He had not the faintest idea in which direction Clavering lay, but he was satisfied with himself.

He had baffled the tramp. His watch-chain still hung from his waistcoat, and his gold watch was attached to it. Most of his money had been taken away, but Tom, who had never been kept short of money by his doting guardian, did not care much for that.

"H'm! Yes," muttered Tom. "I've got away from that brute, but now the question is, where on earth am I, and how am I to get out of this beastly wood?"

There was nothing for it but to go forward and trust to luck, and so at a more moderate pace, he proceeded, keeping a wary eye open for Honest Jim.

By luck, he came out presently into a footpath, and though he could not guess whither it led, he deemed it advisable to follow it.

He blundered against a stile in the dark, clambered over it, and found himself in a road. There was a signpost there, fortunately low enough for Tom to read it by striking a match.

"Clavering, six miles!"

Tom gave a whistle of dismay. He did not know that he was farther from Clavering now than when he started; still having no suspicion of Messrs. Manners and Monty's little joke, but six miles seemed a long walk when he was fatigued and hungry.

A sound of wheels on the road caught his ear. He looked in the direction and saw a heavy market-cart lumbering along through the gloom. The carter was half-asleep on the near shaft. The cart seemed to contain nothing but a few flour-sacks. It was going towards Clavering. Tom stepped quickly into the road.

"Excuse me," he said politely to the carter, "will you give—"

A sleepy grunt was the only response. Tom ventured to tap the drowsy man as the cart came by.

"Excuse me—"

The carter started and gave a vague cut round with his whip. Tom got the lash round his legs and gave a yell.

"Get 'ee away!" said the carter, waking up. "Ye limb, get 'ee gone!" And he nodded off again.

Tom gave up the attempt to beg a lift; but he meant to have the lift, all the same. He slipped behind the slow-going cart and swung himself into it.

Taking care to make no sound to alarm the surly carter, he lay down in the sacking with which the bottom of the cart was thickly covered. The repose was very grateful to his tired limbs, and, though he had no intention of falling asleep, in five minutes he was safe in the arms of Morpheus. He had drawn a couple of sacks over him for the sake of warmth, for the night was chilly, and he slept contentedly, unconscious of the fact that he was smothered from head to foot with flour, and that his head was resting in a little heap of the same, spilled from one of the sacks. He slept on till he was suddenly awakened by the stopping of the cart and the sound of voices.



Tom Merry stood up in the cart and stared round. "It's a ge-ge-ge-ghost!" gasped Garge and took to his heels.

CHAPTER 3.

How Tom Merry Arrived at Clavering!

TOM MERRY awoke with a start. The cessation of motion was sufficient to awaken him, but he did not quite realise where he was for the moment. He lay and listened to the sound of voices. All around him was darkness.

"Back it in theer, Garge!"

"Roight, Maister Giles!"

The latter voice was the carter's. Then Tom Merry realised what had happened. He had slept while the cart reached its destination, and it was being backed into a yard, the carter quite unconscious of the boy lying there among the flour-sacks.

Tom Merry did not wish to be backed into a yard and locked up for the night, and he thought it was quite time he left his present quarters. He pushed off the covering sacks and sat up. He was white from head to foot, and his face, smothered with flour, was positively ghastly. He was quite unaware of it.

"Is theer anything alove in the cart, Garge?"

"Naw, Maister Giles."

"I thought I heard something move."

"Ain't nothing there but sacks."

"I beg your pardon!" said Tom.

He started up from the cart before the two astonished men. There was a glimmer of a lantern in the hand of Master Giles, but it was only a glimmer. They saw Tom very indistinctly in the dimness, and stared at him in amazement and terror.

"It's a ge-ge-ghost!" gasped Garge, and he took to his heels.

Master Giles was not long in following him. Tom was left looking after them in amazement.

"H'm!" muttered Tom. "I wonder what is the matter? They appeared to be quite startled. Well, I must get out of this."

He descended from the cart. The yard, paved with cobblestones, was very gloomy. Tom Merry felt his way towards the gate. There was a sound of voices.

"I tell 'ee I saw 'un plain!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said a woman's voice. "Give me the lantern. You've been drinking, Garge. Get away! I'm ashamed of you!"

"I tell 'ee—"

"Give me the lantern!"

"Doan't go—doan't 'ee go, Mistress Giles—"

"Pooh! I'm not afraid, and I've not been drinking, Garge!" sneered Mrs. Giles.

The lantern-light came glimmering across the yard.

Tom Merry was a little bit alarmed. His appearance was usually productive of smiles; now, it seemed, for some reason unknown to himself, to excite terror. He thought it best to keep out of sight, and he dodged behind a barrow that was upended in the yard.

A stout lady with a white apron and a red face marched across the cobblestones, lantern in hand. Behind her, visibly trembling, came Garge, the colour of chalk. He was still adjuring Mrs. Giles not to risk it, but that lady took not the slightest notice of him. They passed the barrow where Tom Merry crouched, and now if they had turned their heads they would have seen him. But they did not turn; they marched on towards the cart. Mrs. Giles put a foot on the near shaft and looked into it.

"There's nowt here but flour-sacks," she said in tones of withering contempt.

"It's the gig-gig-ghost!"

"You great baby, frightened at a shadow!" Mrs. Giles stepped down. "Get along with you, do! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Oh gracious! Save us!"

Tom, thinking this was a good opportunity for making his escape, had stolen forth, and was heading for the open gate, when Mrs. Giles turned and saw him.

The sight of a ghostly form fitting through the darkness was too much for the good lady's nerves. She gave a loud shriek, and the lantern fell from her hand and smashed on the cobblestones. Garge, with a groan of terror, dived under the cart.

"Save us!" screamed Mrs. Giles. "It's a g-g-ghost!"

Tom wondered what on earth made them take him for a ghost, but he was not the boy to desert a lady in distress. Instead of running out of the gateway, as he might easily have done, he hurried towards Mrs. Giles to proffer assistance and reassure her. The stout lady staggered back against the cart.

"The ghost!" she screamed. "Help!"

"Pray pardon me!" exclaimed Tom in his politest tones.

"I have not the faintest idea why—"

"Help!"

"Madam, I assure you you are in no danger, and—"

"Help!"

"Help!" yelled Garge from under the cart.

"I beg of you to listen to me, madam—"

"Help!"

"All right!" came the voice of Master Giles from the distance. "I've got the blunderbuss! I'm coming!"

Tom shook in his shoes. Even his politeness was not equal to that test. He wanted to reassure Mrs. Giles, but he didn't want to receive a charge of shot. He turned and bolted for the gate, and ran full tilt into Master Giles, who was coming from that direction. Down went the blunderbuss with a crash and down went Master Giles, and Tom sprawled over him.

In a moment, however, he was up again, and sprinting for dear life. He was out of the gate like a flash, and running down the road. As soon as he discovered that he was not pursued, he stopped to get his breath and to attempt to discover where he was. A man was coming up the road, and Tom walked towards him to inquire.

"Excuse me, but can you—"

The man stared at him for a second, and then fled, with a yell. Tom stood lost in amazement.

"I think the people here must all be mad!" he murmured. "Ah, here is a policeman! I will ask him."

He went quickly towards the policeman. He heard the guardian of the law give a gasp, then a lantern flashed on him. A red, angry face looked at him from behind the lantern.

"You young rascal, you gave me a start! What do you mean by it? Blessed if I don't run you in, and chance it!"

And a strong hand closed on Tom's shoulder.

"I beg your pardon, but—"

"Come alonger me, you young rascal! I'll teach you to play your tricks on the King's 'ighway!" exclaimed the constable.

Tom, with a desperate wrench, tore himself loose and fled. He heard the heavy beat of footsteps behind him, and put on a frantic spurt. The footsteps died away. Tom halted again, breathless, and very much astonished. Fortunately he discerned a signpost a few minutes later, and learned that it was half a mile to Clavering.

He set out at a swinging trot.

He was as hungry as a hunter, and his watch told him that it was past eleven o'clock. He had not intended to arrive at the school in the middle of the night, but now he had no choice in the matter. A big building behind a stone wall loomed up on the right, and Tom guessed that it was the college, which he knew was on the outskirts of High Clavering. He stopped at the big gates, and, having discovered the bell, tugged at it. He heard a distant peal ringing through the silence of the gloomy buildings. But there was no response.

He rang again and again, and at last there was the sound of a movement. He heard a fumbling and a grumbling, and then a voice demanding his business.

"If you please, I am Tom Merry," said our hero in his politest tones. "I have unfortunately been delayed, and—"

"So you've come, have you?" growled the voice. "Jolly good hiding waiting for yer, that's one comfort. Come in, do! Waking an honest man up in the middle of the night!"

"I am truly sorry!" exclaimed Tom, as he passed in. "I assure you that it was— Why, where has the man gone?"

The school porter had expected to see a boy enter, and



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not a spectre. He gave a gasp at sight of the ghostly figure, and retreated into his lodge.

"What is the matter, my good man?" called out Tom.

"You—you young himp, giving me a turn like that! I'll complain to the 'Ead, that's what I'll do! What do you mean by it?"

"Mean by what? I do not grasp your meaning."

"I'll grasp your blooming ear, if you don't cut along, you young rascal!"

"But where am I to go?"

"Go up to the House, of course! There's a master gone to Westholm to look for you, and an old lady a-setting up in hysterics, and the 'Ead a-setting up along with her. You'll catch it 'ot, you will, and no mistake. See that window with a light in it? Go there."

Tom obeyed. The close was very dark, but he soon reached the window from which the light glimmered, and he found a door beside it, at which he promptly knocked. There was a cry of joy within.

"It is Tom! I am sure it is my darling Tommy!"

Tom knew his old nurse's voice. The door flew open, and Miss Priscilla appeared. She had flown to it without waiting for the slower movements of the Head of Clavering, who was also sitting up waiting for the truant. The Head wasn't so anxious as Miss Priscilla. He was more inclined to be angry.

Miss Priscilla had arrived at the school minus her charge. She had made her anxiety felt by nearly everybody at Clavering. Herr Schneider, the German master, had gone over to Westholm to look for Tom. Miss Priscilla never dreamed of leaving Clavering till she was assured Tom was safe, though the Head solemnly vowed and declared that it would be all right. She stayed at the college as a matter of course; and the Head, finding that she was determined to sit up till Tom arrived, sat up, too.

The Head was a young man, Victor Railton by name, but a fine schoolmaster. He sat up with Miss Priscilla patiently enough; but at the same time, he resolved to give Master Tommy a lesson when he arrived, but he did not confide his intention to Miss Priscilla. The anxious lady thought him rather heartless because he ate his supper without any apparent loss of appetite, although Tom was missing. Miss Priscilla touched nothing.

At the knock on the door she immediately guessed that Tom had arrived, and flew to it.

"I am really sorry—" began Tom, taking off his cap.

He got no further. Miss Priscilla's scream brought Mr. Railton to the spot, and he was in time to catch her swaying form. He gave a start himself at the sight of Tom; but he was an athlete, and his nerves were strong and steady.

"Is that Thomas Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom, bowing.

"How dare you come here in such a state? How dare you, I say? You have frightened this good lady, and—"

"Is it really Tom?" murmured Miss Priscilla faintly. "I thought he had been killed, and that it was his go-go-ghost!"

"I really fail to perceive why people should take me for a ghost," said Tom.

"Look at yourself in that glass," said the Head sternly.

Tom stepped in and obeyed, and gave a start of astonishment.

"I—I—I— It must have been the flour!" he gasped.

"Calm yourself, Miss Fawcett. The boy is quite safe. Pray calm yourself," said Mr. Railton, wishing Miss Priscilla and her precious charge at the end of the earth.

Assured of her darling Tommy's safety, Miss Priscilla recovered. She disengaged herself from the Head's support, much to his relief, and flew at Tom and hugged him.

"My dear, dear boy! My sweetest little Tommy!"

"Oh, don't!" said Tom. "I ain't a little boy, and I don't like being called Tommy."

"My sweetest child! How anxious I have been!"

"I am exceedingly sorry," said Tom. "I had no intention of causing you alarm. But pray do not hug me any more. And perhaps Mr. Railton will let me have some supper. I am exceedingly hungry."

"You do not deserve it," said Mr. Railton. "However, you shall not go to bed hungry. There is a cold supper already laid for you. Lose no time. I think you have kept Miss Fawcett and myself up long enough."

"I really had no intention—"

"You can explain to-morrow morning. Eat your supper."

Tom fell to as soon as Miss Priscilla allowed him. The lady sat on the other side of the table, watching him, as if afraid that he would melt from her sight all of a sudden. The Head of Clavering was watching him, too, with a very peculiar expression.

Although Tom was caked with flour the Head could see the extremely unusual style of his garments, and though he said nothing on the subject then, he thought a great deal. He noticed, too, Tom's rather peculiar way of expressing

himself, and reflected that that wouldn't do for Clavering. Tom was really the reverse of a prig by nature, but his training had been peculiar, under a doting old lady's charge, and so he had fallen into a way of expressing himself that was not exactly in accordance with his years.

"My most sincere thanks for this really excellent repast," he said, with a bow to the Head. "I am really—"

Mr. Railton rose to his feet.

"Come with me, Merry. I will show you to your room, as all the servants are in bed," he said.

"Good-night, my darling boy!" said Miss Priscilla, hugging Tom.

"Good-night!" said Tom. "I declare that you have covered yourself with flour. Good-night!"

And the new boy at Clavering followed the Head.

In an upper corridor Mr. Railton opened a great oak door, and the light of the candle he carried flickered into a great apartment, in which Tom dimly made out an apparently endless row of white beds.

"This is your bed," said Mr. Railton.

He pointed to an empty one. All the others were tenanted by boys who were mostly snoring. In the next bed to the vacant one Tom saw a face he knew; a face with a large mouth that was now half-open. Manners was his neighbour.

"Get in," said the Head. "I shall come back for the candle in five minutes."

He left the dormitory. Tom Merry glanced along the big dark room and shivered a little. It was not like his cosy little room at Huckleberry Heath. Neither was there a hot-water bottle, he found, to put at his feet, although the night was cold. This was an omission he resolved to mention to Mr. Railton when he returned, never doubting that it had been overlooked.

He tumbled into bed quickly enough. When Mr. Railton came back for the candle, Tom's floury face looked up at him from the pillow.

"Good-night, Merry!" said the Head.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Tom. "They seem to have overlooked the hot-water bottle."

"The what?"

"The hot-water bottle."

"What hot-water bottle?"

"I always have one on a chilly night," explained Tom, in the innocence of his heart.

Mr. Railton smiled grimly.

"I am afraid, Merry, that you must accustom yourself to its absence," he said. "You will certainly not be molly-coddled while you stay at Clavering. If you want to warm yourself before going to bed, I should recommend Indian clubs, or an exerciser."

"But really I must insist—"

"Good-night!"

The dormitory door closed behind Mr. Railton, and Tom was left in darkness to insist as much as he chose, but minus a listener.

"I declare, this is too bad!" murmured Tom.

But he was very sleepy, and ere long, for the second time that night, he dropped off and slept soundly.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom's First Day at Clavering.

DAYLIGHT was streaming into the tall, narrow windows, high up the dull-blue walls of the dormitory, when Tom Merry's eyes opened. He heard voices, some of which seemed to be familiar to his ear.

"That's the funny merchant." It was Manners who was speaking. "Monty and I ran into him at Westholm yesterday, didn't we, Monty?"

"No; he ran into us," said Monty.

"Oh, don't be funny! This is the kid, chaps. He was wearing these same clothes, though they seemed a bit cleaner then. He was a regular mammy's baby boy. Talked like a Dutch uncle, too. Offered to walk to Clavering with us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We weren't taking any, were we, Monty?"

"Not much!" said Monty. "They recommend you to walk with an object. But I wouldn't walk with an object like that. Ha, ha, ha! Object is the name for it."

"You are excessively rude," said Tom Merry, sitting up in bed and looking round him. "It is not good form to make these personal remarks."

There were a dozen boys about the bed in various stages of undress. Some were staring at Tom, others were examining his clothes. Tom had folded them up carefully on a chair. But the boys of Clavering were evidently no respecters of persons or of apparel. The jacket was on the

floor, and Monty Lowther was holding up the knickerbockers for inspection. Another lad had taken the gold watch, and was winding it up. Tom had wound it up overnight, for he had been taught to be careful and methodical. But Master Jimson seemed to find some more winding to do. A peculiar buzz from the watch seemed to hint that something had gone wrong with the works.

When Tom Merry spoke all eyes were immediately fixed upon him.

"What did you say?" asked Manners, with elaborate politeness.

"I think you must have heard my remark," said Tom. "It is, therefore, unnecessary for me to repeat it. Please give me my watch."

"I'm winding it up for you," said Jimson. "I've been winding the blessed thing for five minutes, and the knob's still going round. How long does it usually take, kid?"

"You've broken it!" exclaimed Tom. "How stupid of you!"

