

WHAT IS THE SECRET OF THE VANISHING MAN? SEE THE LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL YARN WITHIN!

The GEM 2^d



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THRILLS ABOUND IN THIS STUNNING LONG COMPLETE YARN—

The MYSTERY



CHAPTER 1.

No Cash!

"IT'S rotten!" Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully.

"Beastly!" said Manners.

"Disgusting!" agreed Monty Lowther.

"My deah fellahs, it is simplay intolewable!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Unless my wegistered lettah comes, I weally do not know what we shall do."

"And I don't, either," said Jack Blake. "I squandered my last coins on a new pair of footer boots."

"Ditto!" said Herries.

"It's really too bad!" said Tom Merry. "It's really all D'Arcy's fault!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Yes, it is. You're always rolling in giddy wealth, and you have no right to be stony broke like the rest of us at such a critical moment."

"Weally, I am extwemely sowwy I am stony bwoke, deah boys."

"It's all your own fault," said Blake severely. "You had a fiver from your governor last week, and you went and squandered it all on fancy socks and ties, and things like that."

"Reckless extravagance!" exclaimed Herries.

"But weally, deah boys——"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Gussy, you're a little ass. But——"

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"I object to bein' chawactewised as an ass——"

"But the fact remains that we are stony," said Tom Merry seriously; "and Gussy having failed us in the hour of need——"

"Oh, weally——"

"I really don't know how we are going to raise the wind," Tom Merry went on. "We called you kids in to a consultation——"

"Who are you calling kids?"

"Oh, rats! The consultation doesn't seem to have helped us much. We are all broke. I have a threepenny bit with a hole in it, which has been refused at the tuckshop. That's all the wealth that Manners, Lowther, and myself can raise amongst us."

And the Terrible Three looked doleful.

"And we have absolutely nothing in the world," said Blake. "Herries is stony, I am stony, and even Gussy is stony, through his reckless extravagance."

"Oh, weally, Blake——"

"So the great question arises, what's going to be done?"

Tom Merry ran his fingers through his curly hair.

"There's three ways of raising money," he remarked: "You can beg, borrow, or steal. Now, there's nobody to beg of, nobody to borrow of, and stealing's barred."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So I don't know what's to be done unless we go down to Rylcombe and pawn Gussy's gold watch."

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy!"

The juniors looked at one another disconsolately. It was

—OF TOM MERRY & CO., THE POPULAR CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!

OF THE HUT!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

really a most distressing state of affairs. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the chums of the Shell, were usually at loggerheads with the three Fourth-Formers, but a common distress had drawn them together now. There was a famine in the financial line. The Terrible Three were stony, and Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were stony. And the prospect of raising the wind seemed to be absolutely nil.

"There's Figgins & Co., over in the New House," Blake remarked reflectively. "We've had so many rows with them that they'd come to our help like a shot if they could, but I happen to know that Figgins is in the same fix."

"Yaas, wathah! I asked him myself, deah boys, and he had only a French penny, and I wofused to wob him of his last coin. They wouldn't have taken it at the tuckshop."

"Ha, ha, ha! The worst of it is that we've all drawn upon our respected paters to the last limit. We can't get any more from home."

"I am not sure of that, deah boy. I have witten to my governah, explainin' the painful circes of the case, and I think it pwob that he may come to the wescue like a Bwiton."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I know your governor's rolling in filthy lucre, D'Arcy, but he sent you a fiver last week, and it stands to reason that he won't shell out again yet," he replied. "I'm afraid that must be left out of the account."

"I may get a wegistered lettah by the next post."

"Ten to one you don't."

D'Arcy glanced at his watch—the handsome gold time-keeper which Tom Merry had humorously suggested pawning.

"The post is now due," he remarked. "We shall soon see. I pwopose that we postpone this painful discussion, and punt a ball about till the postman comes."

Blake slapped him on the back heartily.

"Good idea, Gussy. You have good ideas sometimes—"

"Yaas, wathah! But I weally wish you would not be so wuff, Blake. You have caused me considewable pain in my shouladah and disawwanged my necktie. I weally—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Lowther, who was looking out of the study window. "Here comes the postman; and, by Jove, he's got a registered envelope in his hand!"

The six juniors shouted out together in their relief. They fell on Gussy and hugged him. It was a demonstration of affection, but Arthur Augustus struggled furiously to get away from it. It disturbed his aristocratic calm; for D'Arcy was very strong upon the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"Pway welsease me, deah boys!" he gasped. "You are wufflin' my hair, and it takes me ten minutes to bwush it to my satisfaction. You are tweadin' on my patent shoes. You are wumplin' my waistcoat—"

They let the swell of the School House escape at last. Tom Merry ran to the window to look at the postman. The quadrangle was white with a fall of snow, and the Rylcombe postman was picking his way very carefully along the gravel path. He had his bag on his shoulder, but as Lowther had stated, there was a registered envelope in his hand. It was perfectly plain from the window, though, of course, the superscription could not be read.

"It is a stwoke of luck," D'Arcy remarked, setting his collar to rights. "I was weally afwaid this time that the governah would send me a lectuah instead of a fivah. But he has turned up twumps after all."

"Let's go and meet Blagg," said Tom Merry, opening the door of the study.

"Lead on, Macduff!" said Blake.

And the six juniors descended the stairs, and waited for the postman at the door of the School House.

Several other fellows were waiting there, among them Gore of the Shell, the special enemy of the Terrible Three and Study No. 6.

Gore had a rather unusually important air about him. He strutted with his hands in his pockets, and two or three juniors were showing him great respect. The chums observed it, and wondered what was in the wind.

"I suppose Gore is expecting a postal order by this post," Lowther remarked. "See how Mellish and Rogers are sucking up to the cad."

Gore glanced at the chums with an air of superiority.

"Hallo, I hear you're broke, you kids," he remarked.

"Stony!" said Tom Merry, with his usual frankness.

"Ha, ha, ha! Perhaps I shall treat you when I get my remittance—if you're civil."

"Oh, you're expecting a remittance, are you?"

"Oh, just a tenner!" said Gore, with assumed carelessness. Tom Merry stared, and so did his chums.

"Eh? You're expecting ten pounds!"

"Yes. Nothing wonderful in that, is there?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "It is a gweat deal for a junior to have. My governah sometimes sends me fivahs, but I have vewy seldom had as much as a tennah at once, except on my birthday. I weally think it is weckless of your patah to send you so much."

"More likely it's a yarn," Lowther remarked. "We all know Gore."

The cad of the Shell sneered.

"Do you?" he said. "Well, as it happens, it's not from my pater, but from my uncle in India, who's sent it home for me. I was named after him, and he's sent it as a birthday present, only it's got here a month after my birthday. I expect it by this post. They told me it was coming

in my last letter from home."

"My hat!" said Manners. "I wish I had a few uncles like that!"

"I dare say you'll all be fearfully civil now, you lot," Gore remarked; "but you won't get anything by it, I can assure you."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"We shan't come to you for a share of your funds, Gore, you can be pretty sure of that," he said. "You're not the kind of fellow I could chum with any time."

"Yaas, wathah! I could not bowwow of a chap I did not wespsect, and it is quite imposs to wespsect an outsidah like Gore."

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Gussy?" asked Gore.

"Certainly not, Gore! I am simply statin' the plain twuth. As a mattah of fact, deah boy, I am gettin' a wegistered lettah by this post myself, and so we shall be in funds as well as you, and shall not need to bowwow any of your beastly tennah."

The postman was coming up the steps now. Arthur Augustus stepped towards him.

"Thank you, Blagg! That's for me, my deah fellah!"

And the swell of the School House held out his hand for the registered letter.

But Blagg, the postman, shook his head.

"Your name is D'Arcy, I think, sir?"

"Yaas, wathah—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy."

"Then this is not for you, sir; it's for Master George Gore."

"Weally, that is vewy wotten!"

George Gore grinned as he took the letter.

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"Of course it's for me!" he said. "This is my tenner."
 "Congratulations, dear boy!" said Mellish, the meanest junior in the School House, in his blandest tone. "Congratulations. Leave those outsiders to do as they like, Gore; you've got your own chums to stand by you."

"As long as the tenner lasts, at any rate," said Blake, with a sniff.

"Oh, you dry up, Blake! You're jealous of Gore, but I don't see why he should take any notice of you."

"I don't intend to," said Gore loftily. "I know how to treat my own friends. That rotten gang can go and eat coke. I wonder where I can go and get the tenner changed?"

He had signed for the letter, and he now proceeded to tear it open.

Sure enough there was a crisp ten-pound note inside, as well as a long letter, which the Indian uncle had doubtless sent home to be sent on to Gore along with the tenner. Gore thrust the letter carelessly into his jacket pocket and unfolded the banknote.

There were exclamations of admiration from the juniors standing round. Some of them had never seen a ten-pound note before, and very few had ever possessed one. To boys whose pocket-money ranged from a shilling to half-a-crown a week, as a rule, a ten-pound note seemed fabulous wealth. Gore had jumped all of a sudden into high respect and popularity. Even boys who did not expect to get any of the cash showed him a respect they had never shown before. Such is the power of wealth!

But Tom Merry and his party were not of the number. Sycofaney was not a fault that could be attributed to any of them. Besides, they were busy.

The disappointment had been keen. The sight of the registered letter in the postman's hand had made them jump to the conclusion that Gussy's "guv'nor" had come up to the scratch. But it was a delusion. A letter with a crest upon it was fished out of the bag, but it wasn't registered, and D'Arcy guessed only too well that it contained nothing but parental advice.

•The face of the swell of St. Jim's fell as he received it.

"My word!" murmured D'Arcy. "This is weally a fearful disappointment, and I am howwibly sowwy, deah boys!"

"Anything for us, Blagg?" asked Blake, in a faint hope that some forgotten relation might have written and enclosed some contribution to the famished exchequer.

"One for Master Merry," said the postman.

Tom Merry brightened up as the postman groped in his bag.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I didn't like to write to my old governess and ask her for anything, as I've had so much lately; but I dare say she's guessed that I was hard up, like a thoughtful old soul. Hand over the letter, Blaggy!"

"It's not a letter, sir; it's a postcard."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry expressively.

And six faces fell.

The postcard, whether it was from Miss Priscilla Fawcett or not, certainly couldn't contain any cash, and Tom's interest in the communication diminished.

Blagg handed it over, and Tom Merry glanced at it. Then the interest grew in his face again.

"Can you meet me at Wayland Junction at five? Important.—F.L."

"F.L." exclaimed Tom Merry. "You know who that is, you chaps?"

"Ferrers Locke!" exclaimed Blake.

"Yes, the detective."

The chums looked interested at once. The postcard was written in pencil, and had evidently been dashed off in a hurry. The name of Ferrers Locke was well known to the juniors of St. Jim's. Only a short time before a rascal whom the famous detective was tracking had obtained an entry to the school, and had been captured through Tom Merry and his chums. The prospect of another adventure, and lending his aid to the famous detective, was naturally very attractive to a boy of Tom Merry's disposition.

"Nothing else, Blagg?" asked Manners, with a lingering hope.

"Nothing, sir."

The six juniors returned to Tom Merry's study. Gore had gone off with a crowd of fellows to change his ten-pound note; but the funds had not come in for the six, and they were in as close a strait as ever. The question still was—what was to be done?

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CHAPTER 2.

Raising the Wind!

TOM MERRY ran his fingers distractedly through his curly hair.

"What the dickens is to be done, kids?"

He looked round at five faces as serious as his own.

"Gussy has failed us again," he went on.

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy!"

"We don't blame him, though. It can't be helped. His governor has refused to come up to the scratch. When Gussy writes to him again, I hope he will explain that he regards—and we all regard—the noble earl's conduct as unsportsmanlike. But that doesn't settle the question. Now, you kids, you've seen my postcard. I've got to meet Ferrers Locke at Wayland Junction at five. Locke knows that it's a half-holiday to-day at St. Jim's, so I can get off and see him. It hasn't occurred to him that there may be a scarcity in the exchequer, and that I may not be able to raise the one-and-ninety for the return ticket to Wayland from Rylcombe."

"Thoughtless of him," said Blake severely. "Hasn't he ever been a boy himself, I wonder? If he had, he'd know how the beastly money goes."

"The fact is, we've been careless—"

"Admitted; and Gussy especially has been recklessly extravagant—"

"Oh, weally, Blake—"

"But it's no good going over old ground. We've got to face the facts," Tom Merry remarked. "We're all together in this, chaps! I know you fellows of Study No. 6 would do anything you could on an occasion like the present—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Certainly!" said Blake heartily. "If it comes to the pinch we'll come down to Rylcombe with you to see you off by train, and pawn Gussy's watch en route—"

"I should weally be most happy to come to the rescue in that mannah," said D'Arcy modestly. "I wegard all my pwoperty as being at the disposal of my fwends."

"But it may not be necessary to pop the ticker," said Tom Merry. "That is the correct expression, I believe. I know Figgins & Co. are broke, but they may be able to raise the one-and-nine, and I know they would if they could. I think I'll run over to the New House and see."

"But I say," Blake remarked, "if Figgins gets on the track, he may want to take a hand in the game. You remember the last time Ferrers Locke wrote to you, Figgins & Co. caught on, and they nearly made a hash of the thing."

Tom Merry grinned. He remembered very well the adventures of Figgins & Co. as amateur detectives.

"Oh, that's all right!" he said confidently. "I shall tell Figgins, and put him on his honour, and then he won't be able to take a hand."

"Good! Then buzz off! We'll wait here."

Tom Merry went out into the quadrangle, and trudged through the snow over to the New House. Several New House boys saw him coming, and a snowball caught him behind the ear, but he went on his way imperturbably.

"Yah! School House cad!"

"Give him socks!"

The warfare between the rival Houses at St. Jim's seldom slept. Sometimes, however, Tom Merry and Blake made pax with Figgins & Co., and the followers had to obey the behests of the leaders.

Tom Merry entered the New House, brushed the snow off his collar, and went up the stairs to the well-known study of Figgins & Co.

"Come in, fathead!" called out the voice of Figgins, as Tom Merry tapped on the door.

The leader of the School House juniors entered the study. "Well," said Figgins, the long-limbed chief of the New House faction, looking curiously at Tom Merry, "what do you want here, you School House bounder?"

"Friendly visit," grinned Tom Merry. "We're all broke on our side."

"Same here," said Figgins ruefully. "Broke to the giddy wide! We haven't had tea in the study for two days past."

And Fatty Wynn, the Welsh partner in the Co., made a dismal grimace.

"I'm growing thin," he said dolefully. "I feel that I shall go into a decline if things don't look up a bit. Do you notice that my face is growing wasted?"

"No, blessed if I can!" said Tom Merry, surveying the chubby countenance of the Falstaff of the New House. "It seems to me that if you laid up for the winter like a Polar bear, Wynn, you'd have plenty of fat to live on for six months or so."

"If you've come here in search of a black eye, Tom Merry, you've come to the right spot," said Fatty Wynn,

looking warlike. "I can take a joke with any fellow, but on a serious subject like this—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" exclaimed Figgins. "Grub is always a serious subject with Fatty. You've stabbed him in the very tenderest spot. But I say, Merry, about the tin. How much do you want?"

"Look at that!"

Tom Merry handed over the postcard to Figgins & Co.

"I want my return fare to Wayland, if I can get it," he said. "Ferrers Locke seems to be coming down by the London train to the junction, and he hasn't time to come on in the local to Rylcombe. I must be there to meet him."

"Some chaps have all the luck," said Figgins, with good-humoured envy. "How do you know we shan't chip in here, and—"

"Because you're on your honour now I've shown you

"Rot!" said the long-limbed junior cheerfully. "Let's hunt for that brown."

They hunted for the "brown." It was a long hunt, but, finally, Fatty Wynn gave a whoop of triumph. He had discovered the missing penny under the edge of the square of carpet which adorned the floor of Figgins' study.

"There you are, Tom Merry!"

Tom caught the penny deftly enough as it was tossed to him. Kerr handed over his fourpence, and Wynn his sevenpence.

"Good!" said Tom. "I'm awfully obliged to you fellows, and I'll let you have this back as soon as I can. Though," he went on ruefully, "that won't be for some time, I'm afraid. By Jove, I wish I could think of some way of earning an honest penny!"

"I say, Merry," exclaimed Figgins, "as you're going in for some fresh affair with the detective, and we're left out



The ruffian did not speak, but flung Gore to the ground and proceeded to go through his pockets. Gore uttered a groan as he realised the footpad had relieved him of all his money.

the postcard," grinned Tom Merry. "You can't, you see."

"I admit it. But— Well, never mind. How much have you got, Kerr?"

"Fourpence."

"And you, Wynn?"

"Sevenpence."

"That's elevenpence," said Figgins thoughtfully. "If we could get another brown, we should have your single fare to Wayland, Merry, and you could walk back, or else borrow it of Ferrers Locke."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I shouldn't like to do that. I don't want him to know how we're fixed. I can walk back all right. I'd walk there, only I should never be able to do it by five. And I couldn't get through on a bike, with the snow so thick on the road."

"Well, we'll manage the single fare," said Figgins encouragingly. "I dropped a penny here this morning, and didn't have time to look for it. I dare say we could find it if we hunted for it. That will make up the bob."

"That's jolly good of you, Figgins!"

of it, you might manage to let us into the thing if you can, you know. We'll go Co., you know, and leave rows over for a bit, if there's anything we can do."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand. "I'll do the best I can for you, Figgy. So-long, and thanks awfully!"

And Tom Merry tramped back to the School House. Two or three New House snowballs lodged in the back of his neck as he went. He rejoined his waiting friends in the study.

"Got it?" was the general inquiry.

Tom Merry displayed sixpence and six coppers.

"Then you'll have to walk back?" said Manners.

"Yes. That won't hurt me."

"You'll have to take care of the time to do it before locking up," Monty Lowther remarked. "We'll come down the Wayland Road and meet you."

"Good!" said Blake. "And we'll see you off at the station now."

And it was done. The six juniors put on their coats and caps, and walked down to Rylcombe Station, and Tom bought his ticket and took the train to Wayland. And as

he sat in the railway carriage, scudding between snow-sheeted embankments towards Wayland Junction, the hero of the Shell wondered what it was that Ferrers Locke wanted, and whether it would mean another adventure.

CHAPTER 3.

A Curious Case.

FERRERS LOCKE stepped from the train that had stopped, snorting and puffing, in Wayland Junction Station. Very fit and very well the famous detective looked, with his well-knit, athletic frame, his keen face and penetrating eyes. He gave a glance up and down the platform, and at once spotted Tom Merry.

Tom Merry had been on the platform a quarter of an hour. He at once saw the detective as he alighted, and came towards him. Ferrers Locke shook hands with the hero of the Shell, and seemed glad to see him.

"I thought you would be here, Tom," he said, "and I am glad. I want you to help me again, if you are willing."

"No 'if' about it, sir," said Tom Merry brightly. "I'm willing, of course."

"Yes, I was sure of that, Tom. But I don't want you alone, as it happens; I want your friends to help me as well. Will you answer for them?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Rather, Mr. Locke! They'd jump at the chance of taking a hand. But—"

"Come into the waiting-room," said the detective. "I have very little time to spare, and we must speak quickly. That is why I asked you to come over here, instead of coming to Rylcombe, or up to the school myself."

They went along the passage to the little waiting-room. A fire was burning there, and Tom Merry poked it into a cheerful blaze. The afternoon was cold and misty.

