

"THE WRONG TEAM!" GREAT ST. JIM'S YARN OF SPORT, MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE **INSIDE.**

The **GEM**

2d

*Chirying
the
Football
Skipper!*

AMATEUR ELEVEN!

The WRONG TEAM!



"We're the other team," said Tom Merry. The Thebans' skipper stared at him. "You!" he ejaculated. "You're not Merry!" "Yes, I am," said Tom, growing crimson. "But—but you're only a kid!" exclaimed Vivian, in amazement.

CHAPTER 1.

Most Important!

"**P**WAY leave all the talkin' to me!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Bosh!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"My impression is," said Monty Lowther, "that Gussy had better be left out of the deputation. He is sure to begin talking when we get into the Head's study, and then all the fat will be in the fire."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Hear, hear!" said Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye and surveyed his comrades with a scornful glance, which ought really to have withered them up on the spot. But the juniors of St. Jim's were tough, and they showed no signs of withering.

There were quite a crowd of them. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were taking the lead. Blake, Herries, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,445.

Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth were also taking the lead. Figgins & Co. of the New House, too, were taking the lead. Kangaroo of the Shell and Reilly of the Fourth were the only members of the party, in fact, who weren't taking the lead.

With so many leaders, the deputation certainly ought to have been well led. But they had halted in the passage outside the study of Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, in warm dispute. Perhaps too many leaders would spoil the deputation, as it is said that too many cooks spoil the broth.

"Be reasonable D'Arcy, old man," said Reilly, the Irish junior. "Sure, you know that you niver open your mouth without putting your foot in it—"

"Weally, Weilly—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better let me explain to the Head," said Tom Merry. "As the eldest fellow here—"

"This isn't a matter for age to count," said Figgins, with a shake of the head. "I suggest letting the most

sensible chap do the talking—and that bars you out!"

"Why, you New House ass—"

"You School House fathead—"

"Look here—"

"Look here—"

"Order!" said Kangaroo. "The chief thing is that we've got to persuade the Head to give us leave for this afternoon. We can't do that by all talking at once."

"Faith, and I think—"

"Just what I was womarkin', deah boy. Bettah leave the talkin' to me. As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Blake, in a tired voice.

"I wefusa to wing off. Besides, as a chap connected with the chaps we are goin' to see, I have some authority to speak in the mattah," said Arthur Augustus, with considerable dignity.

"You don't know the Thebans team!" exclaimed Manners.

"My bwotah knew a chap who used to belong to it when he was at Oxford," said Arthur Augustus.

"Therefore—"

"Rats!"

HERE'S ANOTHER WONDERFUL YARN OF SPORT, MYSTERY AND EXCITING ADVENTURE.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

"You uthah ass——"

"I think——"

"I considah——"

"Cheese it!"

"Look here, you fellowa——"

"Leave it to me——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

The door of the Head's study suddenly opened. The juniors, in the excitement of the moment, had forgotten how near they were to that sacred apartment.

Dr. Holmes looked out into the passage with a severe glance.

"Boys!" he exclaimed.

The buzz of voices died away quite suddenly.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "You have disturbed the Head, you noisy asses. I weally beg your pardon, sir. Pway allow me to apologise for these duffahs!"

"Well, of all the cheek——" murmured Tom Merry.

The Head frowned.

"What are you gathered here in the passage for?" he asked. "It is very nearly time to go into your Form-rooms."

"Yaas, sir; but——"

"You see, sir——"

"It's like this, sir——"

"In the circumstances, sir——"

"Faith, and sure I——"

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes, in astonishment. "What is the matter? Have you juniors come here to say anything to me?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

"It's very important, sir."

"Then you may come into my study," said the Head. "But please do not all speak at once. I should understand you far better if you talked one at a time."

And the Head stepped back into his study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave his companions a warning glance.

"I told you so," he muttered.

"Pway leave the talkin' to me——"

"Ass!"

"Oh wats!"

The juniors marched into the study. Dr. Holmes surveyed them severely. His first impression was that he was to listen to some complaint, as the Fourth Formers and Shell fellows had evidently come to him as a deputation.

"Well?" he said inquiringly.

"Pway allow me to explain, sir——"

"This afternoon, sir——"

"We want——"

"The Thebans are playing at Abbotsford, sir——"

"And we want to see——"

"The footer match——"

"If you please——"

"Weally, you fellows——"

Dr. Holmes held up his hand.