Jimson laid down the watch and came towards Tom.

"What did you call me?" he inquired.

"Stupid," said Tom. "Exceedingly and unpardonably stupid, my lad."

"Dot him on the boko, Jimson," said Manners.

"Rather!" said Jimson. "Marma's pet must not be cheeky."

And he promptly brought his fist into sharp contact with Tom's nose, and Tom lay down again with a thump.

"If you want some more," said Jimson, "you've only got to say so."

"You are very rude," said Tom. "I disapprove of violence as a general rule, but in this case I think the circumstances call for severe measures."

He got out of bed.

"That chap," said Manners, "has been eating a dictionary, or a Greek lexicon, or something, or else he's the reincarnated spirit of Dr. Johnson. I say, look out, Jimmy; he's going for you!"

Jimson had turned his attention to the watch again. He turned back quickly at Manners' warning, and put up his fists. Tom Merry went for him pluckily enough. But Tom knew just as much about boxing as he knew about flying. Jimson brushed his hand aside, and gave him a second tap in the same place, and Tom Merry sat down. Miss Priscilla Fawcett considered boxing brutal, and she would never have had her protegee instructed in the manly art of self-defence. It had not occurred to her that inability to protect oneself is about the surest way to get attacked.

"Now, don't be an ass!" said Jimson good-naturedly. "I don't want to hurt you, baby. Keep off the grass, can't you, fathead!"

"Certainly not," said Tom. "I shall fight you, unless you apologise for your unwarrantable conduct."

Jimson pretended to faint in the arms of Monty Lowther.

"Where does he get those words from?" he gasped.

"Now, then, kids!"

It was a sharp voice at the door. A prefect looked into the dormitory, with a severe frown on his face. The frown was not a real one, however, for the face was a fat and extremely good-natured one. Daly was Clavering's fattest and best-tempered prefect.

"What are you dawdling about this morning for?" demanded Daly.

"We're examining this new thing," said Manners. "We found it here when we woke up. Thought it was a nightmare at first. Funny article, ain't it?"

"Well, you'd better be quick down, that's all."

The boys hurriedly proceeded with their dressing, and the row between Tom and Jimson ended for the present. Tom washed and dressed, and carefully brushed down his clothes. He could not quite get all the flour out of the velvet, but he did his best. He was the last boy out of the dormitory. Although he had not had much of a night's rest he was looking very bright and cheerful.

Daly, the prefect, tapped him on the shoulder. The fat prefect looked him over with a grin of amusement.

"I say, I suppose you're the new kid, Merry, ain't you?"

"Yes; my name is Tom Merry," said Tom, with a bow.

"I am very happy to make your acquaintance."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Daly, staring. "I'm gratified to hear it. Where did you get those clothes from?"

"These clothes? I came to Clavering in them."

"Then the sooner you get a change, the better."

"I shall do so immediately my box is unpacked," said Tom, thinking the prefect was referring to the dusty state of his garments. "I was, unfortunately, smothered with flour last night, owing to—"

"Keep all that! You talk too much!"

"Well, I declare!" said Tom. "I was only answering—"

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"Dry up! The Head has asked me to see to you. You're to breakfast with him instead of in the Hall; I really don't know why."

"Neither do I," said Tom.

"Dry up!" said Daly. "Come along!"

Tom Merry followed the prefect. He was shown into a large room with sunny windows, where the breakfast-table laid for three looked very inviting.

Miss Priscilla was there, and she immediately kissed Tom on the forehead in full view of the prefect.

"My dearest Tommy, how do you feel this morning, after your dreadful adventure?"

"Quite well, thank you!" replied Tom. "I'm jolly hungry!"

Mr. Railton came in. He looked hard at Tom, and said good-morning to him, and the three breakfasted together. Mr. Railton had had no choice but to ask his housekeeper to find accommodation for Miss Priscilla the previous night; but he was anxious to get rid of the lady at the earliest possible moment.

He had looked out a train for her to catch, and ordered the cab.

Miss Priscilla insisted upon hearing a full narrative of Tom's adventures, and looked inclined to faint when he told of his encounter with Honest Jim. She made Mr. Railton promise that the police should be informed, so that they could be set on the track of the miscreant without delay, and expressed the opinion that hanging was a great deal too good for him. Mr. Railton, who was only too anxious to be rid of the good lady, assented to everything, and heaved a sigh of relief when the station cab came round for Miss Fawcett.

Tom, of course, conducted Miss Priscilla to the cab in his most Chesterfieldian manner. He rather wished he hadn't, however, when Miss Priscilla took a pathetic farewell before a dozen grinning boys, including Manners, Lowther, and Jimson.

"Good-bye, dearest Tommy!" she said, kissing him for the twentieth time. "Mind and don't forget all I have told you. The hot-water bottle on cold nights—"

"Yes," said Tom; "that's all right!"

"The flannel vests—"

"I won't forget."

"And never, never get your feet wet. If you do—"

"I will be careful."

"And don't forget to write to me if you should want anything."

"I promise."

"Remember your chest is delicate, and—"

"It isn't," said Tom; "it's as sound as a bell! But I won't forget. Good-bye!"

At last Miss Priscilla was safe in the cab. As it drove off she called out to Tom, and he ran after it to hear what she said. So did Manners and Lowther. What she said was:

"Above all, remember the flannel—"

The rest of the parting adjuration was lost in the rattle of the wheels. Tom waved his hand, and Miss Priscilla disappeared.

"Dearest Tommy," said Manners, "I beg of you to take especial care not to get your dear little tootsies wet."

"Don't forget your chest-protector, Tommy," said Monty Lowther; "and take particular care of your flannel socks. Above all, remember the feeding-bottle."

Tom flushed red. The sight of Mr. Railton caused the jokers to leave him alone. Mr. Railton beckoned to Tom, who joined him, and the Head of Clavering led the way to his study.

"You may sit down, Merry," he said.

Tom Merry sat down. He rather wondered what the headmaster had to say to make him look so extremely serious.

"Now, Merry," said Mr. Railton, "I have to speak seriously to you. You have, I believe, been in the charge of Miss Fawcett for a long time?"

"Ever since I was a baby, sir," said Tom cheerfully.

"Ah, that accounts!" murmured Mr. Railton.

"Accounts for what, sir?"

"You must not ask your headmaster questions. You have many things to learn. I am afraid you have been somewhat coddled, Merry. Have you always worn those clothes?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"You should have been provided with others on coming to Clavering. The usual list was supplied to Miss Fawcett, but seems to have been overlooked. I suppose you must continue to wear them until you can be provided with others. Now, I suppose you know you were guilty of a great breach of discipline in leaving Miss Fawcett yesterday without permission and causing so much anxiety. Why did you leave her?"

"I felt inclined to, sir. I have always had my own way," said Tom.

"That will be changed now that you are at Clavering. You will discover that I have my way here, and that you must submit to discipline, like the rest," said Mr. Railton patiently. "If any other boy had done what you have done I should have flogged him. I overlooked it in your case, under the peculiar circumstances; but, mind, nothing of the kind must happen again."

Tom was silent. He began to realise that life at Clavering would not be much like life at Laurel Villa, at dear old Huckleberry Heath.

"I shall be sorry to have to punish you," said Mr. Railton; "but that must come unless you learn to respect your elders and to obey them. Do you play cricket or football?"

"No, sir. Nurse says they are rough games."

"Hum! You will learn, and they will do you a great deal of good, I think. And now we will have a little examination, if you please."

Mr. Railton had licked all sorts of boys into shape, though he had never had to deal with one exactly like Tom before. But he had a keen eye, and could see the boy's faults were all on the surface. It was, indeed, surprising that a boy who had been so utterly spoiled should have turned out half so well.

And the young Head of Clavering was agreeably surprised when he came to make an examination of the new boy's mental attainments.

Tom's tutor had let him have his own way almost to any extent, and the boy had studied whenever he thought he would. Mr. Railton naturally expected to find him an ignoramus; but Tom was a bright boy, and had a gift of industry, in spite of his training.

He had in consequence made pretty good progress. Mr. Railton had expected to have to put Tom, big as he was, in the Lower Fourth, if not lower still in the school. He was agreeably surprised to find that Tom was by no means the fool one might have taken him for being.

With a good deal of satisfaction, he realised that the new boy could go into the Shell, where, though as yet he was not aware of the pleasure in store for him, Tom Merry would have the excellent company of Manners, Lowther, Jimson & Co.

So, after the examination, Tom Merry was turned over to the tender mercies of Mr. Welch, the master of the Shell. He made his first appearance in Form during second lesson, and a general grin went round.

Mr. Railton had explained a few things to the Shell master, and Mr. Welch did not smile when he beheld Tom; but the Form did.

Some of the young gentlemen, in fact, were indignant as much as they were amused.

"Cheek to stick that funny animal in here with us!" exclaimed Manners. "We don't want him in the Shell. Might as well have him put into the Fifth while they were about it. His proper place is in the Third with the giddy infants."

"We'll make the Shell too hot to hold him," said Gore, a big, overgrown fellow who ought to have been well up in the Fifth long ago, but stuck in the Shell by reason of an incurable laziness. "Nice to be seen out with that bouncer. Won't the fellows chip us when old Welch takes us for a walk and that thing along with us?"

"You are talking, I think, Gore!" said Mr. Welch.

"No-no, sir! I was only—"

"Take fifty lines for talking, and fifty more for telling an untruth!"

"Yes, sir," said Gore.

He ground his teeth. He rather unreasonably blamed Tom for the imposition, and inwardly resolved to make "Spooney" sit up for it when he came to get at him.

But this was not the only offence Tom Merry committed against the high and mighty Gore. There was never too much space at Clavering, and an influx of new boys at the beginning of the term had packed the studies unusually close.

The Fourth Form went four to a study, and sometimes five, according to its size. Boys in the Shell and the Lower Fifth, as a rule, shared a room among three, sometimes four. For some time Manners, Lowther, and Gore had had a study to themselves. Their feelings may be imagined when they learned, after morning school, that Tom Merry had been assigned to them for a study-mate.

Manners and Monty Lowther were wild, but Gore was furious. They held a council of war in the study, but they could come to no more useful decision than to give the newcomer a high old time.

When Tom came there he knocked at the door before



There was a bellow in the study not unlike that of an angry bull, and Herr Schneider danced about clasping his injured head!

entering, and came in with the politest bow. He was greeted with unfriendly looks.

"Get out!" said Gore.

"Pray excuse me!" said Tom. "I was told that I am to share this room and prepare my lessons here. Mr. Welch said also that probably some of my study-mates would help me to prepare at first, till—"

"Yes, I can see us doing it!" sneered Gore. "Look here, you're not coming into this study!"

"But Mr. Welch said so."

"I don't care a rap for old Welch!"

"Indeed!"

The angry face of the master of the Shell looked in at the door. Mr. Welch had come there, guessing that Tom Merry's reception would not be a cordial one, and intending to bring the weight of his authority to bear. As he was not far behind Tom, he was in time to hear Gore's flattering reference to himself.

"I am glad," said Mr. Welch furiously—"I am glad, Gore, to learn the manner in which you refer to your master behind his back. Come with me, please, and I will give you reason to remember this occasion—"

Gore unwillingly accompanied the incensed master.

"Well, kid," said Manners, not unkindly, "I'm sorry for you when old Gore comes back, that's all. You'll get it!"

"I am deeply sorry for this unfortunate occurrence!" exclaimed Tom. "It was not my fault, and I really do not see why Gore should be angry with me."

"My eye!" said Monty Lowther impressively. "He'll skin you!"

It was some minutes before Gore returned. He came in in a towering rage, rubbing his hands, which were smarting from a severe infliction.

"Now, you young brute," he snapped—"now I'll settle with you! Don't let him get away!"

Tom Merry showed no desire to get away.

"I say, don't you go for him too much, Gore," said Manners. "He's only a silly kid, and he can't use his fists, you know. Draw it mild!"

"You shut up, Manners! I'll ask for your advice when I want it!"

And Gore went for Tom. Tom put up his fists promptly; but, as we have already mentioned, he was quite innocent of any knowledge of the noble art of self-defence. Gore sent him flying with the first thump, and he fell in the grate.

"Get up!" roared Gore. "Get up and have some more!"

Tom was feeling too dazed to get up just then. Gore stooped over him and seized him by the ear, with the idea of lifting him. Tom lashed out with his fist and caught the bully a terrific crack between the eyes—and Gore sat down!

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Manners. "You weren't looking for that, Gore!"

Gore scrambled up in a fury. He seized a walking-cane and began to thrash Tom. The new boy scrambled to his feet under a shower of blows. As Gore had a weapon Tom thought it would be fair play for him to have one, too, and he snatched a cricket-stump from a corner and faced the bully pluckily.

Slash came the cane across his shoulder, and then crack went the stump on Gore's head, and the bully of the Shell saw stars. Then Tom gave him a dig in the ribs and followed it up with a cut across the shoulders, and Gore began to beat a retreat.

"That fellow's mad!" he gasped. "Keep him off! He'll brain me with that stump! He's dangerous! Hold him!"

Neither Manners nor Monty was inclined to hold Tom. On the contrary they cheered him on, quite pleased to see the bully of the Form scared by the new boy.

"Go it, Spooney!" cried Manners. "Lay into him!"

"Break his coconut for him, Baby!" cried Monty Lowther.

Tom was warming to his work. He was smarting and tingling all over from the lashing of the cane. He would never have used a stick so long as Gore kept to his fists, and would rather have taken a thrashing; but the cane justified the stump. And now that he had started, Tom Merry wasn't inclined to leave off till he had made the bully properly sorry for himself.

Gore retreated round the table, and the victorious new boy followed him excitedly, cutting and digging at him. Twice round the table they went. Round they went again, and then Gore made a wild break for the door.

"After him!" yelled Manners, choking with laughter.

Tom Merry needed no bidding. He was after Gore like a shot, and the bully, unable to get the door open in time, collapsed in a heap close to it, and frantically put up his arms to protect his head.

"Don't!" he yelled. "You'll kill me! Manners, hold him off! Lowther, talk to him! He's as mad as a hatter! Keep him off!"

Tom brandished the stump, and crashed it against the door over Gore's head, and the bully wriggled in terror.

"Will you apologise if I let you off?" demanded Tom.

"Yes, yes! I am sorry—I am awfully sorry!"

"Then I will overlook your offence," said Tom magnanimously. "You have made a most wanton and unjustifiable attack upon me merely because your master discovered you expressing yourself in a reprehensible manner; but if you sincerely apologise I am satisfied."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Manners. "Where does it all come from?"

Gore staggered to his feet. He would have liked to hurl himself upon Tom, but Tom still had the stump in his hand, and the bully dared not risk it.

"I'll pay you out for this!" he snarled, and he went out of the study and closed the door with a slam.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Monty Lowther. "I never saw old Gore so taken down in all his life before! The new kid isn't such a spooney, after all, Manners."

"No more he is," said Manners. "But, I say, kid, I'd advise you to learn how to use your fists, you know. You won't always have a cricket-stump handy."

"I can't box," said Tom, in his frank, engaging way. "I have never really fought in my life. I wish somebody would teach me."

"I will!" said Manners, in a burst of generosity.

"Oh, thank you so much!" said Tom, beaming. "That will be nice. By the way, are you fellows fond of tarts and sweets and things?"

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"Are we?" murmured Monty Lowther. "Oh, no, not half!"

"I've got a lot in my box, and—"

Manners, much to Tom's astonishment, fell upon his neck as if he recognised in him a long-lost brother.

"Monty, old man, his heart's in the right place, if he hasn't got any brains," said Manners. "Kid, where's that giddy box?"

"I think it has been put up in the box-room, but I don't know where that is."

"I'll show you. Come on, Monty! Follow the man from Cook's. This way."

And Manners, with his arm linked quite affectionately in Tom's, marched him off, and Monty Lowther brought up the rear.

CHAPTER 5.

Tom Meets Herr Schneider.

TOM MERRY'S box had been packed with loving care by Miss Priscilla, and that good lady had not overlooked the eatables. Manners and Lowther rather stared when they saw what a supply of really first-class eatables Tom had brought with him to Clavering. They were not long in falling to, and they did full justice to the "feed."

"This is a bit of all right!" said Manners, starting on his sixth jam-tart after having demolished a rabbit-pie and half a cake. "Tommy, my son, that dear old lady is a scorcher—a regular scorcher. She knows what a chap wants. Nothing mean about her. I wish I had a few old aunts of the same brand."

"Rather!" said Lowther. "This ginger-pop is really ripping! Hallo! There's Gore looking in! Hallo, Gore! What do you want?"

"Wondered what you kids were up to here," said Gore, looking into the box-room. "Hallo! Where did you get all that tuck?"

"It's the new kid's spread, and he's invited us."

Gore looked enviously at the spread.

He wished that he had not been quite so hasty in sitting on the new boy. But Tom was not the fellow to bear malice.