"You are returning to London, then, sir?" he asked.

The detective shook his head.

"No, I shall be busy down here for some days to come, I expect. I am going to Wayland Manor from here. I am going to stay there until this matter is settled." The detective's brow wrinkled thoughtfully as he stretched out his hands to the blaze. "How many real chums have you, Tom, upon whom you can absolutely rely?"

"There are Manners and Lowther, sir, my own chums; then there are the fellows in Study No. 6—Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy—they'd be only too glad to join in," said Tom Merry. "And Figgins & Co. would jump at the chance, and they are true blue—three of the best. What do you think of nine of us, sir?"

"A very good number, and quite sufficient for my purpose."

"We're all ready and willing, Mr. Locke," said Tom Merry eagerly. "And there isn't one you couldn't trust with your life!"

"I am sure of it," said the detective, smiling. "Now, Saturday is another half-holiday at St. Jim's, is it not?"

"Yes, we have Wednesday afternoon and Saturday afternoon."

"Saturday afternoon will suit my purpose very well. You are acquainted with the country round St. Jim's, of course."

"I know pretty well every inch of it, sir."

"You know the old hut in the wood near the ruined castle?"

Tom Merry laughed.

Ferrers Locke looked at him curiously.

"I camped out there once, sir," said Tom Merry. "I should know the place if anybody does."

"Ah, yes, I remember you telling me!" The detective nodded. "Well, I want a watch kept upon that old hut and its vicinity. It is a curious case that brings me down here, and there is a mystery connected with that ruined hut which it is my business to solve. You may have heard that there have been robberies committed in the neighbourhood of Wayland lately, the past two or three weeks."

"Yes, I heard some folk in Rylcombe saying so, Mr. Locke, and a countryman was robbed in Rylcombe Lane the other day."

"I have reason to suspect," resumed Ferrers Locke, "that the scoundrel is a certain character upon whom I have had my eye for some time, but who has lately disappeared from his usual haunts. I traced him as far as Wayland some weeks ago, and there lost the trail. I had given the matter up, when I received the report of these robberies, which are evidently committed by someone with more cunning and resource than a common country footpad. The squire at Wayland has set his keepers hunting for the rascal, whom he believes to have a lurking-place somewhere in the woods, and they found traces of fire and food in the old hut in the Castle Wood."

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Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming with interest now.

The idea of a hunt for a desperate character through the dark and snowy wood was very attractive to the adventurous junior. And the ruffianly and brutal character of the hunted man prevented Tom from having any sympathy for him. The unknown scoundrel had been guilty of several robberies with violence, one of his victims being a boy belonging to the Grammar School near St. Jim's, who had been badly knocked about.

"The squire's keepers kept a watch near the hut after that," resumed Ferrers Locke, "and on one occasion they found a dark figure stealing towards it at night. They followed, and according to their declaration the figure disappeared into the hut and remained there, and yet when they searched the hut it was quite empty."

Tom Merry smiled.

"That sounds rather a tall story, Mr. Locke."

"Yes, but it is quite possible, if some secret hiding-place exists in the old hut," Ferrers Locke observed. "It is built on the ruins of the old priory that once stood in the Castle Wood. There is hardly a trace of the ruins left, but there may be some secret hidden in those recesses of which the knowledge has been lost."

"It is possible, sir."

"Now you know what I want you to do. The rascal is on the watch against the squire's keepers, but schoolboys can wander anywhere in the wood without exciting suspicion. If he saw boys from St. Jim's wandering in or near the old hut, he would not imagine that they were looking for him."

"That's very true, sir."

"And so you and your chums will be able to help me in a way that men could not do. The only doubt in my mind is about the danger—"

"Oh, that's nothing, sir! You won't find any of us nervous, I assure you."

The detective laughed.

"I know that, Merry, and I know that you are more likely to err on the side of temerity," he said. "But I could not allow you to run into danger. I should be responsible to Dr. Holmes and the parents of the boys. But so long as you keep at least three together there will be no danger. You must promise me to go nowhere in the wood separately."

"Willingly, sir!"

"Now, under these conditions, I should like you to keep watch upon the vicinity of the old hut as well as you can, Tom, in all your leisure hours; but if nothing is discovered by Saturday, then I shall encroach upon your half-holiday."

"It's quite at your service, Mr. Locke!"

"Good! I am remaining in the neighbourhood myself, and I shall search the vicinity of the hut; but it is quite possible that I may discover nothing. But the scoundrel has become a danger to the roads in the district, and he must be run down. If nothing is discovered by Saturday, the squire's keepers and my own men will beat the woods for him, and have a regular hunt. At that time I want the old hut to be watched carefully, so that if he returns to it for shelter, it may be discovered in what den he hides himself."

"We'll watch it, sir," said Tom Merry gleefully. "We'll nab the bouncer."

"And then there is another matter," the detective remarked. "I don't want you to do this work for nothing."

Tom Merry turned red.

"Now, listen patiently, my lad," said Ferrers Locke, smiling. "I am not thinking of paying you out of my own pocket, which would bar friendship in the case. But I shall receive a certain reward in case of success, and of this I intend to hand over a certain proportion to my assistants."

"I see, sir."

"And so, if the rascal is run down, I shall hand over one guinea to each of the nine shadowers," said Ferrers Locke.

"I—I don't know whether we could take it, sir; but I'll talk it over with the others, and see. It's very kind of you, Mr. Locke."

The detective smiled and rose to his feet.

"I must be off," he said, looking at his watch. "The car from the manor is waiting for me outside the station. You will catch the next train back to Rylcombe."

Tom Merry did not reply.

Whether or not he accepted the reward for his detective work, he didn't mean to borrow of Ferrers Locke now, and it never occurred to the detective that Tom had not a return ticket.

Tom Merry accompanied the detective to the station entrance, where the car was waiting. Tom Merry shook hands with Ferrers Locke, and waved his hand as the car drove away in the dim winter mist. He waited until the vehicle had disappeared before he walked out of the station and took the road to Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 4. Tom Merry Meets the Enemy!

TOM MERRY trudged cheerily on through the thickening mists of the winter afternoon, following the high road till he arrived at the stile, whence the footpath ran through the wood to Rylcombe Lane. It was a short cut for foot passengers, saving a couple of miles, and it was by this way that Tom Merry's chums were coming from the school to meet him returning.

Although Tom had heard before seeing Ferrers Locke of the rascal who had committed robberies in the neighbourhood, he had thought nothing of him when he had told his chums that he would walk home through the Castle Wood. But now, as he quitted the high road, and plunged into the dim shadows of the leafless trees, the thought of the unknown rascal came clearly into his mind.

It was quite possible that he might meet him. A junior from the Grammar School had fallen in with him a few days previously and suffered at his hands. Tom Merry had promised the detective that he would not start the hunt for the rascal without at least two of his chums with him, and that promise he meant to keep. But it was quite as risky, now that he came to think of it, to walk through the wood alone in the winter mist. But it was too late to think of that now, and, in any case, he had to get back to St. Jim's somehow.

He kept a wary eye open as he entered the dark shadows of the wood, and tramped on up the snow-powdered footpath. The path was cumbered with boughs and twigs that had been brought thickly down by the winter wind, and masses of rotten leaves left from the autumn. Tom Merry's thick boots went crunch, crunch, squash, squash, as he strode along the dim path.

He gave a sudden start, and the blood thrilled in his veins, as he heard a sudden rustle in the trees on his right. But it was only the shooting of a pile of snow from an over-weighted bow, which had at last bent under the weight of it. He laughed at his alarm, and tramped on.

The path grew darker in the thickening mist as he tramped on, and by the time he had reached the middle of the wood he could hardly see the path, and was only sure of his way by watching the grim, gaunt trunks that rose at his sides.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "This is cheerful, and no mistake! I should think it pretty nearly time I heard something of the fellows."

He gave the long, warbling whistle that was a well-known signal among the boys of St. Jim's.

There was no reply, however, save the weird echoes of the whistle from the dim depths of the wood.

Rustle, rustle!

Tom heard the sound, and smiled as he thought of his former alarm. But a minute later the smile left his face, and his heart beat fast, as a figure sprang out of the trees into the footpath.

Tom Merry halted.

The figure was big and burly, and wrapped to the neck in a thick coat with a muffler round the top, and a fur cap drawn down over his ears. Only a prominent red nose and a bristling moustache, damped with frost, and a pair of glittering eyes, were visible of the man's face.

Whether to go on unconcernedly, or to turn back, or to dart into the wood, Tom Merry did not know. He had little time to think. The burly figure came striding towards him.

"Stop there!"

"Well?" said Tom Merry, and, in spite of his courage, there was a slight tremor in his voice. "I am stopping."

"Hand over your money, your watch, and everything of value you have about you!"

The voice was hard, rasping, and savage.

Tom Merry could not help grinning at the idea of being asked for money in his present state of impecuniosity. The man in his path was evidently the lurking thief of whom Ferrers Locke was in search. Tom Merry had met him, but not in the way he had hoped. The hero of the Shell was more like the hunted man than the hunter just now!

"Do you hear me? Do you want me to hurt you?"

"I haven't any money," said Tom Merry coolly. "I have a watch, but as I require it as a timekeeper, I haven't any intention of making you a present of it."

The man muttered a savage curse.

"Once more, will you—"

Tom Merry did not wait to hear him. He turned and ran swiftly back along the dim path.

The ruffian, with a furious oath, sprang in pursuit, gripping a short, thick cudgel in his right hand.

"Stop! I'll brain you! I'll—"

The heavy footsteps behind him told Tom Merry that he had no chance of outrunning the scoundrel. He could not put on his best speed for fear of dashing into the trees in

the blinding mist. But he did not depend upon his running for escape. He had a stratagem in his mind, an old trick, but one that might save him.

He dropped suddenly to the ground, and threw himself back towards the running man. The device succeeded, aided by the dimness of the mist.

The man's legs came crashing against Tom Merry, and he fell headlong over the boy. There was a grunt of pain as he crashed headlong to the ground, and the cudgel rolled away into the underwood.

Tom Merry was on his feet in a flash.

There was a pain in his back, where the ruffian's knees had struck him heavily, and his head was a little dizzy. But it was not time to give way. He turned in the direction of St. Jim's, and dashed down the path.

Twice he fell, jumped up again, and raced on.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

He heard the pounding feet of the pursuer behind.

Crash!

Somebody or something reeled back in the middle of the footpath as Tom Merry dashed blindly into it. There was a gasping voice in the mist.

"My word! I am knocked weally bweathless! What fearful wuffian is it that has wun into me in this howlid mannah?"

Tom Merry could have given a shriek of delight at hearing the well-known tones of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Gussy!" he gasped. "Thank goodness! Where are the others?"

"We're all here," said Blake, as he loomed up in the mist. "What on earth's the matter? You must be a giddy ox to be sprinting like this in such a mist!"

"He's after me—"

"He! Whom? One of the Grammar School chaps, or a village bounder?"

"No, no! The ruffian—the footpad!"

The pounding feet of the ruffian were quite close now, though the mist was too thick for him to be seen.

Blake understood at once. His eyes gleamed with the light of battle.

"Line up, chaps!" he whispered. "We're just in time to give Bill Sikes a warm reception. Get out of the way, Gussy! You're no good here! We'll capture the scoundrel, and carry him off to the police station in Rylcombe, by George!"

"I wufuse to get out of the way, Blake!"

"Ass! He'll hear you and sheer off!"

"That will be your fault. I wegard the suggestion that I should clear out of the way as an insult, and I distinctly wufuse to do anythin' of the kind!"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to shut up! I am quite as able as any gentle-

(Continued on the next page.)

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man present to deal with this despewate chawactah, and I wufese eithah to shut up, or to get out of the way!"

"Here he is!" roared Lowthah. "Come on!"

A burly form had loomed up out of the mist, and had halted, evidently having heard D'Arcy's voice, and learned that there was more than one foe to deal with. But the juniors gave him no time to run.

They piled on him in a moment, and he was borne back with a crash against a tree, snarling and fighting like a wild sat.

"Collar him!" shouted Tom Merry. "He's the brute who knocked the Grammar School chap about! Collar him! It doesn't matter if you hurt him!"

With a tremendous effort the ruffian tore himself loose.

"Collar him!"

But it was too late. With a crash, the scoundrel broke through a frozen bush, and vanished into the dim wood. The juniors ran a few paces in pursuit, but the hopelessness of the chase soon occurred to them.

"Chuck it!" growled Blake, as he came back to the path. "We could never run him down. Never mind, we gave him a jolly good mauling! It was Gussy's fault he got away!"

"I wufese to look at it in that light! If you had not been wude and diswepseful I should not have been dwiven to wemonstrate—"

"Oh, ring off! Let's get back to the school. I'm getting fed-up with this mist."

It was certainly not pleasant in the misty wood. The juniors tramped off to St. Jim's, and reached the school just before locking up, much to their relief.

CHAPTER 5.

Tea in Tom Merry's Study.

"F IGGIN'S!"

"Hallo, kid!"

Curly Gibson of the Third Form at St. Jim's put his head into Figgins' study. Figgins & Co. were discussing footer, as usual.

"Tom Merry wants to see you three over in the School House," said Curly, and went on his way whistling.

Figgins faced his chums.

"It's news from Ferrers Locke!" he exclaimed. "Tom Merry promised to let us into it if he could. Come along! Get your caps! It's snowing again."

"Perhaps it's a feed in Tom Merry's study," said Fatty Wynn hopefully. "If I don't get a feed again soon something serious will happen. The grub they provide in this school isn't enough for a rabbit."

"Not for a Welsh rabbit, perhaps," grinned Kerr. "I find it enough."

"Well, you're a skinny Scotsman!"

"Now, then, no personalities!" said Figgins. "I don't think there's likely to be a feed in the School House, kids, unless Gore gives it. He's been awfully flush with money to-day. I hear that he had a ten-pound note from an uncle in India or China, or somewhere."

"It's a fact," said Kerr. "I was in the tuckshop when he asked Dame Taggles if she could change it; and I saw it, and it was genuine enough. He went down to Rylcombe with it, as Dame Taggles couldn't manage it. The old soul has never been asked to change a tenner before, I imagine."

"I say, Gore isn't half a bad fellow!" said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "And grubs grub, you know, wherever it comes from. There's a good many things about Gore that I've always liked, and—"

Figgins seized Fatty Wynn by his plump throat and jammed him against the wall. Fatty writhed and wriggled like an eel.

"Lemme alone!" he gurgled. "You're thr-thr-throtting me. Figgy! What the dickens are you up to? Are you off your silly rocker?"

"No," said Figgins. "I'm upholding the honour of the study. If you should ever allow your ghastly appetite to make you kow-tow to a rotten cad like Gore for the sake of a treat, we'll expel you from the study, you fat cannibal!"

"Oh, Figgy!"

"We'll boil you down into tallow, you plump oyster!" said Kerr. "You—you fat Falstaff! You ghastly gormandiser!"

"Oh, I say, shut up!" remonstrated Fatty Wynn. "I'm not thinking of chumming up with Gore because he can stand feeds, you know. You couldn't think that of me."

Figgins released him, and Fatty Wynn rubbed his fat neck. Figgins' grip had not been a gentle one. Figgins was emphatic.

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"Well, we won't think it of you," said Figgins. "But the thought crossed your mind, you fat animal, so don't say it didn't!"

"Well, I like to look on the best side of things," said Fatty Wynn. "There's good in everybody, you know, as Shakespeare says, and there may be good in Gore for all we know. A little kindness might bring it to light."

"Possibly. And you can be as kind as you like to him sometimes when he's stony," said Figgins. "I'll remind you next time you're flush, if Gore happens to be broke."

"H'm!" said Fatty; and he did not pursue the subject.

"Let's get off!" said Kerr. "If Tom Merry hasn't any grub in his study, we shall have to get back to the New House to tea, so there's no time to waste."

"Come along, then, kids!"

Figgins & Co. quitted the New House. A few flakes of snow were whirling on the wintry wind in the wide quadrangle. The New House juniors crossed to the rival House, and soon found themselves at the door of Tom Merry's study, which was opened at once, when Figgins knocked, by the hero of the Shell himself.

"Come in, kids!" said Tom Merry hospitably. "There's not much besides a welcome, but there's lots of that."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy has found out a way of turnin' an honest penny, Figgins, and you're wanted to join."

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were all three in Tom Merry's study. The fire was burning cheerfully in the grate, Tom Merry having borrowed some coal of the House dame. The gas burned brightly—the light being supplied by the school—and so not being affected by the shortness of cash in the study. The tea-table was spread, and the cloth was nice and clean and white, but it had to be admitted that the show made by the provisions thereon was a poor one.

Figgins & Co. glanced at it, and Tom Merry nodded his head disparagingly.

"Rotten, isn't it?" he remarked. "I know it is rather a mouldy turn-out, Figgy; but it's the best we can do, and if you've got anything better at home in the New House, don't mind saying so, and we'll excuse you."

Figgins laughed.

"That's all right, old son," he said. "We've got an absolutely bare cupboard at home, and we should have had tea in the Hall, and you know what tea is like if you don't add anything to the school fare yourself. This is all right; but it's a bit rough to invade you when supplies are running so short."

"Oh, it's always a pleasure to see you, Figgins!"

"My hat, that's worth ninepence!" said Figgins. "If you've done making pretty speeches, kid, we'll all sit down."

"Pway do, deah boys, and do the best you can!" said D'Arcy. "We have all clubbed together with our supplies to make up this feed, and it's a weally wotten one, after all. But you must take the will for the deed, you know."

"I believe a will is a deed, in a legal sense," said Monty Lowther, who was given to punning. "You see—"

"No, we don't," said Tom Merry. "We never see your rotten puns, Monty. Sit down, Figgy, and make yourself at home. Try the sardines; they're jolly good, and there's nine of them, which will be one each all round. That's a start, anyway."

"First rate!" said Figgins. "Nothing could be better."

"Nothing," said Kerr heartily.

Fatty would have said the same from native politeness, but he simply could not. The sight of a poorly provided table always seemed a touching one to Fatty Wynn; and when he happened to be hungry, it grew tragic.

It occurred to him to cut across to the New House, and get the school tea before tackling the feed in Tom Merry's study. But he reflected that when he got back the table would certainly be bare, and so he remained where he was, but he was not happy.

Tom Merry poured out the tea. There was plenty of that, for Tom had borrowed it of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, the most good-natured fellow in the school. There was plenty of sugar, too, a supply of that having been raised from Darrell and Rushden, two Sixth-Formers with whom Tom was on good terms. But the milk was not plentiful, the juniors having only a little left in the bottom of a condensed milk tin. But everyone present suddenly discovered that he really didn't care much for milk, anyway, and so apparently it did not matter much.

The nine sardines suddenly disappeared. One was a very small one, which Tom Merry magnanimously placed upon his own plate. There was a whole loaf of bread, generously provided by the House dame, and, as Blake pointed out, by careful husbandry of the combined supplies

of butter, marmalade, and jam, there would be enough of something or other to stick on all they wanted to eat.