"Silence!" he exclaimed. "You may explain, Merry. The rest of you keep silent."

"Weally, sir——"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Oh, vewy well, sir! I'm afraid that Tom Mewwy won't be able to put it to you pwoperly, sir, that's all. You see, sir——"

"Silence! Go on, Merry!"

Tom Merry gave a little cough.

"Well, sir, this is how it is. The Thebans have come to Abbotsford——"

"The Thebans?" repeated Dr. Holmes, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"I do not quite understand," said the Head. "The Thebans were a race of ancient Greeks, inhabitants of Thebes, in Boeotia. I do not understand how they——"

The juniors grinned. They could not help grinning, in spite of their great respect for the Head. Dr. Holmes was not so well posted as his juniors in football matters.

"They're not very ancient Thebans, sir," said Tom Merry, in explanation. "They—they're modern Thebans, sir. It's the name of a footer team, sir—a Varsity team. Of course, you've heard of the Corinthians, sir? Well, the Thebans are a team like the Corinthians—regular coughdrops, sir."

"Regular what, Merry?"

"Ahem! I mean, splendid football players, sir. They're at Abbotsford, sir, and they're playing a match with the County Ramblers. We wondered if you'd let us off lessons this afternoon, sir, to see the match?"

"Really, Merry——"

"Of course, we know it's an awful cheek to ask you, sir," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "But—but you're always so kind, sir——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That—that we thought—it's a wonderful match, sir—Thebans against the

It came as a big surprise to St. Jim's when Tom Merry received a challenge from the Thebans, a crack amateur football club. But it was an even bigger surprise for Tom Merry's eleven when they turned up and found they were the wrong team!

best amateur team in Sussex, sir. The—the match will really have an educational value, sir," said Tom Merry, rather proud of that choice of words.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Head smiled.

"And we should like awfully to go, sir," said Figgins of the Fourth. "It's not often we get a chance to see a match like the Thebans against the County."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! And as I am connected with the Theban team——"

"Ah! You have a relation playing in the team, D'Arcy?" asked the Head, perhaps seeking in his mind for an excuse for granting the somewhat excessive request of the juniors.

"Not exactly a welation, sir," said D'Arcy. "But when my brother Conway was at Oxford, he knew a man who was in the team, sir. He's mentioned it to me."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"That is rather a shadowy connection, D'Arcy," he remarked. "I am afraid you are asking a great deal, to miss your lessons for the remainder of the day——"

"Yes, we know we are, sir," said Tom Merry meekly. "But it's such a rare chance of seeing a first-class amateur match, that we throw ourselves on your kindness, sir."

"Faith, and so we do, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Well, well," said the Head. "If this is really such an extraordinary match——"

"Oh, it is, sir! They're the Thebans, you know, sir!"

"Mr. Railton knows all about them, sir. He played in the Thebans once," said Monty Lowther eagerly.

"Yaas, wathah; a wegular wippin' team, sir."

"Very well, I will speak to your Form-masters," said the Head, smiling. "You will promise, of course, not to get into mischief, and to come back directly after the match?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Thank you so much, sir."

"You are very kind, sir."

And with expressions of very sincere gratitude, the juniors trooped out of the study.

Arthur Augustus looked very pleased with himself.

"Jolly lucky I was with you," he remarked. "Of course, the Head couldn't vewy well refuse, affah the way I put it to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows——"

"The Head's a brick!" said Tom Merry. "Let's get off! We shan't be at Abbotsford in time for the beginning of the match, anyway, unless we hurry."

And Tom Merry & Co. rushed away to make their hasty preparations.

CHAPTER 2.

The Unknown!

ALL St. Jim's knew that the Thebans were at Abbotsford, playing the County Ramblers that afternoon; and all the school would have been glad to go to see the match. But only Tom Merry & Co. had had cool "cheek" enough to ask the Head to excuse them from lessons for the purpose.

If the other fellows had known of Tom Merry & Co.'s success, there would probably have been a rush to the Head's study for similar permission.

But the juniors who had been granted leave very considerably kept the facts to themselves. As Monty Lowther remarked, it would hardly be fair to the Head to let a whole crowd of slackers swarm into his study asking for leave from lessons.

Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not stay to adorn his person, but jammed on to his aristocratic head the first silk hat that came to hand.

It was a sharp, somewhat misty October afternoon; just the weather for a quick walk, and the crowd of juniors set off at a good pace.