"Come in!" he said. "There's plenty, and you're very welcome. I shall be honoured if you will join us."

"Well," said Gore, "you're a howling prig, but there's nothing wrong with the grub, so here goes."

And he joined the feasters.

"We shan't be able to eat any dinner," said Manners; "but that doesn't matter. You don't get rabbit-pies like that at Clavering. Try one of them, Gore. I can recommend them."

"Thanks, I will," said Gore, opening his pocket-knife, for cutlery was the only thing that was wanting at the feast.

"I—Hallo, there's Jimson!"

Jimson was looking in at the door.

"You fellows got a spread, and enjoying it all by your little selves?" he demanded. "Well, that's what I call piggyish!"

"Tain't our spread," said Manners. "It's the new kid's, and he's invited us."

"Well, he's surely going to invite me, too," said Jimson. "I wound your watch for you, you know, Merry."

Tom laughed.

"Yes, and broke it," he said.

"Of course, accidents will happen."

"Come on," said Tom hospitably. "You're welcome."

"Well, that's decent of you, after the way I dotted you on the boko!" said Jimson. "You're a good sort, and I suppose you can't help being a silly ass."

And he sat on a corner of the box and started. A few minutes later a couple more heads were poked in at the door. Somehow, the news that a feed was going on in the box-room seemed to spread, and it brought the boys of the Shell from near and far. Tom was hospitality itself. He invited each newcomer to join in the banquet, and, generous as the supplies were, they began to diminish rapidly.

There were soon a couple of dozen boys of the Shell and the Lower Fifth in the box-room, enjoying themselves immensely, and they all agreed that Tom Merry was a brick. The dinner-bell called them away at last, when there was little left but crumbs, and they went into the dining-hall and took their places, but they ate nothing. They had had enough; in fact, most of them had had more than enough.

Tom's generosity and his forgiving temper naturally made something of a diversion in his favour. The boys, as

was to be expected, chipped him incessantly, but their "chipping," was mostly good-natured. The feast in the box-room, in fact, had paid Tom's footing in his Form.

In the evening he prepared his lessons in the study with Manners, Lowther, and Gore. The latter, as soon as the immediate effects of the food had worn off, relaxed into hostility; but Manners and Monty were good-natured enough. Manners helped Tom with his preparation, and Monty promised to teach him how to play cricket.

Football was over, and King Cricket reigned in its stead. The boys of Clavering were eagerly discussing forthcoming matches now. The talk was so much Greek to Tom, whose education had been sadly neglected as far as sports were concerned; but he was an intelligent lad, and he did not, like an ignoramus, affect to despise what he did not understand. He was eager to learn.

"Funny place you were brought up in, and no mistake," said Monty condescendingly but good-naturedly. "Here's a chap, nearly fifteen, dressing in a baby's velvet nickerbockers, and never bowled a ball in his life. Do you know the difference between a bat and a boundary, kid?"

"No," said Tom.

Manners and Lowther roared.

"Credit he'll be to Clavering," said Gore, with a sneer. "I wish you joy of your pupil, Lowther. Why don't you cut him?"

"Oh rats!" said Monty. "He's a decent sort, and that's more than you are. He stood a jolly good feed. You didn't talk about cutting him then."

Gore growled, but he had no reply to make to that. Preparation over, Manners got out his boxing-gloves. Manners rather prided himself on his boxing, and the fellows in the Shell did not like standing up to him. He was glad to have a pupil, as a matter of fact, and Tom's open-hearted admiration was very gratifying to him.

"Now for the first lesson," he said. "Get that table out of the way, Monty."

"You're not going to box here!" growled Gore. "There isn't room!"

"Oh, you're a pig! Go into the Common-room if you aren't satisfied!"

And Gore grunted and took himself off.

The table was pushed into a corner, and the chairs and bookcase placed upon it to clear a space for Tom Merry's first lesson in the manly art of self-defence.

He put the gloves on, with Monty's assistance, and faced Manners cheerfully. He was not looking quite so cheerful after a few minutes. Manners' idea of instructing was to hit Tom on the nose as often and as hard as he could, leaving it to Tom to learn how to guard his nasal organ. Tom was floored half a dozen times in quick succession, and it says much for his pluck and determination that, after each fall, he came up smiling, with undiminished keenness.

"My hat!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, who was sitting on a chair on the table, and looking on with the air of a critic. "He sticks it out well, Manners. When he's dressed in clothes suitable for a civilised chap, instead of a monkey, we may be able to make something of him. Go it, Spooney!"

Tom came up for the seventh time. He had observed now how Manners guarded himself, and as his nose was feeling decidedly the worse for wear, he did his best to guard it. Somewhat to the instructor's surprise, in the seventh round, Tom knocked his hand up, and countered neatly, with a heavy smack on Manners' own nose.

The unexpectedness of it made Manners stagger.

"Bravo!" said Monty. "That's one for your boko, Manners!"

Manners smiled a sickly smile.

"You're improving!" he said. "Keep on, kid!"

Tom kept on. Manners found it less and less easy to knock him down, and Tom was certainly in good condition; for, after a round dozen falls, he still came up freshly, and Manners was beginning to blow a little now.

"Well, he can stick it out," said Monty Lowther. "Hallo, look out!"

The warning came too late. The door of the study opened, and a fat figure appeared. It was that of Herr Schneider, the German master. The German's fat, red face was very angry. His study was under that occupied by Manners and Lowther, and the terrific tramping and stamping of the boxers overhead, and the loud thump whenever Tom went down, had excited him in a state of frenzy. He had come up at last with a cane in his hand to remonstrate. He opened the door of the study and bounced in at an unlucky moment.

Tom was just warming to his work, and he was hurling himself at Manners, who was nearest the door. By rare luck he got through Manners' guard, and his right came on Manners' chin with a thump. Manners went flying, and would have brought up against the door if it had been shut.

As it was, he brought up against Herr Schneider. The German wasn't prepared for the impact. Manners crashed into his portly form, and he reeled back into the passage and sat down, and Manners sat down, too, on the top of the German.

"Oh lor!" gasped Monty Lowther. "There will be a row!"

Monty was right. Manners jumped up as quickly as if the German master was red-hot, and stood gazing at the gasping master in dismay. Herr Schneider was fat and unwieldy, and slower to rise, and, moreover, nearly all the breath had been knocked out of him. He puffed and panted and put his hand against the wall of the passage for assistance in getting upon his feet.

Here was a chance for Tom Merry's unflinching politeness, and he did not let it pass. He stepped quickly into the passage, and extended his hand to the Herr.

"Pray let me assist you, my dear sir!" he said.

To his astonishment the Herr replied with a sounding box on the ear, which sent him flying into the study again. Then Herr Schneider finished getting upon his feet without assistance. Tom rubbed his ear, which felt as if it was on fire.

"How extremely ungentlemanly!" he exclaimed.

"Mein Gott!" exclaimed Herr Schneider. "Tat poy! I nefer saw vun like it before! Lowther, Manners, you will each of you write vun hundred lines for making such a noise mit yourselves in dis room!"

"Yes, sir!" said Manners and Monty Lowther together.

"You will come mit me," said Herr Schneider, seizing Tom by the arm.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Tom. "Manners is just instructing me in boxing, and I particularly wish to finish the lesson; so, if you do not mind—"

"Come mit me!" roared Herr Schneider.

"But, really—"

The German jerked him bodily out of the study.

"Come mit me, and I will see what te Head say to your impertinence!" he panted.

"Poor old Spooney!" murmured Manners. "Fancy talking to a master like that. He's going to catch it hot, Monty!"

"Well, he is a coughdrop!" said Monty, getting off the table. "Come to think of it, you were making rather a row. I'm sorry for baby boy."

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Herr Schneider led Tom, still with a grip on his arm, directly to the headmaster's study. Herr Schneider had not taken a liking to Tom. He had gone over to Westholm the previous day to look for the truant, and had not enjoyed taking the trouble. Now, on the new boy's first night in his study, he had made a tremendous disturbance. When that was followed up by what Herr Schneider regarded as impertinence, the cup was filled to overflowing.

Herr Schneider was not a bad fellow at heart, but he was crusty—exceedingly crusty. He was down on sports and anything like horseplay, and he liked to see boys still as mice. As he could never get any human boys to keep as still as mice, he was never satisfied.

"Come in!" said Mr. Railton's cheerful voice.

The German marched in with Tom Merry.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Railton. "What is the matter?"

"Tat poy," said Herr Schneider, releasing Tom, and pointing an accusing forefinger at him—"tat poy has been most insolent. I pring him to you, sir. He make a t'undering noise, and call me—me, Otto Friedrich Schneider—me, unshentelmanly!"

The Head's brow became very stern.

"Merry, have you dared to apply such a term of disrespect to Herr Schneider?"

"The facts are these, sir," said Tom. "By an unfortunate accident, Herr Schneider was overturned in the corridor, owing to an unforeseen collision between Manners and himself, which was due to his sudden and unexpected appearance—"

"You must not speak like that, Merry," said Mr. Railton, hiding a smile. "I really never met a boy with such a peculiar phraseology before."

"Indeed, sir, I am explaining with conciseness and lucidity—at least, I was under that impression," said Tom.

"But, as I was saying, Herr Schneider then committed an unlooked-for and unprovoked assault upon me, and, naturally, I characterised such conduct as being in the last degree ungentlemanly; when, as it happened, I was in the act of proffering him assistance, which I believe he needed."

"Tere nefer was such a poy," murmured Herr Schneider. "Nefer—nefer!"

"Are you not aware, Merry, that you must not pass such remarks upon a master?"

"No, sir, I wasn't aware of that."

"You are aware of it now, and if it occurs again you will be severely punished. This time I shall try to persuade Herr Schneider to pardon you. Leave the room!"

"Certainly, sir."

And Tom quitted Mr. Railton's study.

At this dismissal of Tom Herr Schneider looked a great deal as a cat might look from whose claws a mouse had just escaped. Mr. Railton turned to him. He knew it wouldn't be easy to pacify Otto Friedrich Schneider, but he meant to try.

"I trust you will overlook this fault of Merry's, Herr Schneider," said Mr. Railton. "I must explain to you that he is a somewhat peculiar lad, and his training has been very peculiar. You saw Miss Fawcett yourself yesterday, and you will acknowledge that a boy trained by that really excellent lady is not likely to fall into Public school ways at once."

"Nein, nein!" assented the German. "Vat he needs mooch is a good thrashing."

"I hope that will not be necessary. I wish first to see what patience will do."

"Poy's are all the same, Herr Railton. Dey have high spirits till dey are vell peaten. All poy's require peating every morning."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"I hope not, Herr Schneider. In the case of Merry in particular, I am convinced that the boy is really sound at heart, and that his faults lie on the surface."

"If you wish me to overlook his faults, Herr Railton, I will do so, of course," said the German, looking about as pleasant as if he were having a tooth out.

"I do wish it," said Mr. Railton, with a pleasant smile.

He was determined not to see that Herr Schneider was grumpy. Mr. Railton was a young man, and most of the masters at Clavering were older than himself. Herr Schneider was old enough to be his father. This fact made Mr. Railton reluctant to use his authority as he might otherwise have done.

Herr Schneider, with the stiffest of bows, quitted the Head and went back to his own quarters. He passed the study where the boxing match had taken place; but it was dark and empty. Tom had rejoined his two friends, and they had gone with him to the Common-room. The Herr passed within hearing distance of that apartment, and the strains of a song floated out to his ears:

"Schneider, Schneider,
Schneider, how you vos?"

"The next time," muttered Herr Schneider, as he strode on—"the next time tat poy oversteps the line I will not take him to the Head—I will take him to mein own study and gif him a lesson tat he vill remember."

CHAPTER 6.

More Trouble for Tom!

CLANG! Clang! The unwelcome sound of the rising-bell awoke Tom Merry. He opened his eyes and blinked in the light that streamed in at the high windows of the dormitory.

At Laurel Villa, at dear old Huckleberry Heath, Tom had generally risen at whatever hour suited him best. Although he was as strong and sturdy as a boy well could be, Miss Priscilla had persisted in regarding him as delicate, and he had been allowed all the indulgences of an invalid. Now he awoke and lay calmly regarding the other boys as they dressed, feeling in no hurry himself.

"I say, Spooney!" called out Manners, as he fastened his collar. "Buck up, or you won't get any breakfast!"

Some of the boys were already gone. Tom's movements were leisurely, and the others were mostly out of the dormitory before he was out of bed. Manners, in fact, helped him to make up his mind to rise by jerking off his bedclothes in sheer kindness of heart.

"Ugh!" shivered Tom.

"Oh, buck up!" said Manners. "Don't be a milksop!"

"Hallo! Where are my clothes?" demanded Tom.

He had placed them on a chair beside his bed when he undressed the previous night, but there was no sign of them now.

"Give it up," said Manners, looking round.

"I say, if this is a lark—"

"Haven't touched them—honour bright!" said Manners.

"Have you seen Spooney's togs, Monty?"

"No," said Monty, who was going out. "Better come along, Manners. Welch will spot us if we're late for prayers."

"Right-ho!"

And Manners made to follow his chum.

Tom was dismayed. His clothes had been removed. On

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the chair, neatly folded up, was a large, coarse sack, but at first he did not understand what its presence there meant.

"I say, what am I to do?" he called out. "I can't come down without them."

"Don't ask me riddles," said Manners. "There's a sack there. Shove that on and come down!"

"Don't be an ass! I should present an exceedingly ludicrous appearance, and—"

"Oh, if you're going to fire those words at me, I'm off!" And Manners and Lowther hurried away.

Tom was left alone in the dormitory. He hunted high and low for his clothes, but they were not to be found. His practical joker had evidently made away with them. His underclothing was there, and he donned it, but in that light and airy attire it was hardly possible to descend. His eyes fell on the sack again.

A senior put his head in at the door. His face was angry. Mr. Welch had sent him to look for the absentee, and he didn't like the trouble.

"Merry, where are you?"

"I am here," said Tom. "I am in a most unfortunate predicament—"

"Come down."

"I should be happy indeed to do so, but some individual has—"

"If you aren't down in one tick you'll get a thrashing!"

And the messenger disappeared without waiting for Tom's explanation.

Tom was desperate. It was evidently necessary to go down, and there was nothing for it but to don the sack. He picked it up and shook it out. Two slits had been cut in the sides of it, evidently for a wearer's arms to pass through, and another in the bottom for the head. Tom turned the sack upside down and slipped it over his head.

Gore looked into the dormitory.

"Are you coming down, Merry, or is Mr. Welch to come up for you?"

"Somebody's taken my clothes," said Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I believe it was you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll punch your head!"

"Well, come down in the sack—it suits you awfully well."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Gore went away, roaring with laughter.

Tom's appearance was certainly comical. His head came out of the slit in the bottom of the sack, which hung on his shoulders. It came down as far as his knees.

"Well, I've got to go," said Tom to himself. "It's not my fault. Here goes!"

And he left the dormitory. He passed one or two people on the stairs, who stared at him in amazement and burst out laughing. Then he reached the big Hall where Clavering was now at breakfast.

The boys of the Shell were at a table next to the Fifth, and Mr. Welch, their master, was at the head of it. He looked up as Tom came in. The next moment the Hall shook with the yell of laughter that went up. Seniors and juniors joined in the shout. But Mr. Welch frowned darkly.

"Merry!" he cried, as soon as he could make his voice heard. "Merry!"

"Yes, sir?"

"What is the meaning of this—this masquerade?"

"I regret exceedingly, sir—"

"Explain yourself."

"Owing to an unfortunate—"

"Explain yourself instantly."

"How can I explain myself, sir, if you will not afford me

an opportunity?" exclaimed Tom. "I had no desire to appear in this unusual and absurd attire, but—"

"Merry, go back to your dormitory immediately!"

"Yes, sir."

"Dress yourself properly, and return. I will deal with this flagrant piece of impertinence presently."

"But—"

"Go this instant!"

"Permit me to explain—"

"Go!" roared the master of the Shell, and he rose from his seat with the intention of giving Tom a start.

Tom Merry did not wait for it. He scuttled out of the hall, and returned disconsolately to the dormitory. There he sat on his bed, resigning himself to the loss of his breakfast.

A quarter of an hour later Mr. Welch looked in. He had a cane in his hand and a gleam in his eye.

"Now, Merry, I will deal with you. As you have not chosen to dress yourself, you can take your punishment minus your clothing, and I have no doubt that you will be sorry. Remove that sack."

Tom slipped off the sack. Mr. Welch seized him and bent him over a bed, and gave him half a dozen stinging cuts, which he would certainly not have felt so keenly if he had been wearing his usual attire. It wasn't his fault that his clothes had been taken away; but the angry master would listen to no explanation.

"There!" said Mr. Welch. "Now dress yourself and come down immediately. If you are not in your Form at the same time as the other boys, beware!"

