

IN SEARCH OF A GOLDEN IDOL!

Read the ripping long complete
school and adventure yarn inside!

The GEM

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PACKED WITH THRILLS AND LAUGHTER! HERE IS A RIPPING—

THE ST JIM'S MAGICIAN!



By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

Who makes Pies appear from a hat? Who makes Snakes appear from smoke?
Who tied up Gore so that no one could undo him? Tom Merry's Uncle Frank
—the St. Jim's Magician!

CHAPTER 1.

A Visit From Uncle Frank.

TOM MERRY came off the football field at St. Jim's with the ruddy glow of health in his cheeks. There was an extremely muddy football under his arm, and a satisfied smile upon his face.

The School House had just beaten the New House by two goals to one, and so Tom Merry, the captain of the School House juniors, had reason to be satisfied with himself and his team.

Manners and Lowther, Tom's chums in the Shell, looked equally pleased, while Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, of the Fourth, were brimming over with satisfaction.

"Done them this time," said Blake, with a grin. "Figgins played up like a giddy International, but we were bound to walk over them."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Right, Blake; and I must say that you kids played up well against the New House," he said approvingly.

The words of praise from their captain did not seem to

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particularly elate the chums of the Fourth. Blake, in fact, gave Tom Merry an extremely aggressive look.

"Who are you calling kids?" he asked.

"My mistake," said Tom Merry blandly. "I should have said cads; but really—"

"Telegram for you, Master Merry," said the School House page, who was waiting for Tom outside the pavilion.

Tom Merry took the buff envelope, and looked at it rather anxiously. A junior of St. Jim's did not frequently receive telegrams, and naturally the thought crossed his mind that it might mean some bad news from home.

But as he opened it and glanced over the message, a smile broke over his face.

His companions looked at him with interest.

"What's the news?" asked Manners. "Somebody died and left you a fortune?"

"Miss Fawcett coming to pay you a visit, and bringing you a new chest-protector and a bottle of cod-liver oil?" asked Lowther.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "This is from 'Uncle Frank.'"

"And what—"

—LONG COMPLETE YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S!

"He's coming down here. Listen! Handed in at Huckleberry Heath Post Office, 'Coming by the four o'clock, Rylcombe—Francis Fawcett.'"

"Good!" said Manners and Lowther together. They evidently liked the idea of a visit from Uncle Frank.

"I shall be glad to see him," said Blake. "He's wired so that you can meet him at the station, Tom Merry. I think we'd better all go, and show him that we appreciate the honour. Eh—what?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. "It is weally incumbent upon us, you know, to tweek Uncle Fwank with great respect. He was vewy kind to us at Hucklebewwy Heath, you know."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Let's go and meet the train. We shall have time if we buck up."

Tom Merry glanced at the big clock on the tower.

"By Jove, we shall have to buck up!" he exclaimed. "This wire has been here some time, I suppose. Let's get changed and be off. We'll go, of course."

"Let's ask Figgins, too, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "He was with us at Hucklebewwy Heath, you know, and vewy friendly with our respected uncle."

"Of course. I say, Figgyl!"

Figgins, the captain of the New House juniors, had gone off the field. He turned in the doorway of the pavilion as he heard Tom Merry calling. Kerr, Wynn, and Marmaduke Smythe—otherwise known as the Co.—were with him, and they stopped, too. Figgins & Co. were looking just a little glum. They had expected to win the footer match, and they had played up well to win, but the School House had been a trifle too strong for them.

"Hallo!" said Figgins.

"You remember Uncle Frank," said Tom Merry, joining Figgins & Co. "He's coming to Rylcombe by the four o'clock train. Will you come along to meet him with us?"

"Rather!" said Figgins heartily. "Jolly glad he's coming! We'll give him a welcome. You kids will come, too?"

"Certainly!" said Kerr.

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn. "I suppose it will be the proper thing for somebody to stand a feed when a distinguished visitor comes, won't it? I think so, anyway."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I expect there will be a feed," he remarked. "You'll have a chance to show what you can do in that line, Fatty. Uncle Frank won't have seen all the sights of St. Jim's unless he has seen Fatty as a trencherman—"

"I don't eat much!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "Somebody's always cracking jokes on the subject, and that's got me a reputation as a big eater. I'm fearfully hungry now, after the footer. A goalkeeper gets hungrier than any of the others, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha! He does when he's named Fatty Wynn. But get changed, kids. We shall have to hustle to get to Rylcombe in time."

The juniors were not long in towelling down and changing their clothes. Inside of ten minutes they were all ready, with a single exception. That exception, of course, was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Come on, Gussy!" shouted Blake, looking in again.

"Wait a minute, deah boy! I cannot find my tiepin!"

"Come without it."

The swell of the School House stopped in his search for the missing tiepin to fix a withering glance upon Blake.

"If you think I can go to meet a respectable gentleman without a tiepin, Blake, you are making a great mistake," he said.

"You silly ass—"

"I refuse to be called an ass! I wegard—"

"If you can't come without the pin, look for it, fathead!"

"How can I look for it while you are talkin' to me? You are wastin' time—"

"Are you coming?"

"Yaas, wathah—when I have found my tiepin!"

"I say, aren't you ready?" exclaimed Tom Merry, looking in. "It's high time we were off!"

"Gussy is off!" growled Blake. "Right off his silly rocker! He's looking for his hairpins!"

"Don't be fivulous, Blake. I am lookin' for a tiepin, Tom Mewwy—"

"Here, take mine, if you can't come without one!" exclaimed Blake impatiently.

D'Arcy looked at the pin Jack Blake extended towards him. Then he shook his head.

"I am afraid I couldn't wear that pin, Blake. It is not at all a nice one—"

Blake glowered.

"Right-ho! Then you'll come without one, ass! Get moving, donkey! If you don't shift I shall stick the pin in you, fathead. Do you hear, image?"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised— Ooooooh!"

Blake had given the swell of St. Jim's a gentle dig with the tiepin, and D'Arcy jumped a foot clear of the ground.

"Blake! You howwid beast—"

"Are you going?"

"Not until— Pway keep that pin away! You howwid boundah! Don't! Ow! Yaas, I am goin'! I will go without my tiepin if you like."

"Thought you would!" grinned Blake, as D'Arcy bolted.

"Come on, Merry; I've shifted the image at last!"

The eleven juniors marched off together towards the gates. D'Arcy was looking extremely indignant, and it was evident that the loss of his tiepin still worried him. Not that he thought of the value. It was certain to turn up, for that matter. But Arthur Augustus was extremely particular about his appearance.

Tom Merry looked at his watch as the party poured out into Rylcombe Lane.

"I say, we shall have to run!" he exclaimed. "Follow your leader, kids! I'll race you to the station!"

"Right-ho!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, atfah a game of footah, it is weally too exhaustin' to run, and—"

"You'd better follow, then!" snorted Blake.

And the juniors set off at a run. D'Arcy hesitated for a moment, and then he ran, too, and the party came into the village at top speed, and arrived breathless at the station.

CHAPTER 2.

The Anglo-Indian Arrives!

"NO!"

"But, my tear sir—"

"Certainly not!"

"But—"

"I tell you, no! Stuff! No!"

"Hallo! That's Uncle Frank's voice," murmured Tom Merry, as he entered the little country station. "He's arguing with someone. I believe he's generally arguing with somebody."

Figgins grinned.

"Who's that with him?" he said. "Do you know the bouncer, Merry?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

Mr. Francis Fawcett, late of Boggleywallabad, India, and now of Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath, was looking exasperated. He was a little brown-skinned man, with eyes as keen as gimlets. Twenty years in the tropics had made him as brown as a berry, and his keen little eyes looked like blackcurrents in an overdone bun. His companion, who appeared to be arguing with him, was evidently of the tribe of Israel—a very old gentleman, with very shiny hair and a very aquiline nose, and a very insistent and at the same time insinuating manner.

"But, my tear sir," persisted the old gentleman, "I tell you—feefty pounds—"

"No, I tell you, Mr. Solomonson!"

"Feefty pounds—"

"I would not take a hundred."

"You did not give so mooch—"

"I gave ten rupees for that little idol, Mr. Solomonson, but, of course, I did not know its value when I bought it for that sum."

"Exactly. If you receive feefty pounds, you make a good thing out of it."

"But I don't want to make a good thing out of it—"

"My tear sir—"

"Stuff! I tell you I won't sell the idol! That settles it! Hallo, Tommy! So you've come to meet me, have you?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, as he shook hands with Mr. Fawcett. "I was afraid we should be late. I didn't get your wire as soon as it arrived, as I was on the football field. But we're in time, so it's all right."

"Yaas, wathah! If I may make a we-mark, Mr. Fawcett—"

"No, don't bother me any more!" exclaimed Mr. Fawcett, turning to the old man at his side, who was tapping him on the sleeve. "You've badgered me all the way down in the train, and I've had enough of it."

"But, my tear Mr. Fawcett—"

"Ha! Get away! Stuff and nonsense! No more, I tell you!"

The aspect of the peppery little Anglo-Indian was decidedly threatening, and Mr. Solomonson thought he had better give it up. He moved away, but with evident unwillingness.

"Ha! He's gone! Thank goodness!" exclaimed Mr. Fawcett. "The old fellow has been bothering me all the way from Huckleberry Heath. He got into my carriage on purpose. You remember the little golden idol I showed you at Laurel Villa, boys. He wants to buy it, and won't take 'no' for an answer."

"Shall we duck him in the pond outside, sir?" asked Figgins, ever ready to oblige.

"Ha, ha, ha! No. I am glad to see you all, boys—"

Tom Merry duly presented Manners, Digby, Marmaduke, Kerr, and Wynn, who had not previously met Uncle Frank, when D'Arcy tried again.

"Ah, D'Arcy!" exclaimed Mr. Fawcett, shaking hands with the swell of St. Jim's. "Hallo, my lad! What's the matter? Are you ill?"

"N-n-no!" gasped D'Arcy.

Uncle Frank had a grip like a vice whenever he chose to exert the full power of his strong fingers, and D'Arcy had had the full benefit of it. The swell of St. Jim's looked quite limp.

"Are you sure?" asked Uncle Frank, tightening his grip. "You are looking very flustered, D'Arcy. Have you been over-exerting yourself?"

"N-n-no!"

"Well, you certainly look a little exhausted," said Mr. Fawcett, releasing D'Arcy's hand, much to his relief. "You must take care of yourself."

"I was goin' to remark—"

Mr. Fawcett looked at him.

"I am extremely ashamed," said D'Arcy, "of appearing in the pwestace of a wespecced gentleman without a tiepin, but it is weally not my fault. It was that boundah Blake who wushed me off—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" exclaimed Lowther.

"I wufuse to wing off, at least until I have properly explained to Mr. Fawcett the reason why I appear—"

"Dry up! Shall we walk to the school, Mr. Fawcett, or shall we take the hack?"

"We will walk," said the Anglo-Indian, taking up his bag. "If I had required a conveyance I should have asked Dr. Holmes to send one. I shall be staying at the school for a few days, I expect, and I hope to see something of you during that time, though I shall probably be busy during the evenings."

Tom Merry wondered what Uncle Frank would be busy about during the evenings, but he did not ask any questions. The party left the station, and the old globe-trotter set out at a steady tramp up the lane to the school, escorted by the delighted juniors.

Tom Merry dropped behind, and made a sign to Figgins, who dropped behind, too.

"What's in the wind?" asked the leader of the New House.

"We shall have to give Mr. Fawcett a study feed," said Tom.

"We had better get some things while we're in the village. Got any tin?"

"Yes, three bob and some coppers."

"Good! If the Co. have any gather it in. I'll see it clear next week. Here's all I have. Will you do the shopping?"

"Certainly," grinned Figgins.

"Bring it along to the School House when you've got it. I can't stop behind as I am the host in Study No. 10."

"That's all right. There's plenty of tin here, and I'll take Fatty Wynn along to help in selecting the tommy."

"Right-ho! And get to the school as quickly as you can. Go right into our study if we're not there, and get the tea going."

"Rely on me," said Figgins.

"Uncle Frank is bound to be hungry after his journey, and the cupboard is quite bare," said Tom anxiously. "I've spoken to Blake, and it's the same in Study No. 6. So get a move on you, Figgins, old man, and we'll keep uncle occupied till tea's ready."

Figgins grinned and nodded, and dropped to the rear with Fatty Wynn, and stopped at the tuckshop presided over by Mother Murphy. The rest of the juniors marched on with Mr. Fawcett.

The Anglo-Indian did not appear to notice the diminution in the numbers of his escort. His gimlet eye for a moment fixed itself on the tuckshop, but he gave no other sign. A slight smile hovered for a moment on his brown face, however.

Tom Merry & Co. had talked a great deal of Uncle Frank at St. Jim's, and the marvellous magical tricks he had brought from India, and so there were a number of eyes fixed upon the gentleman from Boggleywallabad as soon as he entered the ancient gateway of the school.

Tom Merry was rather proud of his relation as he escorted him across the old quadrangle amid the gazing fellows.

"I say, look!" Gore, the cad of the Shell remarked to

his crony Mellish. "That's Tom Merry's Uncle Frank, isn't it? My hat! He looks more than half baked."

Mellish giggled.

"Got a face like a bun, hasn't he? Is he Merry's uncle, or a monkey he has captured?"

"I'll ask him," grinned Gore.

He signed to Tom Merry as the little procession came by. Tom stopped with a look of inquiry.

"I say, Merry," said Gore, in a stage whisper.

"What is it, Gore?" asked Tom Merry unsuspiciously.

He was not on good terms with the cad of the Shell, but he did not guess what was coming. Gore had never been known to play the game, and he never allowed courtesy to stand in the way of a knock at anyone he disliked.

"Is that your uncle, Merry, or is it a monkey you have picked up off an organ?" asked Gore, in the same stage whisper, which he knew perfectly well would reach the ears of the Anglo-Indian.

Tom Merry flushed red.

While he was in the very act of doing the honours of St. Jim's it was particularly annoying to have his relative treated with inexcusable rudeness.

Tom did not waste time in replying to Gore's question in words. There was only one way of replying to it adequately, and that way Tom Merry replied. His right fist shot out like lightning, and Gore rolled head over heels along the quad.

Uncle Frank did not even look round.

The little party arrived at the door.

"You are coming to have tea with us in the study, of course, sir?" said Tom Merry.

Uncle Frank nodded.

"I'm afraid that will be giving you a lot of trouble," he said.

"Not in the least; we shall be happy, sir!" said three or four voices together.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "It's always a pleasuah to entahtain a distinguished visitah, sir, and we'll pwovide a weally wippin' tea!"

Mr. Fawcett smiled.

"In that case I shall be very pleased to come," he said. "I must first go and pay my respects to Dr. Holmes. When do you have tea, Tom?"

"Oh, any time, sir! If it's not quite ready we'll show you round St. Jim's before it gets dark, if you like, sir."

"Certainly! A good idea!"

And the visitor from India betook himself to the Head's study.

"I wonder how long Figgins will be," muttered Tom Merry. "I'd like to have a nice tea ready for Uncle Frank. He was awfully kind to us at Huckleberry Heath."

"Yaas, wathah! You can get ewevythin' weady in the study, you know," said D'Arcy. "And you can get some gwub to start with at the school shop. Those little pork pies at Dame Taggles are vewy nice when they are fwesh, and the waspberry tarts—"

"Good idea," assented Tom Merry. "They're not as good as Mother Murphy's things, but we can't keep a hungry traveller waiting. Go and get some, Gussy. I've left all my tin with Figgins, so you can pay for them."

"With pleasuah, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus trotted off.

The Terrible Three entered their study and began to tidy up with rapid fingers, and get the grate neat and swept, and the kettle boiling. Meanwhile, Mr. Fawcett was in the presence of Dr. Holmes.

They were old acquaintances—very old, in fact, as they had not seen each other for more than twenty years. The meeting was a very cordial one. Dr. Holmes was a great chess player, and Mr. Fawcett was equally devoted to the game, and as soon as the Head of St. Jim's knew that the Anglo-Indian was in England, he had immediately asked him down to the school to settle an old and friendly rivalry.

"I am taking tea with my sister's ward, Tom Merry, in his study," Mr. Fawcett explained to the Head, with a smile.

"We dine at seven," said Dr. Holmes, as he shook hands again with his old friend.

And then the Head of St. Jim's fell to his writing again, and the man from India left the study in quest of Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy is Taken In!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY crossed the quadrangle with unusual haste in his movements. Gore and Mellish noticed at once that he was making for the tuckshop, and observed, too, that for the moment his manners had lost their repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"Going for some grub," Mellish remarked, jerking his thumb towards the swell of the School House. "They're feeding the brown-faced chap in their study. They won't ask us to the feed."

"I say, suppose we let Gussy get his stuff at the tuckshop and then bone it from him," suggested Gore. "It would be a ripping wheeze to leave Tom Merry and his lot without anything in the larder for the visitor."

Mellish chuckled.

"Yes, it would be all right so far; but what about when Tom Merry and the rest got on the track and wiped up the quad with us?"

"H'm! I suppose they would be wild. But I know! We'll put the New House fellows on the scent; they'll soon relieve Gussy of his provisions——"

"We've got a visitah, you know, and rethin' weady for his tea!"

"Horrid!" said Gore. "You're going to give him a ripping feed, I suppose?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you're going to ask us?"

"No, wathah not. The study won't hold more than a dozen, you know, and you are such a howling cad, Goah, that you can't expect it. You were wude to Mr. Fawcett when he came in."

"If you want a dot on the nose, Adolphus——"

"Shut up, Gore," said Mellish, with a wink. "Gussy's right. You were rude to Mr. Fawcett. What are you going to get, D'Arcy?"

"Some pork pies and waspbewwy tarts," said D'Arcy. "I



While Gore sat upon Gussy, so that the swell of St. Jim's could not see what was happening, Mellish hastily poured some red ink into the jam tarts!

"No go!" said Mellish tersely. "Tom Merry and Figgins & Co. are as thick as thieves now, over entertaining this Indian chap. House rows are off!"

"Oh, hang it!" growled Gore. "I owe Tom Merry one for that dot on the nose. Can't you think of some idea, Mellish, confound you?"

Mellish grinned.

"I've already thought of one, if you like to help me carry it out," he said.

"Get it off your chest, then."

"Come on, and let's speak to Gussy."

They hurried after the swell of St. Jim's, and overtook him before he reached the school shop. Gore tapped him on the shoulder.

"Pway don't delay me now, Goah," said D'Arcy, looking round. "I am in a feahful huwwy."

"Why, what's on?" asked Mellish.

know Dame Taggles makes a fwesh lot to-day, and when they're fwesh, they're weally wippin'!"