"We'll take the short cut through the wood," Tom Merry remarked, as they reached the stile in Rylcombe Lane. "Then we can catch the local train at Wayland for Abbotsford."

"Good egg!" said Figgins.

They tramped along the footpath through Rylcombe Wood. The leaves were thick under their feet, and brown old leaves were falling from the branches over their heads, and fluttering on the wind. On the thick carpet of leaves, their feet made hardly any sound as they strode on. There was a very thoughtful expression upon the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and once or twice he glanced about him into the dusky depths of the wood.

"What's wrong?" asked Tom Merry, noticing it.

"Nothin', deah boy. I was thinkin' of footpads."

"By Jove!" said Blake. "Quite right. There was a man attacked on the path only yesterday by a couple of ruffians. They're not likely to bother us, though, even if they're here now; we're rather too many for them, I should think."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, there are twelve of us," he remarked. "We should be rather a big mouthful for a couple of tramps."

"Yaas, wathah! You need not be nervous, deah boys—"

"Eh?"

"You need not be nervous; I am with you, you know."

"Who's nervous, you ass?"

"I wefuse to be called an ass—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther suddenly. "What's that?"

He held up his hand and listened.

From the winding footpath ahead of them in the misty depths of the wood a sudden sharp cry had come to the ears of the juniors.

"Oh, help!"

"Bai Jove! It's somebody in trouble, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Somebody goin' to the footah match, pewwaps, and those wascals—"

"The footpads!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath. "Come on; we're just in the right place at the right time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry broke into a rapid run as he spoke.

The rest of the juniors dashed after him at top speed.

There was no doubt that the cry they heard came from some solitary pedestrian in the heart of the wood, who had fallen in with the two footpads who had committed a robbery on that very path the day before. The St. Jim's juniors dashed at top speed to the rescue. There were enough of them to tackle a couple of tramps, certainly; but they did not give a thought to any possible danger.

Their footsteps were soundless on the thickly fallen leaves. Tom Merry was well ahead of the others, and first of the party, he came round a turn in the path and burst upon a startling scene.

A young man was struggling fiercely in the grasp of two roughly dressed, stubbly bearded ruffians, who were trying to hurl him to the ground. Just as Tom Merry came in sight, one of them brought down a heavy cudgel with a crash upon the young man's head. Tom Merry heard a low groan as the victim fell.

The two footpads were on their knees beside the fallen man in a moment, rifling his pockets.

"You seoundrels!" shouted Tom Merry.

The man with the cudgel sprang to his feet.

"You look arter the stuff, Pincher!" he muttered; and he faced Tom Merry, swinging up the cudgel.

"Brain him, Billy!"

Tom Merry halted.

He had outstripped his comrades, and the man Billy had the cudgel raised to strike him down as soon as he came within reach.

"Come on, you fellows!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Urry up, Pincher!" muttered the man with the cudgel. "There's more of 'em!"

"I'm through!"

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Pincher sprang up from the fallen man, who had not moved. He lay quite still and motionless, hardly seeming to breathe. There was a trickle of red over his forehead, where the cruel blow had struck him.

The St. Jim's juniors came up with a rush.

"Come on!" shouted Tom Merry.

And he led the attack. A dozen sturdy juniors rushed right at the two footpads, but they did not stop to face them. Pincher had cleared out the pockets of the fallen man, and the two rascals, without waiting to face the juniors, darted into the bushes and disappeared.

"After them!" shouted Figgins.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry quickly. "Better look after this chap!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry threw himself upon his knees beside the fallen man. He was quite insensible, and his eyes were closed. His face was deadly white, save where a red trickle ran down the forehead and across the pale cheek.

"My hat! He's had a hard knock," muttered Manners.

"Poor chap!" said Tom Merry. "I wonder who he is? If we knew where he belonged, we might get him home."

The juniors gathered round the fallen man. He had been stunned by the savage blow from the tramp's cudgel, and he showed no sign of returning to consciousness. The St. Jim's juniors regarded him with dubious glances.

"Some of us will have to look after him," said Blake doubtfully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That means missing the Thebans' match," said Herries.

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry, with a sigh. "Still, we needn't all miss it. Two or three of us will be enough to look after this poor chap and get him somewhere."

They were silent.

Nobody wanted to miss the Thebans' match at Abbotsford. Nevertheless, all of them would rather have missed it than have abandoned the insensible stranger. The question was which of them should make the sacrifice.