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Tom. "If I am to go into the Form I shall have to go in the sack, and then I shall be caned again. It is most unreasonable!"

It was evidently useless to stay in the dormitory, so he put the sack on again and made his way to the class-room. A howl of laughter went through the Shell at his appearance, which the master's presence could not restrain.

Mr. Welch looked at Tom as if he could scarcely believe his eyes. His eyes followed Tom Merry as if he were mesmerised as the boy calmly marched in and took his place on a form.

"Merry," he gasped at last, "this is—is incredible!"

"If you had allowed me an opportunity, sir," said Tom,

"I should have informed you that—"

"Silence! Step out here!"

"It is your intention to inflict a second castigation, I protest—"

"Step out!" cried Mr. Welch in a voice of thunder.

Tom unwillingly rose from his seat. But at the same time Manners rose.

"If you please, sir, somebody's collared Merry's clothes," he said quickly. "His togs are not in the dormitory."

"Oh!" said Mr. Welch. "Is that the case, Merry?"

"Yes, sir. I had no others there, and so—"

"Why did you not explain this before?"

"I endeavoured to do so, sir, but—"

"Go back to the dormitory, and wait there till some clothes are brought to you," said Mr. Welch angrily.

Tom left the room.

"If I knew who had played this trick upon a new boy," said Mr. Welch, "I should cane him severely. Manners, you can go and find some clothes for Merry."

Manners followed Tom. Gore sent a scowl after him. He thought Manners had spoiled an excellent joke by enlightening the master as to the true state of affairs.

When Tom Merry reappeared in the class-room he was clad in a beautifully new velvet suit, with a pretty bow. Mr. Welch frowned at the sight of him, but made no

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Brown & White



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remark. Later in the day Tom's purloined clothes turned up. They were found in a bundle outside one of the dormitory windows. But the practical joker was not discovered, although Tom had a pretty shrewd idea as to his identity.

CHAPTER 7. A Boundary Hit!

"NOW then, stop that!" called out Monty Lowther. It was the first lesson in cricket. Monty had not forgotten his promise. He took Tom down to the ground with him, and perhaps he regretted his generous offer a little when a howl of laughter greeted him and his protegee.

The Head had taken measures to have Tom supplied with a garb more suited to a boy in the Shell at Clavering School, but that naturally would take some time, and so for the present Tom still appeared in the charming attire which was the delight of Miss Priscilla's eyes.

"I say, you do look a giddy guy, Merry," said Monty nervously. "Still, a promise is a promise. Come on, ass!" And he took Tom under his wing. Tom was quite ignorant of the noble summer game, and the merest rudiments were Greek and Hebrew to him. A crowd of interested fellows gathered round to watch the course of instruction.

"Now, then, stop that!"

"That" was a cricket ball which Monty tossed for Tom to catch, skilfully aiming it to plump on Tom's chest if he did not stop it. Tom stopped it—with his chest!

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Gore. "I envy you your pupil, Monty!"

"Oh, you shut up!" said Lowther. "Who got a couple of duck's eggs at Redclyffe, eh?"

Gore coloured.

"You needn't talk!" continued Lowther victoriously. "The new kid knows as much about cricket as you do, anyway. Now, Merry, I'm going to bowl to you. If you get leg before wicket, I pity you."

Tom took the bat rather gingerly.

"He doesn't know how to hold it," grinned Gore.

"How should he?" said Jimson. "Let me show you, young 'un."

"Thank you very much," Tom said gratefully.

"See, look," said Jimson. "You take hold of the broad end, so; then, when the ball comes up you poke at it with the narrow end—so—just as if you were spearing salmon, you know. Yes, that's right."

Monty had gone to bowl, leaving Tom at the wicket, and so he did not hear this precious information given to his pupil. The boys, hugging themselves with mirth, stood round waiting for Tom to carry out Jimson's instructions. Tom, in the innocence of his heart, obeyed Jimson to the very letter.

"Play!" yelled Monty Lowther.

Down came the ball. When Tom stepped quickly before the wicket, and thrust at the ball with the handle of the bat, Monty's face was a study.

"You ass!" he shouted. "What on earth are you doing?"

Tom shouted, too, but with pain; for the ball had, of course, not been stopped with his novel method of batting, and it had cracked on his leg with considerable force.

"Leg before wicket!" chuckled Jimson. "You're out!"

The boys were screaming with laughter. Monty Lowther came running along the pitch. He glowered at poor Tom.

"What do you mean by holding the bat like that, Merry? Are you off your rocker?"

"But Jimson told me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimson.

"He was only rotting," said Monty, grinning in spite of himself. "For goodness' sake take hold of the handle! Let me show you!"

He gave Tom some instruction in holding the willow, adjusted him to keep a straight bat, and then bowled to him again. Tom, a good deal to his own surprise, stopped the ball on the crease.

"Good!" said Lowther approvingly.

"Oh, jolly good!" said Gore sarcastically. "Wish the captain were along now. He's sure to snap Merry up for the First Eleven as soon as he sees his form."

The suggestion sent some of the boys into hysterics. Tom took no notice of Gore. Another ball came down from Monty, and Tom swiped at it with all the vigour of a beginner. He hit the ball, marvellous to relate, and the ball hit Gore, catching him on the chin.

"Ow!" roared the bully of the Shell, clapping his hands to his chin and dancing about like a lunatic. "Ow! Ow! Wow!"

The boys were still laughing; but Gore's antics were now

the cause of their merriment. Tom made his politest bow to his injured enemy.

"I am truly sorry!" he exclaimed. "It is really not safe to stand so close to the wicket when I am batting."

"By Jove! He's right there!" muttered Manners; and he beat a prompt retreat.

Gore thought he had better do the same, and the rest of Tom's lesson passed without any further chipping. At the end of it Monty Lowther expressed himself as upon the whole satisfied with him.

"You must practise every day," he said. "I'll put you up to all I know. You must watch others at practice, too, and see a good game whenever you get a chance; that's the way to improve your form. You'll want some flannels; I never saw such a guy as you look on a cricket-field in all



The Hall shook with the yell of laughter that went up as Tom Merry frowned darkly. "Merry—Boy! What is the meaning of t

my natural. And if you've got any tin you'd better invest in a bat of your own."

"Oh, I've plenty of money!" said Tom. "Miss Fawcett allows me as much as I like. She's very fond of me."

"I wish she were fond of me, then," said Monty. "Blessed if I don't make love to her when she comes to see you again! I never have enough money."

When afternoon school was over the lessons in the great game were continued, and Tom Merry proved himself a very apt pupil. Before very long he was able to wield the willow, and though his batting was clumsy it was creditable to such a complete tyro. Monty gave some instruction in the mysteries of bowling, and as Tom was eager to learn he began to pick it up.

"Will you come down to the village with me to buy a bat?" Tom asked his new friend.

Manners and Lowther looked at one another.

"Will we, Monty?" said Manners.

Lowther coughed.

"Well, I don't want to speak unkindly, Merry," said Monty. "But, if you'll excuse us, we'll wait till you're dressed in a rather more civilised style."

"You see," said Manners, "not to put too fine a point

on it, people might take you for a guy and throw things at us!"

"Dear me!" said Tom. "I shall be glad when I have the new clothes the Head has ordered for me—I shall, indeed!"

"So shall we," said Manners. "The fellows have already nicknamed our study 'the nursery,' and it isn't nice."

Tom blushed. He had felt very satisfied at one time with his garments, but since coming to Clavering he had grown more and more uncomfortable in them. He was looking forward to the time when he would exchange them for the "common or garden" Etons.

"We shall have a practice match on to-morrow afternoon," Monty Lowther remarked. "You can look on, Merry. It's a half-holiday, you know. But we'll have time for half an hour at the nets, if you like, before it starts."

"Thanks awfully!" said Tom. "You fellows are very good to me."

"Oh, rats!" said Monty.

Tom looked forward to the following afternoon; but there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, as he was destined to discover.



me in, but Mr. Welch nequered?"

Herr Schneider had not forgotten his grudge against Tom, and that morning he took the Shell in German. He soon showed he had a very keen eye on the new boy. Tom had a sort of smattering of German, but it was his weakest point. The Herr soon discovered that he had him at his mercy, and he did not spare him.

"Mein Gott!" said Herr Schneider, when he had worried Tom for about five minutes. "That poy is the stupidest tat efer vos. You should be in te Lower Fourth, Merry, and nit in te Shell at all."

"Yes, sir," said Tom. "Mr. Railton put me in the Shell, but I suppose he didn't know any better. Shall I tell him what you say, sir?"

Manners nearly exploded.

"Oh, my hat!" he murmured. "Old Schneider will have a fit, I think!"

The German master had become almost purple in the face.

"Merry, take feefy lines for impertinence!"

"Certainly, sir; but it was far from being my intention of being guilty of impertinence!"

"Mein Gott! Hold your tongue! You talk too much!"

"Yes, sir."

"You vas more stupid tan efer was! You know noting! You vill go down to te bottom of te class! Take tat sentence again—'Des grimmes unrecht ihr genthan.' If you cannot tell me to English of tat, I deal mit you severely, after!"

"I am afraid sir, that I cannot satisfy you in this matter," said Tom politely. "My knowledge of German is not yet sufficiently extensive—"

"Silence! You cannot answer?"

"I regret that I am unable—"

"Enoff! You stay in dis afternoon, and in my study I vill gif you some instruction."

"Impossible, sir," said Tom; "I am engaged already. I am very sorry, but I have promised to go down to the cricket-field."

The whole class giggled joyously. Herr Schneider rapped his desk with his cane.

"Silence!" he roared. "Merry, I vill deal mit you later. Tat impertinence passes all bounds. Manners, if you laugh vunce more I gif you feefy lines! You vill construe tat line instantly, sir! Speak!"

"You are committing a great injustice, sir," said Manners meekly.

"Vat?" roared the German; and he strode towards Manners.

"Well, you asked me," said Manners.

"I—I—" The German paused. Manners' rendering of the line was a passable one, and it was difficult to take exception to it; but Herr Schneider knew very well that Manners intended the remark for him personally. "I—hum! Ah, ve vill pass on!"

He glowered at Manners, and passed on to the next boy.

The class was almost in hysterics, trying not to laugh.

The line the German master had chosen to puzzle Tom with had afforded Manners an excuse for being impertinent. Manners had certainly had the best of it, and the Shell was delighted. But Herr Schneider was not delighted, he was angry, and his face was flushed during the remainder of the lesson, and when he dismissed the class, he reminded Tom of that appointment in his study.

"Must I go, Manners?" asked Tom, as they left the class-room.

Manners whistled.

"Well, I should say so. Sorry about that cricket practice. Never mind, we'll wake the old humbug up. He'll sit in his armchair reading his beastly old Deutsh newspaper, while you are swotting away at German. We'll see that he isn't allowed too much quiet."

When the boys were dispersing in various directions to spend the half-holiday, Tom Merry was rapped on the shoulder, and he found the German master at his side.

"Come mit me, Merry."

"Will you please let me off, sir?" said Tom meekly. "I really should like to go out and get some cricket practice."

"Certainly nod! You need to learn Sherman more tan you need to learn cricket, I suppose. You poyis gif too mooch time already before to dose brutal cricket and feet-ball. You vill come to my study."

And he marched Tom Merry off to his quarters. There he sat the new boy down at his table, opposite himself, and set him to work. The sun was shining in at the window, and the cheery voices of the boys came in from the old close. Far off sounded the schoolboys' shouts. Never had German seemed so dry and uninteresting to Tom Merry. Herr Schneider meant well, but, as a matter of fact, he was going the best way to work to make study laborious and distasteful.

"Now you vill write," he said. "I vill keep mine eye on you, while I read mit meinself mine baper. Go on!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom heavily.

His pen scratched on the paper slowly and unwillingly. The German characters had never sprawled over an exercise in a more spider-legged manner than they did now under Tom's reluctant pen. Herr Schneider, satisfied that he was teaching the new boy habits of industry, opened his German newspaper to read the news of the Vaterland.

The sun, shining in at the window, glimmered upon the bald spot on the top of his head, and Tom, whose attention soon flagged from his work, found himself watching that shiny spot. Herr Schneider looked up suddenly.

"Vy you nod work, Merry?"

Tom coloured.

"I—I was thinking, sir."

"Hein! And vat were you tinkung about?"

"N-nothing in particular," stammered Tom.

The German gave him a sharp look.

"Indeed! Answer my question immediately!"

"I was thinking—er—"

"Go on!"

"Well, sir, I was thinking how funny that bald spot on the top of your head looks, when the sun's on it!" said Tom with candid simplicity.

The German seemed about to choke. Every morning he spent five minutes before the glass arranging his scanty locks to cover up that tell-tale spot, and he had flattered himself that it was not very noticeable.

"You—you—you go on mit your writing!"

Tom's pen scratched away. The German breathed hard. There was a sudden roar outside the window. The strains of a song floated in:

"Schneider, Schneider,

"Oh, Schneider, how you vos—"

Tom giggled. The German master sprang to his feet, and rushed to the window and threw it up. The song came in then with a roar:

"Oh, Schneider, how you vos—"

Herr Schneider shook his fist at Manners, Lowther, and a dozen other boys of the Shell, who were singing at the top of their voices, apparently oblivious of him.

"Poys, go away immediately!"

"Hallo!" said Manners in an injured tone. "Mustn't we sing in the close, sir?"

"No!" roared the Herr. "Go away, or I come down mit meinselb after!"

"Oh, very good, sir; but think it very hard that we must not practise singing in the open air. It's awfully good for the voice."

"Manners, I vill—"

"All right, sir; we're off!"

And the heroes of the Shell marched away grinning. The German slammed down the window, and went back to his seat. Tom was grinning, but his face instantly became grave as Herr Schneider glared at him.

But there was no peace for the Herr yet. The singing party had been got rid of, but a game of cricket commenced as near to his window as Manners dared, and the boys of the Shell, entering into the spirit of the game, cheered and shouted themselves hoarse. The German opened his window again.

"If you make so mooch noise, I vill stop you mit tat game!" he shouted. "Go farther away!"

"Oh, hang it!" said Manners. "Some people are never satisfied. I don't see why we should shift our pitch just to please that unreasonable old boulder. I shouldn't wonder if a ball were to go through his window, chaps!"

"Oh, I say!" said Monty.

"I don't say it will, but his window is now in the line of fire, isn't it? And accidents will happen in the best regulated cricket matches."

Tom Merry, considerably comforted by the kind efforts of his Form-fellows to avenge his detention, pursued his task. His pen seemed to crawl, but every now and then the German's twinkling eyes looked up from his paper, and then it travelled a little faster.

Suddenly there was a terrific crash. The German gave a jump as if he were electrified, and even Tom started.

There was a splintering of glass as a cricket ball smashed through the window, and the German master started to his feet. He was in a direct line with the window, and the moment was unfortunate. The ball would have passed over his head. He rose just in time to stop it—with his head!

There was a bellow in the study, not unlike that of an angry bull. The ball came off the German's head and dropped on the inkpot, scattering ink in all directions, and then, as if satisfied with what it had done, rolled into a corner.

Herr Schneider clapped both hands to his head, and danced about the room like an inmate of Colney Hatch.

"Ach!" he roared. "Mein head; it is broken!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom. "That's a boundary to us, anyway!"

"Mein Gott! Mein head—mein head! Mein Gott!"

There came a sweet and gentle voice from below the window:

"If you please, sir, would you mind giving us our ball?" It was the last straw. The German master caught up a cane, and dashed out of the study to visit summary vengeance upon the cricketers.

As he sprinted along, with his left hand clasped to his head, and the cane brandished in his right, he excited amazement and mirth, and a yell of laughter greeted him.

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in the close; but the cricketers ran as they laughed. Herr Schneider was not safe just then at close quarters, and that game of cricket proved an unfinished match.

Meanwhile, Tom, thinking it scarcely prudent to wait for the Herr's return in his present mood, hastened to leave the study, and when Herr Schneider returned, his vengeance unsatisfied, and simmering with fury, Tom Merry had vanished.

CHAPTER 8.

The Feast that Didn't Come Off!

"WELL, you look a bit more like a Christian now!" exclaimed Manners.

Tom Merry had just entered the study, arrayed in the new Etons that had been provided by the care of Mr. Railton. The velvet suit and the big bow were gone for ever. Tom's appearance was indeed changed.

Instead of looking like an overgrown child, he now looked what he was—a handsome, sturdy, well-set-up lad of fifteen.

"Yes, by Jove, he's clothed, and in his right mind at last!" said Monty Lowther, eyeing Tom critically. "I don't mind coming with you to buy that bat now, Merry."

"Thank you!" said Tom. "But I don't know whether Miss Fawcett will like it when she sees the change."

"Oh, she's bound to!" said Manners. "Anyway, we like it better, and that's the point, isn't it, Monty?"

"Just so," said Monty. "By the way, Merry, there's a letter for you. Lady's handwriting, too, if I'm not mistaken."