A gleam shot into Mellish's eyes. He stopped outside Dame Taggles' little shop, and the swell of St. Jim's went in.

"I say, Gore," whispered Mellish, "will you cut off to my study, while I watch here for D'Arcy, and get me the bottle of red ink off my table, and the jar of mahogany stain out of the cupboard."

"What on earth for?" asked Gore, staring at his companion as though he thought Mellish had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"Oh, only to add a flavour to the grub for Tom Merry's study!" said Mellish.

Gore stared again, and then he grinned. He dashed off at top speed towards the School House. He returned within

three minutes with a jar in one hand and a bottle in the other. The dusk was thickening in the quadrangle of St. Jim's.

"Has he come out?" whispered Gore.

Mellish shook his head.

"No. Give me the things. Look here, I'll get back behind the corner, and as soon as he comes I'll dash out and send him flying—by accident, of course. You'll help him up and keep him busy as long as you can while I do my little bit with the tarts."

"Right-ho!"

Arthur Augustus, unconscious of the deep-laid plot of the two young rascals, was busy in the school shop, selecting his pork pies and his tarts. Dame Taggles was an economical soul, and she always tried to sell the stale ones along with the new, and you needed a keen eye to do your shopping satisfactorily at St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus scrutinised every separate tart and pie carefully through his eyeglass, and they were then wrapped up in two paper bags. The swell of St. Jim's paid for them, and marched out of the tuckshop with a paper bag well-filled under each arm.

There was a rush of feet, a sudden biff, and a yell from D'Arcy. Mellish, dashing round the corner, had run right into him at top speed, and the swell of St. Jim's went flying. The bag of tarts flew in one direction, and the bag of pies in another, and both, of course, burst as they touched the ground, and the viands were scattered.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" exclaimed Gore, rushing up.

He seized D'Arcy to help him to rise, and slipped, and fell upon him, pinning him to the earth.

"Lemme gewwup!" came a muffled voice from under the weight of Gore. "You howwid boundah, you are simply cwushin' me! You are wufflin' my twousahs and my beastly waistcoat!"

"Can't help it!" gasped Gore. "I've broken my leg."

"I don't care a wap if you have bwocken all your beastly legs and arms. Get off me and let me get up, you heavy bwute!"

"How can I when I've broken my leg?" demanded Gore, an eye on Mellish as he spoke.

Mellish was industriously collecting the scattered tarts and pork pies. He slipped a few into his pockets as prizes of war; but most of them came in for the little improvement he had designed for the benefit of the feasters in Tom Merry's study. The raspberry tarts received a strong flavouring of red ink, which was not likely to be noticed along with the juice, and a little mahogany stain was squeezed into the pork pies. Of course, these kindly attentions took some little time, but Gore was quite able to keep Arthur Augustus busy.

"Goah, I wegard you as a wotten cad!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, struggling in vain under the weight of the bulky Shell boy. "You are doin' this on purpose!"

"Well, that's what I call ungrateful!" exclaimed Gore. "I rush to your aid like a chum, and break my leg in helping you, and then you call me names."

"I don't believe your leg is broken."

"Well, I can't move, anyhow!"

"You must move. I must get up. My twousahs will be ruined. My waistcoat will be a mere weck. Besides, Mr. Fawcett is waitin' in Tom Mewvy's study by this time for his tea, and we shall look wude."

"Ha, ha, ha! I mean—oh, oh, how my leg hurts!"

"You are tellin' beastly woppahs, Goah!"

"I tell you—"

"If you do not instantly let me wise, I shall thwash you

when I get up! Unless you want a feahful thwashin', Goah, you will let me wise at once."

"I can't. I shall have to risk the thrashing."

D'Arcy struggled furiously. But Gore had the advantage, and he was easily able to keep the slim swell of the School House pinned down by his weight alone.

"Oh, you howwid beast!" exclaimed D'Arcy, gasping for breath. "I will thwash you feantly when I get up! Wescue! Wescue, St. Jim's!"

"Now shut up, D'Arcy; and when my leg feels a bit better I'll get off your waistcoat."

"You are tellin' untwuths, Goah! There is nothing whatevah the mattah with your wotten leg. I wegard you as a cad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wescue—wescue!"

"Hallo, what's the trouble?" asked Mellish, coming up out of the dusk. "I'm sorry I ran into you, Gussy. I've collected up your tarts and pies."

"Thank you, vewy much, Mellish! That is a vewy fwiently thing to do. I should wegard it as a gweat fayah if you would shift this howwid boundah off me."

"It's all right," said Gore. "I don't think my leg is broken, after all. The pain is gone now. You can get up, D'Arcy."

And Gore rose and D'Arcy scrambled to his feet.

"If I were not in such a feahful huvwvy, Goah, I would give you a feahful thwashin'!" said the swell of the School House hotly. "Give me the bags, Mellish. Thank you vewy much! You can have some of these tarts if you like. Take some!"

"No, thanks!" said Mellish, whose pockets were already full, and who had no taste for tarts flavoured with red ink. "Thank you vewy much, but you'll want them all for the study feed. Gore, I am surprised at you for treating Gussy in this disrespectful fashion. Come along, and don't stand there, grinning like a hyena!"

And Mellish and Gore walked away together.

"Howwid bwute, that Goah!" murmured D'Arcy. "I despise him feahfully! This wotten wow has made me quite cwosa."

He hurried to the School House, and arrived at Tom Merry's study just as it was reached by Mr. Fawcett. D'Arcy waited for the Anglo-Indian to enter first, and then carried in the paper bags.

The cloth was laid, and in the light of the gas and the cheerful fire, the study looked very homelike and cosy. Figgins and Fatty Wynn had not yet arrived, but D'Arcy's supplies came in time to begin tea. The kettle was boiling, and Lowther made the tea as Mr. Fawcett came in. Manners and Blake were cutting bread, and Kerr was searching through the cupboard for any fragments that might have escaped previous search wherewith to grace the festive board. He could find nothing but a fragment of mouldy cheese, which he thought he had better leave where it was.

"Please sit down, sir!" said Tom Merry, drawing out the only easy-chair between the table and the fire for Uncle Frank. "Tea's just ready. If the chair's too low there's a nice cushion here. That's only cocoa beans spilt on it, and it's quite dry. Have you made the tea, Monty?"

"Yes, just," said Monty Lowther. "Better let it draw a minute or two."

"Right-ho! Pork pies this way, please! You'll find these pies simply ripping, sir! Dame Taggles makes them, and they're a special thing."

"I'm sure I shall," said Uncle Frank. "How nice they look! You are in cosy quarters here, Tom. This makes me feel young again."

And Uncle Frank, who was really hungry, made active play with his knife and fork. Some of the juniors followed suit, for company's sake, while Lowther poured out the tea, and Tom Merry was ready to pass Mr. Fawcett anything he needed.

The pork pie on Uncle Frank's plate looked very tempting. It was nicely done, and when it was cut a rich gravy ran out—a surprisingly thick and rich red gravy.

"Very good," said Uncle Frank. "I—"

He stopped suddenly, and his jaws, which had been busy, stopped working. Tom Merry was alarmed at the look which came over the brown face of the Anglo-Indian.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" he exclaimed anxiously.

"The—the—the—"

"What is it, sir? Nothing wrong with the pie, I hope?"

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"What can it be?"

"Ow!" exclaimed Kerr, jumping up. "Ow! What's the matter with the beastly thing? I'm poisoned!"

Tom Merry looked at him in amazement.

"Is anything wrong with the pies, Kerr?"

"Yes. Ow! G-r-r-r-r! Ow! I'm poisoned!"

"Horrible!" exclaimed Blake, with a shudder,



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"I—I suppose this is a little joke, is it?" thundered Uncle Frank, rising to his feet.

Tom Merry looked dismayed. The Anglo-Indian had a temper as hot and peppery as the climate he came from, and his face was absolutely crimson now.

"A—a joke, sir!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Yes!" roared Uncle Frank. "You have put mahogany stain or something like that in the pies, I suppose. That's what it tastes like."

"I haven't, sir!" exclaimed Tom, deeply distressed at being thought guilty of a trick upon a visitor under his own roof. "I assure you—"

"Great Juggernaut! I'm poisoned!"

"Ow—ow—ow!" moaned Kerr.

"Oooh! Oooh-groooh!" mumbled Blake.

"I assure you, Mr. Fawcett," exclaimed Tom Merry, "I give you my word, sir, that I didn't know anything was wrong with the pies."

Tom Merry never told a lie, and Mr. Fawcett knew that he was to be believed. He could see, too, that Kerr and Blake were suffering as much as himself. He mumbled over his handkerchief, trying to rub the taste out of his mouth.

"Dame Taggles must have been careless," said Tom Merry. "It's a rotten shame!"

"It's a rotten pie!" groaned Blake.

"Mrs. Taggles must have been using bad meat for the pies," said Manners. "That's the only explanation I can think of."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," said Tom Merry. "I'll chuck that away. And will you try another pie, sir?"

"No, I think not," said Mr. Fawcett, recovering his calmness and resuming his seat. "Pray forgive me for suspecting you of playing a trick, but that pie tasted exactly like some furniture stain, and it would be a dangerous trick to place anything of that kind in food. But I know you would do nothing of the kind. I was hasty."

"That's all right, sir," said D'Arcy, beaming. "You weally did look feahfully bad-temphed; but it's all ovah now, and your apology is accepted."

Mr. Fawcett's eyes fixed on the swell of the School House like a pair of gimlets, but D'Arcy was drinking his tea, and did not notice it.

The door of the study opened, and Figgins and Fatty Wynn came in, each with a rather bulky parcel under his arm. Mr. Fawcett took up his teacup and appeared to notice nothing. He did not seem surprised when he had finished slowly drinking his tea at the great addition to the viands on the table when he set down his teacup.

"Sorry I'm late for tea," said Figgins blandly. "We dropped behind in the lane somehow, and Fatty Wynn can't get along."

"Oh, I say, Figgy!"

Figgins trod on his toe.

"Better late than never," said Tom cheerfully. "Sit down! There's the coal-box for you, Figgins! And as for Fatty, there never was room for him at any ordinary-sized table, so he can have the locker. Now we're all right!"

And the troublesome pork pies having been disposed of in the coal-locker, the feast in Tom Merry's study went forward gladly enough.

CHAPTER 4.

Uncle Frank—the Peacemaker!

TOM MERRY was always a pleasant host, and a feed in the study of the Terrible Three was seldom anything but a success. The rivals of St. Jim's being all on the most amicable terms, and their honoured guest being determined to please and to be pleased, everything was certain to go swimmingly.

The provisions brought from the village tuckshop were really first-class. Mr. Fawcett, who was to dine with the doctor, ate sparingly, but he took a little of everything, and was pleased with it, so his present hosts were satisfied.

Tom Merry kept him supplied, while Lowther was on the watch to fill his teacup whenever it showed a sign of getting empty. Mr. Fawcett was not a great tea-drinker, but he distinguished himself on that occasion.

He told stories of India, which held the juniors spellbound. Like all healthy British boys, there was a love of adventure deeply seated in their natures, and tales of wild life on the frontiers of our great empire appealed to them strongly. And Mr. Fawcett could tell a story well. His way was rather short and abrupt, and he would relate a yarn in a series of ejaculations, as it were; but, on the other hand, he never posed, or forgot a necessary point, and had to go back for it. There was nothing prosy about him, a fault which a hearer finds it hardest to forgive.

"I say," said Figgins presently, after Mr. Fawcett had finished a story of Indian magic, "I should like to see some

of those tricks again that you showed us at Hucklebury Heath, sir. Some of us were not there, you know, and Kerr and Wynn and Dig and Marmaduke and Manners haven't seen any Indian magic."

"We should like to, though!" chimed in the juniors named at once.

Mr. Fawcett smiled.

"I should be very pleased to give you an hour after dinner, if you like," he said. "I am booked after that to play chess with the Head."

"You are very kind, sir," said Tom Merry. "I say, suppose we have it in the Common-room, so that all the kids can see. They'd all like it as well as we should."

"Yaas, wathah! That's extwemely thoughtful of you, Tom Mewwy! I wegard that suggestion as a weally good one."

"Certainly!" said Mr. Fawcett heartily.

"You'll have a raspberry tart, sir," said Lowther hospitably, as he saw that the gentleman from Boggleywallabad had finished.

"Well, really—"

Mr. Fawcett hesitated.

"They're ripping, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I bought them myself and selected them with extweme care, sir!"

"You must have one, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"You must have one, sir!" said Kerr. "When Gussy selected them with his own fair hands."

"Oh, weally, Kerr—"

"Thank you, I will!" said the Anglo-Indian, as a raspberry tart was placed upon his plate, and he dutifully attacked it.

"How rich they look!" Lowther remarked. "I never saw a raspberry tart such a rich red before. Dame Taggles is improving."

"You see, Lowthah, I selected them myself with extweme care—"

"Gerrooooooh!"

That sudden and expressive ejaculation broke from Mr. Fawcett.

He sprang to his feet, sending his chair flying backwards in his haste, and it crashed against the fender.

Streams of red were running from the corner of his mouth, and his features were twisted up into an expression of anguish.

Tom Merry jumped up in alarm.

"Oh—oooooh! Ugh! Ow!"

"What's the matter, sir? What's the—"

"Ink!" howled Uncle Frank. "Red ink! Ow! You have poisoned me!"

"Red ink!"

"My hat!" said Manners, who had just tasted one of the tarts. "Mr. Fawcett is right. Somebody's been shoving red ink in the tarts!"

Mr. Fawcett wiped out his mouth.

Tom Merry was looking so distressed that the old gentleman could not for a moment suspect him of having been a party to the trick.

"D'Arcy!" exclaimed Figgins. "You young rotter! So that's your little game!"

"I fail to compwehend you, Figgins," said the swell of the School House, with great dignity.

"You fetched the tarts and the pork pies—"

A light broke on all the fellows at once. A chorus of denunciation arose.

"You rotter!"

"You fetched the tarts and you doctored them!"

"You shoved furniture polish into the pork pies!"

"It's his idea of a joke!"

D'Arcy looked round in amazement at the indignant faces of the juniors. Mr. Fawcett fixed him with his gimlet eyes.

"So that is your tit for tat, D'Arcy, is it?" he asked. "I remember you were the victim of a conjuring trick at Laurel Villa, which was played for your own good, you know."

"My deah sir, pway listen to me—"

"You doctored the tarts!" howled the Terrible Three.

"Inhospitable beast!" chorused Figgins & Co.

"I'm ashamed of you, Gussy!" said Blake and Herries together.

The swell of St. Jim's rose to his feet with a great deal of dignity.

"I fail to compwehend the weason of these wemarks," he said. "If you suspect me—"

"Rats!"

"If you suspect me of bein' guilty of the extweme and inexcusable wudeness of playin' a twick on an honahed guest—"

"Who did it if you didn't?"

"I can only say that I wegard the suggestion with the contempt it deserves, and that you are weally a set of extremely asinine persons."

"Rats! Who did it, then?"

"If the pork pies have been flavoured with furniture polish, and the waspbewwy tarts with wed ink, can only say that I am ignowant of the crics."

"You brought the rotten things here—"

"Yaas, wathah! But I did not tampah with them, deah boys. Mr. Fawcett, I weally hope you will accept my assuwanee that I did not tampah with the provisions destined for the entertainment of an honahed guest. I am sure you are awah that I wespect you too highly."

The Anglo-Indian laughed.

"I accept your word, D'Arcy, of course."

"As a gentleman, I should expect you to do so," said Arthur Augustus. "As for these stupid persons, I disdain to weply to such an accusation."

"Well, we're going to get to the bottom of the affair!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Did the things pass out of your hands after you bought them from Mrs. Taggles?"

"No. Only Mellish wan into me vewy wuffly in the quad, and that wascal Goah sat on me, so that I could not collect up the tarts and the pies. Mellish gathahed them up for me."

"Oh, I see! And doctored them at the same time."

"Yaas, wathah! Now you suggest it, I weally think he must have done. I wemembah I was surprised at Mellish doin' a decent thing for once."

"You—you ass! You ought to have guessed that it was planned between them!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Oh, wats! How was I to guess anything of the sort? But I tell you what, deah boys! We cannot ovahlook a feahful insult like this diwected at a guest of this study. We must give Goah and Mellish a feahful thwashing."

"Yes, rather," said Blake. "I was thinking so."

"We'll have them out and frog's-march them up and down the quad," exclaimed Figgins excitedly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Allow me a word," said Mr. Fawcett.

"That's all right, sir," said Lowther. "We'll make them smart. We'll make them sit up."

"I was going to say—"

"Yaas, wathah! We'll give them howwid beans, sir! I assuah you that they shall be made to wegwet this extremely ill-bwed conduct."

"But I want to ask you—"

"If you don't considah a fwog's-march severe enough, sir, we'll put the wotten wascals undah the pump, sir."

"That is not what I—"

"Then we'll lick them with a swap, Mr. Fawcett. I assuah you that you shall be completely satisfied in this wespect."

"Let Mr. Fawcett speak!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Dry up for a minute, Gussy!"

Gussy adjusted his eyeglass and gave Lowther a stony stare.

"I wefuse to dwy up, Lowthah! Mr. Fawcett is talkin' all the time, and I am answevin' him. You are an ass, Lowthah!"

"I would like to say," said Mr. Fawcett, "that I want you lads to let this matter drop. I do not want my visit here signalled by a quarrel. Pray, take no more notice of the affair, and I shall take it as a favour to myself."

"Certainly, sir," said Tom Merry promptly. "You shall have it exactly as you like, and if you say the word we won't rag those wasters."

"Very good! Let the matter drop!"

And then Mr. Fawcett took his leave, promising to visit the juniors' Common-room when he left Dr. Holmes.

"That's a good idea about the entertainment in the Common-room," said Monty Lowther. "Let's go and tell the fellows about it."

"We'll let some of the seniors come in," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "That is, of course, if they behave themselves and keep their place. The room's ours, and we shall have to be in authority."

"Good!" grinned Blake. "We'll get Kildare to come along and see fair play."

And Tom Merry & Co. left the study.

CHAPTER 5.

Knox, the Prefect, is Put Out!

THE news that there was to be an exhibition of Indian magic in the juniors' Common-room was received with enthusiasm by the fellows of the Shell and the Fourth Form, and the Lower Forms at St. Jim's. There was not likely to be a lack of attendance, but rather

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the reverse, for the juniors were soon turning up in large numbers, and as New House fellows were admitted it looked like being a crush.

The Common-room used by the juniors of the School House was not quite equal to that belonging to the Upper Form fellows. It was in reality an odd room which had been allowed to the youngsters for themselves, and it was not very large. But by judicious management Tom Merry hoped to keep the crush in order.