"I'll stay here, for one," said Tom Merry quickly. "Somebody's got to do it, and as I'm the leader of the party—"

This time Tom Merry's leadership was not disputed.

"Well, it's rough on you," said Figgins.

"That's all right."

"We'll tell you about the match when we get back," said Kerr.

"Yes, rather; we'll do that," said Fatty Wynn heartily.

Tom Merry smiled.

"The question is, who's going to stay with me?" he said.

Monty Lowther granted.

"I'm going to, of course," he said.

"And I," said Manners.

"Good! You fellows may as well buzz off, then."

The juniors hesitated.

"Sure you'll be able to manage?" asked Blake.

"Oh, yes!"

"Pewwaps I had bettah stay, too—"

"That's all right, Gussy; you'd only be in the way."

"Really, Lowthah—"

"Buzz off!" said Tom Merry. "Three of us can manage this chap all right. We may get away in time to see the finish of the match, too. No good your missing it. Buzz off!"

"In the circus—"

"Buzz off!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, vewy well!"

And the juniors went on their way, leaving the Terrible Three alone with the unfortunate stranger. They disappeared along the footpath in the direction of Wayland.

CHAPTER 3.

The Good Samaritans!

TOM MERRY was kneeling beside the fallen man.

He had wiped the blood from his face, and was resting the man's head upon his knee.

The pale face was set and grim, and the man's breathing was very faint.

"He looks pretty bad," said Monty Lowther, bending over the insensible man.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; but he's only stunned. It was a hard knock, though. Lucky we're not very far from Rylcombe Lane. We had better carry him there, and get a lift for him into the village to Dr. Short. He'll look after him."

"Good!" said Manners. "One of us can buzz off first and stop anything that passes in the lane. Shall I go?"

"Yes; that's a good idea."

Manners ran back towards Rylcombe Lane. He reached the stile, and waited there to stop the first vehicle that should pass, to afford a lift to the injured man.

Tom Merry and Lowther remained with the fallen man. A bowler hat lay near him, where it had fallen off in the struggle, and Lowther filled it with water at a stream in the wood near the path, and they bathed the man's face. But he did not recover his senses.

"I wonder who he is?" said Lowther. "A stranger in this neighbourhood, I should say. I've never seen him before."

"Those brutes have taken all his things, so there's no finding his name," said Tom Merry. "If we knew, we might get him to his home."

"Might be in his hat. Some chaps have their names written there," said Lowther, picking up the bowler hat.

"Is it there, Monty?"

"Only the initials," said Lowther, looking into the hat. "T. M."

"T. M.," repeated Tom Merry. "Same as mine!"

"Yes. I wonder what they stand for?"

"He doesn't seem to be coming to," said Tom Merry, scanning the white face anxiously. "We'd better get him along."

"Right-ho!"

The insensible man was sturdily built; but the two juniors were sturdy, too, and they raised him without much difficulty, Tom Merry taking his shoulders, and Lowther his legs. They carried him along the footpath back to Rylcombe Lane.

"Come on!" called out Manners, as they came within sight of the stile. "I've got a lift."

"Good!"

A car going towards Rylcombe had halted in the lane at Manners' call. The driver dismounted to help the juniors place the insensible victim of the footpads into the vehicle.

"We'd better go along with him to explain to Dr. Short," said Lowther, "and we shall have to go to the police station about it, too."

"Yes."

"Jump in, boys," said the driver. "There's room for all of you."

"Thank you!"

Tom Merry supported the unknown man's head upon his shoulder as the car drove to Rylcombe. It stopped outside Dr. Short's house, and the insensible man was carried in.



Racing along the footpath, Tom Merry suddenly burst upon a startling scene. A young man was struggling fiercely with two ruffians. Just as Tom came in sight, one of the ruffians brought down the heavy cudgel on the young man's head, and he sank to the ground.

Dr. Short, the local medico, who attended the St. Jim's boys, was fortunately at home. He was very much surprised to see his visitors.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What is the matter? An accident?"

"A robbery, sir!" Tom Merry explained. "This gentleman was knocked down by footpads in the footpath, and we've brought him to you, sir."

"Quite right, my lad! What are you doing out of school this afternoon, though?" asked the doctor.

"We had leave to go over to Abbotsford for the Thebans' match, sir; though we've missed it now, owing to this," said Tom Merry.