Tom took up the letter. He recognised Miss Priscilla's hand at once.

"It's from nurse," he explained.

"My hat! Nice big boy you are to have a nurse!"

"Well, she was my nurse, you know, and I still call her nurse," said Tom; "but I'll read the letter, if you will excuse me."

"Will we excuse him, Monty?" giggled Manners.

"We will," said Monty.

Tom slit open the letter, and read it. It was a long letter, and we need not reproduce it all here. It expressed Miss Priscilla's anxiety at his passing from her care into that of indifferent strangers, and impressed upon him the necessity of keeping his feet dry, and never neglecting his chest. It contained valuable hints about socks and flannel vests; but at the end was a piece of information which Tom valued more than all the rest.

"I am sending you a little parcel, my dear boy, containing things I believe very necessary to you, and you will receive it soon after this letter. Write and tell me how you are getting on, and acknowledge the parcel. I have packed it very carefully."

Tom read that portion of the letter aloud.

"Containing things necessary to you!" said Manners, with a lively recollection of the feast in the box-room. "That must be the grub, of course!"

"I suppose so," assented Tom.

"The old lady knows how to pack a hamper," said Monty Lowther, with a reminiscent smack of the lips. "I intend to be on hand when that parcel arrives."

"I—too!" exclaimed Manners. "Merry is a jolly good fellow, and he wouldn't want to keep a feed to himself."

"Hardly," said generous Tom. "I'm more than willing to share out to the study, and to any of the fellows who like to come in."

"That's the right sort! How big do you think the supply will be? It depends upon that, you know, how many fellows we invite."

"Well, Miss Fawcett isn't mean," said Tom. "There's bound to be plenty."

"Well, we want to be sure to have enough to go round," Manners remarked cautiously. "We won't have a big party like that one in the box-room. No sense in having all the tommy scoffed up in a couple of minutes. Suppose we have us three and Jimson and Steele and Harris. Gore, too, as he belongs to the study."

"All serene!" said Tom.

A week ago he would have said, "I approve of your suggestion," so it will be seen that his education was progressing.

"That letter's been here some time," remarked Monty Lowther. "I shouldn't wonder if the hamper was at the porter's lodge already. Lazy old Tibbs won't carry it up till you hunt him up. You and Manners go and get it while I call the chaps in."

"Good idea!" said Manners.

The idea was acted upon. Monty went to call together the feasters, while Tom Merry and Manners hastened to the porter's lodge to claim the consignment. A large parcel for Master Merry proved to have arrived.

Tom Merry and Manners bore it to the study in triumph, Monty Lowther was there, with Gore and Harris and Steele and Jimson. They were sitting round the table, looking expectant. Some of them had brought their own cutlery, and Jimson had provided a couple of plates, and Steele a dish. All was ready for the feed.

"So you're back," said Jimson. "Haven't you opened the giddy thing? Here's a knife, Merry; cut the string."

"And buck up," said Harris. "I'm jolly hungry. That was a good spread in the box-room, and if the kind old soul has sent you another like that, we'll bless her. The parcel ain't a big one, though. Why didn't she send a hamper while she was about it?"

Tom cut the string. Then he opened the parcel. It was wrapped very carefully, and he took off half a dozen layers of brown paper without coming to the contents. The guests began to look impatient.

"My hat!" said Harris, who was evidently disposed to be critical. "There won't be much of a feed, I fancy, when you do come to it."

"Oh, shut up!" said Manners politely.

"Well, let's see what it is, anyway." Tom went on unpacking. More rolls of paper, until at last something which looked like flannel came into view.

He looked rather dismayed as he unfolded it, and revealed a chest-protector.

"Are we to eat that?" demanded Harris sarcastically.

Tom laid it down and went on. The next thing that came to light was a bottle, and he began to hope; but his hopes were shattered as he read the label. The whole party in the study read it, too, with a howl of indignation.

"Cod-liver oil!"

The words were repeated in every variety of tone:

"Cod-liver oil!"

"My only maiden Aunt Selina! Cod-liver oil!"

"Are we to drink that?" demanded Harris.

Tom, in desperation, dragged out the remaining articles in that fatal parcel. A really well-knitted comforter, and other articles of the same description, lay on the table, and he added to them a packet of cough lozenges, a rubber hot-water bottle, and a bottle of wonderful medicine in which Miss Priscilla believed implicitly, and which the manufacturer claimed would cure all the diseases under the sun.

Tom gazed at the collection on the table, and the disappointed feasters gazed at them. Harris rose to his feet, and gathered up his knife and fork. He looked inclined to stick both of them somewhere in Tom's person.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry, you chaps!" said Tom, colouring to the roots of his hair. "Of course, I didn't know—"

"I should think you didn't!" said Harris, with emphasis. "Suppose we scrag him, chaps, and pour his blooming cod-liver oil down his throat!"

"Jolly good idea," said Steele, "and we'll make him eat all the giddy cough lozenges."

"No, you won't!" said Manners. "It's a ghastly frost; but he meant well. Sorry the feast is off, chaps. Good-bye!"

Manners and Monty Lowther sided up with Tom, and the disappointed guests abandoned their design. They marched indignantly to the door.

"Next time you ask me to feed, Spooney," said Steele, "I'll knock your head against the wall!"

"And I'll jump on your neck!" said Harris.

"And I'll dot you on the nose!" exclaimed Jimson.

"Oh, I say!" said Tom. "I'm awfully sorry. I'll get a feed, and—"

"Yah!"

And the indignant boys marched out of the study, and Gore followed them and slammed the door. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther looked at one another.

"I'm sorry!" said Tom.

"It can't be helped," said Manners, with an effort; "a pity we invited the chaps. It's all right, Merry; we'll overlook it."

And this generous forgiveness quite touched Tom Merry. He determined that he would make up for that lost feast as soon as he could.

"What shall be done with this stuff?" he asked.

"Do as your respected nurse wishes," replied Manners. "Eat the cough lozenges, drink the cod-liver oil, and stick the giddy chest-protector on your manly chest. Come on, Monty!"

And they left the study, leaving Tom alone with his undesired possessions. He wrapped them up again, carried the parcel out, and hurled it over the wall; and what became of Miss Priscilla's well-meant gifts after that he never knew.

CHAPTER 9.

A Surprise for Miss Priscilla!

"TOMMY—my dearest Tommy!"

It was a half-holiday again, and Tom, arrayed in spotless flannels, was going down to the cricket field, with Manners and Monty Lowther, when the voice of Miss Priscilla suddenly fell upon his ears.

"Hallo, here's the old lady!" muttered Manners. "Bunk, Tom!"

But Tom, though he felt inclined to take his friend's advice, could not find it in his heart to treat the dear old lady with such contumely. He turned towards Miss Fawcett and doffed his cap in the politest way.

"How do you do, nurse?" he asked.

A crowd of boys immediately gathered to watch the interview, which promised to be a peculiar one. Miss Priscilla's eyes nearly started from her head as she looked at Tom.

"Tommy," she said faintly, "what are you wearing those strange garments for?"

"Flannels?" said Tom. "I'm going to play cricket."

Miss Priscilla shrieked.

"My dearest boy! Suppose the ball should strike you? Suppose you should over-exert yourself? My dear child, I entreat you—"

Tom turned as red as fire. The giggle that went round the group of interested boys did not add to his comfort.

"I'm all right, nurse," he said. "Don't make a fuss. Cricket's a jolly good game. It's not rough, and only silly asses run it down."

"What an expression! Where did you learn that?"

"Oh, I suppose I picked it up! Will you come and see the match? It's only a practice match, you know, but Lowther is putting me up to some wrinkles—"

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"Some what?"
 "Tips," said Tom. "Points, you know. Allow me to introduce Manners. Manners—Miss Fawcett. Hallo, what are you up to now?"

Miss Priscilla had seized him, and was unbuttoning his shirt in the neck. She only wanted to sound his chest; but Tom looked as if he thought she was going to bite him.

"I say, back pedal!" cried Tom.

The boys were shrieking.

"My dear Tommy—"

"Back pedal!" howled Tom, jerking himself free. "My beastly chest is all right!"

"Your—your what? Oh, my child—my child, you never used such expressions as that at Laurel Villa, at dear old Huckleberry Heath!"

"I've had some sense knocked into me since then!" said Tom. "I fancy I was a giddy guy at Laurel Villa, though I wasn't aware of it, and thought myself all there and all serene! None of that rot at Clavering, you know!"

"My goodness gracious!"

"This is a jolly place!" said Tom. "The Head's a brick, and the masters are all good sorts, except old Schneider, and he's a cough-drop. But won't you come and see the match?"

Miss Priscilla was so overcome by Tom's new and unexpected flow of language that she submitted to being led away without a word.

"My old duds!" explained Tom.

"You—you never talked slang at Laurel Villa."

"No," said Tom cheerfully. "We live and learn, don't we?"

"My sweet Tommy—"

"Oh rats!" said her sweet Tommy. "I wish you'd call me Tom. If any of the chaps heard you, I should be sweet Tommy for the rest of my life."

"I—I will take you home with me, if you wish, and—"

"That you won't!" said Tom promptly. "I'm a Clavering chap now, and I like it. I'm jolly proud of it, too!"

Miss Priscilla changed the subject.

"Did you take the cod-liver oil I sent you, Tommy?" she asked, with tender solicitude.

"Ye-es," said Tom; "I took it out into the close, and shied it over the wall!"

"Tommy!"

"Jolly good riddance to it, too, nurse!"

"But the cough-lozenges—"

"They went along with the chest-protector, and the chest-protector went along with the comforter, and the comforter went along with the cod-liver oil!"

"Oh, Tommy—Tommy!"

"My dear nurse," said Tom, kissing her on the cheek, "you don't know anything about boys! I don't want to be coddled. I can see now what an ass I might have grown. You got me into a nice pickle with that cod-liver oil!"

THE SLACKER'S LAMENT.

No, I'm not coming out to-day,
 I have no time to lark and play;
 If you ask why, I groan and say—
 "Five hundred lines!"

Oh, run away—get out of sight;
 I'll stop here if it takes all night
 Buzz off!—leave me in peace to write
 Five hundred lines!

□ □ □ □ □ □

I remember, I remember,
 The place where I was born;
 I remember when my boyish,
 Curly locks were shorn;
 I remember, when a kiddie,
 Playing on the mat;
 I remember, I remember
 Lots of things like that.

I remember everything
 That happened years ago;
 My memory is perfect, there's
 A million things I know.
 I remember all my jokes
 For years; but, sad to say,
 I simply can't remember lessons
 I learnt yesterday.

Tom, who, though he had changed a good deal, had lost none of his old politeness, found her a seat, and sat her down to watch the cricket. It was only a practice match between two teams belonging to the Shell, but it showed how much Tom had learned since coming to Clavering College.

He batted and bowled quite respectably, and though Miss Priscilla trembled whenever the ball was bowled to Tom, she gradually became reassured as she saw that he was not, after all, hit by it, and that there seemed to be really no danger of his getting an arm or a leg broken.

And when Tom made a boundary hit, and the boys gave him a cheer, she felt something like pride in his performance, and realised that cricket was not the idiotic and useless game she had deemed it. The healthy, happy faces and cheery voices of the cricketers could not fail to impress her. But after the game she had another shock when Tom had changed and he came to rejoin her in his school clothes.

"Tommy, where are your own clothes?"

"Gone!" said Tom, with much satisfaction. "Manners and Monty and I made a bonfire of them in the corner of the close, and there isn't a cinder left!"

"My dear child, your sweet—sweet velvet suit, and that lovely bow—"

"Ye-es," said Tom; "but I'm not a kid of seven, you know. I was chipped nearly to my death before I got rid of those silly togs!"

"Those wh-wh-what?" gasped Miss Priscilla faintly.

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"How, Tommy?"

Tom explained about the intended feast and the frost it had ended in.

"The least you can do now," he said, "is to stand a feed for the whole of the Shell. The Head would give his permission if you asked him, and it would be ripping!"

"It would be what?"

"Ripping—spiffing, you know!" explained Tom. "I owe the chaps some compensation. You'll stand a feed, won't you?"

And Miss Priscilla, who was so amazed by the change in Tom that she hardly knew whether she was awake or dreaming, consented.

The Head's permission was obtained, and Manners and Monty Lowther gave expert advice as to the purchase of the provisions. All Miss Priscilla had to do was to find the cash, which she cheerfully did. She was even prevailed upon to join the honourable company of the Shell at the table, and join in the feast, and it passed off splendidly.

The boys voted Tom a brick, and Miss Priscilla another. And when Miss Priscilla finally left the school, she was persuaded that she had not, after all, made a mistake in sending Tom Merry to Clavering College.

THE END.

(Tom's arrival certainly created a stir! But he's got two good friends already. Next week's fine yarn is called "The Hero of Clavering!" Mind you read it, boys!)

Anything you want to know? Just ask here.



Questions of all sorts and sizes answered by the Oracle! He's infallible! Try him—and see!

IVE got a little query for you, Whiskers," said the Ed. this morning. "It's about brains. George Bradstowe would like you to tell him which animal in the world has had the smallest brain in proportion to its size?"

"I should say that distinction belongs to the *Diplodocus*," I told the Ed. "The *Diplodocus* was an enormous animal that roamed the earth millions of years ago, living on succulent water-weeds and squashing about in the swamps with an enormously long neck and an enormously long tail. Really, the *Diplodocus* would be more correctly described as a gigantic land reptile, and skeletons of this creature have been found measuring 84 feet in length and nearly 13 feet in height. The *Diplodocus* had a flat snout and could close his nostrils when under water, and the tail was flexible, like the tails of some lizards living to-day. No doubt the old Dip used this great tail of his as a sort of lash. But you want to know about the brainy matter. Well, Ed., the *Diplodocus*, in spite of his enormous size, had a brain no larger than an ordinary walnut; in fact, not so large. I think we may safely say that the old *Diplodocus* was a big, hefty, brainless sort of chap, who didn't know how to keep himself alive."

"Where were these remains found?"

"The first skeleton of the *Diplodocus* was found in Colorado, in 1877. The name *Diplodocus* means 'double bar,' and was given to it by Professor O. C. Marsh on account of the peculiar formation of the bones of the tremendous tail. There is a plaster cast of a complete skeleton in the British Museum in London. It was presented by Andrew Carnegie, in 1905."

"Can you tell Dick Reade what a dowser is?" asked the Ed. next.

"I can, sir," said I. "A dowser is a water-finder. Water-finders are people who have the gift for finding the whereabouts of hidden springs and streams underground. They do this by walking along with a forked hazel-twigs in their fingers. When they get to the place where the water is, the twig twists round in their fingers, and moves about in a violent and extraordinary manner."

"Sounds like a trick to me," remarked the Ed.

"Not a bit of it. There's no doubt about it that some people have a gift for finding hidden water supplies, but just

how they manage it has never been properly explained. In many cases these dowers don't use a hazel-twigs at all; they use instead a watch-spring or a piece of wire."

"What is a mustang?"

"A mustang is the name for the wild or half-wild horse of the American prairies. They are descended from the horses that were brought into the country by the

Spaniards after the conquest in the 16th century, and the name, mustang, comes from a Spanish word, *mesteno*, which means 'wild.'"

"Now here's a question from a Brightlingsea reader about elephants. He has read in a story of some men being charged by a herd of elephants, but the elephants, according to the yarn, didn't make any noise. I always thought elephants trumpeted when they attacked?"

"You're wrong there, Ed.," said I. "The African elephant will roll its trunk up when making an attack, and will make a shrill, loud trumpeting noise, but the Indian elephant does just the opposite. The Indian elephant charges with its trunk down, and curled, and doesn't make any noise at all. There are a great many other points of difference between the Indian and African elephant, believe me. For instance, the Indian of the species doesn't like the sun, and will never get into the direct rays of the sun if he can help it. During the hot season in Upper India the elephants keep to the denser parts of the forests, and will only come out on to the open grass tracts during the rainy seasons."

"Can you tell Ted West why the game played on the pavement by kicking a stone from one square to the next is called hopscotch?"

"The name has nothing to do with Scotland, Ed. Scotch is an old English expression meaning to score. In the game the scores are made by hopping while the stone is kicked along."

"The next query is from a Kirkcudbright Gemmite. He wants to be told something about a dragoman. What is a dragoman, Whiskers?"

"In the East a dragoman is the grand master of ceremonies in the imperial palace. The name is also given to guides who show Europeans round the sights, and act as interpreters for them. These guides are called dragomans—not dragomen, as you might suppose."

"Can you tell me who the Dyaks are?" was the Editor's next poser.

"The Dyaks are the wild, native tribes of Borneo. They are well-known for their habit of head-hunting, which has been largely suppressed during the last few years. The great idea in life of the Dyaks was to collect as many skulls as possible—one for every important event in their existence. A funny sort of hobby, believe me."