The eleven comrades were all ready to deal with trouble if it arose, and it soon did arise. Many of the seniors were glad to come to the entertainment, and Tom Merry issued the invitations with a royal liberality. But some of the Upper Form fellows were inclined to put on airs of master-ship, and were far from wishing to acknowledge that they were there on the kindness of the juniors.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had promised to look in, but he had not yet arrived.

Knox, the most unpopular prefect of the School House, was the first senior to come in, and the room by that time was pretty full of seniors, and the best places were, of course, taken. There was plenty of room to stand, but every kind of article that could possibly be used as a seat was taken up. Knox stared about him rather ill-humouredly, and while he was doing so Sefton of the New House came in.

"Hallo, Knox!" he remarked. "No seats left."

"Blessed if I'm going to stand!" said Knox.

"That's what I was thinking. Some of these youngsters can give up their seats. Here, Gibbons," went on Sefton, speaking to the champion dullard of the Shell, "I want that chair. Jump up!"

Gibbons looked up at him.

"I'm sitting in it," he said simply.

"I know you are, and I'm going to, so you can get out of it. Up with you!"

"But it's my chair."

"Is it? Well, you can lend it to me!"

Gibbons looked round the crowded room in his slow way.

"But there's no other seat," he protested. "I can't stand, you know."

"I think you'll have to," grinned Sefton. "Come! Up with you, before I twist your silly ear! Get a move on!"

Gibbons was about to rise, with extreme reluctance, when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came on the scene.

He promptly interfered.

"Don't get up, Gibbons. Sefton, deah boy, you are labouwin' undah a misappwehension. You seniors are not in authority here."

Sefton glared at him. But D'Arcy had been glared at before, and it had never ruffled his aristocratic composure.

"You see, deah boy," he explained, "this is the juniors' woom, and we are in authority here. There are eleven of us keepin' ordah, and I weally hope that you will not start givin' twouble."

"You cheeky young rascal!" roared Sefton.

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye.

"Weally, Sefton, I wegard your language as most wewehensible. You are a wotah, as a mattah of fact. I must beg you to westwain yourself."

"Do you want a hiding, you young ass?"

"Certainly not! And I wefuse to be called an ass. I wegard you as a wude boundah, and I shall be obliged if you will kindly leave the woom," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

Sefton stared at him blankly for a moment, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"Yes, I can see myself doing that!" he exclaimed. "Get out of the way, you little ass! Gibbons, get off that chair!"

"You will do nothin' of the sort, Gibbons," said D'Arcy. "And you, Sefton, must behave yourself in a more gentlemanly mannah if you are goin' to wemain here."

"Oh, get away!" exclaimed Knox. "I'm a prefect, D'Arcy, as you ought to know, and I tell you we're not going to stand up while kids like you sit down!"

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass from Sefton to Knox.

"I am awah that you are a pwefect, Knox, and a wotten bad one you are," he said. "But on the pwesent occasion you must wegard the wules like the west of us. This is our woom, and we are mastahs here. Ewevwybody who comes in must submit to our woprah authority."

"Are you going to get out of the way?" roared Knox.

"Certainly not. It is a qweestion of dig with me, and I uttally wefuse to get out of the way!"

Knox wasted no more breath in words, but seized the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder.

D'Arcy would have been swung out of the way without

ceremony, but the fracas had attracted the attention of Tom Merry and his comrades, and they were hurrying up.

Knox's hand was knocked off D'Arcy's shoulder. The prefect turned on the aggressor with a glare of rage, and found himself looking into the calm face of Tom Merry.

"You—you young heend!" "Stop that!" said Tom Merry, with a ring of authority in his voice. "This is our room, and if you don't behave yourself you'll get slung out of it, and sharp!"

"Bravo!" shouted the juniors on all sides. Knox was almost choking with passion.

"Do you know you are talking to a prefect?" he snapped. "I don't care whether you are a prefect or not. You have no right to come and make a disturbance in this room!"

"I'll do as I like! I'm going to sit down!"

"You are going to do nothing of the sort. You should have come earlier. There are no seats left now!"

"Lick him, old kid!" advised Sefton.

Kildare, with a shade on his brow. "Sefton and Knox—Let's see what it is."

And the three seniors walked towards the scene of the dispute.

Knox had hesitated as he saw the captain of St. Jim's come in, but he felt that he had gone too far for retreat.

"Hallo!" said Kildare. "Anything wrong? Don't let's have any bother here now, when Mr. Fawcett may come in any moment."

"Hang Mr. Fawcett!" said Knox.

Kildare's eyes flashed.

"Don't be a pig, Knox, if you can help it," he said quietly. "If you say anything of that kind in the hearing of the doctor's visitor I'll make you sorry for it."

"Will you?" said Knox, setting his teeth.

"Yes, I will."

The captain's manner was quiet—very quiet—but it carried more weight than the prefect's bluster.



As Tom Merry turned the corner of the passage, he saw the figure of a man silhouetted against the window. In a flash he recognised it as Mr. Spionson, who was after Uncle Frank's golden idol!

"My hat!" said Knox. "If he gives me another word of his cheek I'll wipe up the floor with him!"

"Will you?" said Tom Merry, with a glint in his eyes. "Not while I can hit out, Knox! You've made a mistake in coming here to bully us. If you don't behave yourself there are enough of us here to sling you out."

Knox said no more, but reached out at Tom Merry.

A general row was imminent, but at that moment Kildare, the captain of the school, entered the room.

The captain for a moment did not notice that a row was going forward. He glanced about the room with his pleasant, cheerful smile.

"Hallo! No seats left!" he said. "We shall have to stand, Darrel. Let's lean up against the wall at the back here. We can see over the heads of the youngsters."

"Right!" said Darrel of the Sixth. "But, I say, there's some trouble there. Knox has got his rag out, as usual. Hallo, Monteith!"

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, had entered the room. He nodded to Darrel and Kildare and joined them.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Something up between Tom Merry and Sefton," said

Knox's defiant gaze fell, and he gave an uneasy laugh.

"Oh, don't get your rag out over nothing!" he exclaimed.

"I haven't any intention of being rude to our entertainer. It's decent of him to provide a show for nothing, and if the hat is passed round I'll put a tanner in it."

Smack!

Tom Merry's open hand came across the prefect's mouth with a crack like a pistol-shot.

"You cad!" he cried.

Knox staggered back.

The blow was nothing, but sheer surprise made him stagger. To be smacked across the mouth by a junior was a new experience for a prefect of St. Jim's.

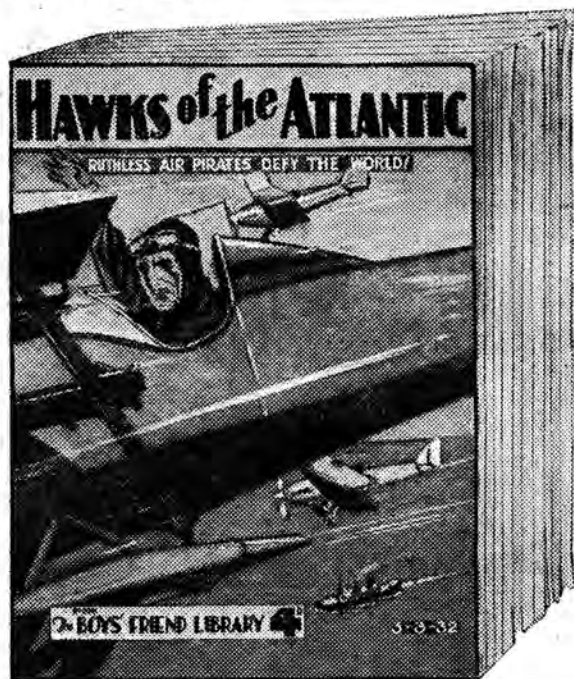
Tom Merry stood, scarlet with rage, quivering from head to foot. If he had been expelled for it the next moment he would still have struck that blow.

It was only for a moment that Knox showed surprise;

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then, spluttering with rage, he leaped forward, and it would have gone hard with Tom Merry if the powerful grip of the Sixth-Former had been fastened upon him at that moment.

But a strong arm was thrown between, and Kildare pushed the savage prefect back.

"Get out of the way, Kildare!" roared Knox, mad with rage.

"I shall not get out of the way."

"He has struck me—a prefect!"

"And serve you right," said Kildare. "If he had not done so, my blow was ready. You care! Get out of the room!"

"I won't! I—"

"Get out of the room!" roared Kildare, his hot Irish temper flaring up in a blaze of indignation. "Get out, or I'll fling you out!"

Knox looked into the face of the Irish lad and weakened. Kildare could have thrown him half across the room if he had liked, and he looked as if he would do it.

"I don't want to row with you, Kildare," muttered Knox.

"Get out of the room, then."

Knox hesitated, and then strode savagely to the door. A faint hiss followed him, but a single glance from Kildare stopped that.

Monteith gave Sefton a glance.

The New House bully stepped quietly away and leaned against the wall at the back. The humiliation of Knox had been a lesson to him, and he had no desire to draw the anger of the captain of St. Jim's upon himself.

The room was still in a buzz with the exciting incident when Mr. Fawcett came in. In blissful unconsciousness of the late row, Uncle Frank passed through the crowded audience, who gave him a cheer, and entered the space which had been left for him—not a large space, but sufficient for his purpose.

And then the entertainment commenced.

CHAPTER 6.

Gore in a Fix!

MR. FAWCETT had foreseen that his Indian magic would be in demand at St. Jim's, for he had brought the necessary paraphernalia in his travelling-bag. He seemed to require very little, however, for even the most wonderful tricks, many of them far more marvellous than anything the boys of St. Jim's had seen before.

The youngsters prepared themselves for a treat, and they were not disappointed. When Uncle Frank asked for a watch, D'Arcy passed forward his famous gold watch, with a smile. He remembered the fright he had had at Laurel Villa, when Uncle Frank had played a trick with that same watch, and he knew now that he had nothing to fear.

Uncle Frank smashed the watch in a basin with great thoroughness, and then restored it uninjured to its owner; and then he produced yards and yards of coloured ribbon from Figgins' cap, and a set of chess from D'Arcy's silk hat. These were only a preliminary canter, so to speak; the real magic was to come.

Gore and Mellish had front seats, as also had Wynn and Trimble, having taken care to be early, and they were watching the performances of the magician with as much interest as the others, but in a carping spirit, as was usual to them.

Mr. Fawcett's next trick was to produce all kinds of edibles from a top-hat. Wynn and Trimble gasped when he produced a steaming pie twice as big as the hat. But they were not asked to make it disappear, though no doubt they could have done so.

Mr. Fawcett's eyes dwelt upon Gore for a moment, and he certainly recognised the boy who had uttered an insult to him in the quadrangle, but he made no remark.

"Lot of rot, I call this!" said Gore in a stage-whisper to Mellish. "Stale old tricks; you see 'em at any conjuring show. Call this magic?"

"You're right, Gore; it's a fraud."

"Now, my young friends," said Uncle Frank, looking at his interested audience, "I am going to show you the Indian knot trick."

"Nother stale old wheeze, I expect," murmured Gore.

"I shall tie a knot in a certain way," went on Mr. Fawcett, "and every lad who chooses will be allowed to attempt to untie it; but I do not think it will be done."

"Bet I could do it!" muttered Gore.

Mr. Fawcett's gimlet-eyes were on him at once.

"Ah, here is a lad who thinks he can do it!" he said. "He shall have the first attempt, then."

Gore turned red.

"Blessed if the josses hasn't ears as sharp as needles!" he muttered.

"Yes, my hearing is quite good," said Mr. Fawcett, whose

quick ears caught that remark, too. "Will you come upon the stage, my lad? Let me see—what is your name?"

"Gore, sir," said the cad of the Shell. He rose to his feet, not at all displeased to be taking a prominent part in the show, and determined to make it a failure and turn the conjurer into ridicule, if he could.

"Ah, Gore! Please stop this way."

The "stage" was only a portion of the floor left vacant for the conjurer. Gore stepped upon it, and Uncle Frank produced a thin, strong cord from his bag.

"Now," he said, "I shall tie this young gentleman's feet together—"

"Oh, will you?" exclaimed Gore.

"Certainly! That is the trick. Then you will be allowed five minutes to unfasten the cord with your hands. If you succeed I will acknowledge that your boast is justified."

"But—" said Gore rather uneasily.

"Sit down here, please," said Uncle Frank, fairly pushing Gore into a chair. "It will not take me many minutes."

It did not take many minutes, for Uncle Frank's hands worked like lightning. Gore tried to follow the evolutions of cord, but his eye was soon dazzled and defeated. He had to trust to his ability to find and untie the knots.

A dozen feet of cord were used up before Uncle Frank ceased. Then Gore's feet were as firmly fastened together as if they had been glued. The ends of the cord were not visible, and the mass of it looked impenetrable.

"Now," said Uncle Frank, rising to his feet, "you are at liberty to untie that, Bore. Is your name Snore?"

"Gore, sir!"

"Oh, Gore! Well, you may now untie the rope; and if you cannot do it, the other young gentlemen may take their turn."

Gore bent down and tackled the cord. The crowded audience watched him with great interest. Gore was a fellow much given to what the juniors described as "showing off," and his discomfiture, if it happened, was not likely to get him much sympathy.

Five minutes passed, and Gore had made no impression upon the cords. With an aching back, a flushed face, and tingling fingers he at length sat up.

"Do you give it up, Snore—I mean Bore?"

"Yes!" snapped Gore. "I can't undo the beastly thing! Get it off!"

Uncle Frank turned to the audience:

"Would anyone care to tackle the knots?"

The juniors almost fell over one another in their eagerness to show their skill. Fellow after fellow tried, and had to give it up.

Kildare came forward at last and tried his skill, but had to give it up, like the rest.

Uncle Frank smiled blandly.

"So you give it up, my young friends?"

"Yaas, wathab!" said Arthur, Augustus. "Bai Jove, my deah sir, it's beyond me, you know. I weally cannot untie the knots, or even find the beastly things, you know, and so it's no use these fellows twyin'—"

"Oh, ease off, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to ease off! I was sayin'—"

"Rats!"

"As the test is given up, I will untie the knots myself," said Uncle Frank; "that is, of course, if I am able to do so!"

Gore gave a jump as if he had been electrified.

"What's that?" he howled. "If you're able? Do you mean to say—"

"Patience, my friend! I tied that cord on the understanding that you would untie it. You declared that you could do so!"

"I—I—I—"

"I will do my best, and I have no doubt that, in the long run, I shall succeed," said the Anglo-Indian. "But you must be patient."

He bent down and fumbled with the cord. He rose to his feet again in a couple of minutes, and shook his head solemnly. Gore watched him with intent anxiety. Already he was beginning to feel cramped about the lower limbs.

"I am extremely sorry," said Mr. Fawcett. "The cord, as you see, remains unfastened. I am afraid that it must be left to your skill, Gore."

"I can't unfasten it; I told you so!"

"That is very unfortunate, as it is of no use leaving it to me. I am sorry for you, Gore. Let this be a lesson to you not to be too sure of your abilities in an untried direction, and—"

"Are you going to let me loose?" howled Gore.

"As I have said, I am compelled to leave that to your own ingenuity."

"I'll jolly soon cut the cord, then!" exclaimed Gore, taking out a knife from his pocket and opening the largest blade.

"Here, weally, you must not destroy Mr. Fawcett's property!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Don't be a cad, Goah!"

"I can't get loose, you fathead!"

"That does not matten vevy much. You can sit there, and pewwaps the cord will get loose. You have no wight to destroy anothah gentleman's pwoerty!"

"Oh, I have no objection!" said Mr. Fawcett, with a smile. "Only the cord has a metal wire running through the centre of it, you see, which, I am afraid, will not yield to a knife! But Gore may as well try."

Gore simply snorted with rage. He was beginning to suspect that Mr. Fawcett had deliberately played this trick upon him. He slashed savagely at the cord with his knife. The outer covering came off in patches, showing the thick, strong wire within. A wood-axe would not have severed that!

Gore out and hacked at it, and blunted his knife and cut his trousers. But he made no impression on the wire. The whole room was shouting with laughter by this time. Gore's cocksureness had received its proper punishment, and no one felt anything but amused at his predicament.

"Pray have patience, my dear boy," said Uncle Frank blandly. "I cannot spare more time now, as I have little left for the rest of the tricks I wish to show you, but I will have another try when the entertainment is over. Now, please don't say any more, as I must have silence for the next trick!"

"I want to be let loose!"

"I said I wanted silence!"

"I want—"

"Silence!"

"Order!"

"Hold your row!"

The audience joined in the demand with no uncertain voice. Gore scowled, and was silent. The looks of the juniors were threatening, and he already saw pea-shooters and catapults coming into view, to bombard him if he did not keep quiet.

The next trick was the basket trick, famous enough in India. A live rabbit was brought in, and Mr. Fawcett placed it in a basket, and covered it up in the full sight of the audience. Then a white mouse was dropped in, and the basket closed.

Mr. Fawcett's next proceeding filled the juniors with amazement, and many of them with horror and dismay. He took a short Oriental sword from his bag, and drove it again and again into the wicker sides of the basket. Shrill squeals of pain were heard from within, and a stream of red ran under the edges.

Figgins looked at Tom Merry. The hero of the Shell was looking grave, but that was all. He knew that Uncle Frank was incapable of cruelty to an animal, but he was amazed.

"My word!" muttered Lowther. "If that rabbit isn't cut to ribbons, the man's a black magician, and no mistake!"

Uncle Frank ceased his stabbing and jabbing at last. He drew away the sword, which was red half-way to the hilt, and wiped it. The cries of pain had ceased in the basket, but the horrid red was still in sight on the floor.

"Will someone open the basket?" asked Uncle Frank.

There was a general hesitation. So real had the whole thing seemed, that the juniors could not help feeling that when the lid of the basket was raised a horrible scene of slaughter would be revealed. It was Kildare who came forward at last and opened the basket.

He uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"Well, get out the body!" said Uncle Frank.

"There's—there's nothing there!"

"Nothing there!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

There was a rush to examine the basket. Sure enough it contained nothing living. The rabbit and the mouse had disappeared.

The juniors were astounded.

"But where's the giddy rabbit?" demanded Tom Merry. "I'll swear I saw it put in the basket—or, rather, I'd almost swear it!"

Uncle Frank laughed.

"Perhaps D'Arcy could tell you," he said.

"I?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in amazement. "I weally cannot do anything of the sort, my deah sir—I haven't seen the wabbit since you put it in the basket!"

"What is it doing in your hat, then?"

"My hat!"

D'Arcy's hat—the silk hat that had been used in a previous trick—was still standing on its crown on the floor. There was a general stare towards it and exclamations of astonishment.

"The rabbit!"