"Can't expect luxuries in times like these," said Blake. "After all, we've a lot to be thankful for. There's fellows who have to live on bread and water, you know, and you never know what your might come to. I've heard of fellows keeping wives and families on a pound a week—"

"Pway excuse me!" said D'Arcy. "But I must remark that that is quite imposs, Blake. Suppose the fellow you are speakin' of only gave—say, a guinea for a silk toppah, that would be a week's cash gone. Then if he got a fancy waistcoat for twenty-five bob, it would take up more than a week's money. He'd have to live without gwub for a fortnight or more to pprovide just those two vewy necessawy articles, and I put it to all the gentlemen pwesent—could a man possibly appeah in public with nothin' but a silk hat and a waistcoat? He would have to spend—"

"Ha, ha, ha! If D'Arcy were wrecked on a desert island," said Figgins, "I believe he would be happy, so long as he saved a silk hat and a fancy waistcoat from the wreck. Pass the jam, Manners. I see there's a flavour left. This is really ripping!"

The juniors made the best of a poor feed, and it was ended at last. They shoved the table away, and pulled their chairs nearer the fire. It was a bit of a crush, but, as Blake contentedly remarked, that made it all the more cosy. A fellow can always be happy if he is determined to be.

"And now," said Figgins, "we'll hear this great and ripping plan of making money."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry.

And he proceeded to relate the particulars of his meeting

take it. I won't bring us under the rules governing professionals."

"Ha, ha, ha! But—"

"If it came out of Locke's own pocket we couldn't take it, and he wouldn't insult us by offering it," said Figgins. "But as a part of the reward which he receives for getting hold of the rascal, why, I think we're really entitled to it if the detective chap likes to share out. It's only fair, if we helped to capture the scoundrel."

"That's how I look at it," said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathan! We pweserve our status as amateurs, deah boys, as we can wegard that payment simply as expenses as they do in cunty cwicket," said D'Arcy.

"Good idea!" was the general verdict.



Mellish was on the look-out, but Gore was too quick for him. His right-hander caught Mellish in the eye and the Fourth-Former went crashing to the floor.

with Ferrers Locke at Wayland Junction, and the arrangement he had made with the detective. And he went on to tell of his adventure on the way home through the Castle Wood.

Figgins gave a prolonged whistle.

"My hat! Some fellows have all the luck!" he exclaimed. "Still, as we're going to be in it, we can't grumble. And you think it was really the cad Locke is after, Merry, whom you met in the wood?"

"Certain of it."

"Pity you couldn't collar him. But, of course, you couldn't expect to—a lot of School House kids! If some of us had been there—"

"You'd have made a bigger muck of it," remarked Blake. "Nice way you extinguished—I mean distinguished—yourself last time when you hunted a burglar—"

"Let's get on with the washing," said Figgins hastily. "We're in this, of course? As for Ferrers Locke's offer of a guinea each for the job, I don't see why we shouldn't

"The plan of campaign's arranged, then," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully.

"We're going to do as Ferrers Locke directs. In all the spare time we can get we'll watch for that rascal, and we'll see if we can spot his hiding-place in the wood. I never noticed any secret den that time I camped in the old hut, but it may have been there all the time. Part o' the floor, I know, was the old stone-work of the priory. Are all you kids agreed upon giving up the football on Saturday afternoon, too?"

"Certainly," said Figgins heroically. "You can't expect to effect anything without making sacrifices, you know. We'll give up the footer, and welcome."

"Good! It's a bit of a wrench to give up a Saturday afternoon, I know, at a time of the year when it's too dark to play after afternoon school," said Tom Merry; "but it's for the good of the cause. That scoundrel in the wood is a dangerous villain, and he may do ever so much harm to innocent people if he's not caught."

And the juniors discussed the matter in all its bearings round the study fire, roasting and eating chestnuts the while, the said chestnuts being a present from Tom Merry's governess at Laurel Villa, and very welcome to the youngsters in their present state of need. During the discussion a noise in the adjoining study had been growing ever louder, and once or twice Tom Merry had tapped on the wall as a hint to the revellers next door to keep quieter. But the row continued.

"I say," exclaimed Figgins suddenly, "that's Gore's study next to yours, isn't it, Tom Merry?"

The hero of the Shell nodded.

"He's keeping it up on that tenner," said Figgins, grinning. "It's about time we broke up, I think. Let's have a look in at Gore before we go."

The idea was greeted with general approval, and the nine juniors crowded out of the study.

Tom Merry knocked at the next door down the corridor, opened it, and entered.

CHAPTER 6.

Gore Gives a Feed.

GORE and his friends were certainly "keeping it up," as Figgins expressively put it. Gore's study was a good-sized one, almost as large as Tom Merry's, and it was crammed with juniors who had shown a marvellous friendship for Gore since the arrival of the magnificent gift from the Indian uncle.

The table had been augmented in size by several boards laid from it to Gore's writing-desk, and two or three forms had been smuggled into the room to seat the numerous guests.

Gore sat at the head of the table, as befitted. There was just room for him there, with his back to the window, which was open on account of the heat. The evening was cold, but there was a fire in the study, and the heat from that, combined with the twelve crammed juniors, made the company glad to have the window open.

The table and its extension were groaning under the good things, to use a novelistic expression. Certainly Gore, if he meant to purchase popularity by the expenditure of his sudden wealth, had gone very wisely to work. The "grub" was good, and there was plenty of it. A couple of pounds carefully laid out will go very far in providing a "feed," and Gore had certainly expended as much as that in this entertainment.

The juniors crowded round the table were eating heartily, and they only paused between the mouthfuls to make complimentary remarks to their host.

Gore seemed to be feeling extremely well pleased with himself. He had none of the qualities which make a fellow liked, nor did he ever seek popularity by any kind of unselfishness or good nature. But he liked it, all the same, and it was cheaply bought with mere money.

As long as his cash lasted George Gore was likely to be popular with the meaner sort of juniors in the School House. When it was gone it was extremely doubtful if his sudden popularity would not go with it.

"My hat! This is jolly!" Mellish remarked. "I always said that Gore was a jolly generous fellow, and I say it again."

"So he is," said Walsh. "He'd make a far better leader for the School House juniors than that chap Merry."

"True enough. Why shouldn't Gore be House captain?" Gore's eyes sparkled. He had always aimed at supplanting Tom Merry, and he was not keen enough to see that he lacked the qualities of a leader, especially courage and ready wit.

He was about to speak when the door opened, and Tom Merry & Co., crowding and looking over one another's shoulders, stared into the study.

Gore gave them a far from amiable glance.

"There's nothing for you," he said rudely. "You needn't come crawling round in the hope of being asked to the feed, because you're not wanted."

Tom Merry's eyes burned, but Blake only grinned. He had too hearty a contempt for Gore to allow anything the cad of the Shell said to annoy him.

"My dear kid, we haven't come to the feast," he said. "Figgins, our honoured guest from the New House, had a curiosity to see the animals feed, and we brought him here to show him."

"That's the idea," said Monty Lowther. "You must look upon us simply as keepers showing a party of visitors round the Zoo at feeding-time."

Gore scowled. He always felt at a loss in a war of words with Tom Merry & Co.

"Oh, get out, you fellows!" said Mellish. "We know

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very well that you came on the chance of what you could get."

"Of course they did," said Barker. "Look at Fatty Wynn—how he's eyeing that ham. He looks as if he'd give his little finger for a good bite at it."

There was a howl of laughter in the room, and Fatty Wynn turned red and disappeared from view. It was true that he had been fixing an unconsciously longing look upon that ham.

"You can travel," said Gore. "What are you poking into my study for? You'll soon be pulled down off your perch, Tom Merry. The School House juniors are thinking of getting a new leader."

Tom Merry laughed.

"And his name is Gore, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Gore defiantly. "Why not, if the majority choose?"

"My dear kid, before you've worked up your majority your ten-pound note will be gone, and then the chance will be gone," said Tom Merry good-naturedly. "You can't keep this sort of thing up long, and when you can't feed these chaps—"

"Oh, get out!" said Mellish, who did not relish Tom Merry's frankness. "You're bothering us. I tell you we're not going to ask you in."

"Oh, let's go!" said Figgins. "If we had that lot in the New House we'd kill and bury 'em under the coal cellar. Come along!"

A loud jeer followed the sightseers as they withdrew. As Figgins closed the door an over-ripe banana whirled out of the study and burst on his nose. The New House leader gave a yell and threw the door wide open again, but Kerr caught him by the arm and pulled him back.

"No rows, now, Figgy—they're not worth it."

"That's all very well," growled Figgins, wiping his face with his pocket handkerchief. "My face is beastly sticky!"

Kerr closed the door, and Figgins rather unwillingly left the spot.

Tom Merry and his friends accompanied the visitors to the door of the School House, and saw them out into the quadrangle.

Figgins & Co. went out into the misty night and looked up at the lighted window of Gore's study as they passed under it.

"There's the great feast-giver," chuckled Kerr, pointing up.

Gore's back and head could be clearly seen at the open window.

A gleam of mischief darted into the eyes of Figgins.

"Wait a minute, kids!" he muttered.

"What's the game?" asked Fatty Wynn, as Figgins stood with his head thrown back, gazing up at the lighted study window, as if making a mental calculation.

"Cut over to the New House and bring my footer, Kerr, will you?" said Figgins, without replying to Fatty Wynn's question.

"What on earth for?" asked the astonished Kerr.

"Don't ask questions; do as I tell you."

Kerr, who never disputed the behests of his chief, obeyed. He returned in a few minutes with the footer and handed it to the leader of the New House.

A voice could be heard coming from the study—it was Mellish's—making a speech thanking the founder of the feast. Gore rose in reply, and his whole broad back was exposed at the open window.

Figgins' eyes gleamed. Then he calculated the distance between himself and the open window.

At the identical moment he bounced the ball over, then his right foot shot out, catching the leather a first-timer. Like a rocket the footer soared upwards to sail clean through the open window.

"Gentlemen," said Gore, "I rise to reply—I rise to—Oh, ow! Groooogh!"

Something—he did not know what—had hit him in the back of the neck, and with considerable force, too. He was totally unprepared for such a shock, and he fell forward, and plunged wildly upon the table. His arms came down upon the crockery with a crash, and his nose was buried in a dish of butter.

But that was not the extent of his misfortunes. It happened that the flimsy extension of the table was at the end where Gore sat, and it wasn't built to stand the weight of a well-grown junior suddenly plumping upon it. There was an ominous creak, a lurch, and just as Gore was rising from his unexpected face-wash of butter, the structure collapsed.

There was a terrific smash of crockery, a crash of falling dishes with their contents, and in the midst of the ruins Gore plumped wildly.

Figgins & Co. heard the smash, and chuckled grimly.

"That's one better than his rotten banana," Figgins remarked, and then he hailed the window. "Good-night, Gore! I hope you will be able to sort yourself out."

Wrathful faces crowded the window, among them Gore's, red with rage and with a mass of butter still adhering to it. Missiles showered out into the night. But Figgins & Co. had beaten a swift retreat, and the missiles whirled aimlessly among the fallen snowflakes.

CHAPTER 7.

Tracked in the Snow!

TOM MERRY and his chums lost no time in carrying out the directions of Ferrers Locke. On the following day, after morning school, they strolled down the lane to the wood. The ground was impossible for the usual football practice, and, as Blake remarked, this new "wheeze" had come in good time to keep them busy. It was quite as good fun as punting a ball about in the gym, or sliding on the frozen Rhyl.

The Castle Wood did not look inviting. There were drifts of heavy snow in the glades, and the trees, gaunt and leafless, rustled drearily in a bitter wind. The boys' boots sank deep in the snow, and the light flakes were still fluttering down.

They followed the footpath to the spot where Tom Merry had encountered the enemy the previous night. Tom looked back and gave a whistle as he saw the deep tracks nine pairs of boots had left in the snow on the path.

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins, following his glance. "No good trying to do this thing secretly, kids. Ferrers Locke was quite right, you see; he must have thought of this. If the squire's keepers start hunting for the rascal while the snow is on the ground, or the local police either, their tracks would soon warn the fellow where to look out for them."

"That's so," agreed Tom Merry. "But the tracks of a party of schoolboys couldn't alarm him. Ferrers Locke thinks of everything."

He quitted the path, and they followed him, plunging into the wood. As near as possible Tom entered the trees at the spot where the ruffian had taken to flight the previous evening. But the fall of snow during the night had completely obliterated his tracks, and amid the frozen bushes there was nothing to indicate that human feet had passed that way.

The juniors, eager in the hunt, pressed on without much regard to the passage of time. One o'clock boomed out over the woods from the village church, but they hardly noticed it. They pressed on, eager to find traces of the scoundrel who haunted the wood, and the direction they took led them towards the ruined hut in the heart of the wood—the hut where Tom Merry had "camped out" on a memorable occasion.

Suddenly Tom Merry uttered an exclamation. They crowded up at once.

"What is it, Merry?"

"Look!" said Tom laconically, pointing to the ground.

"Footprints, by George!"

They were unmistakable footprints, deeply indented in the soft snow. The fresh flakes falling had partly covered them; but the fact that they were not entirely obliterated showed that the man who had left them had recently passed that way.

Tom Merry bent down and examined the tracks with the air of an Indian hunter.

"Jolly big boots that chap wore," he said, "and he trod heavily, too, as if he were carrying something. See how deep the marks go."

"Good old Sexton Blake!" said Figgins admiringly. "Can you tell us the colour of his eyebrows from the size of his boots?"

"No," said Tom Merry, laughing, "I can't. But I think we had better follow this chap. He may be only a keeper, of course; but he may very likely be the man we're hunting for."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Figgins, as the chime of the village clock floated through the frosty air. "That's half-past one!"

The juniors looked at one another. Half-past one was the dinner-time at St. Jim's for the boys, and they were not allowed to miss that meal. Tea was the only meal that could be taken at choice in their studies. Dinner was an important function. It was impossible to miss. But it was manifestly impossible to get back to St. Jim's in time now.

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry. "If we buzzed off now we should be too late. It will only mean lines, so long as we turn up in time for afternoon school at half-past two. We shall have to miss our dinner. I begged a bundle of

sandwiches from the House dame in case of accidents, and here they are. Lowther has a pocketful of chestnuts, too."

"Good!" said Figgins. "Hand out the grub, and let's feed as we go along."

"We can't leave the trail at a point like this. Come on, and let's run the giddy pirate to his lair."

"Yaas, wathah! I think if we explain the circles of the case to Mr. Wailton, he will not be angry," said D'Arcy. "When he knows that we were huntin' a beastly burglar fellow, of course, he will see—"

"Ass!" said Blake. "If you say a word, I'll drown you in a hip-bath. You want drowning twice a day, at least."

"But, my dear boy, Fewwahs Locke would not ask us to do anything that the mastahs at the coll would object to, I am sure—"

"I know that, fathead. He has probably written to the Head about it. Still, you can't be too careful. Don't be an ass. If we get an impot we'll take it and say nothing. It's all in the day's work. Besides, Ferrers Locke thinks we're only going to do the watching business. As a matter of fact, if we come upon the rascal we shall lay him by the heels. See?"

"Yaas, wathah; but—"

"Shut up!" said Tom Merry. "Don't talk; voices carry a long way in this air. Buck up!"

In silence the band of juniors followed the trail. The footprints led them steadily on, still in the direction of the old hut.

Tom Merry came to a sudden halt. The old hut lay before them, visible through the bare, frosty trunks. It did not look like a refuge for such weather. The walls were tottering, the windows open to the wind, and the roof partly gone. Snow was piled thickly upon it and around it. The tracks in the snow led right up to the gaping doorway.

Tom Merry gave a suppressed exclamation.

"Look!"

There was no need for him to speak, however. All the juniors saw a dim form moving in the hut—a burly figure in a thick coat and heavy boots, visible for a moment through the opening of the doorway.

Tom Merry turned to his companions with gleaming eyes. "That's no keeper, kids. I know him again," he whispered. "It's the scoundrel who attacked me last night—the brute who knocked the Grammar School kid about."

There was a hiss of deep-drawn breath. The same thought was working in nine brains at the same time.

"We've run him down," said Figgins. "We've cornered him. We're going to rope him in."

"Good!" said Blake. "We've all got weapons of some kind, and nine of us ought to be enough to handle the rascal!"

"Yaas, wathah! If he wesists we shall stwike him to the gwound."

"The thing's settled, then," said Tom Merry. "Come on! Follow me, and weapons ready. If he resists, hit him hard, that's all."

"Right-ho!"

Each of the juniors was armed in some way—cudgel or stick. They had not come unprepared.

Tom Merry quitted the cover of the trees, and ran swiftly and silently over the soundless snow towards the hut. Fast on his track came the rest of the juniors.

It took Tom Merry less than a minute to reach the hut. No sound came from within, and whether the ruffian was aware of his approach or not he could not tell. He paused one moment at the open doorway, and then sprang into the hut. He was ready for a savage blow, but it did not come. He gazed around him in amazement. There was no one in the hut.

He stepped right in, and the juniors crowded after him. Exclamations of surprise fell from all lips, but Tom Merry motioned them to be silent.

"Gone!" muttered Lowther. "But where on earth has he gone to?"

"Goodness only knows!"

They stared round in amazement. There was nowhere in the hut for a man to hide. That the ruffian had been there they knew, for they had seen him plainly for one moment through the doorway. That was less than two minutes ago. Yet now he was gone, without leaving a trace behind.

"He must have seen us coming, and cut out at the back," whispered Figgins.

Tom Merry shook his head.

There were two or three gaps in the rear wall of the hut through which a man might easily have passed. But the snow without was white and untrodden. It could not have failed to leave unmistakable traces if the ruffian had passed that way.

"I suppose the wuffian can't be on the woof," suggested D'Arcy, looking upwards.

"Ass!" said Blake. "It wouldn't bear his weight."

"But where can he be, then, deah boy?"

"May as well have a look," Kerr remarked; and he climbed on Figgins' shoulder and put his head over the gap in the roof of the hut.

The roof was white with snow, and quite untenanted. The snow there had not been disturbed.

Kerr dropped back to the ground and shook his head.

"My word!" said Tom Merry. "This is a bit above my comprehension. We know he was here; and besides, there are his footmarks leading right up to the doorway, and there are none leading away from the hut."

"Then he is still here," D'Arcy remarked. "It is extremely remarkable that we cannot see him, if he is heah, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry was examining the hut with keen glances.

He bent and carefully scanned the floor. It was of bare earth and stone, the hut having been built over the ancient ruins of the priory that had once existed there. Tom Merry tapped with his foot on the grimy, moss-grown stone beneath him. Was it possible that some opening existed there?

It seemed to be the only feasible theory. Nine keen pairs of eyes scanned the stone in the hope of discovering some traces of an opening.

The result was—nil!

Figgins suddenly looked at his watch. He gave an exclamation of dismay.

"I say, it's ten past two. If we don't cut back at top speed we shall be late."

It was evident that nothing more could be done. The juniors gave up the task, and set off for the footpath. Then they started at a run for St. Jim's.

Tom Merry's brow was wrinkled in thought.

"Well, we've discovered something, at all events!" he exclaimed at last. "We know for certain now, as Ferrers Locke surmised, the old hut is the ruffian's lurking-place, and that there is some secret den there where he hides. We've only to discover where it is and we shall have him."

"Only!" said Blake, with a grimace.

"Oh, we shall do it!" said Tom Merry confidently. "Here's St. Jim's!"

They went in, and separated in the Hall, hurrying off to their respective class-rooms. They were just in time to take their places with the rest.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, looked severely at the Terrible Three.

"You were not in to dinner, Merry, Lowther, and Manners," he said. "You need not trouble to make excuses. You will take two hundred lines of Virgil apiece."

"Yes, sir," said the Terrible Three, with one voice, meekly enough.