"I should think so," said the Ed. "They'd have to hunt a long time to find a head like yours, Whiskers; your noddle is the eighth wonder of the world, and no mistake. Can you tell Harry Gilmore what an onion flute is?"

"The onion flute was played in the 17th century, Ed. The music of an onion flute was something like the music you get from a comb, with a piece of tissue paper over it. It was made in the form of a wooden tube, widening out slightly to form a bell. The upper end of the tube was closed with a fine membrane, like an onion skin, and there was a hole just below into which the performer sang. Onion flutes are still manufactured as toys, as a matter of fact. They are called the *mirliton*."

"What wood are hoops made from?"

"The best wood for hoop-making is hickory. Hickory-trees belong to North America, and get their name from the American Indian name, which is *pohickory*."

"What is an hidalgo?"

"Hidalgo is a Spanish word, Ed., and used to be a title in the nobility of Spain. The word is used nowadays for anyone of gentle birth. Hidalgo is really an abbreviated form of the words '*hijo de algo*,' which mean 'son of something.'"

"Can you tell Sam Spence what durra is?"

"Durra is a grain used for making bread in the East. Durra is the Arabic name for it; in other parts it's known as millet, or Kaffir corn. In India it is called *jowarce*."

"What is laughing-gas?"

"Laughing-gas is nitrous oxide, an anæsthetic used a great deal in dentistry. It's much safer than chloroform or ether," I told the Ed., "and talking of dentistry, my teeth haven't had a job of work for some hours, so I'll take 'em to lunch and give them a steak pudding to try their strength on. So long, Ed!"

"Just a moment, Whiskers, don't be in such a hungry hurry," said the Editor. "I have one more question to ask you. Although I have left it till last, it is not the least. Gemmites want to know what they will find in the paper next week. Can you tell them?"

"Of course I can," I replied, feeling somewhat annoyed that he should imagine even for a moment that I didn't know a thing like that. "Now let me see."

"Martin Clifford has written another tophole story about the early schooldays of Tom Merry. It's called 'The Hero of Clavering!' I know it must be awfully good, because the office boy stopped here late last night reading it."

"How do you know he stopped late?" asked the Ed.

"Well, you see, sir," I answered, "as a matter of fact I stopped late myself—I was reading the Rookwood story by Owen Conquest, and I forgot about the time!"

"What's the Rookwood yarn called?"

"It's called 'Lovell's Lucky Loss!'"

"What else is there in next week's GEM, Whiskers?" queried the jolly old Ed.

"There's another instalment of that corking new serial, 'The Cricketer Crackman!' by Richard Randolph, sir," I answered, "as well as the usual bright features—this one included—which are always to be found in the GEM!"

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ANOTHER RIPPING NEW COMPLETE ROOKWOOD YARN.

TUBBY TAKES THE CAKE!

By
OWEN CONQUEST.

CHAPTER 1. Strategy!

"SIX pounds!"

Tubby Muffin's eyes gleamed as he breathed the words.

He was not referring to Treasury notes, nor coin of the realm. Nor were his thoughts on either postal orders or cheques. His thrillingly breathed words related to a cake—a six-pound cake.

The cake, as yet, belonged to Hansom of the Fifth. Tubby had not seen the cake, though he hoped to do more than merely see it very shortly. He had heard about it, however.

Most of the fellows in the Classical Fourth and Fifth at Rookwood had heard about Hansom's cake. Hansom was not a secretive fellow, and everybody knew that it was his birthday, and that his people had sent him a magnificent six-pound cake, with his initials elaborately iced upon it.

Tubby had planned it all out. He knew that Hansom and his study-mates were attending a cricket meeting in the Fifth Common-room, and that the meeting would end in ten

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**Hansom had a handsome cake.
But Tubby Muffin found it,
And quickly set about the job
Of wrapping himself round it!**

minutes at most. Therefore, he had to be pretty slippery if he wanted to know more about Hansom's cake.

Tubby was slippery. In the twinkling of an eye he was in the study, with the door closed upon him, and once more the Fifth passage was empty.

Then an ecstatic expression spread over Tubby's plump features.

The table was, as he had expected, set for tea—Hansom's birthday party. And what a feast it was! Tubby's eyes fairly gloated over the array of good things. And the cake was there, gracing the festive board with glittering, dazzling brilliance. Indeed, it overshadowed everything else on the table.

"Oh-h-h! Oooooooh!" breathed Tubby in delight. "Ripping!"

Hansom, in his pride, had certainly not overstated the case. The cake was easily six pounds in weight. It was massive, and encrusted with delicious-looking creamy, iced decorations. It was, in fact, a lovely cake.

For several blissful seconds Tubby Muffin's eyes devoured the cake, so to speak. Then he started to get busy.

He crossed to the window first. It was already open slightly at the bottom, and Tubby opened it much wider, raising the sash gently. Then he blinked cautiously out.

But the window overlooked a quiet corner of the quadrangle, which was, as he expected, deserted just then. Then Tubby glanced downwards.

Exactly below was the sill of another window. It was the window of Putty Grace's study—and Tubby knew that Putty and his study-mates had gone for a picnic up river.

"He, he, he!" giggled Tubby.

From under his waistcoat he drew a small cushion-cover, and from his pocket he drew a length of string. Then he bobbed to the table again.

Obviously Tubby had planned it all with masterly skill. All he had to do was to slip the cake in the bag—and anything else he could cram in—tie it up, and lower it through the window on to the wide window-sill below. Then it was simply a matter of cutting downstairs into Putty's deserted study and devouring the cake there.

Easy, indeed, and safe as houses!

"Strategy!" murmured Tubby. "He, he, he! Here goes!"

He stretched out two podgy hands for the big, tempting cake.

And just then a soft footfall sounded in the passage outside.

Tubby's heart leaped, and he glanced round him wildly. It might not be anyone coming to the study, but he dare not risk it. In a flurry of fear the grub-raider sighted the study armchair, and he whipped behind it and crouched down, palpitating.

Just in time, for next instant the door opened and someone entered softly.

He knew it was not Hansom. Hansom was a boisterous, heavy-handed, heavy-footed youth, with a masterful, elephantine tread. This intruder—whoever he was—had almost crept into the study.

Why? Tubby wondered, but dare not look. He heard the unknown stop at the table, and then he heard slight movements—the clink of a table-knife, a rustling, and then a low chuckle.

Tubby was suspicious now. Was it someone else after Hansom's cake? The thought made Tubby tremble with righteous indignation. Torn inwardly with mingled indignation and anxiety, Tubby Muffin listened until he could not stand it any longer. The suspense—the fear of being robbed of Hansom's cake—was too much.

He took a chance, and peered round the edge of the big chair.

Then he started, and his fat face grew wrathful as he recognised the unknown.

It was Lattrey—Lattrey of the Fourth!

"Oh, the awful cad!" breathed Tubby.

Lattrey's back was towards him, and he could not see what he was doing. But he was certainly not eating the cake, and Tubby's terrible fear faded a little.

Still, Lattrey was Lattrey—the most disliked fellow in the Fourth, and fit for anything. And Tubby was just about to jump out and face him when Lattrey moved.

He twisted up something like a small paper package and crammed it into his waistcoat pocket. Then he slipped to the door and whipped out, closing the door after him.

"M-my hat!" murmured Tubby, quite perplexed. "What was the cad up to, I wonder?"

He scrambled out from hiding, still fearful for the cake. But it was still there, and Tubby's fear fled at sight of the luscious-looking celebration of Hansom's natal day. Whatever Lattrey had been up to he had certainly not taken the cake, and that was all that mattered.

There was no time to reflect on the matter, however—every moment was precious. Most likely Lattrey had intended pinching the cake, but his nerve had failed him while in the act.

Tubby Muffin grinned at the thought, stuffed a jam-tart into his mouth to be going on with, and got busy again.

Tenderly he grasped the big cake, and edged it gently into the cushion-cover. Then he filled up space with jam-tarts, biscuits, chocolates, and anything else good that was within reach.

The cover was soon filled, and, with his mouth full of tart, Tubby tied the cushion-cover securely at the top and slipped to the window.

A glance out showed that the quad was still deserted, and in a couple of seconds the loaded cushion-cover was lowered down on to the sill below. Then Tubby let go the string and turned to the door to make his get-away.

In his eagerness to get to his loot Tubby forgot to be so cautious now. And he was half-way out of the study when he suddenly became horribly aware that the passage was not deserted. He gave a startled gasp, and dodged back into the study.

But it was too late—he had been seen.

Four juniors happened to be coming along the Fifth passage, and they sighted him at once. And the four were Jimmy Silver, the leader of the Fourth, and his chums, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome.

"Hallo! That fat chunk of flabby mischief, Tubby!" said Raby. "Did you spot him?"

"Yes, rather! In Hansom's study," remarked Lovell, with a chuckle. "That means he's after Hansom's giddy cake!"

"No doubt about that!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "But it's no joking matter, Lovell. That fat grub-snatcher wants stopping, and in any case we don't want trouble with the Fifth. Let's yank the fat ass out!"

"Right-ho!"

And Jimmy Silver & Co. made a rush for Hansom's study.

CHAPTER 2.

Not a Capture!

TUBBY MUFFIN, palpitating behind the study door, heard the rush and knew what it meant. He had been spotted.

At the thought Tubby whipped behind the big armchair and took cover again, hoping for the best.

His hopes were in vain. Jimmy Silver opened the door, glanced round the study, and snorted.

"You can come out, you fat burglar!" he called grimly. "We know you're here!"

Tubby lay low. He had glimpsed a cricket bat in Jimmy Silver's hand and he knew what to expect from the captain of the Fourth.

"Right! We'll soon root you out, you fat clam!" said Jimmy. "Stand by the door, Lovell!"

Lovell grinned and stood guard at the door. The others entered to root out Tubby, and it was Jimmy Silver who found him next instant. He dropped his cricket bat and hooked a hand in Tubby's collar.

"We'll teach you better than to disgrace the Form by pinching grub from fellows in other Forms!" said Jimmy

Silver grimly. "Collar aim and yank him along, Newcome!"

As he spoke Jimmy Silver released Tubby and stooped for his bat on the floor. And as he did so Tubby Muffin acted desperately.

He leaped madly for the door, cannoning into the stooping Jimmy Silver as he did so. Jimmy yelled and overbalanced, plunging head-first into Raby's back. Raby also yelled as he plunged, in his turn, forward across the table and rammed his face into a partly depleted plate of jam-tarts.

Crash!

Newcome had made a jump to stop the fleeing Tubby, but he fell over Raby's sprawling legs and went headlong with a terrific crash. Almost at the same moment there was another crash from the doorway. It was Lovell's head against the doorpost—for a wild charge with Tubby Muffin's weight behind it was far from being a light matter.

Lovell yelled fiendishly while Tubby scudded desperately on.

"After him!" roared Jimmy Silver.



With an alarming series of bumps, crashes, and yells Raby, Newcome, and Lovell went hurtling down the stairs!

Jimmy, like the rest of them, was hurt by Tubby's ruthless conduct. There was ferocity in his usually cheery voice, and Tubby Muffin gasped and flew for the stairs.

Then another cheek awaited him. It happened in the form of Gunner, who appeared at the head of the staircase just then, and Gunner grasped the position at once as he sighted the racing figures.

"Stop him!" yelled Lovell.

Cuthbert Gunner grinned and blocked the landing with his burly form. He felt equal to stopping any number of flabby Tubby Muffins. But he quite overlooked the weight behind a rush from Tubby Muffin. He also quite overlooked the fact that he was standing at the head of the stairs.

The next instant he paid dearly for both errors of judgment.

Tubby, more desperate than ever as he heard the ferocious yells behind him, simply lowered his head and charged.

Crash!

Gunner scarcely knew what happened next. He staggered dizzily back from the tremendous concussion, fully expecting to sit down hard on solid ground. Instead the earth seemed to drop away from him, and he went backwards down the stairs like a whirling catherine-wheel, with a series of bumps and wild howls.

Tubby Muffin, equally winded and dazed from the shock, only just saved himself from following by grabbing frantically at the banisters.

But others, like the hapless Gunner, were not so lucky.

Lovell came charging along ready to take the stairs three at a time if necessary. Instead he took them half a dozen at a time—and not on his feet, either!

Lovell saw the danger just in time; but Raby and Newcome, almost on his heels, didn't. As Lovell pulled up, almost tripping headlong over Tubby's legs, Raby crashed into him, while Newcome, quite unable to pull up, crashed into Raby.

"Look out! Oh, my— Yarooooop!"

Bump, bump! Bang, bang! Bump!

It happened in a flash, too swiftly to be avoided.

Raby's charge simply toppled Lovell down the stairs, while Raby and Newcome, clutching each other desperately, lurched over Tubby Muffin's sprawling legs and followed him.

With an alarming series of bumps and a chorus of wild yells, Raby, Newcome, and Lovell went downstairs and joined Gunner at the bottom.

"Oh! Oh, great pip!"

Jimmy Silver pelted up and pulled up, warned of the danger just in time. He was far too alarmed to think of Tubby Muffin—it seemed impossible that any of the four could have escaped broken bones after such a headlong tumble. Without a glance at the grovelling fat youth, Jimmy tore down the stairs, taking them three at a time in his alarm.

Tubby Muffin scrambled to his feet, still gasping for breath.

"He, he, he! Serves 'em jolly well right!" was Tubby's unsympathetic remark, and with that he departed hastily back along the Fifth passage.

But not to Hansom's study! Tubby had suddenly remembered the back staircase, and so by devious routes he made his way thence to wait until the coast was clear. And Tubby hoped it would not be long before it was clear, for he was anxious to get to Putty Grace's study. He felt he had earned Hansom's cake now.

Meanwhile, the Fistical Four and Gunner were examining injuries at the foot of the staircase, amid a chorus of dismal groans and gasps. All save Jimmy Silver were covered with bumps and bruises, and all were raging.

"Ow, ow, ow! Yow-ow! Ow, ow, ow!" was the chorus.

"Never mind!" said Jimmy Silver. "It might have been worse! It's a marvel to me none of you have broken bones."

"Ow, ow!" gasped Gunner, his face contorted with anguish. "My back's broken, I'm certain, and one of my legs, too! Ow, ow! Yow! That—that fat barrel!"

"Where is he?" gasped Lovell, hugging the back of his head in anguish. "Tell me where the fat little worm is! I—I'm going to smash him into bits! I'm going—"

Lovell did not wait. He had already started after Cuthbert Gunner, who was leaping up the stairs with remarkable agility considering he had a broken back and a broken leg. So Lovell followed, eager, like Gunner, to settle matters with Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin of the Fourth. And after Lovell went the rest—the desire for revenge causing Raby and Newcome, like Gunner and Lovell, to forget their numerous injuries.

"Hold on, Lovell!" called Jimmy, as they pounded upstairs. "See if the fat rotter's in Hansom's study again!"

The thought had occurred to Lovell, however, and he stopped and flung the door of Hansom's study wide. It was

likely as not that Reginald Muffin had taken refuge where the grub was.

Lovell rushed inside, and the others followed. The room was empty, and, after a hurried search, they backed out again, Jimmy Silver grabbing up his cricket bat.

"Not here! The fat rotter's gone round by the back stairs, I bet!" snapped Jimmy. "We'll give him twenty with this when we get him!"

They rushed on again, and went off full tilt on the vengeance trail. From the staircase came a shout, but if they heard it they did not heed. They tore off in the opposite direction. They wanted Tubby Muffin's blood, and they wanted it too badly to heed Hansom of the Fifth. For it was Hansom who shouted.

CHAPTER 3.

More Avengers!

"WELL, I'm hanged!"

Thus Hansom of the Fifth, as he came along from the stairs with his chums, Lumsden and Talboys. Edward Hansom was a lofty youth, and he was lounging along with his hands in his pockets and laying down the law—as regards cricket—to his study-mates, as usual. But he quite forgot cricket as he sighted the Fistical Four emerge from his study and bolt off at top speed.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he repeated, in scandalised accents. "You—you fellows saw that? Those kids—those cheeky young Fourth fags—"

"They've been up to something," said Lumsden. "They spotted us coming and bolted. That means—"

"They're not the sort to raid grub," said Talboys, shaking his head. "Still, it looks fishy—"

"Gad! No end fishy!" said Lumsden. "Come—"

But Edward Hansom was already rushing to his study. He was thinking of his cake—that magnificent six-pound birthday cake with his iced initials on it. If anything had happened to that cake—

Hansom almost fainted at the thought.

He was nearer fainting still as he rushed into his study and glared at the table. The cake was gone—gone like a beautiful dream.

"Gone!" he gasped faintly. "M-my cake's gone, you men! Those—those little rotters—"

"Must have taken it," said Lumsden. "Well, the little rotters!"

"No doubt about that," said Talboys, pointing at the various plates. "They've been helping themselves to the tarts and things, too, the cheeky little sweeps!"

Hansom gave a roar of rage.