Sure enough there was the white rabbit, curled up in the topper, and comfortably asleep.

The juniors stared at one another and at the magician. The animal had not been hurt.

"But where's the white mouse?" asked Figgins.

"Ask Gore."

"Hang the white mouse!" said Gore. "How should I know?"

"You ought to know what's in your own pockets!"

"My pockets! I know there's no white mouse in my pocket!"

"But let D'Arcy look."

"Rats! I tell you— My only Aunt Jane!" Gore broke off in absolute amazement, as the swell of St. Jim's thrust a hand into Gore's pocket and drew out a white mouse.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Solomonson Again!

"**B**AI JOVE!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Well, my word!" said Tom Merry. "Fancy Gore having it in his pocket all the time!"

"And he says he never knew!" exclaimed Figgins, astonished.

"Oh, we all know how to believe Gore!" said Kerr.

"I tell you I didn't know!" howled Gore. "And it's not the same white mouse, either. You can't tell these little beasts from one another!"

"Oh, dwy up, Goah; you are a boah!"

"I tell you he must have slipped it into my pocket when he was fooling over this cord, and it's not the same mouse—"

"Oh, wats! Pway dwy up!"

"He's hidden the other one somewhere!"

But no one was listening to Gore. Whether his explanation was true or not, nobody cared a rap. The trick was, none the less, a marvellous one.

Uncle Frank looked at his watch.

"Ah, I shall have to leave you now," he said. "You may put those things into my bag, Tom. I will try—"

"Will you undo this cord, Mr. Fawcett?" exclaimed Gore.

"To find an opportunity of showing you some more magic before I leave St. Jim's—"

"Will you untie me?"

"But I am almost due now to play chess with the Head. Are all the things in the bag, Tom? I must be gone in five minutes."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I have no more to—"

"Will you unfasten me?" screamed Gore. "I know jolly well you can if you like!"

"So good-night, lads!" said Mr. Fawcett. "Eh? Did you speak to me, Gore?"

"Will you unfasten this beastly wire?"

"Oh, that wire! I cannot leave it there, Gore. I shall want it again, so perhaps I had better have another try."

Mr. Fawcett bent down and took hold of the twisted wire cord, and in some mysterious way it came loose in his hands in a few seconds.

He rose to his feet, folded it up into a coil, and slipped it into his bag. Gore got off the chair, and yelled as the cramp made his legs tingle, and began to rub his ankles savagely.

Mr. Fawcett smiled blandly as he snapped his bag shut.

"How fortunate that I was able to undo the cord," he remarked. "Gore might have remained like that all night

otherwise. My lad, may I advise you not to be too cocksure in the future. You need improvement in that respect."

Gore would have made a disrespectful reply if he had dared. But he knew that Tom Merry would wipe up the floor with him if he did, so he only growled sullenly. Mr. Fawcett laid a little packet on the table.

"You asked me to let you see my little curiosities?" he remarked. "Here they are, Tom. Put them on the table in my room when you have done with them."

There were many curious articles turned out of the packet. Among them was the famous little golden idol, with the hideous face, to which the Anglo-Indian had hinted that a story was attached. It passed from hand to hand, and many a shudder was caused by the malevolent expression of the hideous little wizened face.

But the one upon whom the deepest impression was made was Gibbons, the dunce of the Shell. He turned quite pale when he looked at the horrible-looking idol, and retained a scared look even after it had passed from his hands.

Mr. Fawcett took his leave, leaving the curios in the hands of the juniors. Tom Merry told the story of the little idol, as much as he had heard of it from Uncle Frank, and the juniors listened with awe.

"Rats!" said Gore, the sceptic. "I don't believe that it ever was boned from an Indian temple. It's all moonshine!"

"I didn't say it was," said Tom Merry. "I say the native who sold it to Mr. Fawcett said so. That's all I know. It's a hideous thing, but I should say it's valuable."

"Yaas, wathah! The eyes are made of wubies!"

"But they're not real rubies!" sneered Gore.

"And the thing's made of gold, too," said Lowther.

"Spoof, I expect," said Gore.

"Oh, shut up, Gore!"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally considah that Goah should shut up! Goah, old fellow, you are too much and too often!" said D'Arcy. "Pway dwy up!"

Gore stalked away, scowling. He had had a lesson that evening, but he did not seem much better for it.

Kildare looked at his watch as he left the room presently. "Five minutes to bed-time," he remarked.

Tom Merry collected up the curios to take them to Uncle Frank's room. He left the Common-room with the packet in his hand and went upstairs. In the dim corridor he ran against a strange figure.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, stopping in amazement.

"My tear young shentleman—"

It was a silky, insinuating voice. The man was the Hebrew Tom Merry had seen talking to Mr. Fawcett at the station—the curio collector who was determined to gain possession of the little golden god with the ruby eyes.

Tom Merry stared at the collector in amazement and strong suspicion.

"How did you come here?" he exclaimed.

The dealer made a deprecating gesture.

"I mean no harm—of zat I assure you, my nice young shentlemans!"

"What are you doing here?"

"I—I come to see Mr. Fawcett."

"How did you get into the house?"

"I—I—"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "I know your little game, perfectly, Mr. Solomonson. If you weren't an old man I should dot you on the boko, and trot you downstairs head-first. As it is, I'll see you off the premises."

Potts, the Office Boy!



"My tear young shentlemans—" "Are you going quietly?" "My tear young—" "Scat!" exclaimed Tom Merry impatiently. "Will you clear out?" "I came to see Mr. Fawcett—" "I'll take you to him, then," said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

But the old collector exhibited signs of dire alarm at the offer. He avoided the hand Tom Merry would have slipped through his arm.

"I—I mean to say, young shentlemans—" "You are a prevaricating old humbug!" said Tom Merry. "You either come straight to Mr. Fawcett, or I'll see you out of the school. Which is it to be?"

"I—I will go out if you wish—" "Come along, then, and get done with it."

The old collector unwillingly followed him down the passage. His hawkish eyes lighted upon the parcel in Tom's hands, and he appeared to recognise the shape of the rose-wood box within which the curios were contained.

He stopped, his black eyes glinting with eagerness, and he laid a clawlike hand on the junior's shoulder.

"Stop a minute, my tear young shentlemans," he said, in a wheedling voice. "I want to speak to you most important!"

Tom Merry stopped. He realised that the old collector was not exactly a purloiner of the property of others, in the common way. He was evidently led astray by the mania of a collector to possess a certain article. And, having regard to the man's years, Tom Merry, indignant as he was, could not be rough with him.

"Well, what is it?" he asked. "I've got to get to bed in a few minutes, and I can't stop talking here."

"Vun minute only, young shentlemans!" said the collector appealingly.

"Oh, go ahead! I'll listen. But do cut it short!" "You are vun nice boy—a fery nice young shentlemans—" "Leave all that out!" said Tom Merry tersely. "Cut the cackle and come to the hosses, Mr. Solomonson!"

"I know zat schoolboys sometimes run short of de monish," said the old fellow, diving his claw into his pocket and making some coins rattle. "I know zat." "Well what about it?" asked the hero of the Shell impatiently.

"I should like to give you vun tip, zat is all, my tear and nice young shentlemans!" said the old man coaxingly.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

Mr. Solomonson outspread his hands in his earnestness.

"I speak not of vun shilling or half-ze-crown," he said. "I vill gif you a pound—a whole pound to yourself."

"I don't want it," said Tom Merry, wondering what on earth the old man, who certainly did not look like a philanthropist, should want to give him a pound for.

"But I vill—I vill! And not vun only, but five!" exclaimed the collector, diving his hand into his pocket again, and bringing it out half full of Treasury notes. "Look zero! Vill you have five—ten—ten pound?"

"Off his rocker!" murmured Tom Merry. "Fancy offering to give away ten pounds! Put your money away, Mr. Solomonson; I don't want it!" he added aloud.

"But I offer you ten—twenty!" said the old man eagerly.

"You shust let me look in ze box you carry, and I gif you twenty pounds."

Tom Merry flushed scarlet.

He understood now. The old Israelite evidently knew what he was carrying, and was offering him twenty pounds for a chance to steal the little gold idol.

"Vat you say?" said Mr. Solomonson cajolingly. In the dimness he could not see Tom's expression clearly, and he mistook the boy's silence. "Twenty pounds, shust to let me look into ze box—"

"You rutter!" said Tom Merry. "If you were about a hundred years younger I'd use you for a duster, and wipe up the corridor with you."

"My tear young shentlemans—" "Are you going out, or shall I run you out on your neck?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Twenty pounds— Oh, I am going! Don't be excited; I am going!"

"Go, then, confound you!"

Grumbling to himself all the way, Mr. Solomonson walked slowly down the stairs, and Tom marched him out into the dark quadrangle.

"Go to ped now, my tear young shentlemans," said Mr. Solomonson. "I find my vay easy to ze gate."

Tom Merry smiled.

"You're very kind, but I'll see you off the premises," he said. "This way! Come on, and don't waste time!"

"But, my tear young shentlemans—" "Oh, come along!" exclaimed Tom Merry impatiently.

And he gripped the old fellow by the arm, and took him down to the gates at a run. The gates were locked, but Tom Merry roused out Taggles, the porter.

"Let this bounder out!" he exclaimed. "You oughtn't to have let him in."

Taggles looked self-conscious. Mr. Solomonson had expended a pound in persuading the school porter to let him in to go up to the House unannounced. Taggles, to do him justice, had only imagined that Mr. Solomonson was an eccentric old fellow who wanted to see the Head on business, and had never dreamed that the wizened old Israelite meant any harm.

He unlocked the gates without a word, and Mr. Solomonson passed out into the road. Tom Merry stood by while Taggles locked up again. Mr. Solomonson came close to the gate, and stretched a claw between the bars.

"Twenty pounds!" he said.

Tom Merry put his hands in his pockets, with the box under his arm, and walked away. Mr. Solomonson shook the bars in his earnestness.

"Twenty pounds!" he shrieked.

But the hero of the Shell was gone.

"Ere, get hoff with you!" exclaimed Taggles indignantly. "Wat have you been a-doin' hof? Stealing something, I suppose?"

"Twenty pounds!" moaned Mr. Solomonson. "Twenty pounds! He is gone!"

"Yes. And you'd better go, too, if you don't want me to set the dog on yer!" said Taggles disdainfully.

"Mein goot frient," said Mr. Solomonson, "I haf to see Mr. Fawcett on a matter of fery important business!"

"So you said afore, you old fraud!"

"I vill gif you five pounds if you vill let me in!"

"You hold ass!" said Taggles, angry at having to refuse such an offer, and venting his anger upon the old collector. "You silly hold ass, it's as much as my place is worth! Get halong with you, and your five pounds!"

"TEA-TOTAL!"



"Twenty pounds!" shrieked Mr. Solomonson. Taggles growled and walked away. He slammed the door of his little lodge, and the disappointed collector gave it up.

CHAPTER 8.

Alarm in the Dark.

TOM MERRY re-entered the School House, and went up to Mr. Fawcett's room, where he placed the rosewood box in its wrappings on the table by the bed. Then he hurried off to the Shell dormitory. The boys of the Shell were just going in, and Tom joined them in time.

"Lights out in ten minutes," said Darrel.

"Right-ho, kid!" said Tom Merry. "Don't worry yourself. We wouldn't keep our little Darrel waiting for worlds. I'd rather keep my old grandfather waiting."

Darrel walked away, smiling.

The Shell began to undress, and Tom heard a great deal of laughing and chattering going on round Gibbons, the dunce of the Form. Gibbons was looking very strange, and Tom walked over to him.

"I say, anything the matter?" he asked.

"Only the booby's frightened," grinned Gore.

"What's the matter, Gibbons?" asked Tom Merry, taking no notice of the cad of the Shell. "You can tell me, I suppose?"

"It's—it's nothing," stammered Gibbons. "Only that—that—"

"That what?"

"It's the little idol," sniggered Gore. "Gibby has got it on the brain. He's afraid to go to sleep."

"It's not true, Gore!" exclaimed Gibbons, turning red.

"Only—"

"What's not true, you fathead? Do you mean to say that—"

Tom Merry pushed Gore back.

"Let him alone," he said quietly.

"Mind your own business, Tom Merry, and keep your beastly hands to yourself!" exclaimed Gore furiously.

"Let him alone, I say! There's going to be no bullying in this Form while I'm at the head of it! And if you say another word, Gore, I'll sling you across your bed!" said Tom Merry, with a flash in his eyes.

Gore turned away with a growl.

"It's—it's only that horrid little thing—that beastly idol! It haunts me!" said Gibbons hesitatingly. "I—I can't get its horrid little face out of my mind! I—I thought I saw the beastly thing peering out of the shadows at—"

"Oh, put it out of your head!" said Tom Merry soothingly. "I oughtn't to have let you see it, I suppose. I never thought— But never mind, old chap! Don't think of it! When you go to bed, start the multiplication table till you fall asleep, and you'll be all right."

"That's right, coddle the booby!" sneered Gore. "I think—"

Tom Merry caught the cad of the Shell by the neck, and gave him a swing that sent him fairly sprawling across his bed. Gore gave a yell and rolled off the bed on the farther side from Tom Merry.

"You beast!" he roared. "I'll—"

"You'll hold your tongue," said Tom Merry. "Only a word or two more, you cad, and I'll give you the champion hiding of your life!"

And Tom Merry walked back to his own bed.

"Good for you, Tommy," said Manners. "That simple kid Gibbons will start dreaming about that horrid little idol if he thinks about it, and have a nightmare. Hallo! Here's Darrel! Are you looking for anything, Darrel?"

"I'm looking to see if you youngsters are in bed," said the prefect, laughing. "Hurry up with you, you young rascals! Do you want to keep me waiting all night?"

"Well, old kid," said Tom Merry, "we do, as a matter of fact. You're so nice to look at, you know."

"Hurry up, you scamps!"

The scamps hurried up, and Darrel put out the light and left the dormitory. The chatter of the fellows died away presently, and silence reigned in the long, lofty room.

Slumber fell upon the heroes of the Shell.

Tom Merry fell into a sound sleep. He had had a strenuous day, and he was ready for a good rest. He lay sound in slumber till, with a sudden start, he awoke. Something had awakened him. What it was he did not

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know, as he lay blinking up into the darkness, and wondering dizzily what had happened.

The chime from the school tower came to his ears; the four quarters, and then the solemn strokes. He knew that it was striking midnight. But that had not awakened him. He was awake before it commenced.

A sudden cry rang through the dormitory.

Tom Merry started and shivered.

He heard it clearly—the cry of someone in wild terror—and he knew that it must have been a previous sound of the same kind that had roused him from sleep.

He sat up in bed quickly. What was the cry? Whence came it? As he sat shivering in the cold it was repeated. "Gibbons!" muttered Tom Merry in alarm, as he de-



Uncle Frank and Tom stopped by the door and looked into the room removing the golden object.

tected the bed from which the cry came. "What can be the matter with him?"

The hero of the Shell scrambled out of bed. He felt for a box of matches among his clothes, but, as is usual in such cases, the matches were not to be found just when they were wanted.

The cry rang out again, followed by an incoherent muttering. Voices raised in alarm were heard now calling out to know what was the matter.

"Oh, where are those hanged matches?" groaned Tom Merry.

He found the box at last, and struck a vesta. With the match flaring in his hand, he ran quickly towards Gibbons' bed.

He caught sight of the boy sitting up in bed, his face white and fixed with terror, and the match went out.

"SHOWMEN OF ST. JIM'S!" NEXT WEEK! IT'S A 100 PER CENT LAUGHTER-MAKER!

Setting his teeth, Tom struck another, and lighted a candle. Then he hurried to Gibbons. The boy was awake, and mumbling to himself.

"Gibby! I say, Gibby, old chap, what's the matter?" exclaimed Tom anxiously.

Gibbons looked at him uncomprehendingly, and went on muttering strangely. Lowther and Manners were out of bed by this time. Gibbons did not seem to recognise the chums of the Shell, and all the time the unmeaning muttering went on.

"I say, look after him a bit, and I'll fetch Mr. Fawcett!" said Tom Merry hurriedly.

"Right-ho! Buck up!"

Tom Merry hurried out of the dormitory. Mr. Fawcett's

room. In the darkness of the passage he knew that he, at least, had not been seen. Whatever object brought the old Hebrew to St. Jim's in the dead of night, the matter was of secondary importance now. The first thing was to get help for Gibbons.

"Mr. Fawcett! Uncle Frank!"

"What is it?" came the quiet voice of Uncle Frank.

"One of our fellows is in a fit or something. Will you come?"

"In one second!"

It did not occupy Mr. Fawcett much more than a second to jump out of bed and slip a dressing-gown round him and a pair of slippers on his feet. Then he touched Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Let us go."

Tom led him at a run along the passage. In a few seconds they were in the Shell dormitory. In the candle-light a dozen fellows were collected round the bed of Gibbons, all of them looking pale and anxious. There was a general gasp of relief when Mr. Fawcett came in the room.

"Please come here, sir," said Manners. "We can't do anything with him."

Mr. Fawcett was at the bedside in a moment.

"What is the matter, my lad?" he asked, in a soft, kindly voice, very different from his usual abrupt tone, and he took Gibbons' hand.

The boy continued to mutter incoherently.

"He has been dreaming," said Mr. Fawcett. "Do you know anything of the cause? Has he been reading any lurid nonsense—blood-and-thunder stories, or trash of that kind?"

"I think not, sir," said Tom Merry. "I think it's the little golden god that's got on his mind. He's been talking about it a lot, and he seems to have got it on the brain."

Mr. Fawcett nodded.

"I understand. He is evidently a boy of simple mind. I should really have removed that wretched thing from the collection before handing it to you. But I think I can soon cure this state."

The boys watched the Anglo-Indian in surprise. Mr. Fawcett, his eyes upon the staring orbs of the semi-conscious boy, began to make passes with his hands before Gibbons' face.

"My hat!" murmured Monty Lowther. "He's a giddy hypnotist!"

The juniors watched the Anglo-Indian spellbound. It was an exhibition of Eastern magic they had not counted upon seeing. The effect of the passes was soon apparent upon Gibbons. He ceased to mutter, and the wild look left his eyes, and they closed peacefully.

"Lie down," said Mr. Fawcett quietly. "Lie down and sleep soundly."

To the amazement of the boys, Gibbons laid himself quietly down, his cheek to the pillow, and fell into a deep sleep.

"Thank goodness!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath of relief. "I—I don't know what might have happened to him!"

"You may go back to bed, boys," said Mr. Fawcett quietly. "This lad will not wake again till the morning. Good-night! I am glad you called me, Tom!"