CHAPTER 8.

The Opposition!

AT tea-time the amateur detectives turned up in the Hall. If they had gone to their studies for that meal, they would have been in the sad case of Mother Hubbard, who found the cupboard bare. The Terrible Three exchanged sympathetic glances with Study No. 6 as the two parties came in to tea.

"Hard cheese!" Tom Merry remarked. "But we'll have a ripping spread to make up for it when we get that guinea apiece on Saturday."

"Yaas, wathah! It is weally too bad!" D'Arcy went on, as he walked to the Fourth Form table with Blake and Herries. "My governah has sent me absolutely nothin' but good advice. Wotten, isn't it? I have witten to him again, you know, and he hasn't answered yet, though he weally has had plenty of time. I wegard it as neglectful."

"Horrid," said Blake solemnly. "Are you sure that you have brought up your governor carefully, Gussy—that you didn't neglect him in his tender youth, or allow him to get into selfish ways for want of a little kind care at the right moment?"

"Oh, don't wot, Blake! This is a weally sewious mattah." "Awfully serious, when we have to eat these slabs of bread-and-butter, instead of having tea in the study," agreed Blake. "Never mind, we shall be wealthy on Saturday. I notice that Gore isn't patronising the school tea. Another feed in his study, I suppose."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I saw Gore and Mellish coming out of Dame Taggles' shop with packages undah their arms, you know, and they gwinned at me. I suppose they thought I wanted some of their beastlay gwub, which was quite an ewwor on their part. I left them gwinning like a pair of beastlay hyenas, you know."

"I hear that Gore is going to take his set down to the truckshop in Rylcombe and treat them," Herries remarked. "He's getting awfully popular. They're talking of making him junior captain—electing him you know, and all that. All the measly rotters in the House are tagging after his ten-pound note."

"It won't last long at that rate," said Blake, with a grin. "Gore's gone up like a rocket, and he'll come down like the blessed stick. There'll be a fall for him soon."

"Silence, there!"

Tea was soon over. It did not tempt the boys to linger, and the amateur detectives were soon out. But there was no leaving the school to renew the hunt. On account of the fall of snow, locking up was earlier, and, besides, there were the lines to do. Figgins, always daring, suggested breaking bounds, but Tom Merry shook his head.

"We might get gated for Saturday," he said, "and then all the fat would be in the fire. No, it's not much of a time for tracking the enemy, anyway. Let's get the lines done, and we'll discuss ways and means afterwards."

It was a good suggestion and it was adopted. The School House "javed" in Tom Merry's study, while Figgins & Co. were similarly occupied in the New House. While Tom Merry and his friends were conversing in quiet tones they could hear the noise from Gore's room, which told that the newly rich junior was entertaining again.

Gore's study was crammed, his popularity rising crescendo, so to speak, as the reports of his last study feed were spread through the House. Even a few New House boys had come over to toady to the cad of the Shell for the sake of his food.

The next day the weather was finer, though there was still a thick white crust of snow on the ground.

Tom Merry was not slow to notice a certain change that had come about in his position among the juniors of the School House. All the "wasters," as Blake described them, had gathered round Gore, and the cad of the Shell was fast

Potts, the Office Boy!



forming a party of his own, and evidently intended to dispute the leadership of the juniors with Tom Merry. That leadership had always been in dispute between Tom Merry and Blake, but Gore was a new rival in the field.

Some of the fellows were toadies, and some did not care a rap who was the leader, as they had no chance of the distinction themselves. And there were a good many members of the old "Smart Set" who still resented the drastic way in which Tom Merry and his chums had smashed up their honourable society.

Consequently, Gore did not find it hard to make an opposition party—though whether it would hold together when there were no more treats was a question, and one he did not think of answering.

Tom Merry took it all coolly enough. If he had allowed himself to be disturbed that would have been a triumph for the opposition, and was very encouraging to Gore. But his absolute indifference rather disconcerted them.

Gore decided to bring matters to a head, and after school on Friday he came up to Tom Merry in the quadrangle with a party of his followers at his heels.

"I want to speak to you, Merry!" he exclaimed, with an air of truculence, emboldened by the dozen or so backers behind him.

Tom glanced at him carelessly.

"Fire away, then!" he said.

"You call yourself leader of the School House juniors," said Gore aggressively. "So does Blake, for that matter, and you've never been able to settle the point between you. But, as a matter of fact, the fellows have had enough of you both. They want a new leader, and a considerable number have asked me to take the post."

"Take it, then!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Do you mean to say that you don't object?"

"Certainly not! If anybody wants you for a leader he can have you, and welcome! If the School House juniors elect you, why, there you are! I shan't interfere. My dear children, you can play any game you like without worrying your little heads about me! I'm quite content to stand aside."

"And you'll follow my lead with the rest?"

"Oh, no!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "That's asking a little too much. When it comes to a tussle with the New House again, I expect Figgins & Co. will wipe up the ground with you. There won't be any more House rows till after Saturday, as Figgy and I have made a truce. But I expect you'll have a warm time next week, if your leadership lasts as long as that. I don't mind."

"Look here, Tom Merry, if I'm made House leader and you don't obey orders, you'll get a licking—and that's what you've wanted for a long time, too!"

"Better give me one while you're on the job, suggested Tom, pushing back his cuffs. "Come on, Gore, old chap, and Mellish can help you if he likes."

"Fair play's a jewel," said Mellish, who had faced Tom's fists once, and never meant to do it again if he could help it. "Man to man is fair."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind! Are you coming on, Gore?"

"No," said Gore uneasily. "You'll get a dormitory licking if you don't follow your leader!"

"Right-ho! I'll risk it!" said Tom Merry, and he walked away whistling.

Gore felt rather uneasy. The leader of a set like the School House juniors required, first of all, plenty of grit, and in that quality Gore was sadly lacking. He had seen

several of his own followers winking at one another when he refused Tom Merry's challenge. He realised upon how unstable a foundation he was building his hopes. Tom Merry was a leader because he won the hearts of those who followed. Gore appealed solely to their stomachs, and so his power was extremely insecure.

"Who's coming down to Mother Murphy's?" asked Gore, looking round.

Instantly there was a chorus of approval, and Gore regained all the ground he had lost—if it was worth regaining.

The party went down to the gates, which were not yet locked. They tramped out cheerfully enough into the snowy lane in the dusk.

It was an easy walk into the village by the short cut. But the short cut was very gloomy and sombre under the wintry trees. Some of the juniors looked about them uneasily into the shadows.

"I say, have you heard about that awful ruffian who has been hanging about this wood?" Mellish remarked. "He half killed a boy from the Grammar School, I hear."

"Oh, rats!" said Gore uneasily. "We shan't meet him!"

"We might. This is just the place—"

"Well, I suppose there are enough of us to tackle him!" said Gore valiantly. "A dozen of us are not going to run from one man, I suppose!"

"Oh, he's an awful ruffian! He carries a cudgel, and he might break your cokerut with a blow. No good—Oh dear, what's that?"

It was a rustle in the frozen thickets.

The party stopped still, and knees began to knock together. If Tom Merry had been there he would have inspired the rest with his own courage. But Gore was not the kind of leader to do that. His teeth were chattering like castanets.

"Wha-wha-wha-what is it?" he stammered. "Wha-wha-wha—"

A burly figure leaped out into the footpath.

"Stop! Run, and I'll brain you! Hold on there!"

It was a hoarse, savage cry. The juniors stood shivering with terror. Mellish and two or three others, who were in the rear, started off at a pace they had never shown on the cinder path, helter-skelter back towards the road. Gore would have run with the rest, but in his terror his foot caught in a root and he sprawled on the ground. He was too terrified to rise, and he lay there palpitating, in horrid anticipation of the cracking blow of the bludgeon.

He shrieked with fear as a rough hand grasped him and dragged him to his feet. His terrified eyes fell upon the burly ruffian, and no one else. The rest of the juniors were scampering down the path like frightened hares. Gore was alone with the terror of the countryside.

The evil face under the close-drawn fur cap was grinning with contemptuous amusement. Gore was evidently a victim of a very different calibre from that of Tom Merry!

The ruffian shook him till his teeth rattled.

"Hand me over your money, quick, afore I brain you!" Gore trembled.

"I—I haven't any! I—I—!" The lie leapt to his lips by instinct; with cowardice the instinct to lie is usually found. "I—I haven't a shilling!"

He had nearly seven pounds in his pockets, and the thought of losing it made him almost desperate. But he did not dare to struggle. The heavy bludgeon in the ruffian's hand scared him too much for that. If a lie could save his money—

Taking Ways!



But it could not. The ruffian did not speak again, but threw the junior to the ground, and went through his pockets with grim thoroughness. Probably Gore's manner had betrayed the fact that he had money about him. The boy gave a groan as he heard the rascal utter an exclamation of satisfaction. Silver coins glittered on the snow as the robber turned the cash out of his victim's pocket.

Six currency notes and a quantity of silver rewarded the ruffian. He must have been amazed to find so much money in the possession of a boy of Gore's age, but how Gore had come by it mattered little to him. He thrust it into an inside pocket of his coat, and Gore's watch and chain followed it. Then the ruffian rose.

He seemed inclined to kick the shivering junior, out of sheer brutality, but perhaps his unexpected haul had mollified his savage temper somewhat. He stood glaring down at him for a moment, and then turned away and plunged into the wood.

Not until the crackling of branches had died away in the underwood, and silence reigned once more, did Gore venture to move. Then he slowly rose to his feet, and, with a fearful glance round him, set off as fast as his legs could carry him.

The gloom, the loneliness of the wood, added to his terror. In every rustle he heard the returning footsteps of the ruffian, in every moving shadow he saw the upraised bludgeon. He was panting with exhaustion and fear as he reached the stile at last, and clambered over it into Rylcombe Lane. Dim forms loomed up before him and round him then, and to his tormenting imagination they seemed all savage foes. He fell on his knees in the snow.

"Mercy! Mercy! I—"

"My hat!" said a well-known voice. "It's Gore!"

It was the voice of Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 9.

The Fall of the Ambitious!

TOM MERRY stared at the form in his amazement. Gore staggered to his feet, red with shame. Tom Merry & Co. were before him in the dim and misty lane, and the ruffian of the wood was probably a mile away.

"What on earth's the matter, Gore?" asked Tom Merry. "Have you gone right off your rocker, or is this a little joke?"

"I—I have been robbed!"

The chums were all interest at once.

"Who's robbed you?" asked Figgins quickly. "And where? Get it out, man, and we may be able to nab the scoundrel!"

"It's the ruffian who's been lurking about the wood for weeks, I believe!" stammered Gore, his terror not quite gone yet. "He attacked us in the wood as we were taking the short cut to Rylcombe. I stood up to him, while the others ran away."

There was a general cackle from nine.

"Yaas, wathah! I think I can see you doin' that, Gore, deah boy," Arthur Augustus remarked. "I know it is not polite to doubt a gentleman's word, my deah fellow, but weally you must not put so gweat a stwain on our credulity."

"Come, let's have the facts, Gore," said Tom Merry. "We'll go after the rascal, and we may be able to collar him."

"He had hold of me!" said Gore sullenly. "I couldn't get away. He knocked me about something awful, and took all my money."

"You don't seem much hurt, and you were running pretty hard, too," remarked Blake. "I fear that you are erring on the side of exaggeration again, Gore. Take warning in time, and—"

"Oh, shut up! I tell you he's got all my money—over seven pounds—and I've got nothing left!" said Gore savagely.

"Hard cheese!" agreed Blake. "We'll see if we can get it back for you. I suppose he's still in the wood?"

"He went into the wood after robbing me."

"Come on, kids!" said Tom Merry briskly. "This is the chance we want. Will you show us where you last saw him, Gore?"

Gore hesitated.

"Come, you won't get hurt, with nine of us to protect you!" exclaimed Monty Lowther contemptuously. "My word! And that's the chap who wants to be leader of the School House!"

"I'll come," said Gore.

And the juniors crossed the stile and penetrated into the darkness of the wood.

Tom Merry was in high hopes. It could not have been

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more than a few minutes since the robbery had taken place, and there was plenty of snow on the ground to retain tracks. The difficulty was the darkness. Tom had a lantern with him, but if he lighted it the glimmer of its light through the wood would be a warning to the outcast.

"Here you are," said Gore, shivering a little as he halted under the trees where the ruffian had appeared.

"This is the place."

"Which way did he go?"

Gore pointed it out. Tom Merry anxiously scanned the ground for tracks.

"You can cut off to the school, Gore," said Figgins, with a wave of the hand. "You're too brave for this sort of thing. You'd put us all into the shade if danger arose."

"Oh, I'm going!" said Gore. "I'll bet you would cut and run sharp enough if you saw the fellow, anyway. There were twelve of us—"

"Yes, but they were mostly rotters, like your noble self," Lowther observed. "We'll get back your money if we can. My hat! I wonder how long it will take you to tumble off your perch if you don't get it back!"

Gore was wondering, too. He scowled and set off towards the school. The juniors hunted for tracks under the snowy bushes, but the light was too dim.

"Better have the lantern," said Manners. "No good groping round here in the dark like this, you know. It's like being in a giddy dark-room without a red lamp!"

Tom Merry lighted the lantern. Eagerly the juniors scanned the snow in the glimmering rays. The tracks were



The ruffian tripped over an outstretched foot and fell heavily, but in vain, for the boys were too quick for him.

found, and the hunters followed them like hounds on the scent. They led towards the heart of the wood, and it was soon evident that the ruffian had returned to the old hut.

Tom Merry halted and blew out the lantern.

"Hallo! What does that mean, Merry?" asked Blake.

"We were getting along nicely."

"We've found out enough," said Tom Merry. "We know that the rascal has gone back to the old hut now, and it's no good going there and finding what we've found before—that he's disappeared without leaving a trace behind. You see, if he's on the watch, as he may be, and spots us tracking him with a lantern, it may spoil our chance to-morrow afternoon, when the hunt begins."

"That's true enough," agreed Blake.

"We shall have a better chance of discovering the truth to-morrow in the daylight. We don't want to put him on his guard. He evidently lives in that secret den of his, wherever it is, and goes out when he thinks it's safe, to steal food and drink, and to rob people in the lanes. But if he got a scare he might clear out of the district all of a sudden, and we should only have our hunt for our pains."

"My dear kid, you talk like a picture-book. Let's hurry back to school."

"Yaas, wathah! It has just occurred to me that we shall be locked out if we do not return to St. Jim's immediately, deah boys!"



and as he fell nine juniors sprawled over him. He fought
Gore had him securely held!

And the juniors took the homeward route.

Tom Merry's reasoning was good; they had discovered enough to confirm their previous theory, and it was not wise to spoil the chance of success by undue haste.

They arrived at St. Jim's just in time to escape being locked out, and separated to go to their respective Houses.

As the School House boys came in they met Gore, who was looking very white and worried.

He came up to them eagerly.

"Have you found my money?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I knew you wouldn't!" exclaimed Gore savagely. "I knew you were only gassing. I knew you'd come back and say you could not do it."

"My dear chap, I know it's a great loss, but the money may turn up. We're going to have another try to-morrow."

"Oh, rats! No more gas, please!"

Tom Merry's good right hand half rose, but he let it fall to his side again. He was patient, and Gore had really cause to be exasperated by the loss of so much money, and with it his prestige at St. Jim's.

The chums walked on, and Gore was left standing alone. Mellish sidled up to him, with a curious expression upon his face.

"I say, Gore, is it true about—"

The bully of the Shell turned upon him savagely.

"Is it true about what?"

"About your losing your money," said Mellish, receding a pace. "I hear that you've lost all your tin—all the rest of that ten-pound note."

"Yes, so I have. All through you cowards running away and leaving me to tackle that beastly ruffian alone."

"Oh, I don't suppose you stayed of your own accord!" said Mellish. "We couldn't be expected to stick there and get brained, could we? I say, I'm sorry. Did he take all your money?"

"Yes, and my watch and chain, too."

"Then you're stony?"

"Simply on the rocks, unless my money turns up again."

Mellish chuckled softly.

"That's not likely to happen, if the local police have to deal with the matter. They couldn't catch a tame mouse. I'm afraid you'll never see your tin again, Gore."

Gore was sullenly silent. He was afraid so, too.

"But, I say, what about the feed?" said Mellish. "We came back to the school without it, you know. It's rather rough on us."

"What's rather rough on you?" asked Gore, clenching his right fist.

Mellish kept a wary eye on that fist as he went on talking.

"Why, you see, you asked us all to a feed, and it hasn't come off. It's rather rough on us to have to miss it, that's all, after being invited."

"How can I stand a feed if I'm broke?" scowled Gore.

"I don't know. That's not my business. I know that you asked us all, and that it hasn't come off. I dare say you could get tick at the tuckshop. Dame Taggles knows you had a ten-pound note this week, so she'll trust you soon enough, if you yarn something about leaving your money in your locker, or something of that sort. She doesn't know anything about the robbery; she'd let it go to a pound or two."

Gore gritted his teeth.

"And you think I'm going to run into debt and tell lies to Dame Taggles for the sake of feeding you, after you ran away and left me in the lurch?" he demanded.

"Oh, you can put it like that if you like! You ought to keep your word. You won't get much of a following in the School House if you don't."

Gore had known upon how insecure a foundation his new popularity rested. But it wasn't pleasant to be reminded of it, especially at such a moment!

His right hand came up. Mellish, who was on the lookout, dodged. But Gore was too quick for him. His right-hand caught Mellish in the eye, and the Fourth-Former went crashing to the floor.

"There's something for you, anyway," said Gore, and he stalked away.

Mellish sat up, rubbing his eye ruefully. Blake, who was glancing down the stairs, gave a chuckle.

"Trouble in the camp already?" he remarked. "I thought that Gore & Co. would last just as long as Gore's ten-pound note, and I was right, as usual."

CHAPTER 10.

Gore Gets into Debt!

GORE had certainly gone up like a rocket, and come down like the stick. Mellish was not the only one of his followers to show up in his true colours in the hour of adversity. Gore found that most of the others were the same.

It was rather a blow to Gore. He had spent a portion of his famous ten-pound note in treating his party, and he had lost the rest through taking them out for a feed. It was rather hard that he should fall from his high estate in consequence.

The smiles of the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 irritated him most of all.

He knew that the chums had anticipated his fall, and Gore, feeling very small indeed, turned over desperately in his mind devices for regaining his lost position.

His followers had not actually admitted that they were done with him because his money had run out. People, of

whatever age, seldom deal so frankly with their consciences. Gore's followers took up the position that they had been invited to a feed, and had not received that feed. Gore had broken his word, and they were done with him.

If only for the sake of keeping up a show in the eyes of the chums, Gore would have done anything to regain his position. And in this strait, Mellish's suggestion appealed to him.

Dame Taggles knew nothing about the robbery. The Head had been told, and he had telephoned to the police, that was all. Mrs. Taggles would not hesitate to trust a customer whom she had seen so recently in possession of a ten-pound note. It would be easy for Gore to run up a bill, if he chose. As for paying—well, his money might be recovered, or something might turn up.

Gore, in the mood of a drowning man catching at straws, decided to try it on.

"I say, Walsh," he remarked, meeting that young gentleman in the passage later on. "I—"

That morning Walsh had been overpoweringly civil to Gore. Now he looked at him coolly, and said:

"Rats!"

Gore controlled his temper with difficulty. He caught Blake's eyes on him from a distance, and he could not afford to quarrel with Walsh.