"My cake!" he roared. "Gone! A six-pound cake! Blow the tarts! I want my cake! I'm going after those little sweeps!"

"Here, hold on!" said Lumsden. "No good going after them! They've gone round by the back staircase, you ass! Why not—"

But the infuriated Hansom did not hear or heed. He rushed out, and his chums felt obliged to follow him. The cake was undoubtedly gone, and it seemed clear that Jimmy Silver & Co., rival juniors from a lower Form, had taken it, probably had already scoffed it. And Lumsden and Talboys were nearly as infuriated as their leader. They had looked forward keenly to sampling that six-pound cake.

They rushed on the trail. Round the Fifth passage, into the Sixth, and then up the stairs went the three. Along past dormitories, and then down the back stairs to the domestic quarters went the avenging Hansom & Co.

It was not until they found themselves in the Fourth Form passage that they sighted Jimmy Silver & Co., and they were just in time to see those worthies vanish into the end study, having failed to find or catch Tubby Muffin.

That fat schemer seemed to have vanished completely. They certainly did not dream of looking for him in Putty Grace's study.

"Well, the fat boulder's given us the miss for the time being," Jimmy Silver was just remarking grimly; "but we'll get— Why, what— Look out!"

The door flew back with a crash. Edward Hansom had arrived.

"Got you, you little cads!" he panted. "Now, what about my cake, you little sweeps!"

"Eh? Your cake?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, staring at the senior's infuriated features. "Who the thump's had your cake, Hansom?"

"You've had it, of course, you little sweeps!" roared Hansom. "We saw you—"

"You're off your giddy hoss, old son," grinned Jimmy.

"We haven't touched—"

"Haven't you?" bawled Hansom. "Didn't we see you

bolting out of my study? You jolly well— Why, look at Raby's face—covered in jam and pastry! That's proof—proof he's been scoffing my tarts!"

"You silly owl! We went into your— Here, keep off!"

But Hansom did not keep off. He had seen all the proof he wanted. Raby's face and his collar and tie still bore jam and pastry crumbs. It was the result of Raby having been rammed with his face in the plate of jam tarts, but Hansom was not likely to know that. He jumped to conclusions, as he always did.

He rushed at Jimmy Silver, and Jimmy howled as he crashed down in the senior's wrathful grasp.

"Collar 'em!" bawled Hansom. "Rag 'em bald-headed! Teach the cheeky imps to raid a Fifth man's grub! Rag 'em, and then rag their dashed study!"

"Yes, rather!" said Lumsden grimly.

Lumsden and Talboys piled in obediently—they needed little urging. The next moment, before they had fairly grasped what was happening, Jimmy Silver and his chums were grabbed and piled one on top of another in a mass of wriggling, thrashing legs and arms, and with their jackets dragged over their heads.

They struggled and yelled as the three furious seniors grabbed chairs, and piled them on top of the human pyramid. Then they proceeded with the ragging, obviously intending to add every stick of furniture to the pile—with Jimmy Silver & Co. underneath.

"Now the ink—cover them with ink!" yelled Hansom. "We'll teach 'em!"

But Jimmy Silver didn't want the ink. They had recovered from the surprise of the attack now, and they started to take a hand. The Fistical Four were not the fellows to submit to a ragging so tamely.

Somehow they scrambled free from the pile of chairs and rugs, and they went for Edward Hansom & Co. A fist took Edward in the right eye and another in the left.

"There's two birthday presents for you!" yelled Jimmy Silver, hitting out again. "And here's more! Go it, chaps! Rescue, Fourth! Rescue!"

It was soon needed. They were four to three, but the three were burly Fifth men, and alone the juniors stood little chance. But their yells for aid were soon heard. The door was suddenly flung wide, and Mornington and Erroll rushed in. They were followed instantly by other Fourth-Formers as they came pouring from their studies at the call.

Obviously it was a Form raid—that much the newcomers soon grasped on sighting Edward Hansom. And they piled in with a will.

Edward Hansom got more and more of the kind of birthday presents Jimmy Silver had given him. In a matter of seconds the three Fifth-Formers found they had barged into a hornets' nest. They went down one by one under the force of numbers, but still fighting gamely.

"Rescue, Fifth!" roared Hansom. "Rescue, Fifth!"

The call was heard by a couple of Fifth-Formers who happened to be passing, and they rushed into the study and joined the scrap with a will. But they were all that answered the call, and the five Fifth-Formers had the time of their lives. They would have had a much worse time had not help of another kind arrived just then. But there was a sudden yell from the doorway:

"Cave! Ware beaks!"

Then a newcomer suddenly appeared in the doorway. It was Dick Dalton, master of the Fourth, and he stared dumb-founded at the mass of struggling forms in the room.

Above the uproar could be heard Edward Hansom's bel-lowing voice.

"I'll smash you! You cheeky young rotters, leggo my hair! Yarooop! If you tip that ink over me— Yooop!"

"Boys! Hansom! Silver! Stop!"

The voice was enough. It was never safe to trifle with Dicky Dalton. The tide of war receded, leaving the five Fifth-Formers gasping and panting in the middle of the floor like stranded fish left high and dry.

CHAPTER 4. Tubby Gets It—Hot!

"WHAT is the meaning of this uproar?" demanded Dicky Dalton. "Hansom, what does this mean?"

With the help of Lumsden and Talboys Hansom snorted out an explanation.



In a very short time the three Fifth-formers found that they had barged into a hornets' nest.

"You are quite sure you saw these juniors leave your study, Hansom?"

"Yes, sir. They bolted on sighting us. They must have scoffed—"

"We haven't even seen your rotten cake!" snorted Lovell. "It was gone when—"

"You had no right in the study at all!" snapped Dicky Dalton. "If you are guilty of purloining food from a senior's study you shall be punished severely. Silver, what were you doing in Hansom's study?"

"We went there after another fellow," said Jimmy. "We never touched Hansom's food at all. At least, only Raby—"

"Who was the boy you went after, Silver?"

Jimmy was silent. He wasn't going to sneak on Tubby—in fact, he felt certain, for once, that Tubby was innocent of taking the cake.

"Very well!" said Mr. Dalton sternly, at last. "If you refuse to answer, than I can only suppose that Hansom's claim is correct, Silver. I am well aware of the ragging

which takes place between the two Forms, and— Good gracious! What ever is that?"

It was a sudden combustion—apparently from the study next door—Putty Grace's study. There sounded a wild yell, followed by sundry gasps and terrific splutters and stamping of feet.

"Yarroooooop! Murder! Gug-gug-grooooooh! Yow-ow! Help! Yarroooooop!"

"Sounds like Muffin!" gasped Lovell. "What—"

"The boy must be ill!" exclaimed Dicky Dalton, in great alarm. "He sounds as if he is choking! Good heavens!"

He rushed out, and the startled crowd rushed after him. Then they all saw Tubby Muffin.

He was dancing about madly in the middle of the room, his hands clutching his mouth convulsively. On his fat features was an expression of anguish. He spluttered and choked and yelled desperately.

Nor was that all. On the floor, partly trodden upon, was a large cake, with a huge slice hacked from it. The slice also lay on the floor, with a huge bite taken out of it.

Hansom stared and stared, and then he gave a wild roar.

"My cake! My six-pound birthday-cake! You—you fat rotter!" he bawled. "Why, I'll—"

Hansom would have rushed at the fat youth had not Mr. Dalton yanked him back.

"Hansom, how dare you? Muffin, cease that ridiculous noise!"

"Yow-ow! Groooooh! My mouth's burned out!" wailed Tubby. "Groooooh! Gug-gug-groooooh! Oh, you awful beast, Hansom! You've shoved cayenne pepper in that beastly cake, you awful beast! Yow-ow!"

"Be quiet, Muffin!" thundered Dicky Dalton. "Silver, was Muffin the boy you followed into Hansom's room?"

"Ye-es, sir!" There was no help for it now.

"Then the matter is clear. Muffin must have taken the cake, Hansom—that is, if the cake is yours—"

"Of course it is, sir!" said Hansom, nearly weeping as he eyed the dusty mass on the floor. "It's mine—"

"And am I to understand that you placed cayenne pepper in the cake, Hansom?" gasped Mr. Dalton. "If you played such a miserable trick, Hansom—"

"Of course I didn't!" almost shrieked Hansom. "Was I likely to muck up my own cake—six pounds—"

"Then that beast Lattrey must have done it!" gasped Muffin tearfully. "Groooooh! Yes, the beast! I remember now! I knew he was up to something when I saw him—"

"Did you interfere with Hansom's cake, Lattrey?"

"It's untrue, of course, sir," said Lattrey, quite calmly. He knew his word was as good as Muffin's, and he was not afraid. "I have never even seen the cake before, sir. You know what Muffin is—"

"Oh, you awful fibber, Lattrey!" gasped Muffin. "I saw you. I was behind the armchair, you rotter! You shoved a paper packet back into your pocket, and I bet it was pepper—"

"Lattrey," said Dicky Dalton sternly, "turn out your pockets!"

"But—but I've never been near Hansom's study, sir!" stammered Lattrey. "I—I—"

"Bulkeley, kindly search Lattrey's pockets!"

"Oh dear!" Lattrey collapsed like a pricked balloon. "It—it's all right, sir—I own up!" he gasped. "Only a jape—"

"Enough!" snapped Mr. Dalton. "The matter is now completely clear. I shall punish both of you severely—very severely indeed!"

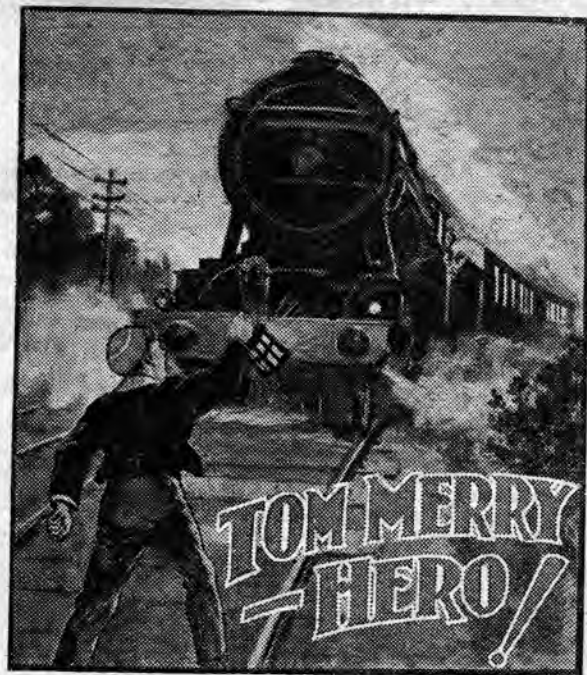
And he did. Bulkeley fetched a cane, and Tubby Muffin, at least, had good reason to believe that there were better things even than cayenne pepper—Mr. Dalton's cane, for instance!

Nor was that all. The moment the master's back was turned Edward Hansom grabbed a fives bat and started in to finish the job Dicky Dalton had started. By the time Hansom & Co. had finished with the two schemers, both Tubby and Lattrey had good reason to regret having interfered with Hansom's famous birthday-cake!

THE END.

(That'll teach Tubby! Another ripping new complete Rookwood yarn appears in next week's GEM!)

The GEM 2^d



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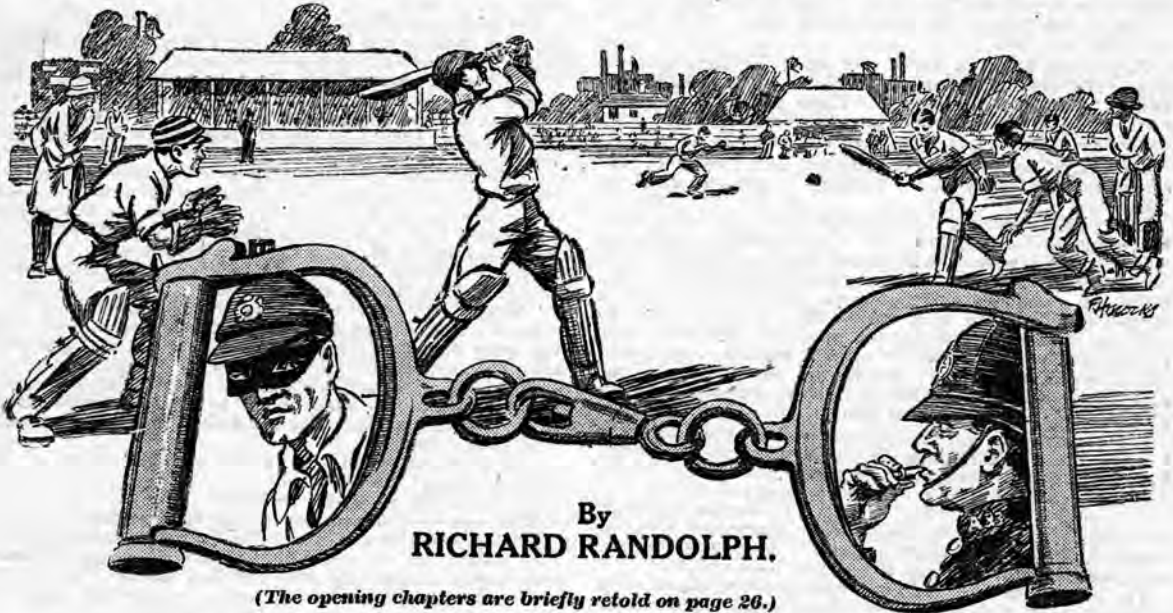
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START IN RIGHT NOW ON OUR RIPPING NEW SERIAL.

THE CRICKETER CRACKSMAN!



By
RICHARD RANDOLPH.

(The opening chapters are briefly retold on page 26.)

Below Ground.

YOUNG Hiam followed the stranger out. It was in his mind to say something, though he did not know quite what, only that he wanted to make this Rodney fellow understand—understand just what? Again Harry was at a loss. That Hiam's saloon was no place for his sort? Hardly that, for he might come there, as many others did, and get no harm from it, since they were not among those of the circle that made the illegal contests paying propositions, let alone of that inner circle which was helping Horry Hiam to amass money at a rate that no honest industry would have done.

And while Harry Hiam hesitated what to say Rod had gone, unaware that the cross-eyed lad wanted to speak to him.

"He's about Ginger's sort," said Harry to himself, with a sigh. "I reckon Ginger's chucked me for good an' all now. He ain't shown up here these three months."

Rod's going did not matter to most of those present—did not matter, indeed, to anyone but Ralph Redgrave. But the mater was not prying, Ralph told himself, and Rodney did not seem like the sort of chap who would shoot off his mouth. Ralph registered a resolve to be home in good time that night. The guv'nor would not stand for two o'clock in the morning.

Because he did not want to give Ralph away by too speedy a return to Lilac Villa, Rod put in the better part of a couple of hours in taking a look round Norchester. When he did reach the Redgraves' house Ralph was using a latchkey.

"Hallo!" said Ralph.

"Hallo!" returned Rod.

They passed in together, to all appearance amicably enough. Mrs. Redgrave asked no questions, and her husband had not come back.

Ralph said he was tired, and went to bed, refusing supper before his father returned. Rod and Mr. and Mrs. Redgrave had a long talk, but it was not about Ralph.

When Rod had left the saloon Hyde and Ralph had had a short bout. No one felt any interest in it. All knew very well that Hyde would not hurt Ralph, and that Ralph was incapable of hurting Hyde. But when two lusty mill-lads, known to be at feud, faced one another with the gloves on those whose interest was really in the boxing crowded round.

And those whose real interest in Hiam's saloon lay else-

where did a quiet fade-out. They were not missed, for more had come in, and the exchange of punches between Bill George and Frank Howe was worth the watching.

They had quarrelled about a girl, these two decent youngsters, and might have spilled blood had they not been decent, for there was the more rancour between them because, after all, the girl had gone to a third suitor. Horry Hiam saw that they were not yet ripe for what he wanted—a fight to a finish with bare knuckles. But every time they boxed they were getting nearer to being ready, and he egged them on, hoping.

Young Hiam—Harry—was not in the saloon. He had made his way downstairs by a secret passage.

None of the others who went down into the big cellar used that passage. They did not know of it, or of the listening-post to which it led. Horry Hiam had grown rather hard of hearing in the course of the last year or two, so that it was Harry who must listen.

The big cellar was the headquarters of a gang of motor bandits and burglars that had caused the Norlandshire police no end of trouble during the last few months. It had grown from small beginnings, and thus far it had scarcely met with a check.

And Horry Hiam was a fence—a receiver of stolen goods, with crafty methods of

disposing of them. His profits were huge—never less than a hundred per cent on what he paid the gang. But, though he gave the gang harbourage, and helped it to clear its booty, he refused to be of it.

Nevertheless, he knew in advance what it would be doing next. And he had plans in connection with it that would have made some of its members feel uneasy if they had guessed them. Harry, for his part, knew little about his father's plans, and had hitherto done his spying without any special dislike for the task.