And the Anglo-Indian went to the door. The boys tumbled back into bed, discussing the strange happenings in whispers. Mr. Fawcett was just leaving the dormitory when Tom Merry ran quickly after him. The hero of the Shell had completely forgotten Solomonson in the excitement and anxiety of looking after Gibbons. But he remembered now.

"Uncle Frank! Stop a minute!"

The gentleman from Boggleywallabad stopped and looked round.

"What is it, Tom?"

"There's a thief in the House!" gasped Tom Merry.

"What do you mean?"

"As I was coming to call you," said Tom Merry hastily, "I caught sight of him against the window. It's Mr. Solomonson. He's come for that little idol!"

To his surprise, Uncle Frank gave a slight chuckle.

"Are you sure it is Mr. Solomonson, Tom?"

"Quite certain, sir. I saw his profile in the moonlight of the window, and I would know it anywhere," said Tom, with conviction.

"How do you know he has come for the idol?"

"He tried to get it from me," said Tom. And then he related his interview with Mr. Solomonson, and how he had seen the ancient Israelite off the premises.

Uncle Frank chuckled again.

"So you refused a twenty-pound note, Tom?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry innocently.

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room. By the light of the lantern they saw Mr. Solomonson in the act of stealing an idol from its box!

room was not far away, and Tom was soon in the passage upon which the door opened. At the end of the passage was a tall window overlooking the quadrangle, and upon the window fell clear white moonlight with a ghostly effect.

Tom's eyes were on the light window as he came up the passage, and he had almost reached Mr. Fawcett's door when he gave a sudden jump and stopped.

Clear and black against the moonlit window appeared the profile of a head!

The long, prominent nose, the pointed chin, the bushy eyebrows; he knew them at a glance, though it was only a silhouette he saw.

It was Mr. Solomonson who stood at the end of the passage, and was just turning away from the window!

The next instant the figure disappeared.

Tom Merry hesitated a moment, and then he ran into Mr.

"Hah! Well, very good! And so Mr. Solomonson has taken to burglary to get hold of the golden idol, has he? He must not have it, because the old rascal deserves to be punished for his dishonesty."

"It's valuable, too, sir, isn't it?" asked Tom Merry, surprised to hear the reason Uncle Frank gave for not allowing the old collector to take the little Indian idol.

"Well, Mr. Solomonson seems to think so, as he has offered fifty pounds for it, and has taken to burgling in his old age to obtain possession of it."

"I thought you said you gave a few rupees for it, sir, because you didn't know its true value," said Tom Merry.

"Did I? Well, it was quite true," smiled Uncle Frank.

"But now let us go and interview Mr. Solomonson. I have no doubt we shall find him in my room."

They hurried to the Anglo-Indian's room.

There was a gleam of light under the closed door.

"He's there!" whispered Tom Merry.

"Yes. Hush! Not a sound!"

Uncle Frank turned the handle of the door with perfect stillness, and opened it. The light streamed out into the passage. Uncle Frank did not enter the room; he simply stood looking in, with a grim smile upon his mahogany face, a twinkle of mocking humour in his gimlet eyes.

CHAPTER 9.

Mr. Solomonson Asks For It!

MR. SOLOMONSON was in full view of the Anglo-Indian and Tom Merry, as they stood silent at the door, looking into the room.

A lighted lantern stood on the table beside the bed, and the old Israelite was bending over the rosewood box, his back to the door.

Mr. Fawcett made no sound, and the old collector was not alarmed.

"Goot!" They heard him mutter the word aloud. "Goot! Zat is vat I look for!"

He had succeeded in opening the rosewood box, and now he held up in a clawy hand the little golden figure of the hideous idol.

His hawk-eyes fairly gloated over it.

"Zat is it! Goot!"

Still the watchers at the door did not move or speak, and the old man was too deeply engrossed to think of looking round.

A CAMEL AT ST. JIM'S? YES!

You can see it here in the small reproduction of next week's cover! If you want to know what it's doing there, read

"SHOWMEN OF ST. JIM'S!"



IT'S A WOW!

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THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,256.

He gazed at the idol as if he would never be tired of gazing at it, but finally he laid it on the table and slipped his hand into his breast.

Mr. Fawcett and Tom Merry watched him curiously, wondering what was coming next. To their amazement the old fellow drew out a roll of rustling banknotes and placed them in the rosewood box and closed the lid.

Tom Merry and Mr. Fawcett exchanged glances.

The rabid curio collector was determined to have the little Indian idol, but at the same time he could not bring himself to be an actual thief.

He was placing the refused purchase money in the box in place of the curio he had taken.

"My word!" murmured Tom Merry.

He was amazed and a little touched, for there was a kind of honesty in the proceeding of the old collector, and Tom's indignation died away. Tom could not have touched a thief with a pair of tongs, but Mr. Solomonson was evidently the victim of a fixed idea rather than a thief.

Mr. Fawcett smiled.

The twinkle was still in his eyes as he stepped silently into the room. Perhaps he was softened, too, by the sight of the old collector's desire to do the honest thing as well as his ruling passion would allow him.

"Ha! Good-evening, Mr. Solomonson!" said Uncle Frank.

The old collector gave a jump, and swung round.

"Mein gootness cracious!" he stammered.

"So you've taken to burgling in your old age, have you?"

said Uncle Frank, picking up the little golden idol from the table and slipping it into his pocket.

The old fellow's eyes followed it hungrily.

"Better telephone for the police, Tom," said Mr. Fawcett,

with a wink of the eye that was farthest from Mr. Solomonson, from which Tom Merry understood that the order was not to be regarded seriously.

"Certainly, sir," said Tom Merry briskly.

Mr. Solomonson groaned.

"Der police!" he said. "Ah, I am not a thief, Mr. Fawcett!"

"What are you doing here, then?"

"Mein tear friend—"

"You took this little idol out of the box, and were going to collar it."

"I wanted him so mooch for mine collection."

"That's no reason why you should have it when it belongs to me!"

"But I have paid for it, my tear friend."

Uncle Frank grinned as he opened the rosewood box,

and passed the banknotes towards the Jew. Mr. Solomonson refused to take them up.

"They are yours," said Uncle Frank. "I won't have you arrested, but you must clear out, sharp! How did you get in?"

"I take a ladder and climb over the wall," said Mr. Solomonson dismally. "I pull der ladder over and put him to a window and get in."

"Great Juggernaut!" ejaculated Mr. Fawcett in amazement. "I never heard of such nerve, at all events! Why, you confounded ass, you might have been caught a dozen times!"

"I must have der idol!"

"You would have been arrested—"

"Vill you not sell me der idol?"

"No. I won't! Get out!"

"I must have der—"

Mr. Fawcett struck a match and held the blaze towards the roll of banknotes.

"Will you take your notes away, or shall I set them alight?" he asked.

The old collector snapped them up in a twinkling.

"But vill you not sell me—"

"Are you going?"

Mr. Solomonson turned unwillingly to the door. He

looked back as he went out, and then went on again, and then looked back once more.

His clawlike fist was thrust into his breast, and came out again crammed with banknotes.

"Take it all!" he pleaded. "I moost have der idol! Dere are hundred—two hundred pounds! Take it all, only—"

"Get out!"

With a dismal groan the Israelite went down the dusky passage.

"I suppose I had better see him off the premises!" grunted Mr. Fawcett, taking up the lantern. "Are you feeling cold, Tom?"

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

He was curious to see the last of this peculiar adventure.

Mr. Solomonson went slowly and unwillingly downstairs,

as if impelled by an invisible force which he struggled in vain to resist. Perhaps he realised that Uncle Frank's boot was ready behind him to help him if he tarried.

He reached the Hall door of the School House, and there he stopped. Mr. Fawcett marched on to light him out, the lantern held up in his left hand. Tom Merry was at his heels.

With a fresh groan Mr. Solomonson opened the door, then he turned a haggard face upon the Anglo-Indian.

"Mine good tear frient—"

"Get out!"

"I entreat you—I moost have der idol!" said Mr. Solomonson, almost tearfully. "Take these notes—£200!"

He held out both hands full of notes.

The mahogany face of the Anglo-Indian wrinkled.

"I tell you I won't touch your money! Get out! One second, though—just to show that I forgive you I'll shake hands with you!"

Tom Merry grinned. He knew what was coming. Mr. Solomonson evidently did not, for he took the offer as a sign of relenting on the Anglo-Indian's part and held out his right hand eagerly. Mr. Fawcett's iron grip closed on it.

"Mein gootness! Ah-h-h-h! Ow-w-w-w-w!"

Mr. Fawcett compressed his grasp.

"Nothing like a grip of the hand to wipe away all misunderstandings," he said. "I will give you a good grip like this whenever I meet you, Mr. Solomonson, to show how I appreciate your honesty in paying for the things you steal."

"Ow-w-w-w-w-w-w!"

Mr. Solomonson was dancing on one leg, the other twisted into the air, and his body was curled up with the intensity of his sufferings.

"There!" said Uncle Frank, suddenly releasing his hand.

"That's how I feel, Mr. Solomonson! Don't forget to give me your hand when I meet you again!"

The old collector stood glaring at him speechlessly for a few moments, and then, still without uttering a word, he turned and disappeared into the darkness of the quadrangle.

Mr. Fawcett chuckled as he closed the door.

"Ha! I think I have given that old fellow a lesson!" he remarked. "I hardly thought his collecting mania would carry him so far as this. It's rather late in life for him to take to burglary."

Tom Merry laughed.

"He's not so bad as I thought at first, sir. I'm rather sorry for him."

"Ha! You're sorry for him, are you?"

"Yes, sir!" said Tom frankly. "He seems to want the thing so much. Of course, he can't have it; it's cheek of him to expect you to part with it!"

"Ha! Perhaps I shall let him have it in the long run," said Mr. Fawcett thoughtfully. "He must have a lesson, though, for trying to take it. Perhaps if I see him again I shall let him have it."

Tom Merry stared.

"You mean you will sell it to him, sir?"

"Perhaps. I might give it to him—we shall see. Time to get back to bed now, Tommy. Run along! Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

Tom Merry returned to the Shell dormitory.

He went at once to Gibbons' bed, and found him sleeping soundly, with a quiet and peaceful look upon his face.

Uncle Frank's influence had evidently calmed his disturbed mind, and dismissed the fearful images that had filled his slumber with horror.

"Where have you been all this time, Tom?" mumbled Monty Lowther, from his bed. He was half-awake and half-asleep.

"Capturing burglars and things," yawned Tom Merry, as he tumbled into bed. "I'll tell you about it to-morrow." And he laid his cheek upon the pillow.

But his reply had fully awakened Lowther, and Manners, too, and they were curious. They sat up in bed, on either side of Tom Merry's bed.

"I say, Tom, what's that?" asked Lowther.

"What's that about burglars?" queried Manners.

"Um-m-m-m-m-m!" mumbled Tom Merry.

He was very sleepy, and was already falling into the arms of Morpheus.

"Tom, don't go to sleep for a minute!"

"Tell us about the giddy burglar!"

"Is it a fact, or were you rotting?"

Snore!

"Tell us about it, you image!"

"Come now, Tom, like a good fellow!"

Snore!

"Oh, rats!" said Manners. "He's fast asleep!"

"Then we'd better follow his giddy example," yawned Lowther. "It will keep till the morning, I suppose?"

And the chums were soon sleeping as soundly as Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Solomonson Gets the Idol.

UNCLE FRANK said nothing the next day of the adventure of the night. Tom Merry told the story to his chums, but it went no farther. Mr. Solomonson's first and last attempt at burglary did not become generally known.

Tom Merry was rather curious to see if the old collector would turn up at the school again in quest of the little Indian god.

The chums kept their eyes open for him, but he did not appear. Apparently, his failure had made him realise that the attempt was useless, and he had given it up.

The little golden idol reposed safely in the rosewood box, and was not shown about any more. The effect of the hideous little image had been alarming in the case of Gibbons, though the dunes of the Shell woke that morning quite well, without any recollection of the scene of the previous night.

Uncle Frank stayed several days at the school, and the boys saw a great deal of him. He played chess with the Head most of the evenings, but he found plenty of time to make himself very pleasant to the boys.

But all things come to an end at last, and so did the visit of the man from Boggleywallabad to the ancient college of St. Jim's.

The day of parting arrived, and at the request of Tom Merry, Uncle Frank arranged to catch a train on a half-holiday, so that the juniors could come in a body and see him off.

So on Saturday Uncle Frank packed his bag, and, declining the car, walked to the station with his bag in his hand, like the hardy old globe-trotter that he was.

Tom Merry & Co. walked with him. They were sorry to lose Uncle Frank, but they had determined to give him a good send off at the village station.

Herries had suggested musical honours, and offered to bring his cornet; but many voices in unison had threatened to jump upon it if he did, and so he had given up the idea.

The little party arrived at the station ten minutes early for the train, and went into the little building. And then Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

A well-known figure was standing near the ticket office, and it turned, and came quickly towards the Anglo-Indian. It was Mr. Solomonson once more.

"Goot-tay!" said the old collector, raising his ancient silk hat from his fringe of greasy, curly locks. "Goot-tay, my frient!"

"Ha! You again!"

"I have come down vunce more to see you about der idol," said the collector, in his most wheedling tones. "I zink you take two hundred pounds, ain't it?"

"I've given you my answer."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Fawcett. But—"

Uncle Frank held out his hand.

"You haven't shaken hands yet, Mr. Solomonson."

Tom Merry and his companions giggled. Mr. Solomonson changed colour, and shrank away from the brown hand that was held out to him.

"Come, shake hands!" said Mr. Fawcett. "I might alter my mind about that idol, perhaps, in time."

The Israelite gave a jump.

"You vill sell him?" he exclaimed.

"Perhaps."

"Two hundred pounds?"

"I could not take that for it."

"Two hundred and fifty?"

"I could not take that, either."

The old collector groaned.

"Name your own figure, my tear Mr. Fawcett?"

"We had better go on the platform," said Mr. Fawcett. "I can hear the train coming in. You youngsters can come on with me."

They adjourned to the platform. Mr. Solomonson, trembling now with eagerness, followed. The local train which was to bear Uncle Frank as far as Wayland Junction came puffing in, to wait three or four minutes.

"My tear Mr. Fawcett—"

"Good-bye, my young friends!" said Mr. Fawcett, shaking hands with the boys in turn, and considerably re-

training from giving them his vice-like grip. "I have had a jolly time at St. Jim's, and I thank you all heartily." "It's been very jolly for us, sir," said Tom Merry. "It was kind of you to come, and I hope you'll come again."

"Yaas, wathah! It is an honah we appweciate sincerely, I assuah you, my deah sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If you honah us with anothah visit, sir, we will twy to make you comfy."

"Good!" said Figgins. "I hope you'll come again."

"I hope I shall, some day."

"And you'll give my love to Miss Priscilla," said Tom Merry.

"And all our respects," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Our wespsects, and our kindest wegarda to the esteomed and amiable Miss Pwiscillah," said D'Arcy.

"I will not forget."

"Make haste, there!"

It was the porter's voice.

Mr. Solomonson rushed to the carriage door, desperately pushing the grinning juniors aside in his haste.

"My tear Mr. Fawcett!"

"Hallo! You still here?" said Uncle Frank cheerfully. "It's nice of you to come to see me off. Will you shake hands?"

"Der idol!"

Uncle Frank appeared to hesitate. There was a curious twinkle in his little black eyes.

"Two hundred and feefty pounds?"

"I cannot accept that figure."

"Anything you like!" exclaimed the collector. "Name your own figure; but remember dat I am a poor man."

Mr. Fawcett slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out the little idol. The hawkish eyes of the collector snapped at the sight of it.

"You vill sell him to me?"

"Well, since you want it so much," drawled Mr. Fawcett. "But I cannot accept two hundred and fifty pounds. I gave ten rupees, which is less than a pound in English money."

"You vill make big profit."

"I have said that I will not sell the idol to you, Mr. Solomonson. I mean it. But I don't mind giving it to you."

And Mr. Fawcett held out the little image towards the amazed collector.

Mr. Solomonson stared at the Anglo-Indian, and stared at the golden idol, without offering to touch it. He evidently feared some trick.

"Well, don't you want it?" asked Mr. Fawcett.

"Urry up, there!" shouted the porter.

Mr. Solomonson seemed dazed.

"The train's going. Are you going to take it?"

"You gif him to me?" murmured the amazed collector.

"Certainly! There it is!"

The clawlike fingers clutched at the little idol. Mr. Solomonson fairly hugged it. Then the claws went to his pocket.

"But I gif you something!" he exclaimed. "I gif you—"

"Not at all."

"But you are too fery generous."

"Nothing very generous in giving away a spoof Indian idol, that I can see," said Mr. Fawcett calmly.

The Israelite gave a yell.

"Spoof! Sham! Imitation! Vat?"

"Exactly! I've said that I didn't know its true value when I gave ten rupees for it in India. I didn't. It was worth about a shilling, perhaps half-a-crown, as the workmanship is really rather good."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

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

Mr. Solomonson's face was a study.

"Imitation!" he moaned feebly. "Spoof! Ah!"

"The real thing is safe enough in its temple in India," said Mr. Fawcett cheerfully. "These imitations are sold in Calcutta and Bombay for a few rupees each. I gave ten rupees, because I was a griffin at the time—a newcomer, you understand. I was done. So would you have been, if I had taken your two hundred and fifty pounds. Ha, ha, ha!"

The mahogany face of the Anglo-Indian assumed a crimson hue as he chuckled away.

"Stand back, there!"

The carriage door slammed. Mr. Solomonson, holding up the imitation Indian idol, and staring at it blankly, was oblivious to his surroundings. The train moved, the engine was shrieking, and smoke poured back along the line. Uncle Frank waved his hat from the carriage window.

"Good-bye, sir!"

"Good-bye, my lads!"

The juniors waved their caps and shouted. The train rushed on, and a bend of the line hid Uncle Frank from sight. He was gone, and Tom Merry & Co. turned to leave the platform. As they went out Tom glanced back. The old collector was still standing there, the little idol in his hands, staring at it in dismay. And so he stood as the juniors poured out, and lost sight of him.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's ripping St. Jim's yarn! It's called "Showmen of St. Jim's!" It's one long laugh from start to finish.)

BIGGER & BETTER!