"I say, Walsh," he remarked, "will you come into the tuckshop?"

Walsh gave a start.

"Eh? What's that?" he asked, with renewed interest.

"It's that feed, you know," said Gore carelessly. "It hasn't come off yet."

"I thought it wasn't coming off at all," said Walsh suspiciously.

"Did you? What rot! Fetch the other chaps, and join

me in Dame Taggles' shop, and I'll show you," said Gore. "You can leave Mellish out. I've had enough of him."

"I say, it's all right—no rotting?"

"Yes, of course!" said Gore irritably.

"But I thought you had been robbed. Mellish said you were absolutely stony."

"Mellish says all sorts of things. If you believe them all—"

"Oh, I don't!" said Walsh, convinced at last. "I'll come with pleasure. I'll join you in a jiffy."

Gore walked away to Dame Taggles' little shop, which was kept within the precincts of St. Jim's. The good dame came to serve him, beaming with smiles. Gore had wasted a great deal of money there already on more or less wholesome diet, and the dame thought there were yet more harvests to reap.

"I've got a little party coming in for a feed, Mrs. Taggles," said Gore airily, feeling in his pockets. "Set out the best you've got. I say, did I leave a fiver here to-day?"

"No, Master Gore."

"H'm! I've left it somewhere. Never mind, you know I've got the money, don't you? And you can trust me till presently?" said Gore, laughing.

"Certainly, Master Gore," said Dame Taggles, who knew that there must be a considerable portion of the ten-pound note left. "With pleasure, Master Gore."

The fellows came in, curious to know what was going to happen. The feed was there right enough, and they were soon enjoying themselves. Gore jumped back into popularity at a bound. He liked being toadied to, and he had his fill of it now.

Tom Merry happened to look into the tuckshop later, and he was surprised by what he saw. A dozen or fifteen juniors, all looking extremely well fed, were toasting Gore with hot drinks.

"Here's to the new junior captain of the School House!" exclaimed Walsh.

And the toast was drunk with enthusiasm.

"My hat! Gore seems to be going up again," Tom Merry remarked. "I wonder what's in the wind now? Perhaps those fellows are a bit better than we thought them."

"Perhaps," said Monty Lowther, "and perhaps not. I think I know a rotten toady when I see one. I dare say Gore's running up a bill. They're not treating him, I'll bet Manners' camera on that."

Gore caught sight of Tom Merry and his chums looking in. He called out to them in his usual insolent manner:

"I say, you fellows! You can come in and have a tart or two if you like. And some ginger-pop, if you like to drink to the new School House junior captain."

"Rats!" said the Terrible Three, with one voice, and they walked away.

"Oh, let them go!" said Walsh, with a sniff. "Tom Merry's no good. He seems to be in a perpetual state of stony broke now. I stick to Gore!"

"So do we all!"

"He's a jolly good fellow!"

"And so say all of us!"

And George Gore beamed upon his faithful followers, and tasted the joys of being an important personage once more. All the time, however, an uneasy feeling was troubling him inwardly as he saw Dame Taggles' little bill mounting up. Unless his money was recovered from the thief he would certainly never be able to pay it, and what likelihood was there of the cash being returned? Very little!

So Gore's triumph was not a happy one. Meanwhile, the Terrible Three had more important things to think about than the amount of "side" that George Gore chose to put on. They had preparations to make for the morrow.

Not a word had been said in the school so far of the projected hunt. The nine juniors looked eagerly forward to the Saturday. It dawned at last, a wet, thawy morning, with the snow melting in the quadrangle, and dripping down from roof to gutter, and the trees and bushes weeping.

Tom Merry made a grimace as he looked out of the dormitory window to see what kind of morning it was.

"What's it like?" asked Manners sleepily.

"Rotten!" said Tom cheerfully. "Wet as the bottom of a river. There won't be any tracking in the beastly snow to-day. Never mind. I suppose we were bound to have a thaw sooner or later, and I dare say it won't last."

Morning lessons were a bore to the juniors. They were over at last, and the nine amateur detectives were free to leave the school.

They strolled out of St. Jim's. Considering the state the ground was in, football was impossible, and so their going excited no particular remark.

As they strolled down Rylcombe Lane a man in a keeper's rough jacket and gaiters came towards them, and signed them to stop.

Tom Merry politely stopped to speak to him, and uttered

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an exclamation of amazement. Under the keeper's cap the face of Ferrers Locke was looking at him.

"Mr. Locke!"

The detective smiled at his astonishment.

"Yes, I knew you would come this way. The hunt will be commencing in another hour. You know what to do. You are to keep a watch upon the hut; but, mind, without tackling the ruffian if you see him."

Tom Merry did not reply to that remark. He had written the previous evening to Ferrers Locke detailing the extent of the discoveries already made.

"What you told me in your letter has confirmed my theory," went on the detective. "The rascal has some secret den under the old hut, but the strictest search has failed to reveal it. It can only be discovered by watching him in the act of using it. That is what I want you to do."

"We'll do our best, sir."

"I know you will. Good luck, and mind that you keep out of danger. In case of accidents, take this whistle. A blast upon it will bring help to the spot, and there will be a score of keepers in the wood in the next hour."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom Merry, taking the whistle.

The detective nodded and entered the wood again. The juniors tramped on down the sloshy lane towards the stile.

"It promises to be exciting," said Figgins gleefully. "We don't want to disregard orders, of course, but really I think there are enough of us to collar the brute if we came upon him, cudgel or no cudgel."

"Yaas, wathah! After his bwutal conduct we shall be fully justified in tweatin' him with wuffness, and although I depwecate violence as a wule, I considah that that wascal deserves to have a feahful thwashin'."

"And he'll get it if he resists us," declared Blake, giving his stick a twirl. "He had better look out, that's all."

The juniors reached the stile and entered the footpath. They turned off through the wood towards the old hut, and now they proceeded with great caution. As Tom Merry had said, there would be no tracking in the snow that day. The snow was thawing everywhere, and the branches and twigs were dripping with water.

Arthur Augustus wriggled painfully as a spatter of water from a shaken branch found its way down the back of his neck. But he bore it manfully. His clothes were getting terribly ruffled and soiled, but he bore that, too, without complaint.

Tom Merry halted at last. The old hut was visible among the trees, and in the daylight it was easy to see into it through the apertures, and he saw it was empty.

After making sure of that, the juniors advanced again and stopped within the walls of the ancient building where, somewhere beyond their ken, lay the mysterious hiding-place of the rascal they sought.

CHAPTER 11.

The Capture.

TOM MERRY was looking very reflective. He had signed to the juniors to tread lightly, and they had not made a sound in the old hut.

"What's the game, Tom?" Monty Lowther asked, in a whisper.

"We've got to watch the hut. The hiding-place may be inside it or close to it. But I fancy the rascal had some means of telling whether the hut is occupied before he ventures out, for he has been watched for here. You fellows had better hide in the trees, in a cordon round the hut."

"And you?" asked Blake.

"I was thinking of getting on the roof here," said Tom Merry, nodding towards the gap overhead. "You see that tree hides it, and I should be pretty safe there."

"You'll find it jolly cold."

"Can't be helped."

"Will it bear your weight, do you think?" Lowther asked, looking very doubtfully at the flimsy structure.

"Yes, I think so. It wouldn't bear a man; but I'm not a heavyweight, you know."

"It's a good idea, if you can stick it out," said Blake.

"But you may be there for hours, and then—"

"Oh, I shall stick it out all right!"

"Then it's a go!"

Lowther and Manners hoisted Tom Merry up, and he was soon crawling out upon the broken, tottering roof of the hut.

It shook a little as he moved, but it held, and Tom thought that it would bear him.

The branches of the overhanging tree drooped round him, and, though they were bare of foliage, they afforded a pretty effectual cover.

"All right, Tommy?"

"All right," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Get into cover, kids—it's near the time Ferrers Locke will begin."

The talk had been in low whispers. The juniors left the hut as silently as they had entered it, and soon found cover in the weeping bushes. It was uncomfortable work, but there was nothing soft about the juniors of St. Jim's. They had been through worse experiences than that.

Tom Merry remained on the watch. He soon found it extremely cold on his perch. The snow had melted off the sloping roof, but it had left it damp and chilly, and the bare branches round Tom were dripping with moisture. He shivered several times, but he did not think of giving in.

Again and again the chime of the village clock floated to his ears over the wintry woods. An hour, and then another half.

Tom Merry was chilly and cramped, but his pluck was as good as ever. He waited and watched, his eyes on the gap which gave a view of the hut below.

Suddenly he started. The roof shook as he did so, and, warned by that, he remained quite still. But his heart was beating hard.

There was a sound in the deserted hut below him.

He strained his eyes into the shadows below. They nearly started from his head as he saw a huge flagstone in the floor swing, apparently of its own accord, and stand on end. The stone was of huge dimensions, and, as one end turned up, Tom noticed that the other end sank down. It evidently moved upon a pivot. The stone was more than a foot thick, and partly narrowed at the end to allow it free play.

Tom Merry's heart beat fast. He understood now. This was some secret of the old priory which had once stood upon the spot.

The ruffian of Castle Wood had probably discovered it by chance, or he might have been a native of the neighbourhood at one time, and learned it long ago, and now remembered it and put it to use.

The stone rose on end, and an evil, unshaven face, with a dirty fur cap over it, rose into view.

Tom Merry drew his head quickly back from the gap. He had seen enough, and he did not wish to risk betraying his presence.

He heard footfalls below. The ruffian left the hut, and plunged into the wood.

Tom Merry saw that he had a large can in his hand, and he guessed that he was going to the spring for water. The spring was a good quarter of a mile from the old hut.

The rascal disappeared, and Tom Merry dropped from the roof into the hut.

His face was blazing with excitement now.

He had discovered the secret. He bent and examined the stone. It did not move to his touch, and evidently there was some way of blocking it which the ruffian knew.

Tom Merry stepped to the door of the hut, and waved his hand.

The juniors were watching keenly. Figgins came into view, and then the others, one by one, and in a few minutes they were gathered in the hut.

"Keep out of sight," whispered Tom Merry. "You saw him go, I suppose?"

Blake and Figgins had seen the ruffian. The rest had been watching different points.

They were all eager to know what the hero of the Shell had learned.

Tom Merry quickly explained.

"My hat!" said Blake. "Who'd have thought it?"

"I did," said Figgins. "You remember I said—"

"My dear Figgins, if I remembered all you have said I should have a brain-box full of silly rot—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry. "Is this a time for ragging?"

"Wathah not!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "This is a time for prompt action."

"Look here," said Tom Merry quickly. "Ferrers Locke and his men are beating the woods for that rascal, and they're pretty certain to fall in with him, or at all events to frighten him back to his lair."

"That's certain."

"He'll come back to his hiding-place as soon as he sees he's being hunted for. He'll find us all here, ready to pounce upon him. That's my idea."

"And a jolly good idea, too," said Blake heartily.

"You see, if he gets down under that pivoting stone he may be able to fix it from below—and there's pretty certain to be other outlets somewhere to the vaults underneath," said Tom Merry. "He mustn't pass the stone, that's all."

"Good enough! I dare say Ferrers Locke will agree that it was the only thing to be done if he were here," said Lowther. "As he isn't, we must act upon our own judgment."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then get back into the shadows here. He won't see us. He's bound to rush right in and go for the revolving stone, and then we can pile on him—"

"And collar him beautifully. Good! Hallo! Hark!"

There was a sound of a distant shout ringing through the wintry woods.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"They're after him already."

Another shout, and the ringing blast of a whistle.

"That's Ferrers Locke!"

The juniors of St. Jim's listened with almost painful eagerness. The crashing of thickets before a hurried runner came to their ears, and then the pounding of heavy footsteps.

The footsteps, swift and sharp, were coming right towards the old hut.

"He's coming!"

"Ready!"

The juniors crouched back into the dim shadows of the hut on either side of the doorway.

Nearer and nearer came the heavy footfalls, and now they could hear the laboured breathing of the runner.

From the distance another shout rang.

A burly form, an evil face under a fur cap, loomed in the doorway of the hut. The ruffian, panting, dashed in, and threw himself towards the revolving stone.

"Collar him!"

A yell and a rush of feet. The ruffian tripped over an outstretched foot and fell headlong, and as he fell nine juniors sprawled all over him.

With a terrible curse he strove to rise.

Tom Merry grasped him and held him down, and the juniors, in spite of his struggles, seized him by the limbs and clothing, and he was pinned down fast.

"Got him!"

"Let me go! Let me—let me go!"

"Not half!"

Tom Merry released one hand, and put the whistle to his lips. He blew a loud and clear blast which rang far through the woods.

It was answered by the detective's whistle and a ringing shout.

"They're coming!"

The ruffian heard the words, and he renewed his struggles.

**"The
Captives
of
Crag
House!"**



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Although the odds were so heavy against him, he was so powerful and so desperate that he nearly succeeded in getting loose. But the juniors were on their mettle, too, and they piled on him, and bore him down by sheer weight.

He gasped and collapsed, and after that his struggles were feeble, though it still continued.

The sound of footsteps could now be heard approaching the hut, and Tom Merry looked up to the door.

Ferrers Locke looked in.

"Ah, I see you have him!"

"Nothing else to be done, sir," said Tom Merry. "It was that, or let him escape. There's a secret way down here under the flags."

The detective nodded.

"I'm afraid I should have been angry if any of you had been hurt," he said. "However, all's well that ends well."

He stooped, and clinked the handcuffs on the wrists of the vainly writhing ruffian. He looked at the bearded face, and gave a nod.

"I thought so. Ben the Puncher. I thought as much."

"You'd—you'd never have caught me!" gasped the prisoner. "It was these imps—"

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"Yes, I owe a great deal to them," he remarked. "But you won't trouble the world again for some time to come, friend Ben. And now we have you, you may as well show us the way into that den of yours, as we want the loot, too."

"Find it!"

"We shall soon do that," said Ferrers Locke cheerfully. He turned to the keepers, who were gleefully crowding into the hut.

"Take him away, men! He's the right man!"

The ruffian disappeared in the grip of three or four sturdy fellows. There was no more hope for him. The prison he richly deserved awaited him. He would not, as the detective said, trouble the world again for some years to come.

Ferrers Locke shook hands with Tom Merry.

"You've done well, Merry!" he exclaimed. "And so have the rest. You have succeeded, though you have done more than I bargained for. I am getting a very decent reward for the part I have taken in this case, though I shall not receive it just yet, but that is no reason why I shouldn't hand over your share at once."

The juniors looked at one another.

"You understand," said Ferrers Locke, "that this does not come from me. I should not insult you by offering to pay for friendly help. It is simply your share of the reward to which you are more than entitled. You need have no scruples whatever about taking it. I give you my word about that."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry, speaking for the rest. "We know we can trust to you, and, as a matter of fact," he went on frankly, "the tin will come in very useful, as we're all stony broke."

The detective smiled.

"I'm glad that you will be benefited by it, at all events," he said.

And he counted out nine pound notes and nine shillings in silver, and each of the juniors found himself richer by a guinea.

CHAPTER 12.

Just Like Tom.

TOM MERRY and his friends returned to St. Jim's a little later in high spirits. They were laughing and talking gaily as they came into the ancient gateway of the college. After the long period of famine it was a pleasure to be in funds again. After being "stony," it was enjoyable to feel that they could order what they liked in the tuckshop, and give free rein to their hospitable inclinations in standing feeds in the studies.

"We'll have a real ripping time now to make up for famishing so long," said Tom Merry. "We'll stand the first feed."

"And we'll stand the second," said Figgins.

"Right-ho!" grinned Blake. "And we'll stand the third. Then we'll start again from the beginning. I can see Fatty Wynn's eyes beginning to glitter already."

"Well, I've been starved lately," said Fatty Wynn. "I admit it's a splendid prospect, and I tell you, Merry, I shall do justice to that feed. Usual time, I suppose?"

"Yes, rather! Time to get cleaned before tea. Hallo, hallo! Gore, old chap, what's the matter with you?"

Gore was passing them, with a face set as white as chalk.

(Continued on page 24.)

YOU'LL FIND IT IN—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

GREETINGS, chums! Did you enjoy this week's fine batch of stories? Of course! And you are going to enjoy next Wednesday's GEM just as much, if not more so. The long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co., which is entitled:

"PUDDINGS AND PAINS AT ST. JIM'S!"

shows Martin Clifford in fine fettle. Figgins of the New House is responsible for the puddings and the pains, for Figgy blossoms out as a cook! I'll not let on here just what tricks he gets up to; Mr. Clifford can tell them better than I can, and it's probable that you'll get pains or aches at least through laughing so much! There will be another thrilling adventure story featuring

"THE PUNCHER PALS!"

and Owen Conquest has produced a sparkling complete tale of the Rookwood chums, entitled:

"TOM RAWSON'S ENEMY!"

You mustn't miss these topping yarns, neither must you forget to turn to our tame humorist Potts if you want another laugh. He's in next week's GEM bet your life. Now let's turn a page or two more of the notebook.

A MAN OF "METTLE"!

The X-ray apparatus has revealed some amazing things in its time, but surely none so unexpected as the two hundred and forty-seven articles which were found in the stomach of a man who was admitted to hospital recently. Among them were sixty-seven rivets, springs, one hundred and forty-six nails, twenty-three pins and needles, and two hob-nails! This jumble of metal was carefully extracted, and it is reported that the patient is making satisfactory progress. The total weight of this "iron tonic" amounted to one hundred and sixty-three grammes. How's that for a record?

IN QUEST OF TREASURE!

Yo-ho for the Spanish Main! If the dream of nine adventurous men comes true, about a year hence a thirty-ton trawler, fitted with an auxiliary engine, will sail into an English port laden with treasure and gems that have lain in the secret lairs of old-time pirates for many years. In the Spanish Main "somewhere" lies wealth beyond the wildest dreams, according to the nine adventurers reckoning. And if they fail to find this glittering prize they have a second string

to their bow, so to speak. Again, "somewhere" in the Cocos Islands it is believed that treasure worth five million pounds to be found. These treasure quests always fire the imagination, so it is not surprising that the "chosen nine" received applications from over three thousand people who wanted to give a hand in unearthing the treasure. The good ship Vigilant will make history if the voyage turns out to be as successful as her crew optimistically reckon, for in her holds, which once stored quantities of fish, will be glittering gems, doubloons, and golden pieces of eight. We wish the Vigilant and her crew "bon voyage."

THE SENTRY WHO WATCHED A ROBBERY!

It was a foggy night, or to be more correct, morning, for the time was three a.m. The sentry tramping up and down outside St. James' Palace, was doubtless wondering how long it would be before he was relieved, for a turn of sentry duty is very monotonous. The monotony in this case was relieved in a startling manner. Out of the fog suddenly appeared a car. It pulled up outside a tobacconist's shop, and from it alighted three men clad in natty evening attire, even to top-hats. But they were no gentlemen, as their subsequent actions speedily proved. One of them promptly smashed two big windows whilst his companions helped themselves liberally to large quantities of cigars and cigarettes. Then they hopped back into their car and drove off like the wind. What did the sentry do? What could he do, except pass on a description of what he had seen to a policeman. You see, military law demands that a sentry should not leave his post. It is argued that the whole raid could have been a put-up job done specially to lure him from his post. Still, it was a queer experience for that sentry, and doubtless thoughts of it will help to while away many future hours of weary sentry-go.

HEARD THIS ONE?