To-night, for the first time, he felt inclined to kick against it, though he hardly realised why. Vague thoughts of Fighting Fitz, of his school friend, Ginger Harman, of Rod Rodney, troubled him.

When a fist or cock or dog fight was on, the big cellar was lighted brilliantly; not so when the gang met. Then most of the bulbs were removed, and there was darkness in the corners, and not too much light even over the long table.

At the head and foot of that long table were two chairs
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WHO IS THE "BOSS"?

Unknown man rules Norchester gang! Strange happenings in secret cellar!

higher than the rest. Midway on each side were two similar chairs.

When a full meeting of the gang was held all the chairs would be filled. In each of the four higher ones would sit a fellow with a masked face. He at the top of the table was known as the "Boss"; he at the foot as the "Vice"; the two in the other chairs were "First Luff," and "Second Luff."

Only these last two knew who were the Boss and the Vice. But the identities of First and Second Luff were known to all but the novices. These had to be blooded to the band by taking part in some enterprise that definitely committed them before they were allowed that knowledge.

That night no novices were present, and First Luff was sometimes addressed as "Geering," Second Luff as "Yankee."

Harry Hiam learned nothing from that. He knew those two already. Geering had been a millhand, but the place where he had worked was closed down. Yankee—Dave Smith—had some years before left Norchester for the States, and had drifted to Chicago. There he had put in a spell as a gunman with one of the big gangs. But he had found the pace too hot for him, and had come back to the home town. Yankee always carried a gat, and would use it if cornered; but he did not approve of the all-too-free gunning prevalent in Chicago, and the machine-gun business had determined him to quit.

But Harry did not know who either the Boss—the "Dandy," some called him—or the Vice were. His father knew, naturally; but Harry kept his son down. Harry was not a partner, only a tool in the hands of Harry.

He had his notions. Till to-night his interest had been little more than idle curiosity. Now there had come to him a feeling that he ought to know. And he was pretty sure that he could find out if he tried hard enough.

The Boss and the Vice both wore overalls above their ordinary garb such as any millhand might wear. The Vice spoke seldom. The Boss spoke much, for it was he who outlined the plans for the near future. But he spoke in what was plainly a disguised voice. It was anything but clear. Some of the fellows farthest from him had to put hands behind ears to get what he said.

There seemed to be a good deal to be done during the next few days. Plenty of grist to the old man's mill, thought Harry. He wondered whether even the Boss, whose brains were acute, realised how big was the profit of the fence in all this. Harry Hiam took the risk of imprisonment, of course; but that risk was not great, for all the traditions of the gang forbade squealing. The fellow who, when nabbed, kept his mouth shut, had done for him all that could be done. And if he went to prison his sojourn there was made as easy as it could be.

Suddenly into the cellar there burst a white-faced youth with frightened eyes.

He was a recent recruit—a novice as yet, though ripe to qualify as a full member of the gang.

"I say, two cops watching the shop—saw them myself!" he spluttered.

A ripple ran round the table—a ripple of interest, not of fear. All there knew that their meeting-place could not be spied upon. Even had the police invaded the cellar at that moment they would have found nothing tangible. A secret society—that was all. The law of the land did not prohibit such societies. England was not Russia or Italy.

If the police were on the watch it was because they had got wind of some minor breach of the law—the cock-fighting, maybe. That, and such things as that, formed a second screen for them, the first being the quite above board activities of the saloon.

"Let 'em watch!" growled Geering.

But the raw hand was excited, and he felt that he had deserved well of the gang by bringing it this news.

"They'll be down here in a jiffy, you bet!" he shrilled.

"Dry up, and clear out!" snapped the masked fellow at the head of the table—the Boss.

And in his annoyance at being interrupted he forgot to use the assumed voice he had been using. He spoke clearly and sharply.

Few of those who heard noticed the difference. The Vice did, also Geering and Yankee; but they did not matter for they knew already.

But young Hiam noticed.

Now he knew—well, almost knew—he could not be quite sure—who the Boss was.

He had never even suspected the truth till that moment.

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Of all those who frequented the saloon this fellow—if Harry was right in his guess—was the very last who had need to get money by crime, it seemed to young Hiam.

Hadn't he enough already? Was the big risk he must take worth while, seeing how much he stood to lose if he were caught out?

Yet Harry was all but sure. And if the fellow he thought was the Boss, it was not hard to guess who the Vice was. Why, it was not a guess, but a certainty!

The recruit was calmed down, not pushed out. The cooler heads of the gang knew that to thrust out even the rawest hand was unsafe. Once enlist a fellow, then keep a hold on him, make him one of themselves—that was their way.

So the business of the meeting went on, while the recruit sat sulky, smoking cigarettes, listening to what was said, till he pricked up his ears as his name was mentioned, and he learned that he had been chosen to play his part in a minor enterprise of the gang—the grabbing of a money-filled satchel from a girl clerk in a town twenty miles away. Everything planned to the last detail.

"Dirty trick!" muttered young Hiam to himself.

But he had listened to such schemes before without feeling quite like that, though he had never felt any yearning to take a hand in any of them.

The meeting ended without his discovering any more that mattered. The plans would be reported to his father in the ordinary course. The fence liked to know in advance what was doing.

Young Hiam wished he could be quite sure in his identification of the Boss.

Yet what did it matter to him?

What did anything matter to him, come to that?

He had never had a chance; and now he could never be such another as his school pal, Ginger Harman, let alone such heroes as Fighting Fitz and Rod Rodney! He could not go back on the old man, but must continue to do his dirty work, with no hope of better things.

But the desire for better things was strong in him now. It had never been so before.

At the Nets.

ROD had come to Norchester on a Friday. He went to work on the following Monday. There had been no difficulty about finding a job for him. Joseph Hyde had the utmost confidence in John Redgrave.

Under the roof of Lilac Villa Ralph was civil to Rod. Away from it they hardly ever met. It was plain to Rod from the outset that he could do nothing with Ralph, and he was not willing to go Ralph's way.

"Nets up to-morrow, boys!" said John Redgrave, a week after Rod's coming. "It doesn't feel like cricket weather yet, but an extra sweater puts that right. You'll both be along, of course?"

They were sitting around the fire as he spoke. Ralph had just come in, aware that his father was at home.

"I'm not sure," he said, mumbling by reason of the cigarette between his lips. "May find something better to do than pottering at the nets in an east wind."

"Eh? I've told you before, my boy, that it ought not to be too much trouble to take your cigarette out of your mouth before you speak. But I heard enough. You'd best look out—your place in the mill team is not too safe, I understand. You'll come with me, Rod? I never had a knock once last year, owing to a lame leg; but I'd like to open my shoulders to slow bowling again."

"Rather, Uncle Jack! What's the odds if it is cold? The sooner we can start the better."

Ralph shifted his cigarette from his mouth, and spoke.

"Your place will be safe enough, dad," he said, with more than the hint of a sneer. "They can't refuse anyone in your position."

"They can, and they would, too! I've no idea of match play again. Not for the First Eleven, anyway. I might fill a gap in the Second or Third at a pinch; but I won't keep a youngster out."

"Oh, well—if you look at it that way!" replied Ralph awkwardly.

He threw his cigarette-end into the fire.

"I'm for bed," he said. "Good-night, all!"

He saw the look of pain on his mother's face. He had sneered at his father; he bade her no special good-night. But it did not trouble him. Before long he hoped to get out of Lilac Villa and cut the bonds that irked him there.

No one else's son could make up to Mary Redgrave for

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

After his father's death ROD RODNEY goes to live with the Redgraves at Norchester, a mill town in the North of England. The first night there Rod and RALPH REDGRAVE go to a boxing saloon kept by HORRY HIAM and his son HARRY. In a scrap there Ralph fouls Rodney because he cannot beat him. Rod also meets ALURED HYDE, Ralph's cousin, who is son of a millowner, and plays cricket for the county. Ralph tries to make Rod challenge Alured but Rod declines and walks off alone. (Now Read On.)



Suddenly into the cellar there burst a white-faced youth. "Two cops are watching the shop!" he panted.

the pain her own boy gave her. Yet there was some little comfort in Rod's cheery, affectionate:

"Good-night, Aunt Molly!"

"I wish the other was our boy!" burst out John Redgrave, after Rod had gone.

"Jack, that's a hard thing to say!"

"Eh, lass, that's true—but what's behind it is harder to bear."

There was no need for more words. They understood one another. But the hearts of both were sore.

"My word, it's a fine ground, Uncle Jack!" said Rod, as he and John Redgrave walked into the Hyde Mills enclosure the next afternoon.

"Don't I know it? Lad, I helped to make it. I mind well the time when it was a market garden, as Kennington Oval once was. And now it's fit for a county match, and would get one every year if it were anywhere else in Norlandshire but Norchester, where the county ground is. Myself, I reckon our wicket's better than theirs. You may have a chance to judge between them one day."

A slight, red-headed lad a little older than Rod caught them up as they made their way across the wide ground to the practice pitch.

"Hallo, Mr. Redgrave!" he said, with a smile that took all the plainness out of a face that could not be called good-looking when he was serious.

"Why, it's Alf!" spoke the mill manager. "Rod, this is Alf Harman. His pals call him Ginger—can't think why, can you? You may have sighted him before—he's in the mill; but I don't think you know one another. Alfred, this is Rod Rodney. Your dad knew his, and will remember him, I'm sure."

The two boys shook hands. They looked each other squarely in the eyes; and in that look there was pledged a friendship that was to last. Rod had found a chum in Norchester.

"Alf's our first-team stumper," said John Redgrave. "Took over the job from his father a year ago. Old man says Alf's his daddy at it, and I think he's right, maybe. Anyway, he never was so quick to get across to them on the leg side as young hopeful here is." Reckons to play for the county one of these days, Alf does."

"I never told anyone so, Mr. Redgrave!" protested Ginger.

"Rod hasn't said so, either; but I know well he's thinking it."

Rod and Ginger had both flushed at the words. But each knew that this kindly man had spoken truth in his case, and guessed that he was right in the other. The shared ambition made a bond between them.

"Hallo, guv'nor!" cried a burly fellow of forty or so, as John Redgrave and the two boys approached the nets.

"It's rare an' welcome yo' are back again!"

"You're reet, theer, Tomson!" seconded another.

There followed a cheer that was genuine. All were glad to see Redgrave back.

The two boys had flushed when he had spoken of their aspirations. But their colour was as nothing to the beet-root hue of John Redgrave's face then.

"Eh, but I've not come back in just that way," he said. "It's an old crock I am now, and I'll not be playing unless there's a gap that wants filling. I've a lad here that's rare and likely, though."

Two or three of the men were known to Rod by sight. He had never spoken to any of them till now, however; but he found them friendly.

John Redgrave was told that he must get on his pads and take a turn at one of the nets. Rod was given a ball. Ginger had rather faded out for the moment. He considered himself as having no asset but his skill behind the stumps. Not once the summer before had he reached double figures, though he cherished the memory of one afternoon when he had kept up his wicket for over an hour while Dick Tomson, the burly man who had greeted Redgrave so heartily, had hit over fifty, and a rival mill team had been beaten by one wicket. Eight not out—that was Ginger's highest score in a serious match to date.

"Come on, Rod!" cried John Redgrave, padded and at the wicket.

Rod had seen at a glance that the pitch would suit his bowling. Sun after rain had caked it a trifle. He had only to bowl the ball that went with his arm to bother most batsmen. It would break inches from the off.

His guardian's middle stump fell to his first delivery. "I never took guard," said Redgrave. "I'll do it now. But that was one out of the box, Rod. You can't keep on bowling the like of that."

THE CRICKETER CRACKSMAN!

(Continued from previous page.)

So others thought; but Rod knew that it was no fluke. Not only could he bowl others as good, but he could deliver others that on such a pitch would be even more effective in a match. The one pitched on the middle stump, for instance, and going away to leg. The batsman was bound to play or smother it with his pads. If he used his legs he risked a leg-before-wicket decision; if he played it it was likely it would be against the break, and that a catch would result.

But at the nets catches and l.b.w. did not count for much. To be convincing one must bowl the man.

To that end Rod worked, Ginger Harman watching him with eyes full of admiration and understanding.

Three in the course of ten balls Rod clean beat John Redgrave. Of course, the veteran was not in practice; but he had still a good eye, and he played a straight bat. His had never been an easy wicket to get.

"I'd like well to keep to his bowling," said Ginger to himself. "Not many catches—one here and there, maybe—but plenty of chances to stump them. He'd 'tice them out of their crease and kindiddle them—and I reckon I could do the rest!"

"That's enough!" said John Redgrave, and came out. Dick Tomson took his place. Dick was counted the Hyde Mills' best bat. He seldom failed, and feared neither fast nor slow bowling.

He had watched Rod, and thought he had mastered the secret of his bowling. But he found himself mistaken when his middle stump went down, and he admitted as much in manifold fashion.

"By gosh, lad!" he said. "I reckon yo've a Wilfred Rhodes in the makin', an' if yo' don't play for the Mills next Saturday they may cross my name oot'n list, an' that's a' to it!"

"The pitch is just right for me," answered Rod modestly. Butly Dick Tomson flung an arm round him.

"An' yo' could not bowl on a plumb pitch could yo'? Not likely! Yo're a bowler, lad—the best we've had, I reckon!"

At that moment Alured Hyde and Ralph Redgrave arrived.

They were not in flannels, and had had no intention of practising. In earlier days Hyde had played in the mill team, but he had given up doing so as soon as he was chosen for the county.

There had been nothing much to do that afternoon, and curiosity had brought them to the ground.

"What's the dashed fuss about?" drawled Hyde.

Dick Tomson looked at him with hostile brown eyes. Dick was, in the main, a friendly fellow, but he could hate, and he hated Alured Hyde. He knew a thing or two about that young man which few knew.

"We've found a bowler!" he roared. "Ay, Measter Hyde, a real, reet bowler—happen another Rhodes!"

"And where is he?" queried Hyde, looking at John Redgrave, at Ginger Harman—anywhere but at Rod, though he was in no doubt as to who was meant.

"Here! Now just yo' try him oot—yo' that have played against Rhodes himself an' young Bill Voce an' Charlie Parker an' the rest of 'em. An' if yo' say he's no good, then I'll—"

Dick Tomson stopped.

"What will you do then, Tomson?" sneered Hyde.

"I'll say yo're a danged liar!" shouted Tomson.

Alured Hyde shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not in flannels," he said. "But that doesn't matter much. Will you send me down a few—er—Rodwich?"

He knew Rod's name perfectly well, and Rod was sure he knew. He meant to be insulting. But Rod smiled.

"Very pleased to—er—Side," he answered.

It was a fair retort, and John Redgrave's laugh rang out as loudly as anyone's at it. There were hardly any but did not relish it. Joseph Hyde's son was not popular.

Alured muttered as he donned pads. He was still furious when he took guard, having ascertained that Rod would bowl left hand, round the wicket.

His wrath was all against him. Hyde really could bat. He had proved that in first-class fray. It is true that he was seldom seen at his best when conditions were difficult; but he had made runs easily and speedily on fast wickets.

Even had he not been handicapped by his annoyance he could not have played the first ball Rod sent him down. It was of the type likely to beat any batsman; and it beat Hyde all ends up.

He had to set up the stumps for himself; no one offered to do it for him. Norlandshire is not a county that breeds many sycophants, and there was no one of that kind among the sturdy millhands who looked on.

Anticipating much such another ball, he covered up with his pads, and was struck upon them without touching the leather.

"Leg before, clean!" roared Dick Tomson.

"Rot!" snarled Hyde. "You know better, Redgrave."

"If I'd been umpire you'd have had to go," answered John. "The ball was on the off stump, but it only broke a trifle. It would have hit the leg stump if your pads hadn't been in the way."

"That's reet!" chorused a dozen voices.

Alured Hyde glared around, looked down at his natty riding breeches as though they were to blame for his failure, slapped his right pad with the bat he had borrowed, and faced Rod again.

This time he kept his legs clear. He might have used them safely, for the ball broke the best part of a foot from the off. He failed to connect with it, and it caused his leg stump to heel gently over.

"Hat trick!" shouted Dick Tomson.

Hyde had had enough.

"You can have a shot at him, Ralph," he said sourly.

But Ralph shook his head. If Hyde could not play Rod he knew that he could not. He could bat a bit and bowl a bit, and always looked as though he might come on in both departments of the game, but, somehow, never did. He was no better now than when he had left school—perhaps hardly as good.

Hyde unstrapped and flung down the pads he had borrowed, and he and Ralph went off together. They had, it seemed, no further interest in the net practice.

Ralph kept silence. There were times when he was a little afraid of Hyde; and Hyde looked at his worst just He was seething with rage.

"Can you get that bounder to the saloon again?" asked the older fellow abruptly.

"I think so. I'll try, anyway."

(Rod's enemies are at work! What are they plotting? Don't miss next week's gripping instalment of this fine serial!)

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