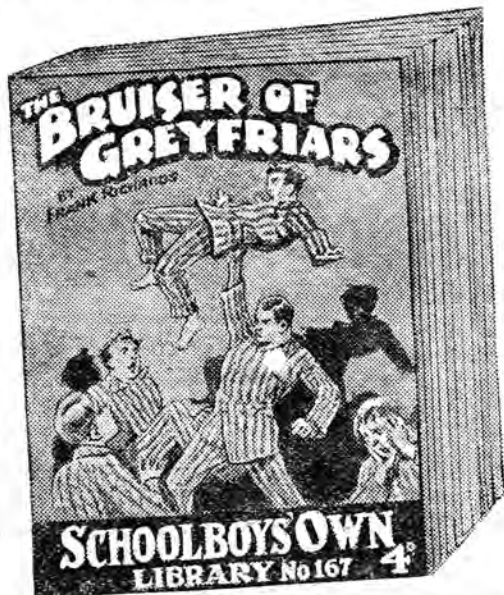
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IF IT'S GOOD IT'S IN—



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

HALLO, chums! I've got some extra good news for you this week. The double length story of Tom Merry & Co. which was published two weeks ago proved such a "winner" that by every post letters are pouring into this office from delighted readers asking for

MORE EXTRA-LONG SCHOOL YARNS!

As you know, I am always out to oblige my thousands of readers, so I have lost no time in arranging for more extra-long St. Jim's yarns. The first of these will appear in our March 26th issue—that's a fortnight from now. Like the idea? Good! Now do me the favour of passing on the good news to your friends. In the meantime look out for next Wednesday's bumper issue of the GEM. In the first place, there is a sparkling long complete story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled:

"SHOWMEN OF ST. JIMS!"

and in it Martin Clifford supplies you with unlimited laughs and thrills. Don't miss this treat, whatever you do. The next Rockwood yarn is a peach, too. Make a note of the title,

"THE MYSTICAL FOUR!"

and stand by for laughs. In place of the Sky Raiders, which comes to an end in this week's number, there will be a nerve-tugging complete story of motor racing adventure which will rank as one of the best stories of the week. In

"THE LAST LAP!"

you will read of the adventures of two boys—about your own age—who are crazy to take a trip in a real racing car.

THE FREAK OF THE ROAD!

"Lawks! Look at that wheel! Must have broken loose from a giant lorry." It would be quite pardonable for you to make this mistake if, when out walking, you suddenly saw a giant wheel tearing towards you at a speed of thirty miles an hour. But a near view investigation of this giant wheel would reveal the very latest thing in road travel. It's called the "Dynasphere"—the invention of an electrical engineer who got his idea from watching the smooth running of a croquet ball. As the giant wheel of the Dynasphere revolves, under persuasion of a small-powered motor, the driving car, complete with space for passengers, which is fitted where the hub of an ordinary wheel would be, remains stationary. The inventor claims that it is possible to pull up his Dynasphere, even when travelling at thirty miles an hour, in the space of a yard or two. So successful have been the experiments with

this "freak of the road" that a five-seater saloon model is now being built.

TRAINING STUNTS!

"Hand me my sledgehammer. I'm going to start training." If you heard a fellow say that you would doubtless wonder what sort of stunt he was training for. And you would be surprised when you discovered that it was a fight with the gloves on. Yet this is one of Tommy Tucker's best methods of training for a fight. It's effective, too, for this comparatively unknown pugilist recently beat Charlie Hickman—reckoned to be one of the most promising exponents of the noble art—in no uncertain manner. Looking at Tommy Tucker stripped for a fight—he is, incidentally, a mission-hall preacher—you would see a two-fisted fighter of a hundred years ago. He is short, boilegged, has a nose that has been broken and a pair of ears that have been well cauliflowerered. But fight—well, he gave the fans at the Crystal Palace the best exhibition of a heavy-weight fight seen for many years. In that one bout he has leapt from being practically an unknown to a star. So there's something in training with a sledgehammer after all. Another "original" method of training is being practised by T. E. Pritchard, the cox of the Oxford boat, to reduce his weight and to keep him fit for March 19th, when the two Varsity crews will battle for supremacy over a stretch of Father Thames. His training method takes the form of trundling a hefty barrel backwards and forwards for half an hour every morning. That may not sound a stiff exercise, but you try it, chums!

HEARD THIS ONE?

George: "Hallo, Bill, why have you got your arm in a sling?"
Bill: "See those steps at the station?"
George: "Yes."
Bill: "Well, I didn't!"

GOGGLES FOR THE COW!

Ever seen a cow with goggles on? No? Well, if you care to make the trip to Northern Russia you'll see plenty of them. Owners of herds of cattle have been putting their thinking caps on, for their losses in cattle have been considerable. When the blizzards are ravaging Northern Russia the unfortunate cows cannot keep their eyes open, with the result that many of them wander away from the main herd and are lost for keeps. The idea of providing the cattle with goggles is a good one, as proved by results,

for after a time the animals give up trying to get rid of them, and when the blizzard comes along they are able to see in comfort.

RAISING THE WIND!

Soon your thoughts will be turning to King Cricket, and to you much harassed secretaries of cricket teams, who are worrying about the financial side of the business, I pass on a wheeze which has been adopted by a Sussex village club whose finances were on the low side. It was decided at the annual meeting of this club to impose a fine of twopence on every batsman, throughout the season, who failed to bag any runs in the first innings of any match. Novel idea, what? I am glad, however, it was never thought of in my time, for with me ducks were painfully frequent, but then I played wicket-keeper, and he is hardly expected to knock up centuries. On second thoughts, in giving you the idea of fining the "Duck" batsmen, I suggest that you rule out the wicket-keeper!

HE KEPT HIS HEAD!

Ever tried standing on your head for any length of time? Not a very comfortable stunt, and an hour of it would tax most of us to the full. Yet Air-Pilot Blackmore recently did a job of work that meant, perhaps, the difference between life and death, with his head hanging down into space for an hour. Not only that, he did it in a blinding rain storm. It happened this way: Blackmore and two colleagues were attempting to land their plane when it "bumped" heavily and the shock broke a bolt of the landing wheel. Up went the plane again and cruised round while the three occupants talked over their plight. Then it was Air-Pilot Blackmore determined to carry out a repair in mid-air. While one of his pals took over the controls and headed for an aerodrome through a lashing storm of rain, Blackmore armed himself with a screwdriver and "went over the side." Fastened round his ankles was a cloth strap to which the third occupant of the damaged bus clung with might and main. It was a ticklish repair job, in all conscience, but nerve and courage did the trick. When Air-Pilot Blackmore was eventually hauled back into the cockpit, both he and the chap who had been hanging on to him were exhausted. But that repair saved them from bad injuries or worse, and eventually they made their well-deserved "safe landing."

THE VOLUNTEERS!

The seventy passengers of a train that had become snowed up some distance away from the small township of Bodok, in Transylvania, a short time ago had their big thrill without asking for it. At any minute they expected a pack of hungry wolves to charge at them. The news of their terrible plight reached Bodok and the result was that every male peasant in the district offered his services in the relief work. Motor-cars were commandeered and stripped of their wheels. In their place were fitted runners. In double quick time a long procession of motor coaches, drawn by horses, and sleighs, were being galloped to the scene. The rescue was made none too soon, for all around the snowed-up train—which was dug out in the early hours of the morning under the glare of improvised torches and flares—were the tracks of wolves.

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A SIDE-SPLITTING COMPLETE ROOKWOOD YARN!

LETTING LOVELL LEAD!



By
**OWEN
CONQUEST.**

**Lovell started out to lead the Classics—and finished up leading the Moderns—
while they chased him round the school!**

CHAPTER 1.

Lovell Sacked!

"**N**OW, Lovell, old chap—"

"Rot!"

"Don't do it!" pleaded Jimmy Silver. "You know your japes always come unstuck, Lovell—"
"Rot! They jolly well don't!" snorted Arthur Edward Lovell heatedly. "Your's always do, Jimmy Silver; and that's why those cheeky, swanky Moderns have been top-dogs lately. I tell you that what's wanted is fresh ideas and a new leader. You're getting played out, Jimmy!"

"Do listen, Lovell—"
"Rats! I've listened enough; we've all listened enough. We want action now, not words, Jimmy Silver. I'm the man for action. I've got ideas—heaps of ripping ideas! You're my pal, Jimmy, but I must say that you're a back number. A new leader's wanted, and I'm the man for the job."

"But—"
"Dry up! You talk too much, Jimmy Silver! I tell you I'm doing it! Leave it to me! Don't argue! I'm doing it! It's bound to come off! I've got the things—a pocketful of screws and a screwdriver! All I do is to sneak into each of the Modern Fourth studies while they're at dinner, screw up each door from the inside, make my escape by the windows—there's a wide ledge running along outside, you know—and there you are! They're all screwed out of their studies, and— Ha, ha, ha! See the wheeze?"

Raby, Newcome, and Jimmy Silver saw it right enough; but they did not laugh.

Apparently Lovell had expected merriment, and he frowned.

"It's better than any of your wheezes, anyway, Jimmy," he said bitterly. "But you needn't worry; though it's my wheeze. I shan't claim the credit. As leader of the Classics you'll get it. I'm not after your job."

With that optimistic and generous statement, Arthur Edward rushed away, still full of zest and enthusiasm, towards the Modern House.

"Oh dear!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "The—the ass!"

"The born idiot!" grinned Raby. "Let him rip, Jimmy!"

"Yes, let the howling chump get himself slaughtered if he wants to!" chuckled Newcome. "If ever a fellow begged for trouble—"

"We'd better go after the chump," said Jimmy Silver dully. "You know what he is, and you know what those
THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 1,256.

Modern chaps are. They'll scalp him, of course! He's bound to muck it up!"

"Bound to!" agreed Raby cheerfully. "It'll do the pig-headed duffer good. If he prefers being scalped by Moderns to getting his dinner—well, let him. I prefer dinner."

"Same here!" grinned Newcome. "Come on, there's the dinner-bell now!"

And Raby and Newcome went in to dinner. Apparently they did not share Jimmy's apprehensive fears for Lovell—at least, they did not share his kindly desire to save Lovell from the results of his enthusiastic attempt to jape the Moderns. But after hesitating a few moments Jimmy followed them. After all, he had warned Lovell, and Lovell had, as usual, ignored his warnings. Besides, Jimmy reflected grimly, it would do Lovell good to discover that it was not so easy to jape the Moderns as he seemed to suppose.

So Jimmy Silver went in to dinner, ready, for once, to let Lovell lead if he wanted to.

But "Uncle James" was too soft-hearted not to worry about Lovell. After all, old Lovell was their pal. And as dinner proceeded without Lovell making an appearance, Jimmy's dismal apprehensions increased. Mr. Dalton had marked him absent, and the master's grim brow boded ill for the truant. Whether Lovell's great wheeze succeeded or not, he was booked for trouble. And even if it did succeed—by means of a miracle—there was bound to be an inquiry as to the screwing up of the study doors. Suspicion would immediately fall upon the fellow who had missed dinner—a fact the optimistic Lovell had overlooked.

"No sign of the ass yet," remarked Jimmy, as they left the dining-hall. "It looks as if he's been collared. Look here, we'd better slip over and see if the bounders have got him."

"Not me!" said Raby emphatically. "Blow Lovell!"

"Maybe he's in the study," suggested Newcome. "Let's go and see."

It seemed likely enough that Lovell—whether he had succeeded in his jape or not—had repaired to their study. And as all three were curious, if not apprehensive, they hurried along to the End Study.

And Lovell was there!

It took Lovell's pals some seconds to discover his exact whereabouts, however. But muffled and frantic gurgles for help from a pile of furniture and study effects in the middle of the room soon guided them.

For the End Study had been thoroughly ragged. The

table had been turned upside down, and all the study furniture was piled up on top of it. And after the astounded, and justly enraged, juniors had removed some of the furniture they found Arthur Edward Lovell.

He was tied hand and foot to a leg of the upturned table. The tablecloth had been draped around him like an Indian's blanket, and had been tied there with towels and dusters. Round him had been piled the carpet, fire-irons, pictures, and other household effects.

"Well, I'm hanged!" gasped Jimmy Silver, almost speechless with wrath. "Is—is this how you jape the Moderns, Lovell?"

"Gug-gug-gug-groogh!" gurgled Lovell.

They removed the handkerchief that had been stuffed into Lovell's mouth, and Lovell's remarks became more intelligible and intelligent.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Oh crikey! Oh dear! Those—those Modern cads did it! They—"

"You needn't tell us that!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "We knew something like this would happen! Oh, you—"

"You burbling champ, Lovell!" raved Raby. "Look at the study! Look at our things, you blithering maniac! This comes of letting you lead! We told you how it would be; we told you so!"

"It wasn't my fault!" howled Lovell, almost weeping with rage. "I never got a chance. I should have pulled it off splendidly, but for bad luck. The cads must have spotted me sneaking in, and followed me. Next time—"

"Next time!" howled Jimmy Silver, in return. "Oh, you—"

"Scalp him!" roared Raby. "Look at the study—all through his footling antics! Smash him!"

"Spifficate him!"

"Why, you— Here, hold on!" bawled Lovell.

But they were not likely to "hold on." They had warned Lovell—had begged him not to tackle the Moderns on his own; but he had ignored their warnings and pleadings, and this was the result.

As one man, Lovell's irate pals rushed at him, and as one man they bowled him over, and bumped him, and rubbed cinders from the hearth into his hair. Lovell howled, roared, and threatened in vain.

There was no mercy for the new and self-appointed leader of the Fistical Four.

Finally he was hoisted up and punted out through the study doorway like a football. Then, breathing hard and still seething with indignant wrath, Silver, Raby, and Newcome locked the door and proceeded to put the desolate study to rights, while out in the passage Arthur Edward Lovell sat and gasped dizzily and gurgled:

"Ooooooch! Ow! Ow! Ooooooch!"

CHAPTER 2.

Up the Pole!

LOVELL staggered to his feet at last. But he was not done yet, and he immediately made a rush for the study again, breathing wild threats and slaughter. Only on finding the door locked did he give it up. Then he limped along the passage and stopped by the landing window to stare moodily out into the quadrangle.

Brooding on his wrongs, Lovell stood and stared, until suddenly he sighted two figures out in the quad. They were Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle, two of the leading Modern enemies.

To Lovell the sight was like a red rag to a bull just then. He forgot his recent wrongs. He only remembered that it was Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle, aided by other Moderns, who had ragged him and the study, and thus brought his study-mates' vengeance upon him.

Unmindful of his many aches and pains, Arthur Edward gave a snort like a warhorse. Then he spun round, scudded along the passage, whizzed down the stairs, and bolted out of the Hall doorway into the quad.

In the distance he sighted the two Tommies again, and, with another snort, he rushed towards them—unfortunately not noticing that half a dozen Modern juniors were standing near his quarry.

That was Lovell's misfortune, though, in his present mood, Arthur Edward felt equal to a couple of dozen Moderns just then. Unfortunately, he wasn't as equal as he felt.

He rushed on, fury in his eyes, determination in his breast. Tommy Dodd sighted him coming, and he chuckled:

"Hallo, here's that silly owl Lovell again!" he remarked. "After trouble again! Jever know such an ass? Look out, here he comes!"

Lovell rushed up and leaped at Tommy Dodd. That cheery Modern youth merely side-stepped and stuck out a foot. Lovell, in his headstrong zeal, went flying over the

foot, and ended up by diving headlong, with his nose digging up the gravel path.

"Yooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd. "What on earth did you do that for, Lovell? Do it again, old chap!"

Lovell did his best, and he was luckier this time; while Tommy Dodd was less lucky. He rushed at Dodd almost before he was on his feet, and his fist smote Dodd's nose—hard. Tommy Dodd howled fiendishly. Though he had told Lovell to try again, he certainly hadn't expected him to.

But it was the only bit of luck Lovell got. Next moment, yelling with wrath, Tommy Dodd had leaped at Lovell, and the two crashed down just as the other half-dozen Moderns rushed up.

Fighting desperately, Lovell was fairly smothered beneath the weight of numbers, and his gallant resistance was useless. In a matter of seconds he was helpless, with Modern juniors seated on his heaving form as they banged his head on the gravel.

"Hold him!" gasped Tommy Dodd, clutching a streaming nose. "Hold the blessed fathead! Don't let him go! He's busted by dose, the raving lunatic! That's right—bang his napper! Perhaps it'll knock a bit of sense into his silly head!"

"Yarroooch! Oooooooch!" wailed Lovell. "Ow-ow! Lemmegerrup! Ooooooch! I'll smash—yow!—the lot of you!"

Evidently, though down, Arthur Edward was not out! "Ow! Wow!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Listen to him! Smash the lot of us, would he? Cheeky bouncer! We'll teach him better this time! Evidently what we gave him before dinner wasn't enough! Find a sack and some cord, somebody!"

Nobody asked what the sack and cord were for. They knew Tommy Dodd, and they obeyed unquestioningly. A sack and cord were rooted out from the rubbish in the woodshed. The yelling Lovell was shoved feet first into the sack, the mouth of which was tied securely round his neck. Lovell had been tied like that before, and enjoyed it. But that had been in sack races, and had been sport. Now he did not find it sport, and did not enjoy it a bit.

But the Modern youths did. They roared with laughter as Lovell stood, balancing precariously in the sack, with his face, frantic and red with rage, showing over the top.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd, quite forgetting his swollen nose at the sight. "Don't he look a picture? Bring him along to the flagpole, you men!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The "men" grasped Dodd's idea now, and they howled with laughter. Half a dozen of them grasped the wriggling, yelling Lovell, raised him bodily, and rushed him to the school flagpole.

"Now sling the fathead up!" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "Lovell always was more or less up the pole, but we'll put him up it in earnest this time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cheering and yelling with laughter, the hilarious Moderns loosened the cord from the flagpole and tied it round the sack, with the apprehensive Lovell inside it. And Lovell's apprehensions were fully justified.

A moment later the Moderns hauled on the rope, and the wriggling, struggling Lovell was hauled a few feet up the flagpole, and then the rope was secured.

"Yooop!" howled the hapless Classical. "Lemme down, you cads! Help! Rescue, Classics! Ooooooch!"

Bump, bang, crack!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell's frantic struggles caused the sack to swing and twirl. And as it swung and twirled it banged the hapless prisoner's head and body against the flagpole.

Lovell's howls were drowned, however, in the yells of laughter from the Moderns as they danced triumphantly round.

Naturally, such an unusual uproar could scarcely pass unheard and unheeded. It didn't. Fellows raced to the spot from all sides of the quadrangle. Windows went up and curious heads looked down. And one of the windows to go up first was that of the End Study.

Like Good King Wenceslas, Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome looked out. They saw the Moderns dancing round the decorated flagpole, and then they recognised the object that decorated the flagpole.

"Lovell!" gasped Jimmy. "It—it's Lovell! That awful idiot's been at it again! They've shoved the ass in a sack and slung him up there! It—it's an insult! An insult to the House and especially to this study! Come on—on the ball!"

Never had Jimmy Silver & Co. left the School House quite so smartly. As they went they collected Classics—at least, Raby stayed behind for a few brief seconds to yell into each

Fourth Study as he passed. Then, leaving the rest to follow, Raby pelted after Jimmy and Newcome.