"Come on," said the station sergeant to a tramp who had just been arrested, "strip yourself for a bath."
"What?" exclaimed the tramp. "Me go into water?"
"Of course," replied the officer. "How long is it since you had a bath?"
"I dunno," said the tramp. "You see, I was never arrested before!"

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS A HERMIT!

Picture a dense wood near Allanford, Durham, in the heart of which is a hut

This solitary dwelling shelters a strange old man of seventy-five who has lived there for thirty-five years all on his lonesome. True he has many pets, which include two dogs, a cat, rabbits, and robins, and he's quite happy. In his hut, which he built himself, are two chairs, a small table, and a coffin! Yes, a coffin! This does duty as a sofa in the daytime and as a bed at night. The only time this old hermit comes into contact with the rest of the world is when he draws his pensions from a near-by village. For food he relies upon what he can catch in the wood, and his last Christmas dinner consisted of a rabbit. Yes, he's very happy, and he has a right to be, for certain people tried to turn him out of his lonely home and failed. The old boy simply would not go!

JUST AS COLUMBUS DID IT!

Passengers on the posh liners that speed across the Atlantic like giant greyhounds will rub their eyes and wonder whether they are dreaming if they catch a glimpse of the strange vessel *Senor Guillen* is shortly to sail across the ocean. Back into the minds of the passengers will probably flash a recollection of some old-time craft they have seen in model form in various museums, for the *senor's* craft is built on the exact lines of the *Santa Maria*. Columbus discovered the "New World" in the *Santa Maria*, so the Spanish *senor* is fitting out a ship, similar in every way and manned by thirty volunteers who will try to experience the hardships and difficulties Columbus successfully overcame. For instance, there will be only one bed, and that will be in the captain's cabin. As for modern maps and compasses they will be rigorously excluded. The objective of the second *Santa Maria* is *Santo Domingo*, and if the trip is successful a memorial, fashioned on the lines of a lighthouse, will be erected to the memory of Columbus. It's a novel stunt, for with the primitive equipment of the bygone days of 1492 sailing any distance must be a matter of great uncertainty.

A GIANT OF THE SKIES!

Did you ever see the famous German airship *Graf Zeppelin* which flew over England last August? If you did you will remember what a monster of the skies it appeared to us on the ground. Yet the *Akron*, the latest airship constructed by the Americans, is more than twice the size of the *Graf Zeppelin*, and it is claimed that she can cross the Atlantic four times without refuelling. To give her greater speed in climbing, the propellers are mounted on a swivel apparatus. This device enables the *Akron* to travel at a forward speed of eighty miles an hour whilst climbing at the rate of two thousand feet a minute. But perhaps the most novel feature about this American wonder ship is the special chamber fitted in her bows which holds as many as seven aeroplanes! The length of this monster of the skies is seven hundred and eighty-five feet, whilst her gas "capacity" is six million five hundred thousand cubic feet. So don't be surprised one day during the coming summer if you see everybody gazing up into the heavens, for it is quite probable that the *Akron* will pay this country a visit.

YOUR EDITOR

THE GEM LIBRARY, No. 1,249.

TUBBY'S WINNING GOAL!

By
OWEN CONQUEST.



CHAPTER 1. Tubby's New Role!

"GO it, Tubby!"
"On the ball!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Compulsory footer practice was in full swing on the junior pitch at Rookwood, and Cecil Adolphus Muffin—more commonly known as "Tubby"—was providing the rest of the players with entertainment, not unmingled with excitement.

The occasions when Tubby Muffin's podgy figure could be seen on the playing fields at Rookwood were limited to compulsory practice days. Though he played football but rarely, however, the Porker of the Fourth usually distinguished himself in some way or other once he did get going.

He was distinguishing himself now. He had almost scored a goal against his own side. He had made a splendid pass to the centre-forward of the other side. And now he was galloping down the field, regardless of the position of the ball, charging madly at all whom he met. The fact that most of the fellows he met were colleagues with whom he was supposed to be collaborating made not an atom of difference to Tubby—he just charged.

Down the field went Tubby, leaving behind him a trail of casualties.

From the fellows who were out of range of his elephantine gallop came a roar.

"Go it, Tubby!"
"This way for the wrong goal!"
"Skittle 'em out!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin came to a halt at last. His fat face was red and perspiring, and he looked very much the worse for wear.

"I say, you chaps!" he gasped. "Where's the ball got to?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Dashed if I can see anything to grin at!" panted the fat junior. "Gimme that ball, someone. I was getting on fine till it went. I want to show you how I can play when I really get warmed up to it, Jimmy Silver!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Thanks, Tubby! I've seen plenty already!" grinned Jimmy Silver, the junior captain of Rookwood. "Matter of fact, I was beginning to wonder whether it was football or American all-in wrestling!"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulkeley of the Sixth appeared on the touchline just then. "Time's up, you kids!" he announced. "You can pack up for to-day, though by the look of things you've been ragging instead of playing football!"

"All serene, Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver. "We just broke off for a minute to watch 'Tubby. He's worth watching!"

"I'll keep a better eye on you next time!" remarked the captain of the Sixth. "Now get in and change your clobber!"

"Right-ho, old bean!"

The footballers streamed off the field, some rubbing their limbs rather tenderly at spots which had suffered from Tubby Muffin's eccentric play.

Tubby Muffin fastened on to Jimmy Silver as they returned to the pavilion. The fat junior was looking unusually serious.

"I say, Jimmy, old chap, you noticed what brilliant form I've been showing to-day!" he remarked. "I suppose you won't hesitate now about putting me in the team for the House match?"

"Eh?"

Jimmy Silver jumped and stared at the Porker of the Fourth in sudden amazement. He had had a good many requests from Tubby Muffin in his time. Requests for loans of cash, tuck, and property flowed from Tubby's fat lips

in an unending stream. But he had never before asked to be played in the football team.

"You can't get away from it that I showed up really well to-day," went on Tubby seriously. "Candidly, you can't deny that, can you?"

"Wouldn't attempt to deny it, old chap!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "You couldn't help showing up well wherever you went. Look at your size!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! You know jolly well what I mean!" grunted the fat junior. "Look here, Jimmy, old chap, the House match comes off next Saturday. I suppose you want the Classics to win, don't you?"

"What-ho! So they will!" said Jimmy Silver genially. "Unless I'm greatly mistaken, the Moderns are in for the licking of their lives!"

"Rats!" came a derisive chorus from Tommy Dodd and a number of other Moderns who had been playing in the compulsory game.

"Well, if you want to make certain of licking the Moderns there's only one way of doing it," said Tubby Muffin, still

Tubby Muffin's far too fat,
He really is a shocker.
What are the fellows laughing at?
Oh! Tubby's playing Soccer!

sticking to the junior captain as they went into the pavilion.

"That's to play me—preferably as centre-forward."

"Jolly good idea, I think!" said Tommy Dodd heartily.

"That'll make absolutely certain of a Modern win!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows! Then it's a deal, Jimmy, is it?"

"It jolly well isn't, old son!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Look here, Tubby, what's the little game? Why do you want to play?"

"Because I'm patriotic; I want to see my House win the match!"

"My hat! Change for you to take an interest in House footer, isn't it?" asked Jimmy, with a chuckle. "Fraid it won't wash, old bean! What's the real reason?"

"Beast! That is the real reason! Of course, I'm also partly influenced by my uncle visiting Rookwood next Saturday," said Tubby, guardedly. "The pater wrote to warn me to be on my best behaviour and he mentioned that uncle is president of the National Sports League. But that's by the way!"

"Naturally!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So that's the wheeze, is it?" yelled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Tubby's uncle is a sporting man, so Tubby wants to impress him by playing for the House! In other words, we've got to lose the match so that Tubby'll get a big tip! Ye gods!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Lovell!"

"Own up, Tubby! That's the idea, isn't it?"

"Nothing of the kind!" snorted Tubby Muffin. "I want to play so as to help my House and—and lick the blessed Moderns! Now, what about it, Jimmy Silver?"

"Nothing about it, old bean!"

"Look here, you rotter—"

"It's no good, Tubby!" said Jimmy Silver patiently. "It should be an easy match for us; but goodness knows what might happen if I played you! Can't be done!"

"Then don't blame me if you get licked!" snorted Tubby. He went to his locker in the pavilion wearing a fearsome frown on his fat brow; then he turned round again suddenly.

"Look here, then, Jimmy, if I'm not to play, what about putting me down as first reserve?"

"But we shan't need a reserve, ass! Nothing's likely to happen to anyone in the team—and even if it does, there'll be plenty of fellows hanging around the pitch who'll be only too glad to turn out."

"Then in that case there's no harm in putting me down on the list, is there?" retorted Tubby. "Nunky's bound to be impressed if he sees my name on the list in the Hall—that is to say, I'm awfully anxious to have the honour of seeing my name down, even if it is only as a reserve!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All serene, then, Tubby!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "If it'll help you with your uncle, I'll put you down as first reserve."

Tubby grinned.

"Thanks awfully, old chap! Of course, it's quite understood that my motives are of the highest—"

"Oh, quite!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There the matter ended—at least, for the time being.

To Jimmy Silver there seemed no harm in writing down Tubby's name on the footer list as first reserve since no reserve would be needed. Had the junior skipper noticed the meaning looks which Tommy Dodd & Co. exchanged between themselves on hearing his decision—had he heard them later indulging in mysterious and somewhat hilarious confab in Dodd's study—he might have changed his opinion. But he didn't. And the Moderns were able to go ahead with the little plot which had germinated in Tommy Dodd's fertile brain, without having aroused the slightest suspicion among their Classical rivals.

CHAPTER 2.

Tommy Dodd's Plot!

"GOING out, old chap?"

Tommy Dodd asked that question.

The leader of the Modern juniors, with his satellites, Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook, had just run into Tubby Muffin near the gates. It was Saturday—the day of the inter-House match—and the Three Tommies were turning their steps in the direction of the playing fields. Tubby Muffin, on the other hand, was evidently going out of gates.

The fat junior eyed the three Moderns a little dubiously.

"I say, you chaps, no larks, you know! I'm going out to meet my uncle."

The Modern juniors looked quite hurt.

"Larks! As if we should play larks!" said Tommy Dodd. "Surprised at you entertaining suspicions like that, Tubby! What time does nunky arrive?"

"Two-fifteen at Coombe. I say, you chaps, I shall have to hurry, or I'll be late!"

"Plenty of time. You can get down to Coombe in ten minutes or so," said Tommy Dodd. "I suppose you'll be trotting him up to the school after that?"

"Naturally. Of course, we shall probably drop into the bunshop at Coombe, first," said Tubby thoughtfully. "Dare say nunky will feel like a snack, after the journey. Which reminds me—I happen to have run short of cash. Could one of you fellows advance me a pound till this evening?"

"Oh crikey—I mean, sorry, old chap, but we can't!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "But about this afternoon. Aren't you first reserve in the House match?"

Tubby nodded.

"Quite right; but it looks as if I shan't be needed, so there's no sense in rooting about the footer-pitch, is there? Of course, properly speaking, I ought to be playing centre-forward for the Classics this afternoon."

"H'm! Exactly!" grinned Dodd. "But suppose you're wanted, after all. Will Silver be able to get in touch with you all right?"

Tubby frowned.

"Well, I hadn't thought of that. Of course, it's unlikely, but stranger things have happened. I should like nunky to see me play."

"All the more reason for you to be on the spot in case you're needed!"

"Something in that. Blessed if I know why you Modern chaps should be so interested, though. If I did play you wouldn't stand an earthly!"

"Well, that's true!" said Tommy Cook solemnly.

"Shure, an' it's a foine old licking we'll be afther having if Tubby turns out!" remarked Tommy Doyle, in his rich, Irish brogue. "It's silly gossoons we are for warning him!"

"Never mind, we're sports; and even if it does mean defeat for us, we'll send you the word if you're needed," said Tommy Dodd heroically. "Rely on us, Tubby! Doyle's not playing, and if anything happens to one of the Classical team, he'll run down to Coombe to give you the wheeze, won't you, Doyle?"

"Shure, an' it's meself that'll be delighted!"

"Fine! Really, this is very good of you Modern fellows!" said Tubby, agreeably surprised at their unusual cordiality. "Still, I don't suppose I'll be wanted. I'm off, now. Ta-ta!"

"Bye-bye, Tubby!"

"Suppose you can't make it ten bob?" asked Tubby Muffin, turning round for a moment.

"Not even five, old bean!"

"Two, then!"

"Catch!" grinned Tommy Dodd, tossing the fat junior a shilling.

Tubby caught it, bit it, and pocketed it.

"Thanks, old chap! Let you have it back to-night!"

Then he rolled off through the gates towards Coombe village.

The Three Tommies watched him out of sight. When he had disappeared round the bend of the lane they chuckled.

"Ought to work like a charm!" said Tommy Dodd cheerfully. "Tubby's on tap now whenever he's wanted. He'll be wanted five minutes after the telegraph-boy trots in with a wire for Mornington. The Classics won't want him, possibly, but we shall!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently Tommy Dodd had developed a remarkable gift of prophecy. Some little time after, when most of the footballers were changing in the pavilion, a uniformed messenger-boy cycled up to the porter's lodge with a telegram.

Putty Grace brought the telegram in with him when he arrived at the pavilion a few minutes later.

"Wire for you, Morny!" he said, handing over the buff envelope to the dandy of the Fourth. "No trouble, I hope!"

"Dashed if I know who's wirin' me to-day!" exclaimed Mornington, in some surprise. He slit open the envelope and read the telegram, then whistled. "Phew!"

"Something the matter, Morny?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Nothin' the matter, ol' bean, if it comes to that," replied Mornington, rubbing his chin in perplexity. "But it's dashed awkward. My Cousin Phil has turned up at Bagshot an' wants me to meet him this afternoon."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Rotten!"

"You won't be able to do it, Morny!" exclaimed Lovell. "We shall need you on the wing in the House match."

"Dare say you will, ol' chap! But it's a little awkward. Phil's been abroad for some time, as I've probably told you. Look pretty rotten if I don't turn up."

"Wire him and ask him to come here," suggested Jimmy Silver.

"How can I? I haven't the faintest notion where he's staying. The wire simply asks me to meet him under the clock at Bagshot Station."

Jimmy Silver frowned.

"Well, we won't like to be without you, Morny; but after all, it's not like an inter-school game. If you don't want to disappoint your cousin, I'll release you for the afternoon and you can go along."

"Thanks, Jimmy! I wouldn't have gone unless you'd actually offered, but I think I'd better trot along, under the circumstances. You'll get someone to take my place easily enough."

"Difficulty'll be to keep 'em back!" smiled Jimmy Silver. "Dickinson's the man for the job, I fancy. Where's Dickinson?"

"Ready and waiting!" answered that junior cheerfully, putting his head round the door of the changing-room. "Want me to play then?"

"Just that!"

"Good!"

And Dickinson, very glad of the opportunity, joined the rest of the players in the changing-room.

There was still a quarter of an hour to go before the kick-off.

Tommy Dodd, who was by this time changed and ready for the game, saw to it that that interval was not wasted. As soon as Mornington was definitely out of the game, the Modern leader slipped out of the pavilion.

Tommy Doyle, who was not playing in the Modern team, was waiting outside. He glanced up inquiringly at his leader.

"Phwat's the news, Tommy?"

"So far, so good!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "Morny's fallen for my wire, and Dickinson has been given his place. Apparently they've forgotten their first reserve."

"Faith, an' I don't blame 'em!"

"Now, it's up to you," went on the Modern leader. "You've got to get Muffin up here before the kick-off, or it'll be too late. Got your bike handy?"

"Shure, an' there it is behind yez!"

"Ride down to Coombe like the dickens, then, and get Tubby up here in time to claim his place in the Classical team!"

"Lave it to me!" grinned the Irish junior.

A moment later he was in the saddle, pedalling down to the gates like the wind.

CHAPTER 3.

Tubby Insists!

"UNCLE JAMES! How are you, nunky?"

Thus Tubby Muffin, as he extended a flabby palm to the lean, cadaverous individual who had just passed the barrier into the tiny waiting-room at Coombe Station.

The lean, cadaverous individual appraised Tubby from under his shaggy eyebrows, and eventually nodded his head.

"Good-afternoon! You are my nephew, Cecil Adolphus, I presume?"

"That's me, nunky!" assented Tubby cheerfully. "I recognised you at once, though it's years ago when I last saw you. I remembered the skinny face you always had, and the beaky nose!"

"What?"

"I mean, I remembered you by your strikingly handsome appearance, uncle!" corrected Tubby hastily, realising that he was putting his foot in it. "I suppose you can see a difference in me?"

Uncle James compressed his lips.

"I can. You have grown very fat, Cecil Adolphus."

"Oh, really, nunky! Well covered, perhaps—hardly skinny," admitted Tubby Muffin, with a frown. "But not fat! That's not the right word at all! Where shall we go now? I suppose you feel peckish after your journey?"

"I do not feel 'peckish,' as you term it," was Uncle James reply to his nephew's ingenuous suggestion. "I had lunch on the main line train before I changed to the local line. Let us proceed to your school."

Tubby's mouth dropped a little.

"Look here, uncle! You can surely do with a snack now you've finished travelling? I was just going to suggest dropping into the bunshop over the road."

"You are very thoughtful; but I assure you I do not require a snack."

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Tubby frowned. Uncle James seemed to be a particularly hard nut to crack.

"I—well, then, uncle, as a matter of fact, I was thinking of calling in for a snack myself!" the fat junior blurted out almost desperately. "I get awfully peckish myself at times, going in for sports so much, you know."

Uncle James started a little.

"Ah! So you go in for sports a lot, do you?"

Tubby nodded eagerly. He felt he had got Uncle James where he lived now.

"Yes, rather! Why, I'm one of the best all-rounders at Rookwood!" he said. "I should have been playing for my House at footer to-day, but as you were coming, I got them, much against their will, to put me down as reserve player instead. Even now I may still be called on."

"Indeed!" remarked Uncle James, entirely failing, much to Tubby's disappointment, to register any manifestations of warm approval. "And because of your sporting activities, you find it necessary to pay a visit to the bunshop! Go, by all means, my boy, if it is necessary. I will wait outside for you!"

"Eh?" ejaculated Tubby.

"Go in and get your snack. I do not mind waiting for you!"

"M-m-m-my hat!" mumbled the fat junior.

The idea that Uncle James would suggest waiting outside while he went in for a snack had not previously occurred to him. It was an idea for which Tubby could summon up no enthusiasm whatever. Going in on his own meant that he would have to pay, and as his resources were limited to the shilling which Tommy Dodd had bestowed on him, the quantity of tuck he could obtain offered but very small inducement to a fellow with an appetite like Tubby's.

"Don't keep me waiting too long!" said Uncle James.

Tubby gulped.

"On consideration, nunky, perhaps I'm not so hungry, after all!" he said. "I'll come along with you. Shall we have a cab?"

"It seems an unnecessary expense, Cecil; but if you consider the journey justifies it, I am agreeable!"

So they had a cab.

It was just as they were climbing into it that Tommy Doyle came on the scene. The lad from the Emerald Isle dismounted breathlessly from his bike and respectfully "capped" the visitor.

"Excuse me, sorr, but it's important!" he gasped.

"Tubby, me bhoy, it's yerself that they're wanting in the match!"

Tubby Muffin's eyes opened wide.

"Me? What's happened, then?"