"Never mind, you have played the Good Samaritan," said Dr. Short. "You may have saved the man's life. Do you know who he is?"

"No, sir; only his initials are T. M."

"H'm! I have seen him before," said the doctor, scrutinising the insensible man, who had been laid in his surgery. "I fancy he was a guest of Sir Julian Marlow, at St. James' Lodge. I am not sure. He is a stranger in this neighbourhood, anyway. If you lads wish to know how he gets on, you may wait in the next room."

"Yes, sir."

The Terrible Three waited in the adjoining room. They were anxious to know how the injured stranger progressed, but they could not help thinking about the Thebans' match as they waited. That match had started long ago, and it was probably near the interval by this time.

"Just our luck!" said Manners, with a sigh. "I've got my camera with me, and I was going to take some snaps of the Thebans."

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry. "I hope this chap will come round soon. He looks a decent chap, too."

"Here's the doctor," said Lowther at last.

Dr. Short came into the room with a very serious face. The juniors could see by his manner that he had not a favourable report to make.

"Has he recovered?" asked Tom Merry.

Dr. Short shook his head.

"No; he is still insensible. I hope it will not prove to be concussion. I'm going to keep him here, Merry, for the present, at all events, until I find out where he has been staying."

"He is not"—Tom Merry's voice faltered—"not in danger, doctor?"

"Not so bad as that, but there is no telling how long he may remain unconscious. I have not been able to find any clue to his name, either; only his initials. You boys had better go and give information at the police station."

"Very good."

And the Terrible Three left the doctor's house. They called in at Rylcombe Police Station, and informed the inspector there of the occurrence, and then strolled down the lane.

"The match is jolly nearly over now," said Lowther. "May as well walk and meet the fellows coming back."

"Yes, I suppose so."

The chums of St. Jim's turned into the footpath through the wood again. They walked to Wayland, and waited at the railway station for the juniors who had gone to the match. A train came in from Abbotsford, and Jack Blake was the first to jump out of it.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake, catching sight of the Terrible Three on the platform. "You fellows here? How's that chap?"

"Laid up at Dr. Short's," said Tom Merry. "How did the match go? Was it a good one?"

"Ripping!" said Blake enthusiastically. "The Thebans are top-notch. They won hands down. My hat, I believe they'd give a League team a hard game!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, following Blake out of the carriage in a more leisurely way. "They are certainly vewy wippin' playahs. Their captain, Vivian, is a weally wippin' forward. I saw him score a goal that I couldn't have scored myself."

"Go hon!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I mean it, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're simply splendid!" said Figgins. "I've enjoyed that match. Beats grinding Latin in the Form-room—just a bit!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry sighed.

"Well, it can't be helped," he said. "It was rotten to miss it, but somebody had to look after that chap."

"Who was he?" asked Kangaroo, as the juniors trooped out of the station.

"I don't know; his initials are T.M., but he hadn't anything left on him with his name on it."

"Hasn't he come to?" asked Reilly.

"Not when we left the doctor's."

"Poor chap!"

"I hope the rotters will be arrested," growled Manners. "I was going to take snaps of the Thebans—"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Herries. "It wouldn't be a bad idea for us to track down those tramps, you know. It's a half-holiday on Wednesday, and we could take Towser out and track them down. You know how Towser can follow a track."

"Yes, a railway track, when he's in a train," grunted Blake.

"Look here, Blake, you ass—"

"I've got an idea," said Fatty Wynn.

modestly. "It's beastly rough on those Shell fellows missing the Thebans match. We'll stand them a feed when we get back to St. Jim's. Mrs. Taggles has got in some new steak-and-kidney pies to-day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"They're ripping!" said Fatty Wynn. "After all, I'd sooner go to a feed than to a footer match. We'll make it up to you, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry laughed. The most luscious steak-and-kidney pies were not likely to console him for having missed seeing the famous amateur footer team. But, as he said himself, it could not be helped, and the Terrible Three tried to take it cheerfully.

When they reached St. Jim's, the Head was informed of the affair in the wood, and he had a word of praise for the chums of the Shell, which helped to console them.

"You have acted like Good Samaritans, my boys," he said. "I am very glad you were there to render this aid to the injured man. I am very pleased with you."

"Well, that's all right!" Monty Lowther remarked, as they quitted the Head's study. "If the Head's pleased with us, we may get another afternoon off if the Thebans play another match anywhere near here. Something in that!"