Though it was a half-holiday, very few fellows had gone out of the gates yet, and soon a terrific battle was raging round the school flagpole, as Moderns and Classics answered to their respective call to arms and rushed to the rescue.

The issue was not long in doubt. The Classics were in the majority by far. Moreover, the sight of one of their number in such an undignified and public position made them fairly "see red."

Possibly they all agreed that Lovell had got only what he had asked for. But Lovell was a Classical, and that was more than enough.

Seeing that the day was as good as won, Jimmy fought his way to the flagpole, and, snatching out his knife, he soon hauled Lovell down and cut him free.

Then Jimmy, having helped the raving Lovell out of the sack, turned and piled into the battle again.

Arthur Edward didn't. Lovell was not feeling up to a battle just then. He was bumped and bruised all over. He limped out of the riot and staggered towards the School House.

He had almost reached the steps when Bulkeley came down them with a sheet of paper in his hand. He stopped suddenly as he heard the distant sounds of the riot from the direction of the chapel.

"What the thump—" he was beginning, when Mr. Dalton came hurrying down the steps, his face grim.

Mr. Dalton, unlike Bulkeley, had already heard the uproar and seen the battle from his study window.

"Bulkeley, come with me!" he snapped. "Cannot you hear what is going on? Call the rest of the prefects!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped Bulkeley.

He glanced at the paper and hesitated. Then, sighting Lovell, he called him.

"Here, take this to Knowles, kid!" he called. "Ask him to pin it on the Modern notice-board; it's from the Head. Look lively!"

He handed the sheet and some drawing-pins to Lovell, who took them mechanically. Next moment Bulkeley was hurrying off to the scene of the riot.

"Oh, blow!" panted Lovell. "Hanged if I'll— Oh, my hat! By Jingo!"

Lovell changed his mind abruptly as an idea came to him.

What a splendid chance to get into the Modern House without trouble, and a splendid chance to carry out his great wheeze of screwing up the Modern juniors' studies! He still had the screws and a pocket screwdriver in his pocket. And practically all the Moderns were screeching in the quad with Classics! A wonderful chance!

Lovell did not hesitate.

Lovell was a fellow who never knew when he was licked. He was sore all over, and he ached in every bone and muscle. But while he wasn't feeling quite up to a scrap, he was feeling more than "up" to seeing his wonderful scheme through. It was now or never!

Forgetting his aches and pains, he bolted across the quad and made a beeline for the Modern side. He would pin up the notice first—even the hare-brained Lovell did not dare to disobey Bulkeley—and then—well, it was a chance of a lifetime. He might even get time to do a bit of ragging in the studies, too!

As he tore across the quad Lovell sighted Mr. Manders, the Modern Housemaster, with Knowles, the Modern prefect, at his heels, making hasty tracks for the scene of the disturbance. And Lovell grinned.

With the Modern House almost empty, the rest would be easy.

He dived into the Modern hallway, and ran to the notice-board.

Not a soul was about. Lovell, with fingers which trembled with eagerness, started to pin the notice on the board.

His eyes scanned it mechanically as he pinned.

And then, as he scanned the notice, his eyes gleamed as a brainwave came to him. And it was connected with the notice itself, which ran as follows:

"ROOKWOOD LITERARY SOCIETY.

"There will be a meeting of the above Society in the School House Sixth Form room, at seven o'clock this evening, when the Rev. D. G. Ponter, M.A., of Latchford, will give a lecture on Early Victorian Literature. All seniors are requested to attend.

"(Signed) H. CHISHOLM,
"Headmaster."

That was the notice. It was quite a usual notice, but Arthur Edward Lovell intended to make it quite unusual.

"Phew!" he breathed, his eyes gleaming. "That's the THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,256.

wheeze! Sling me up on the dashed flagpole, will they? I'll show 'em! It'll muck up their half-holiday, and give me a ripping chance to rag their studies and screw the doors up. Phew! This'll show Jimmy that I'm a born leader! Here goes!"

He took the notice from the board, and made tracks in hot haste for an empty Form-room. Selecting the Modern Fourth Form room he slipped inside, closed the door, and hurried across to the master's desk. Next moment he was busy at work with an ink-eraser and fountain-pen.

He worked carefully, but at great speed. It was done in a matter of moments, and having blotted his alterations Lovell hurried back to the notice-board. To his relief the Hall was still deserted.

Lovell grinned and pinned up the notice again.

He had just done so when he heard footsteps and voices in the quad outside. One voice was the harsh, rasping tones of Mr. Manders, and Lovell did not linger. He darted back to the Fourth Form room.

Lovell had worked out his plans well. Just inside the door was a large cupboard, and hastily Lovell got to work upon it. He removed books from the shelves, piled them up top of the cupboard, and then he removed the shelves themselves, slanting them against the back of the cupboard.

This done, Lovell withdrew the key from the inside of the Form-room door and placed it in the outside of the lock. Then Lovell, dishevelled, dust-covered, but grinning, slipped inside the cupboard and drew the door shut.

All was prepared now for his great wheeze—the wheeze that was going to make the Moderns gnash their teeth and the Classics treat him as the born leader he undoubtedly was.

CHAPTER 3.

"Many a Slip—"

"O W! Ow-ow-wow!"

"Yow! By dose—"

The great battle was over. The combatants had been separated by the irate and indignant authorities, and were being shepherded back to their respective Houses by their respective masters and prefects.

"Ow! Yow!" went on Tommy Cook, as the damaged but cheerful Modern youths trailed after Mr. Manders and Knowles towards their House. "My nose is busted, and we're all booked for trouble now! Look at Manders' chivvy! That means—"

"Never mind—it was ripping while it lasted!" panted Tommy Dodd. "I got a beautiful wallop in on Jimmy Silver's boko, and he'll wear it for a week at least. And if the beaks hadn't turned up we'd have licked 'em—perhaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Far from downhearted, the Moderns trooped up their House steps and swarmed into the hallway, some nursing bruised noses and cut lips, others nursing black eyes and swollen ears. All were damaged, and all were dishevelled, with torn collars and ties, but all were heated, happy, and cheery.

Their cheeriness soon faded, however. Mr. Manders, with Knowles at his side, was standing staring before the notice-board. On the Housemaster's sour features both wrath and astonishment were mingled.

"Most unusual, Knowles!" he was rasping. "The notice is certainly from the headmaster, but this is most singular and unusual. The juniors are not expected to attend these meetings—indeed, it is a remarkable divergence from custom. And the time—there is scarcely time for the boys to change, especially in the disgraceful state they are in now. And a half-holiday—it is, I repeat, most unusual, Knowles. Dr. Chisholm might certainly have acquainted me with— One moment, boys! Stop! Stop, this instant! You hear me?"

Mr. Manders seemed suddenly to become aware of the fact that the juniors were mounting the stairs, and his rasping call stopped them.

The foremost juniors on the stairs halted, and those crowding behind halted. Both Classics and Moderns had been lined heavily for the part they had played in the riot—a punishment both Mr. Manders and Mr. Dalton had agreed upon. And now the juniors were only anxious to get changed, and to get out of doors to enjoy the half-holiday, thankful only that their punishment had not been a gating.

They eyed Mr. Manders rather apprehensively, and their apprehension was more than justified.

"Boys, do not go yet!" snapped Mr. Manders. "I presume none of you has seen this notice from the headmaster yet? If so, you must read it without delay. Afterwards, you will change and make yourselves presentable before proceeding to your Form-room."

The Modern juniors gasped in consternation.

"No boy will be excused attending the lecture upon

any pretext whatever," proceeded Mr. Manders icily. "And any boy presenting himself in an untidy state will receive severe punishment. That is all!"

But it was more than enough. Mr. Manders stalked away, and there was a chorus of dismal groans, and then a rush to the notice-board. Tommy Dodd reached it first, and he read the notice aloud in a voice which fairly shook with wrath and amazement. For the Head's notice now read as follows:

"ROOKWOOD LITERARY SOCIETY.

"There will be a meeting of the above society in the Modern Fourth Form room at three o'clock this afternoon, when the Rev. D. G. Ponter, M.A., of Latchford, will give a lecture on Early Victorian Literature. All juniors are ordered to attend.

"(Signed) H. CHISHOLM,
"Headmaster."

Lovell's alterations had made a difference.

It was a difference which made the Modern juniors fairly gnash their teeth with rage.

"Oh!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Oh, my only hat! Our

A busy, frantically busy, half-hour followed for the Modern Fourth.

In the bath-rooms they rubbed and scrubbed. In the dorms they whipped their everyday clothes off and put on their Sunday best, so to speak. And the thought of the Head being there made them careful to remove all possible traces of the recent combat.

Before the stroke of three every fellow was in the Form-room. They crowded in in a sulky indignant swarm; Victorian literature had no charms for them—especially on a half-day holiday. The things they said regarding the Rev. D. G. Ponter would have made that clerical gentleman's hair curl had he heard them. Fortunately, he didn't. Only Arthur Edward Lovell, hiding in the big cupboard, heard them, and he had to stuff a handkerchief into his mouth to prevent himself yelling with laughter.

All was going splendidly—more splendidly, in fact, than he had hoped for. Certainly he had made the alterations on the notice cleverly—even the Head himself might have been deceived. But Lovell had anticipated some doubts, some suspicions. For it certainly was unusual, odd, and surprising for juniors to be "ordered" to



"WHOOOP!" Lovell let out a yell as the Moderns proceeded to haul him up the flagstaff. He struggled violently, but the sack acted as a strait-jacket, and it was in vain!

afternoon mucked up—absolutely mucked up! And we were going to the pictures at Latchford. Oh, blow—dash and blow! Of all the—the swindles!"

"That means changing into our best bibs and tuckers right away!" groaned French. "I'm not risking a licking from that beast Manders on top of all this, anyway. I'm off!"

There was a rush for the stairs.

None of the fellows wanted more trouble with Manders, and they rushed upstairs for the bath-rooms. Most of them needed soap and water, and plenty of it, and all of them had to change into their best togs for such an occasion. They knew what to expect if they didn't. Possibly the Head himself was coming to the lecture!

That it might be spoof not a single Modern dreamed of suspecting. It was the Head's writing, and the Head's signature. And only one fellow perhaps in all Rookwood would have the audacity, the reckless hare-brained foolishness, to alter the Head's august writing. But not one of the Moderns even thought of Arthur Edward Lovell just then. Grumbling and grouching and seething with indignation, they swarmed up to the bath-rooms and dormitories to clean-up and change for the lecture.

attend such a lecture—and certainly for such a lecture to be held in a junior Form-room.

Yet nobody suspected. It was all working like a charm. All Lovell had to do now was to wait until the last fellow had entered and taken his seat. Then he would nip out of the cupboard, slip like lightning to the door, whip outside and lock it behind him, locking the unsuspecting Modern idiots in. Then, while they waited for the lecturer to turn up, Lovell would be busy ragging their studies and screwing them up.

What a wheeze—a wheeze only Lovell could have thought of and carried through successfully—in Lovell's view!

The room rapidly filled. The fellows took their seats at their usual desks. The last of the rear desks was some distance from the cupboard and the door. Lovell's great hope was that he would be able to slip out and lock the door unseen and unheard, to leave the unsuspecting victims in ignorance of the fact that it was all a Classical jape. That knowledge would come to them later on. And when it did come, and when they found their studies screwed up—

Lovell gurgled with blissful anticipation as he crouched

down in the close confines of the cupboard. Big as the cupboard was, Lovell found it extremely uncomfortable quarters, and already his limbs were aching frantically, and he almost choked with the close air.

The last fellow came in and sat down, to add his comments to the general discontent and disgust. Lovell grinned gleefully as he glimpsed the rows of neatly dressed juniors through a crack in the cupboard door.

Now was the time to make a move. And Lovell was just about to edge the cupboard door open when a foot-step sounded outside, and once again the Form-room door opened. This time it was Mr. Manders who came in. He came in hurriedly, and his rasping voice, somewhat agitated and excited, sent Lovell's hopes sinking a little.

"Ah, you are all here, boys!" he snapped. "I am glad to see, for once, that you are in time. There will be, however, no lecture this afternoon."

It was somewhat in the nature of a bombshell, but a very pleasant one for the Moderns. They stared, fond hopes rising.

"No no lecture, sir!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "But—but—"

"You may well be astonished, Dodd," articulated Mr. Manders, his voice fairly crackling with indignant wrath. "But, unless I am greatly mistaken, the whole thing is a hoax, boys. That notice originally related to a meeting to be held this evening in the School House. Only seniors were requested to attend it. Some miscreant, some impudent rascal, has actually had the audacity, the unparalleled and outrageous impudence to alter Dr. Chisholm's handwriting, to alter his notice—at least, that is my suspicion at the moment. I have just been on the telephone to the headmaster. The whole proceeding struck me as odd and unusual, and I deemed it necessary to make sure the notice was not a mistake. The Head informs me," proceeded Mr. Manders, his voice rising in his agitation, "that he sent over no such notice. It is clear that it is a mischievous and disgraceful hoax."

"Oh, oh, my hat!"

There was a buzz—a buzz of mingled relief and wrath. Some of the fellows jumped up, but Mr. Manders waved his hand.

"Sit down! How dare you? Silence!" he boomed. "You will remain here quietly until I have seen and spoken to Dr. Chisholm. I will send Knowles here to keep order until my return. Silence!"

Mr. Manders rustled away.

The silence continued until he had gone. Then every fellow in the room jumped up and started to talk at once. And every fellow gave his opinion in excited tones that thrilled with wrath and dismay. And that opinion was that it was a Classical jape.

"Of course it is!" howled Tommy Dodd, making his voice heard above the hubbub. "Oh crikey! I knew there was something queer about that dashed notice! It's a Classical jape, of course. We've been done—dished, diddled, and done brown! Oh crumbs! We'll—we'll smash the bounders for this! But fancy having the nerve to alter the beak's handwriting! Who could be expected to guess that?"

Certainly nobody could.

Lovell acted at that moment.

Like lightning he slammed the cupboard door open; like lightning he leaped out and made a mad jump for the Form-room door. He reached it and whipped it open, and there came a howl of rage from the Moderns as they turned and sighted him.

"Lovell!"

The howl did not stop Lovell, however. What stopped him was nearly six feet of brawn and muscle in the form of Knowles of the Modern Sixth, who came through the doorway just as Lovell's frantic jump took him to it.

Lovell's jump landed him full in Knowles' chest. Knowles gave a sort of strangled yelp, staggered back, and sat down. Lovell fell, crasling, on top of him.

Knowles howled, and Lovell howled. But their howls were as nothing to the howls of the Modern juniors. All of them had seen the Classical jape now, and forms and desks crashed over as a mad rush was made for the unlucky Lovell.

"Lovell!"

"It's that Classical bounder! It's Lovell who did it!" howled Tommy Dodd frantically. "Collar him! Stop him—quick!"

There was a roar of voices in the Form-room, and a rush of feet. Knowles staggered up. But they ignored Knowles. They just fell upon Lovell and smote him hip and thigh. Knowles shouted and howled, but he did both in vain.

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Lovell disappeared under a swarm of furious Moderns. But his voice was heard in muffled and frantic accents from beneath the scum.

"Yaroooogh! Help! Oooooogh! Gerroff me neck!" he was shrieking. "Yarooop! Yooooop! Murder! Help! Rescue! Yaroooogh! Gug-gug-groooogh!"

His voice almost died away in a smothered gurgle.

"Stop!" hooted Knowles, slapping heads right and left without avail. "What the thunder—Stop, you young fiends!"

"Stop, be blowed!" howled Tommy Cook. "Bejabbers, wasn't it Lovell who spoofed us? Hasn't he mucked up our half? Smash him! Blow Knowles!"

"Go it!"

It was a roar, and the Moderns went at it. They rolled Lovell in the dust. They rammed dusters and chalk into his mouth. They poured ink in floods over his hair and features. They tipped gum and paste over his head, and rubbed it in. Finally, the hapless japor was spreadeagled over a desk, and a dozen rulers and pointers brought into play on various parts of his anatomy.

Lovell bellowed and shrieked.

And then came a sudden yell at the doorway:

"Cave! Manders!"

Mr. Manders' acid features, crimson with astounded wrath, showed in the doorway behind Knowles.

"Boys, what—what—Good heavens!"

The voice was enough. Almost mechanically the Moderns holding Lovell released him. And that was quite enough for Lovell.

He was a mass of aches and pains. He was stiff from crouching in the cupboard. He was nearly weeping with mingled rage and disappointment. But the way he streaked towards the Form-room door was a revelation of what desperation will do.

The Modern juniors scarcely saw him go. They only realised he had gone when they saw Knowles bowled over like a ninepin. Then some of them got a glimpse of his streaking figure as he sent the astounded Mr. Manders staggering back against the doorpost, and vanished.

"After him!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

Tommy Dodd was first out. He sighted Lovell just streaking towards the Hall doorway. Standing there, evidently waiting patiently for their chum Knowles, were Frampton and Catesby of the Modern House. Lovell, still going strong, went through the two like a knife through butter. Frampton crashed back against the doorpost, his head registering a mighty hit before he slumped down with a bump. Catesby went flying through the doorway under Lovell's charge, and next moment Catesby was rolling down the steps outside.

Lovell went streaking across the quad.

On the School House steps were standing Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome.

"I'm afraid Lovell's up to his silly games again, you men," Jimmy was gloomily remarking. "He isn't in any of the bath-rooms, and he's not in the dorm, either. I hope the footling ass hasn't been visiting the Moderns again. He's nerve enough for anything, you know, and he never learns a lesson."

But Jimmy was wrong there, for once.

Lovell had learned a lesson. And just then he came streaking across the quad. They did not recognise him. His own mater could not have recognised him just then. He was just a mass of ink and chalk and gum. But they knew it was Lovell. Only Lovell could have got himself into such a mess. He did not stop. He just flew past his dismayed pals, and vanished into the House.

"Well," remarked Jimmy Silver, as he stared blankly after the horrid vision. "If that doesn't do it, nothing will. At all events, I bet he's had enough excitement for one day—if he hasn't learnt his lesson. We can safely get off for our walk now. Come on!"

But though even Lovell felt he had had enough excitement he got more—excitement he neither wanted nor liked. He had scarcely left the bath-room when Bulkeley collared him and took him off to the Head. And there Lovell found more excitement—in the form of the Head's cane. It was a record licking. Dr. Chisholm strongly objected to his handwritten notices being altered by a junior, and he strongly objected to the kind of jape Lovell had attempted. And when Lovell crawled from the Head's study at last he was a very subdued Lovell indeed. And he no longer wanted to lead the Classics. He was quite content to let Jimmy Silver lead after that.

THE END.