"Mornington's called away, so, as first reserve, they'll naturally want yez to play for your House," explained Tommy Doyle. "Ye've no time to lose if ye're to be there for the kick-off!"

Tubby grinned. It was just the chance he could have wished for. Once this hard-baked uncle of his saw his nephew on the footer field, battling for his House, he would relent. As president of the National Sports League, the very least he could do at the conclusion of the game would be to hand Tubby a "five" as a mark of his appreciation.

Tubby turned eagerly to Uncle James.

"I'm wanted, after all, uncle, you see," he said. "I thought it would be a wonder if they could get on without me, the chaps rely on me so much in footer, you know! You won't mind if I turn out for the House, will you?"

The visitor's cadaverous face seemed to harden a little.

"Do you want to turn out for your House?" he asked.

"Why, of course! A sportsman like me naturally feels like answering the call when it comes!" grinned Tubby. "I'd very much like you to see me!"

"Then in that case do so!" growled Tubby's uncle. "I will watch you!"

"Thanks, uncle! You'll enjoy it!" said Tubby enthusiastically. "Go ahead, cabby! We're in a hurry!"

The old cabby whipped up his horse, and they rolled away in the direction of Rookwood, Tommy Doyle following on his bike, beaming.

And so it came about that a minute or so before the time fixed for the kick-off in the House match at Rookwood, Tubby Muffin burst into the pavilion on the junior playing field and grabbed Jimmy Silver excitedly by the arm.

"Just in time, old chap!" he gasped. "I'll be changed in half a jiffy!"

Jimmy Silver blinked.

"Changed? You—you mean for footer?"

"What else?" grinned Tubby. "I dare say you began to give me up. But I wouldn't let the House down—not me!"

"But—but Dickinson's playing!" stuttered the Classical House leader. "We shan't want you, after all, Tubby!"

Tubby Muffin paused in the act of taking off his boot.

"You won't want me, did you say? Well, that's what I

call ingratitude, Jimmy Silver, after the fearful trouble I've taken to get here! Anyway, whether you want me or not, I'm going to play. I've told my uncle I'm turning out for the Classics, and I'm jolly well going to do it!"

"But you can't—you mustn't!"
Tubby still continued to change.

"I like that!" he sniffed. "Didn't you put me down on the list as first reserve?"

"I did; but—"

"Well, then, that's good enough for me!" said Tubby. "Morny's been called away, I hear, and you're a man short. I automatically take his place!"

"Sounds fair enough to me!" remarked Tommy Dodd, who was standing near. "In the Modern House, when we put a man down as first reserve, we mean him to act as first reserve. But I suppose you don't reckon to keep your word always in the Classical House, Silver?"

"You—you—"

"I'll stand down, Silver, if it'll help you!" growled Dickinson. "It'll probably mean you'll lose the game; but it's quite true that you put Tubby down as first reserve, and if he feels like claiming the privilege, it's only right that you should give him Morny's place."

Tubby was soon prominent. The ball came to him from a Modern player and Tubby kicked out wildly, sending the ball glancing off his foot at a tangent almost into the Classical goal.

Fortunately it just missed. But it meant a corner kick for the Moderns, and from that corner kick Tommy Dodd was able to take a beautiful "header" that sent the ball spinning just under the bar.

"Goal!"

It was first blood to the Moderns.

The players lined up again, many expressive glances being turned in Tubby Muffin's direction.

Jimmy Silver kicked off once more, and the Classics attacked strongly. The ball came to Kit Erroll, who was taking Mornington's place at outside-left, and Erroll, after a struggle with McCarthy, the opposing half-back, got clear away with it.

It looked a good opening, and the Classical supporters were just getting ready to cheer when a fat figure appeared from nowhere and fairly hurled itself at Erroll.

It was Tubby Muffin! Tubby, apparently under the impression that he was attacking a Modern, sent the unprepared Erroll fairly flying, and booted the ball away



Leaving a trail of sprawling players behind him Tubby dashed on towards the goal. He did not even stop to steady himself, he let drive with a terrific kick!

Jimmy Silver scratched his head.

"Dashed if I like it, anyway! I only put him down because I thought it was a certainty that we shouldn't need him. But he did go down, anyway, and if he insists—"

"I should jolly well think I do insist!" said Tubby Muffin.

"Then we'll have to put up with it. Tubby turns out for the Classics, then!"

And Tubby duly turned out!

CHAPTER 4.

The Winning Goal!

THE game began.

Previously, it had been looked on as a good thing for the Classics. Jimmy Silver and his merry men were usually a cut above the best junior team the Modern House could produce.

But with Tubby Muffin in the team the outlook was different. It was not that Tubby was merely incompetent. He was actively and dangerously incompetent! His unorthodox methods in the great winter pastime usually resulted in injuries to several of his own team and extra assistance to the members of the opposing eleven.

straight to the feet of Cuffy of the Modern House, who raced away with it into Classical territory again.

From the Classics round the ropes came a howl.

"Turn him off!"

"Chloroform him, somebody!"

"Don't let him lose us the game, Silver."

And so the game went on, Tubby Muffin always butting in at the wrong moment, spoiling promising openings and assisting the Moderns in every way possible—all quite unintentionally.

Handicapped as they were by their fat left-half—for that was the position to which Jimmy Silver had assigned his first reserve—the Classics had to struggle hard to keep their end up.

Cook of the Modern House put his side another goal ahead shortly before half-time, and the Classics began to look glum indeed. Then there was a rally, and a minute before the whistle went for the interval Kit Erroll slammed in a splendid goal.

With the score at 2—1 in the Moderns' favour, the teams lined up for the second session.

During the next half-hour a grim struggle ensued. The

Classicals did their best to keep the ball away from Tubby. On the other hand, the Moderns did all in their power to keep it over his side.

On the balance of the play, the fat junior found that he saw less of the ball than he had seen in the first half.

With ten minutes to go, Jimmy Silver led a sparkling run down the field that ended in Lovell equalising for the Classicals. After that, the rival teams fought desperately for another goal that would decide the match.

Five minutes left! Then four! Then three!

"Drawn game, this," remarked Higgs, from the steps of the pavilion.

But even as the words left his mouth something happened.

Fellows who talked about it afterwards described it as a miracle. Perhaps that was an exaggeration. But it was an excusable exaggeration.

To the utter surprise of Classicals and Moderns alike, Tubby started dribbling the ball down the field. A Modern player loomed up before him, and Tubby charged, fairly and squarely, and got past. Another came rushing across the field. Tubby put on a desperate spurt and eluded him.

Towle, the Modern right-back, came on the scene then. Towle was big and brawny and capable, and the most optimistic Classical could not hope for Tubby to do much against him.

But the unexpected happened. Tubby feinted towards the right, then made a blind rush to the left, and Towle, almost paralysed at such tricky tactics from the worst footballer in the Fourth, was left standing!

Tubby did not wait to steady himself; indeed, it was doubtful by this time whether the fat junior was more than half-conscious of what he was doing! He just concentrated his last ounce of energy in his right foot and let drive.

"Goal!"

It was a shriek of joy from the Classicals.

"Classicals win!"

"Good old Tubby!"

The game ended. A cheering, hilarious crowd escorted the podgy hero of the hour back to the pavilion.

And there, at the crowning pitch of his glory, Tubby received a shattering blow.

His uncle was waiting on the steps. But instead of the proud smile which Tubby had anticipated, he was wearing a look of grim disapproval.

"Well, uncle, what did you think of it?" asked Tubby hopefully.

Uncle James still did not smile. He glared instead.

"I had intended to leave you a monetary souvenir of my visit," said Uncle James. "Under the circumstances, however, I do not feel justified in doing so. Good-bye, Cecil Adolphus! I am catching the next train!"

He shook Tubby's hand with great solemnity, and stalked off.

Tubby was left blinking after him in stupefied amazement. When he did pull himself together again he rushed into the pavilion, dived his hand into his coat pocket, and brought out a letter, which he hurriedly perused.

Then he gasped.

"M-m-m-my hat!"

"What is it, Tubby?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Oh dear! I—I thought he was president of the National Sports League!" stuttered Tubby Muffin. "But I must have read the pater's letter too quickly. What the pater says is that he's—he's—"

"Well, what is he?"

"He's president of the National Anti-Sports League!" said Tubby, almost tearfully. "And I've been through that game all for the sake of impressing him!"

For a moment the others stared at the fat footballer. Then somebody spluttered out a laugh, and in an instant the pavilion was echoing to a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you chaps!"

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

It was at that moment that Mornington came in. The dandy of the Fourth was smiling.

"So it didn't succeed, after all?" he remarked.

"What's that, old bean?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"I've just heard that you won, dear man! So the Moderns' little ruse of sendin' me a bogus telegram so that Tubby would let you down didn't come off!"

And then the Classicals roared again—this time over the Moderns, and to such lengths that Tommy Dodd and his men were only too glad to get away and hide their diminished heads.

"Well, it's been a queer match this time," remarked Jimmy Silver, later, as he and his chums departed from the pavilion. "But you can take it from your uncle that Dodd and his crowd won't want to say much about footer for some time to come!"

"I say, you fellows, that's all very well. But what about me?" wailed Tubby Muffin. "I've won the match for you and lost a jolly big tip from my uncle, and—"

"Don't worry, old fat bean!" grinned Jimmy, linking arms with the disgruntled fat junior. "This is a great day for you, and we're going to celebrate it. I suggest a feed in our study, with unlimited tuck. How does that go?"

There was no need for Tubby to reply. His beaming face had replied for him already.

They duly adjourned to the end study. And in tea and unlimited tuck was suitably commemorated that unique achievement—Tubby's Winning Goal!

THE END.

(There's another ripping Rookwood yarn in next week's issue of the GEM. It's called "TOM RAWSON'S ENEMY!" Look out for it!)

THE MYSTERY OF THE HUT!

(Continued from page 18.)

Tom looked after him.

"Keep on, you fellows," he whispered. "I want to speak to Gore."

"Better let the sulky brute alone," said Monty Lowther.

But he obeyed, and the juniors went off to clean away the many traces of the hunt through the wet and muddy woods, while Tom Merry hurried after his old enemy.

"I say, Gore," he said, tapping him on the shoulder, "is anything the matter?"

Gore gave a groan.

"I might have known it. I am ruined!" Then the tale came out in an outburst. "They were twitting me with not standing a feed when I promised, and I stood it last night and ran up an account with Dame Taggles. It comes to over a pound. She didn't know I had been robbed, you see. She never runs accounts, and she thought I had left the money in my room. But she heard to-day that I had lost all the money, and she is frantic. She says she's going to the Head unless I pay up before five o'clock."

"And you can't?"

"Can't! Of course, I can't! I'm stony! And all those cads I've been treating, too, won't lend me anything. Some of them are broke, some have only a little, and won't part up with it. I know Mellish received a quid

from his father, and he hasn't changed it yet, but he won't lend it to me. The rotten cad!"

Tom Merry could not help smiling slightly. Gore's ambition to shine as a leader in the School House had not prospered. It was a heavy fall after his absurd airs and insolence.

"I suppose it seems very funny to you!" said Gore, grinding his teeth, as he caught the smile. "I might have known—"

"Sorry," said Tom Merry. "I did not mean to smile. How much do you owe Dame Taggles?"

"One pound and ninepence-halfpenny."

Tom's hand came out of his pocket with the note and shilling in it. It was a wrench. The money had been hardly and fairly earned, and it was all that stood between him and the state of "stoniness" for some time to come. But Tom was generous to a fault.

"There you are," he said, thrusting the money hastily into the hand of the astonished Gore. "That's all right."

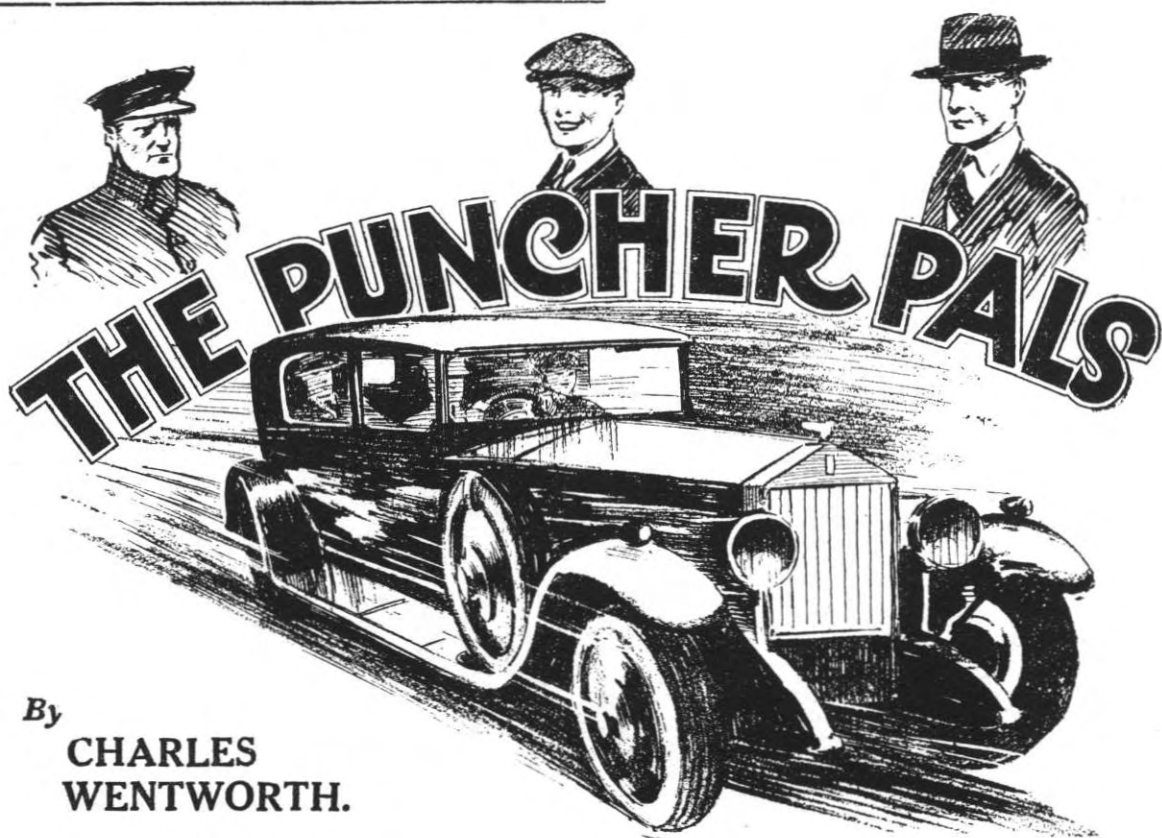
"I—I say, Merry, I—I can't—"

"Yes, you can. That's all right."

And Tom Merry darted off. Gore stood looking stupidly at the money in his palm, and as he realised what it meant to him the weight lifted from his heart. And as he looked after Tom Merry it is probable that the cad of the Shell felt more ashamed of himself than he had ever felt in his life before.

THE END.

(Good old Tom Merry, he's always helping someone! Next week he gets into trouble with his chums for helping the New House in "PUDDINGS AND PAINS AT ST. JIM'S!")



By
**CHARLES
WENTWORTH.**

**CHAPTER 1.
The Raffle!**

THE glorious morning sunshine drew the Puncher Pals from their slumber as irresistibly as a magnet attracts a needle. Sprouts Martin stuck his head out of the portable tent, Skid Collins slid out of the soft, tufty grass which he had preferred to the shelter on a warm summer's night, and Percy Vere literally skipped out of the Rolls-Royce saloon which had provided him with his bed.

Before them stretched a wonderful heath and below a silver pond. The panorama was perfect in its beauty. Percy Vere carried a towel over his arm.

"That pond," he cried, "is almost free of weed. The water is deep enough for swimming. Let us swim."

He was first in the rush, and first in the water and last out. As he towelled his skin into a comforting glow, he hummed a tune.

"I must say, guv'nor," said Sprouts, as they tucked into a breakfast of eggs and bacon and fried bread, washed down with a fine brew of tea, "that there's something to be said for this campin'-out stunt of yourn, when the weather's fine, I feel like a noo born cuckoo!"

"And you look like a half-boiled owl," put in Skid. "What ever did you do to your face to make it look like that, Sprouts?"

Sprouts wagged his cauliflower ears and glared behind his jutting cheekbones as he hurled a loaf at the ducking Skid. "It ain't wot I did to it; it's what the blokes I fought with did to it. You can't become middle-weight champeen without takin' a few 'ard knocks!" he howled.

"All the same," chortled Skid, making a screen of Percy Vere, "they needn't have knocked you so 'ard. You must have stopped every punch with your face!"

Then Percy Vere put his foot down on the quarrel. "Sprouts' face is unfortunate," he murmured; "but let us forget it. I want those things packed up as soon as

possible. It is market-day at Market Desborough, and we are going there."

The car started on its journey in the birth of the morning, and it was only nine o'clock when they rolled into the busy market square of the quaint old town.

Percy Vere directed Sprouts to pull up outside the Free Trade Hall, since it was impossible for the car at the moment to proceed any farther, owing to the crowd. Percy Vere jumped out.

"Stay here, boys!" he cried. "I am going to have a look round. Soon be back."

The crowd was gathered round a rostrum, on which two men were showing the largest and the fattest pig Skid or Sprouts had ever seen. It was a wonderful pig, with sleepy eyes and long, drooping ears. Its skin was made up of big pink-and-black patches, and it had a blob of black over the right eye. While one of the men addressed the gaping crowd the other one gave the pig a hefty slap every now and then, and at each slap it emitted a grunt of protest.

"Coo!" gasped Skid, whose eyes were bulging. "What a monster! I've never seen a pig like that, Sprouts."

"Nor me, neither!" boomed Sprouts. "'E's a reg'lar doll's eye polisher!"

The taller of the two men was speaking in a hoarse voice, and emphasising his points by smashing his right fist into the cup of his left hand.

"Ladies and gents!" he barked. "There's no need for me to tell you that the pig you see before you is a champion. Look arand this 'ere market, go where you like, and you won't find another to match it. The pig is the property of a nobleman who don't want 'is name to appear in connection with the sale of the wonderful animal. He could sell it for twice as much as anyone 'ere might want to give, but 'e wants Market Desborough to 'ave the benefit of the piebald strain, than which there ain't anything to touch it!"

A fit of coughing stopped his talking, but producing some books of pink tickets, he went on bravely, the tears running down his cheeks.

"In order that everyone should 'ave a fair chance, 'is lordship 'as instructed me to raffle the porker champion. Already I 'ave disposed of ten books of tickets. 'Ere I 'ave the last book, and the price of each ticket is a bob. When I 'ave sold the last ticket the raffle will take place. Sold to a lady there, another to the gent with the peaked cap. One fer you, mum, and one for the pretty little gel over there. One for the gent with the welcome-to-our-'umble-'ome face. Now I 'ave 'ere the last ticket, and—"

Sprouts, who had pushed his way right up to the rostrum, bashed a bowler hat over the eyes of a burly farmer who had tried to elbow him out of it, and, snatching the last ticket, gave the seller a shilling.

"Give a bloke a chance!" he cried. "I've bin 'owlin' for a ticket ever since you began to sell 'em from that book!"

The man grinned down at him.

"Well, you've got it, ain'tcher?" he cried. "Number 500, and a lucky number at that. That your car over there, sir? Ah, I see you're a real gent! Ben, let's get on with the raffle."