And the Terrible Three walked over to the New House, to Piggins' study, to share the steak-and-kidney pies with Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 4.

An Amazing Letter!

"A LETTER for you, Tommy!"
It was the following day, and the morning lessons were over.

Monty Lowther was looking over the letter-rack, and he fished out a letter addressed to his chum, and tossed it over to him.

Tom Merry caught it.
"From Miss Fawcett, I suppose," he said. "I expect there's a remittance in it; and if there is, we'll have some more of those steak-and-kidney pies before Fatty Wynn has scoffed all Dame Taggles' stock."

"Hear, hear!"
"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, who had been scanning the letter-rack anxiously through his famous monocle. "I was expecting a wemittance myself—I wote to my patah yestahday, and told him particularly that I was in need of a fivah. It is wathah wemarkable that it has not awvived. It's a vewy exaspawating thing when a chap's govannah gwows so careless in sendin' wemittances."

"Not Miss Fawcett," said Tom Merry, glancing at the superscription on the letter. "I don't know the fist."

"Pewwaps it's for me, aifah all, deah boy—"

Tom Merry laughed.
"Yes, if your name's T. Merry," he said. "This is rather a queer address, you fellows. St. James', without the 'school.'"

The juniors glanced at the letter in Tom Merry's hand. The address ran: "T. Merry, Esq., St. James', Rylcombe."

"Careless ass who wrote that," said Monty Lowther. "There's a house called St. James' in the district, and it may have gone there by mistake."

"Well, there's only one Tom Merry, I suppose," said the captain of the Shell. "The postman has brought me
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enough letters to know my name. I wonder who it's from?"

"Might be a good idea to open it and see," suggested Lowther.

"Right!"
Tom Merry opened the letter.

He unfolded the sheet inside, and glanced at it, carelessly enough—and then his glance became fixed in amazement.

He stared at the letter in blank silence.

"What's the matter?" asked Manners.

"Bad news?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Anything wrong?" asked Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I twust it is not some-one ill, Tom Mewwy."

"Great Christopher Columbus!"

"What is it?" yelled Lowther.

"Explain, you ass."

"My only Aunt Jemima Ann!"

Lowther and Manners seized their chum, and backed him against the wall, and held him there.

"Now explain, you fathead," said Lowther, "before we bang your silly napper on the wall!"

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Well, what is it?"

"I—I don't understand it."

"Fathead! Who's it from?"

"Chap named Stacey—"

"Stacey!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wemembah that name somewhere. It's the name of the secwetawy of the Thebans Football Club."

"Yes, that's the chap."

"What! You've got a letter from the secretary of the Thebans!" exclaimed Jack Blake, coming along at that moment.

"Yes."

"Gammon!"

"Fact!" said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I can quite believe it myself. But there it is—you can all read it if you like."

He held up the letter. The juniors crowded round to read it, and there was a loud exclamation of astonishment as they did so. For a letter addressed to a junior schoolboy it was amazing enough. It ran:

"Dear Merry,—I'm sorry you were unable to come over for the match yesterday. We had a good game, though the team here is hardly up to playing the Thebans. We should be very glad to meet your team if you could come over to-morrow afternoon. We are staying down here till Thursday, and the Abbotsford fellows have given us the run of the ground, as they will be away. We have no match on till Saturday; so if you're free for Wednesday afternoon, and can bring your men over, we shall be glad to give you a good reception. Let me know by wire; just 'Yes' or 'No' will do, as I am going away this evening to stay the night. Address me at the County Hotel here.—Yours always,
"J. STACEY."

The juniors read the letter and re-read it, and stared at it, and stared at Tom Merry, and stared at one another.

Blank amazement was in every face.

That a first-class team like the Thebans—a team that entered for the English Cup—a team that included well-known Blues, and at least one international—that such a team should send a challenge to the junior captain of the school was sufficient to take their breath away.

If Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had a chance of meeting the Thebans with the first eleven he would have jumped with joy; but he would never

have dreamed of such a distinction falling to his lot.

But the junior eleven!

It was astounding.

"My only chapeau!" said Jack Blake, with a deep breath. "I—I can't get on to this at all. It must be a mistake!"

"He must have heard about you, Tommy, and that you're captain of St. Jim's instead of captain of the junior eleven," said Manners slowly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's impossible," he said. "If he's heard of Tom Merry at all he's naturally heard who Tom Merry is. It is clear that he knows I was coming over to see the Thebans play yesterday and was disappointed."