(There's another spiffing Rookwood yarn in next week's GEM. The Fistical Four become "The Mystical Four!" And how!)

BREATH-TAKING ADVENTURE YARN!

THE SKY RAIDERS!



By
JOHN SYLVESTER.

**Amazing escape of Schoolboy Explorers! They return from Mars to the Earth—
but no one believes their story!**

Rescue!

AS they stood there, watching the city of the Craws crumble before their eyes, Billy and Nick, the Schoolboy Explorers, thought back over the amazing adventures that they had experienced during the last few—was it weeks or days? They had had no means of counting time since that morning when they had left the Cornish coast in a weird metal flying machine, bound for Mars, their only companion a strange blue-skinned Martian boy, whom they learned to call Osaka.

They recalled their descent into the deadly jungle swamp, their capture by the forest dwarfs, and then their rescue from the dwarfs by Osaka's blue-skinned countrymen.

It had seemed then that their adventures were over, but almost immediately they had found themselves fighting for the Blueskins against the Craws, rival inhabitants of Mars. Then came their capture by the Craws, and now, when they are about to be put to death, some unknown force was attacking the city, and smashing it to atoms. Strange red cubes were being dropped from airships into the city.

Each cube was packed with a living cargo. To absorb the shock of impact the men wore suits of mail, and looked incongruously like ancient crusaders, complete with helmet and vizor.

The armour-plated creatures sprang out, carrying long sticks or wands. And from these wands issued a violet flame.

"It beats those torches we had under the sea. They are bringing down the whole building opposite."

"But they'll be crushed under it."

"They don't seem to mind."

"They are coming towards us!"

"But—am I going crazy? They've got no faces!"

Billy stared in astonishment at the iron masks. They were peaked, giving a birdlike effect; but the join was not perfect, and inside the vizors were hollow.

"They aren't men at all!" ejaculated Nick. "Why, of course, that explains it!"

"Explains what? It's about as clear as mud to me."

"They are machines! They are mechanical men—robots!"

"Robots?"

"Yes; but that means they can't recognise us. They are just murder machines. They destroy everything within reach. They are starting now!"

Spellbound the boys watched the mechanical men dart across the room. The violent flames were raised automatically to the walls.

There was no explosion. The walls just crumbled!

They were wondering if they would be able to get out, when a voice that both boys recognised echoed in the distance. It was calling them by name.

Instantly they turned round. Billy was the first to spot a boyish figure running towards them.

"We are saved!" he cried, struggling to his feet eagerly. "It's Osaka!"

Osaka did not explain until after he had taken them out of the ruins, and they were safely aboard one of the big air-liners floating above the harbour.

"There's the end of the Craws," he declared, pointing down at the hollow crater where once the city had been.

"Now we are going on a long journey."

"To your own country?" asked Billy excitedly.

But Osaka shook his head.

"You are going to a place which none of my countrymen have ever visited. And I shall be the first, and the only other Martian to land with you."

As he spoke a bell clanged somewhere in the ship, and Nick gave a start as he saw an armour-clad figure hurry across the deck.

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"The crew—" he began, but Osaka interrupted.
 "Yes, they are all like that. They are mechanical men. These airships are all controlled by robots."

Billy experienced an uncomfortable sensation, remembering the wizardry of those terrible instruments of destruction he had seen with his own eyes, and which, otherwise, he would hardly have believed. But he felt he could no longer be surprised by anything that happened.

"Tell us how you escaped?" he urged, as the airship suddenly began to move.

Osaka's story was almost as thrilling as their own. He had pretended to be dying, and, taking his gaolers off their guard, had escaped. Concealing himself in a truck of minerals that was being carried in a lift to the upper ground, he left the city.

After narrowly avoiding recapture by troops he took to the hills. He spent nearly two weeks in the open, feeding on roots and berries, when a strange aeroplane hovered overhead and sighted him.

The aeroplane descended abruptly, and he came face to face with a tall man with a snowy beard.

"Sounds like a fairy-tale," murmured Billy, under his breath. "Sure he didn't appear out of a bottle?"

Osaka, however, was in deadly earnest.

"It was one of the priests of the Fiery Mountain," he said, trembling as he recalled the scene.

He explained that on Mars, the Fiery Mountain was almost a legend. It was one of a very high range of mountains, where a community of men lived in rigid seclusion. It was not a large community. Probably it only numbered a few hundred.

"But they are centuries ahead even of our brainiest men," Osaka declared. "They've got a knowledge that would enable them to rule the whole planet if they wanted to. But until now they haven't taken any interest in using their power."

They were, he said, supermen. Their minds were as much more highly developed, compared with the ordinary inhabitants, as the latter were to the forest dwarfs. They were in possession of the last secrets of science—the secret of the atom.

"Then that's how they destroyed the city!" cried Nick, turning to Billy jubilantly. "I told you so!"

No one on the planet ever dared to venture into the territory of these supermen. Rash explorers had attempted it in the past, but they had never returned.

The deck swarmed with robots. There were numbers of mechanical men rushing about on the ground below.

This was Thalazzar—the mountain retreat of a new race of beings, a small aristocracy of supermen. They were served by slaves they themselves manufactured in those immense laboratories—creatures of metal and acid instead of flesh and blood.

In this way they could gain unlimited power. They could dictate from this strange solitude to the entire planet. For the first time in history they had used their power.

Descending by lift the three followed a robot along corridors made of some quartz-like substance into a large room with crystal walls. In the centre of the room stood a tall man, with a high, dome-shaped head, a majestic silver beard, dressed in a flowing white robe.

Billy felt a kind of awe. So did Nick, as he realised they were in the presence of an intellect that had mastered the ultimate secrets of the universe.

A smooth, deep voice greeted them. In a few concise sentences they were made welcome.

"But you have come only to depart just as quickly. It was a wonderful coincidence I should hear of your existence. I have been planning for many years a voyage to the Earth. It is to take place to-morrow, and I wish you both to accompany me."

"You are going to take us back?" ejaculated Billy.

"Yes," The High Priest smiled. "We have laboured here for centuries to gain Wisdom. Those who stand in our way—as you saw—must be destroyed."

Both Nick and Billy were too thunderstruck to speak. They were going back with this amazing being.

"Come and see for yourselves," he continued, beckoning them to the window. "There is a machine by which we shall travel."

Outside, caught in the last rays of the sun, was a colossal silver cube. It had no windows, nothing to break the perfect symmetry of its structure. It was surrounded by a crowd of metal men, all running about chaotically.

At the sight of the robots the old man frowned.

"They seem restless to-night. Perhaps it is because, for the first time, they have seen war."

"Can they think?" Billy stammered.

"Yes, they have brains; but not like ours. Matter, as you know, consists of tiny particles of electricity, in a

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certain pattern. Their pattern is different. I'm not even certain what they might develop into under stress."

But suddenly he stopped. There was a piercing scream, like a great siren blowing. A look of incredulity spread over his face.

The sun had gone down. In the brief twilight they could see a black, moving mass on the plain outside, and thousands of tiny violet lights.

"It's impossible!" The High Priest gave a choking cry and fell back.

But more sirens were blowing. There was another, even more sinister sound, beginning like an electric whine and rising to a demented howl.

"They are in revolt!" cried the old man. "I see it now. They've realised their own power. It was my fault for teaching them so soon."

"The Earth-Plane is still intact. If we are quick—"

"Come!" cried the High Priest, wheeling and seizing Billy's arm.

It was a weird experience. The shrieking of those sirens was strangely terrifying.

To reach the airship they had to race the black tide surging towards it with frightful weapons of destruction. Billy tore along, Nick and Osaka keeping abreast. But, fast as they went, the High Priest, despite his age, maintained the lead. He had a long tube in his hand.

A dozen robots ran to cut them off. The tube flashed its purple fire and they were annihilated.

But more were coming. As the High Priest reached the airship Billy glanced over his shoulders, and, to his horror, saw Osaka struck. In an instant he was wiped out.

The same fate overtook the other priests hurrying behind him.

"Quick—go inside!"

Billy flung himself through the aperture. To his relief Nick followed. The panel was slammed.

"This is terrible! But they can't injure us now. This airship can resist even the atom-destroyer."

With trembling hands the old man pulled back a lever. Immediately they were rising at the velocity of eight miles a second.

Below, the plateau on those lonely heights was a mere crimson glow, and for miles around it fulfilled its name as the Fiery Mountain. The silver cube hurtled on towards a green star, gleaming like a great emerald in the sky.

But it was not destined to carry the wisdom of the Martian supermen to the Earth.

Two months later Billy climbed on to the top of that silver cube, Nick following him. And every moment it sank deeper into the waters of the Pacific Ocean.

The High Priest had been drowned at the first impact, despite their efforts to save him.

"Look! There's a ship!" cried Billy eagerly.

"I wonder if they'll see us. If they don't—"

But they were sighted. A boat was lowered. The final tip of the airship, on which they were crouching, disappeared as the boat came to pick them up.

They were exhausted, but as they clambered aboard, and one of the sailors asked them on what ship they were wrecked, Billy told the amazing truth.

"It wasn't a ship. We've come from Mars. We are the first human beings—"

"Delirious!" exclaimed a gruff but sympathetic voice.

"But I tell you it's true. We've been to Mars. When I tell you—"

It was no use, however. No one would believe them. Nor, they realised, would they get any better reception when they reached land.

"We'll just have to pretend we were delirious," declared Nick, that night; "otherwise they'll think we've gone potty. We shall get locked up, or something."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Billy, leaning over the taffrail. "To think—"

But he couldn't get any further. He couldn't find words to express his mingled relief and exasperation and wonder. He just gripped the rail and stared up at a red planet, like a tiny jewel, in the south-west.

"Gee!" He shook his head, and then abruptly became his old self again. "I'm starving! I've had enough of those beastly tablets! There's the supper-bell going. Shall we feed?"

"But we'd better not say another word."

"Not another word!" echoed Billy, nodding with sudden decision.

THE END.

(Zoooooom! There goes Donald Saxon in his Saxon Special racing car! Meet him and his two schoolboy pals in "The Last Lap!" a rip-snorting, supercharged, high-speed racing yarn, next week!)

EASTWOOD CUP—SEMI-FINALS!

SEMI-FINAL THRILLS!

SAINTS AND FRIARS TRIUMPH!

By "OLD BOY."

Greyfriars,
Wednesday.

NEUTRAL grounds were chosen for the semi-final ties, and a large contingent of St. Jim's men travelled over to Greyfriars to watch Tom Merry & Co. do battle with Derek Saxby and his stalwarts of Rippingham. By the irony of fate the Greyfriars team travelled to St. Jim's to oppose Gordon Gay & Co. of Rylcombe Grammar School on the St. Jim's ground!

The exchange of grounds did not affect the play of the Saints. Rippingham were a well-built side, famed for their superb ball control, and led by the dashing Derek Saxby. There was very little dash about Rippingham, however, at the start.

Tom Merry netted in the first minute, but was ruled offside, and a little later the Rippingham keeper fisted out when a goal seemed a certainty—his fist unfortunately catching Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's aristocratic "nappah" as well as the ball, and putting the swell of St. Jim's out of the game for a few minutes.

With ten men, Tom Merry & Co. found themselves penned in their own half, and only Fatty Wynn's coolness saved the fort. Gussy resumed with a bandaged head and played a brilliant game on the wing, apparently thirsting for revenge.

At half-time there had been no score, a just reflex of the play.

On the resumption, Rippingham tried storm tactics, and more than one St. Jim's supporter had his heart in his mouth as they swarmed around the Saints' goal. Saxby tricked Figgins and rattled the bar with a great drive; next moment Pope hit the upright and, as the ball rebounded into play, crashed it again goalwards, only to have the mortification of seeing Fatty Wynn hold it and throw it round the post for a corner!

The corner-kick dropped right in the goalmouth, and Fatty Wynn plunged valiantly into a melee. He was bowled

over by sheer weight of numbers, and gasped at the bottom of a heap of players, but he was lying on the ball! When the heap resolved itself into separate footballers again, Fatty was awarded a free kick for a foul kick on his fat anatomy, and his lengthy punt cleared the goal and the atmosphere.

Tom Merry fastened on the leather and threaded his way through like a past-master. It was one of those lone break-aways to meet which the goalkeeper has either to stay at home and brave criticism or dash out and try to reduce the angle of the shot. The latter course, though usually the best, involves a certain goal in the event of failure.

The Rippingham goalie did not hesitate. He fairly threw himself out of goal to meet Tom Merry. But the St. Jim's captain slowed slightly, and as the goalkeeper dived desperately at his feet he tapped the ball deftly across the goalmouth—just out of the keeper's reach—and there was a mighty roar as the ball trickled over the line and lodged quietly in the corner of the net!

"Hurrah, St. Jim's!"

"Good old Tom Merry!"

Tom was overwhelmed with back-slapping, but his face was grim, and he warned his men to fight hard yet. His advice was timely, for Rippingham strained every nerve to equalise, and

brought up their half-backs in a combined effort to carry the fort.

But Fatty Wynn, ably defended by Figgins and Kerr, was safe and sure, and the last few minutes ticked away without further score. As the final whistle shrilled the St. Jim's supporters broke over the ropes and carried Tom Merry and Fatty Wynn off the field shoulder high, and if ever two footballers deserved it they did!

RYLCOMBE V. GREYFRIARS.

GORDON GAY and his men made a brilliant start, and for a few minutes carried all before them. Field in the Greyfriars' goal undoubtedly saved his side again and again during that fierce bombardment, and Gordon Gay was unlucky with a fine shot that Field somehow tipped over the bar.

Harry Wharton rallied his men, however, and the smooth-working Greyfriars forward line which has upset so many defences this season swept down the field.

The Greyfriars attack was sustained, and Carboy had no chance whatever with the flashing drive from Bob Cherry which beat him seventeen minutes from the start.

Rylcombe rallied in their turn, but they were fighting a team just a little better in almost every department, and it was luck that saved them from further downfall before half-time.

The second half found Rylcombe on the run, and only Carboy's tenacity in goal stood between Greyfriars and a heavy score. First Wharton, then Hurreo Singh, then Dick Penfold tested him, and it was a header from Wharton that beat him finally and put the last nail in the Rylcombe coffin.

"If you men can reproduce this form when you play in the final, you'll win hands down!" gasped Gay to Wharton, as they walked off the field together.

"Who are we playing?" was Wharton's first question.

And the answer came back, "St. Jim's!"

At last! All through the competition the rivals of Greyfriars and St. Jim's have hoped to be drawn together, and now they are to battle in the final tie for the coveted Eastwood Cup!

RESULTS.

ST. JIM'S .. 1 RIPPINGHAM .. 0
Merry.

Teams: ST. JIM'S—Wynn: Figgins, Kerr; Rediera, Noble, Lowther; Tabbot, Lawson, Merry, Blake, D'Arcy. RIPPINGHAM—Laurie: Townsend, Grier; Dollyer, Vincent, Keene; Pope, Noyce, Saxby, Higgins, Redgrove.

GREYFRIARS .. 2 RYLCOMBE .. 0
Cherry, Wharton. GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

Teams: GREYFRIARS—Field: Bull, Rodwing; Cherry, Todd, Linley; Hurreo Singh, Nugent, Wharton, Penfold, Vernon-Smith. RYLCOMBE—Carboy: Willis, Wallace; Carp, Wootton ma, Smith; Tadpole, Monk, Gay, Wootton mi, Woolley.



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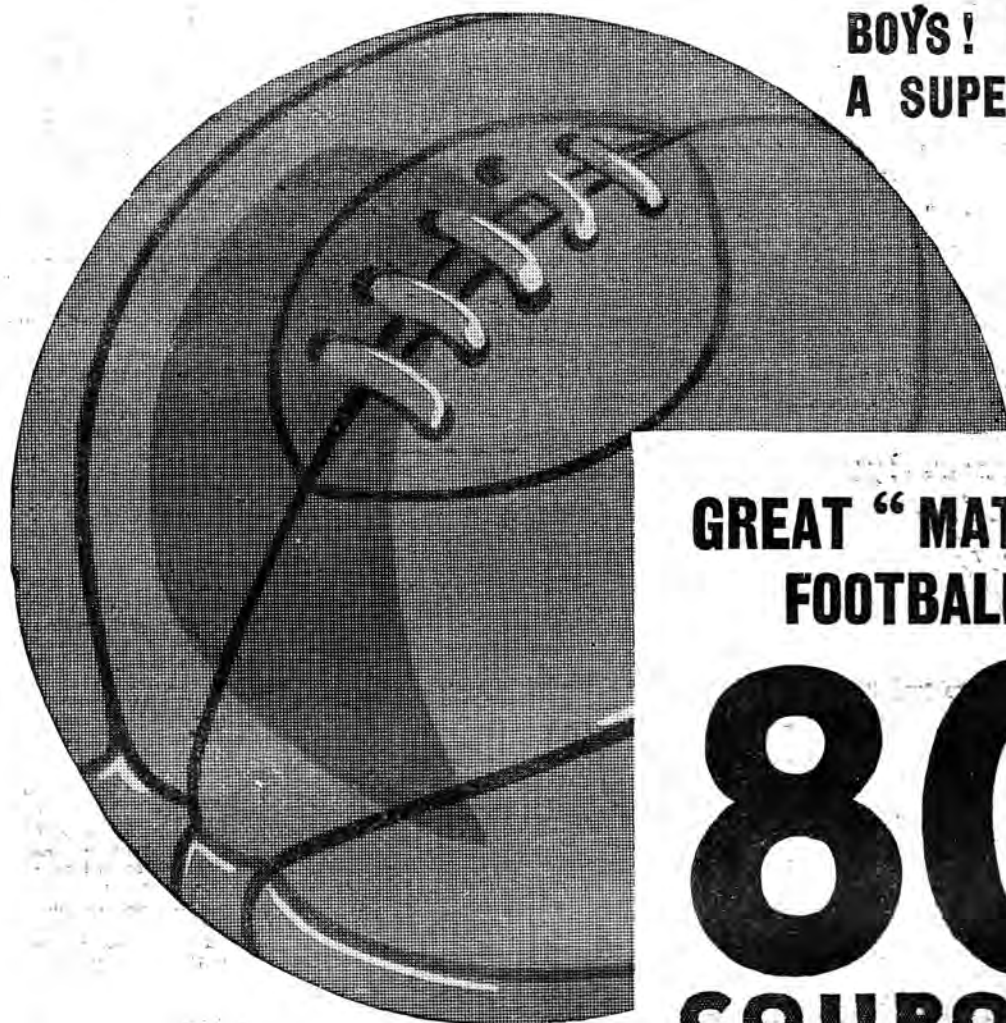
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Printed and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.
Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription
rates: Inland and Abroad, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.,
and for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd.—Saturday, March 12th, 1932.