For five minutes they shook up five hundred duplicate numbers on blue paper, each of which had been rolled into a ball. That done, they beckoned a little boy on to the rostrum, and told him to dive his hand into the waste-paper basket one of the men held. The boy did so, and held out the little ball of blue paper which he had extracted. The man who had raffled the pig took the ball of paper and straightened it out, then held it up to view.

"Number 500!" he cried. "The lucky number! The gent with the motor-car is the winner!"

Sprouts gasped. Skid dug him in the ribs. Then Percy Vere came back and climbed into the car.

"Drive on!" he ordered.

But the crowd was surging round the car. A whole mob of farmers, with monkey whiskers, and armed with heavy sticks, were bellowing at the startled Sprouts. Then through the crush came the two men who had raffled the pink-and-black patched pig, with two volunteers to help them. They were carrying the squealing pig. The man who had sold the tickets hauled Skid out of his seat, and the four men pushed the frightened porker into his place, then slammed the door and beat it.

Fixing an eyeglass in his eye, Percy Vere stared through the glass screen at the grunting hog.

"To whom does that animal belong?" he asked.

"It's mine!" bawled Sprouts, turning round behind the steering-wheel. "But I don't want it. Anyone can 'ave it for a song!"

CHAPTER 2.

A Brain Wave!

THE words were fatal. In a moment Sprouts was surrounded by yelling farmers, who offered him three pounds, four pounds, five pounds, or more for the pig. He had won it for nothing they told him. The money would be all profit.

Sprouts waved them back, shouted at them, beat their hands down, biffed the hat of one of them down over his eyes, as he had done to the over-eager ticket buyer during the raffle.

"Now listen!" he bawled. "If you don't simmer dahn I'll git off the car and fight the lot of yer!"

They drew back breathlessly, and Skid on the one side and a pretty girl with a tray full of flags on the other slipped through.

The girl smiled sweetly at Sprouts and shook a tin tied up with pretty blue bows in front of him.

"You were lucky with the pig," she coaxed, "so I am sure you won't mind helping the Market Desborough Prize Silver Band."

"Lady," smiled Sprouts, "I'd 'olp you to anything, but at the moment I'm worried by these tigers who want my blinkin' pig!"

Skid tugged at Sprouts' sleeve.

"Sprouts," he said, "that was a brain-wave of yours! So many of these farmers want the pig, why not let 'em fight for it? I dare say somebody would lend a hall."

The girl's eyes flashed enthusiasm.

"Why not?" she asked. "We go crazy over boxing in Market Desborough. That hall"—and she pointed to the Free Trade Hall—"belongs to my father. We stage lots of boxing shows during the winter. You could charge a shilling admission, and, perhaps, you will give the money for the hire of the hall to my charity fund."

Sprouts' eyes flamed.

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"What do you want for the hall hire, miss?" he asked. "A sovereign to you and as much more as you may care to give for charity," she answered archly.

Sprouts ran up the between-windows of the car.

"Guv'nor," he cried, "you don't mind me staging this little show, do you?"

"Why—er—no," answered Percy Vere, polishing his eyeglass. "It possesses elements of amusement. Perhaps you will allow me to referee?"

"You betcher; and Skid can take the money!" laughed Sprouts, as he turned to address the crowd.

"There are a dozen of you guys who want to buy my pig," he went on. "Now, I don't know any of yer, and I don't want to show no favouritism. The little lady 'ere 'as hofferred 'er 'all for the contest, and if the gents who want the pig care to fight for it, six rands, two minutes each rand, the winner of the final to take the porker, let 'em step forward and say so now, or ever after 'old their blinkin' peace!"

There followed scenes that beggar description. Some of the farmers, not relishing the idea of taking hard knocks in a battle for the coveted hog, dropped out; others went as far as a bid of ten pounds for the animal; but Sprouts was firm, and in the end eight burly farmers were selected to fight for the trophy.

"The doors will open at half-past one!" barked Sprouts; for while he had been talking Skid and the pretty girl had been organising the show. "That'll give the young lady time to get the ring set up. The scrappers needn't worry abart costoom, because the young lady is going to 'ave the volunteers' clobber put art, shoes an' all."

"Mr. Percy Vere will referee. Mr. Sprarts Martin—that's me—will keep the time, and Skid Collins and the young lady will take the money at the door. The price of admission will be a bob, and the prize pig, which will be shown in a crate beside the ring, will be 'anded over to the winner at the end of the final bout."

"Ladies and gents, I thank yer!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Chevington Beauty!

THAT boxing show at the Free Trade Hall was a wow! Without being advertised, it drew the crowd like a "City Lights" film. When the doors were opened Skid had to yelp for help to stem the rush. A dozen of the pretty girl's boy friends who had set up the ring butted in, and Skid and Miss Armfield—Bessie was her Christian name—took the shillings.

After the first five hundred the rush eased off, and then Skid saw a long queue of boys looking wistfully at the door. One of these boys, catching Skid's eye, came forward.

"How much is it to go in and see the old bucks fight?" he asked.

"A bob," answered Skid; but when he saw the boy's face lengthen and heard the queue groan, he added: "Wait a minute—how much have you got?"

"We can't afford more than threepence," said the boy. "And if we pay that we'll have to miss this week's copy of 'The Ranger.'"

"No, you won't," answered Skid. "Get inside, the whole lot of you! You can go in—free. You don't mind, do you, miss?"

The girl liked Skid. He was intelligent. Besides, he had made her feel as if she were doing clever things.

"Of course not," she replied, and then she banged the door and bolted it, for she saw Sergeant Ploddem coming towards the hall, and she knew him for a spoilsport.

The pig was crated and set on a rostrum close to the ring. Sprouts occupied the timekeeper's chair. Miss Armfield's boy friends had agreed to act as seconds, and were helping the farmers to get into their fighting clothes. Skid and the girl were counting out the money, and Percy Vere was lolling against the ropes, waiting for the fighting to begin.

The first pair to enter the ring were two very big men. One of them towered above the other, but his thirteen stone of flesh, bone, and muscle stretched unequally over a frame six feet three inches from heel to crown. His opponent was even heavier, but a stocky man, with a body like a balloon. They glared hatred at each other whilst Percy Vere read their names, the kids keeping up a regular roar of delight.

"Ladies" (Percy should have said "lady," for Miss Bessie was the only woman present) "and gentlemen, I have much pleasure in introducing to you, on my right, Mr. Archibald Hummer; and on my left, Mr. Gus Barwell!"

Sprouts was wasting no time. Bang! He hit the gong in front of him with a mighty thump after ordering the seconds out of the ring, and the next moment Percy Vere was hopping about, trying to escape the mighty blows the two farmers were launching at each other.

"They own next-door farms," whispered Bessie in Skid's

ear, "and they have already had three lawsuits against each other— Oh! Oh-h-h! He's out!"

Hummer had missed Barwell's ducking head, and the stocky farmer had buried his boxing-glove deep in his enemy's middle. Hummer went down as if he had been pole-axed, and had to be carried, groaning, out of the hall.

They were followed by two well-matched heavy-weights, both running to seed, named Fred Dismore and Ted Wardell. This fight went the full six rounds, and each man was down in turn.

Time after time Percy Vere had to part them, and it was while he was doing this in the last round that Wardell socked Fred on the bean with a haymaker, knocking him out of the ring, Dismore carrying the water bucket with him.

The next two bouts were pretty evenly contested, the men standing toe to toe, and launching smashing hits at each other's faces until both were dyed crimson.

At the end Percy Vere, had, in each bout, to ask Sprouts Martin for his casting vote.

"They're such suckers that I'd wipe 'em both out!" Sprouts wailed in disgust. "But if you must let one slip by, give the fight to crimson knickers, guv'nor. Yellow pants just took the other one."

The semi-finals were decided quickly, and in each instance by a knock-out, Barwell disposing of the second crimson

ignoring Dumps' loud shouts of "Break, break!" and resisting his attempts to part them.

On the floor the frantic partisans of the rival finalists were exchanging punches and blows with heavy sticks, as hard and as fast as they could launch them. The boys were standing on the chairs, urging them on.

In the midst of the uproar Barwell and Wardell rocked and swayed and punched their way to the ropes, each jolting the other's chin up or jarring his nose with a nasty thump while he held with the other hand.

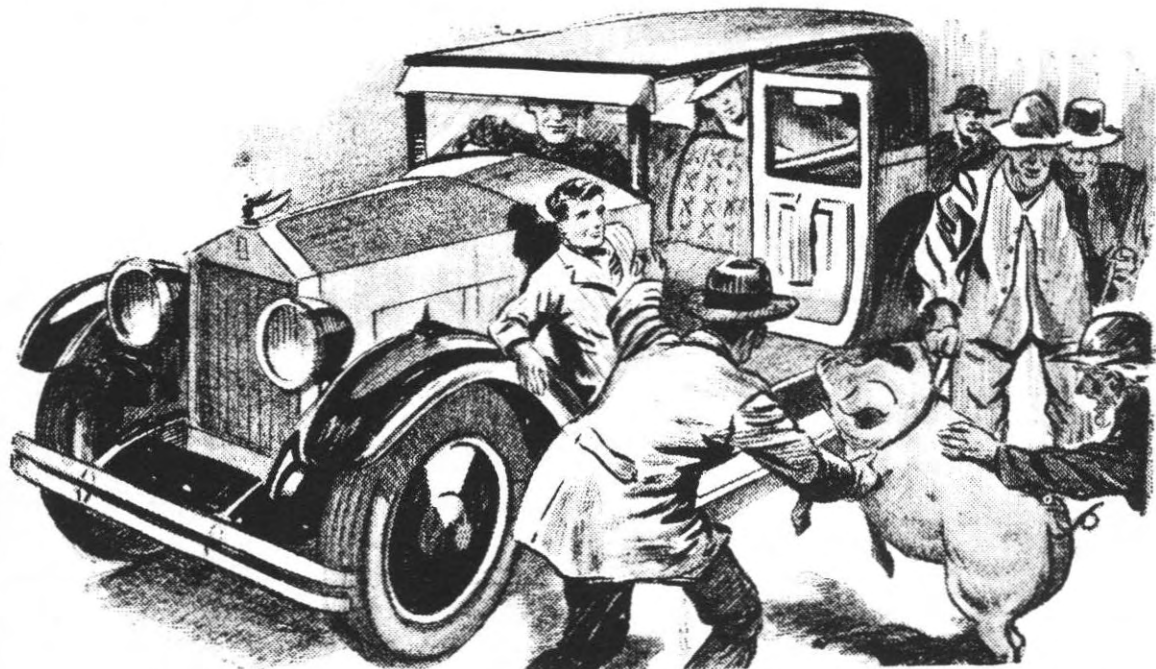
Sprouts was almost speechless from loud shouting.

"Foul!" he yelled. "Foul! Disqualify 'em, guv'nor!"

"I'm afraid," cried Percy Vere, "I shall have to rule you both out!"

They paid no heed, and, still fighting, fell through the ropes together. Crash! They landed on the crate, which broke asunder, and as they rolled over, still fighting, on the floor, with the melee of a general battle going on all round them, the crash of breaking chairs mingling with the dull thud of heavy blows, the pig wriggled his way out of the broken crate and ran, squealing, to the door.

The door opened, and a crowd rushed in, headed by a red-faced farmer and his man. As he caught sight of the running pig the farmer made a dive for it and clutched it in a Rugby player's unbreakable hold.



Two men who had raffed the pig, with the help of a couple of volunteers, tried hard to force the unwilling porker into the car!

knickers contestant, and Wardell easily beating a tough-looking back-to-the-lander, named Kirkwood.

There followed a fifteen minutes' interval, and then Percy Vere announced the final over six rounds, five rounds of two minutes each, and the last round four minutes.

Amid terrific shouting, for Barwell and Wardell hated each other like poison, the round-bodied Barwell set about the compactly built Wardell. They were thirteen-stone men, who were feeling the result of their previous fights. But after a minute of useless sparring they let fly simultaneously with a smashing right, and they both went down with a bang!

They were groggy when they rose. Hummer, the lanky farmer who had been beaten by Barwell in the first bout, edged his way to the ringside, stroked his monkey whiskers, and bawled:

"Slap 'e in the stummick, Wardell! Don't 'e let 'e win the pig!"

The advice was literally taken. Wardell landing a smack on the belt line which doubled Barwell up like a shutting knife. Dismore, another burly farmer who had met with defeat, joined Hummer. He was a friend of Barwell's.

"You let 'e fight 'is own fight!" he bellowed, smacking Hummer on the bridge of his already swollen nose.

In the ring the farmers were locked in a tight embrace,

"I've got 'im! He's mine!" he roared. "Oh, my beauty—my beauty!"

Sprouts grabbed hold of him.

"Ere, go easy!" he roared. "That pig belongs to me!"

The farmer and his man, each holding two legs, lifted the pig between them.

"You're a liar!" yelled the farmer. "He belongs to me! I am Farmer Ditchem! Everybody knows me! The pig was stolen from my farm this morning! Look at the mark—a rose burnt in his side! He is the famous Chevington Beauty!"

The roar of battle was followed by a death-like hush. Battered farmers blinked and winked. Barwell and Wardell, the finalists, each with a black eye, a swollen nose, and puffed-up mouth, heaved breathlessly.

Then half a dozen farmers spoke at once.

"He's right. We ought to have known that pig was the Chevington Beauty!"

Of course, the owner had no difficulty in proving his claim, and bore his pig away in triumph.

Then Percy took Miss Arnfield and the chums to dinner at the Colour Sergeant Inn.

(Perhaps it was just as well that Sprouts got rid of his porker so easily! Look out for another topping adventure of the Puncher Pals next week!)

EASTWOOD CUP, 2nd ROUND.

SAINTS LOWER UNBEATEN RECORD.
GREYFRIARS OVERWHELM COMBERMERE!
THE FIRST GOAL AGAINST HALCHESTER.

By "OLD BOY."

DRAWN away against Halchester in the second round of the Eastwood Cup, Tom Merry and Co. might well have felt a qualm or two! In Norfolk the Halchester giants are monarchs of all they survey, and this season they boasted proudly that they had yet to have a goal scored against them! Rutherford, their goalkeeper, a lanky fellow with a shock of red hair, was certainly worth watching when I dropped in to a Halchester match early in the season.

The team was in a cheerful mood throughout the long and somewhat tiring journey. At Halchester, a greff grey pile erected in the reign of Henry VIII., we were welcomed by Frank Nevis, the Halchester captain, and I noticed the red-headed Rutherford at once.

"I hope you fellows have brought your shooting-boots?" asked Nevis, grinning.

"Rather!" grinned Tom Merry in return. "The ones that scored seventeen against Southwold!"

"You'll need 'em!" remarked Rutherford calmly.

A glance at the pitch was not reassuring. Heavy rains had turned it into little better than a quagmire, and accurate football would be impossible.

Tom Merry won the toss, which was no particular advantage, and the ball rolled.

"Go it, Halchester!"

It was a solid roar right round the ground.

But Halchester did not "go it." Tom Merry swung the ball out to D'Arcy on the wing, and D'Arcy went through the defence like a knife. A half-back charged and slithered, and a full-back went flying as D'Arcy cleverly feinted past him; only Rutherford of the red hair stood between D'Arcy and the Halchester record.

D'Arcy steadied himself and shot straight for the corner of the net. But Rutherford dived, and got to the ball miraculously; it pipped out into play again, and the danger was apparently over. But no! Tom Merry leaped up, and his head caught the leather.

Rutherford dived again, a fraction of a second too late, and the ball hit the back of the rigging amid a silence that could almost be felt.

"Goal!"

The handful of St. Jim's supporters yelled themselves hoarse, and Rutherford held out his hand to the Saints' skipper.

"Good man, Merry! You've lowered my record!"

A goal lead in the first five minutes was very heartening, but the Halchester men were smarting over that lost record, and in the next half hour they showed that their reputation had not been gained by idleness.

Fatty Wynn in goal saved and saved and saved again, but even he was unable to stem the rush of the Halchester forwards. Frank Nevis was first to beat him, with a shot that sizzled past Fatty and gave him no chance. A few minutes later Compton at inside right gave Halchester the lead, and shortly after-

wards Markham neatly deflected a pass from Nevis to add number three.

St. Jim's rallied, but at half-time the score remained unchanged.

On the resumption St. Jim's showed that invaluable asset which has stood them in good stead throughout the season, the ability to keep going at full pressure right through a match. Halchester found themselves swept off their feet, and Tom Merry sent in a regular pile-driver which Rutherford missed completely. There was no time for him to bemoan his lost record; a minute later Tom Merry broke through again and crowned a brilliant solo run by crashing the ball clean through the net, this completing his hat-trick and levelling the scores.

Avid for more, Saints came again, and D'Arcy hooked the ball neatly past Rutherford, to give the visitors the lead. But Halchester recovered pace, and Nevis beat Fatty Wynn in a race for a loose ball four all! Still Halchester pressed, and Compton soon found an opportunity right under the bar—five to four!

Ten minutes remained, and St. Jim's, with the vision of the Cup fading before their eyes, flung themselves heart and soul into the game. Talbot made ground on the right, and from the throw-in he sent an overhead pass to Tom Merry. Tom swung round in his stride and let fly first time; Rutherford made a grab and turned to see the ball trying to climb up the back of the net!

Five all—and five minutes to go!

Fitness counted now above everything, and in the matter of wind St. Jim's had the advantage. They maintained pressure, and the referee was lifting the whistle to his lips when Jack Blake took a lightning pass from Levison, turned, and shot all in the same second. Rutherford dived full length in the mud, but he might as well have dived after a flash of lightning. The ball was in the net. St. Jim's was leading by six goals to five, and the referee shrilled the long blast as Rutherford picked himself up, a sadder and a wiser goalkeeper!

After a hot bath and tea with Frank Nevis & Co., who took their reverse in the best of spirits, Tom Merry and his men were eager to hear how their other rivals had fared. I had been on the phone and had news in plenty. Greyfriars had visited Combermere and enjoyed an afternoon out, winning by sixteen to nil!

"They've missed our score against Southwold by one!" grinned Monty Lowther.

FULL RESULTS.

EASTWOOD CUP—SECOND ROUND.

HALCHESTER .. 5 ST. JIM'S .. 6
Nevis (2) Merry (4)
Compton (2) D'Arcy, Blake
Markham

COMBERMERE 0 GREYFRIARS .. 16
Nuzent (3)
Wharton (5)
V. Smith (5)
H. Singh (2)
Penfold

ROOKWOOD .. 7 LOW BEACH .. 0
Silver (2)
Dodd (4), Lovell

RYLCOMBE G.S. 1 CLAREMONT .. 0
Gay

ST. GAIL'S .. 2 ABBOTSFORD .. 6
Walters (2) Fane (3)
Williams (3)

BAGSHOT .. 3 PEPPERWOOD 0
Pankley (3)

PINGE WOOD .. 0 ST. FRANK'S .. 8
Nipper (4)
Pitt (2)
Grey (2)

Downside .. 2 Overcourt .. 4
St. Anselm's .. 7 Tressilgar .. 2
Tessaleigh .. 10 Greenbank .. 1
Doone Valley .. 3 Sedgminster .. 2
Stapleford .. 0 St. Caesar's .. 9
St. Juniper's .. 9 Harringside .. 0
Curlingham .. 1 Marminston .. 0
St. Thomas' .. 4 St. Winnifred's .. 4
Rippingham .. 6 Mell Tor .. 2

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