"Yes," said Lowther, looking at the letter again. "He says plainly he's sorry you were unable to come. That shows he knew you were coming."

"Perhaps that chap who was hurt by the footpads was a friend of his, and so he may have heard about you through that," Blake said reflectively. "The chap was very likely going over to the match."

"Yes, that's possible."

"That might be the reason for his sending this invitation if you've looked after a chap he knows," Lowther remarked.

"Anyhow, he's sent it," said Tom Merry. "Whatever his reason may be, he's sent it; and we're challenged to take over a team to meet the Thebans."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Kildare would give his little finger to get that challenge," he said. "It was a leg up for the County Ramblers to play the Thebans. We're in luck."

"By George, it's simply ripping."

"I—I suppose there can't be a mistake!" said the cautious Manners.

"Where could the mistake come in? The letter's written to me; he alludes to my being prevented from coming over yesterday," said Tom Merry. "It's plain enough."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"After all, we've got a good team, and we've licked the fellows at Abbotsford School often enough," said Tom Merry. "I dare say the Thebans have heard about it, and they're willing to test us."

"But we've only a junior eleven—"

"Maybe they expect us to take the strongest team possible," suggested Blake. "It would be a good idea to get some of the seniors to play for us—Kildare, Darrell, and Monteith, perhaps."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, rather. I shall make up the strongest team I can, you may be sure."

"That means some of the eleven being left out if you put the seniors in," remarked Blake.

"Well, on an occasion like this fellows must expect to stand down," said Tom Merry. "They can come over and watch us playing the Thebans. That will be better than playing themselves in an ordinary match."

"Yaas, wathah! It will be wippin'! Pewwaps, in the cires, it would be a good ideah to have a fweish skippah on such a vewy important occasion," Arthur Augustus remarked in a thoughtful way.

Tom Merry frowned a little.

"You mean we might ask Kildare?" he asked. "But that would make it a senior team if we had a senior skipper. And we're jolly well not letting this match get into senior hands. It's a bit too good to give away."

"I did not mean Kildare, deah boy. If we had a senior skippah, it would have to be Kildare."

"Why, you ass," exclaimed Tom

Merry wrathfully, "do you think I ought to resign the captaincy to another junior, then, on an occasion like this?"

"Yaas, certainly, to increase the chances of beatin' the Thebans."

"Rats! What junior in the whole giddy school could skipper the team better than I do?" demanded the captain of the Shell warmly.

"I don't want to put myself forward in any way," said D'Arcy modestly, "but for the good of the cause, deah boy, I weally considah it would be bettah to leave the skipphanship in my hands for once."

"Yours?" yelled Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! You see—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I wegard that as the pwoper capah, in the circs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Gussy is right on one point," Blake remarked thoughtfully. "Of course, Gussy couldn't captain a team of white mice. But I should not be unwilling myself—"

"Weally, Blake—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I dare say quite a lot of fellows wouldn't be unwilling to take on my job to play the Thebans," he remarked, "but I'm sticking to it."

"My deah boy, you weally ought to considah the good of the cause, and for that reason I weally think—"

"I'm going to consider the good of the cause, Gussy, and for that reason I'm going to leave you out," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What?"

"You're hardly up to playing against the Thebans," said Tom Merry. "I'm sorry, but I shall have to be awfully careful in selecting my team for a match like this."

"I pwesume that you are jokin'," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Not at all."

"I should wefuse to be left out."

"That wouldn't make any difference, old son. I'm going to get the strongest team together that I can," said Tom Merry. "It's a case of F. S. D., you know—'family stand down.' But I say, isn't this a stroke of gorgeous luck? Fancy playing the Thebans!"

"Oh, it's ripping!"

And the Terrible Three, in the exuberance of their spirits, joined hands and executed a cakewalk down the passage.

CHAPTER 5.

Many Candidates!

THE amazing letter received by Tom Merry was the one theme of discussion among the juniors of St. Jim's after that.

In a quarter of an hour all the fellows knew of it, and Tom Merry had so many applications from fellows who wanted to read the famous letter that he pinned it up on the wall of his study, so that all St. Jim's might run and read, so to speak.

Fellows came to the study, read the letter, gasped, and offered their services as members of the team that was to meet the Thebans.

After dinner, Tom Merry & Co. walked down to Rylcombe Post Office to send the wire to the secretary of the Thebans, at the County Hotel, at Abbotsford.

Tom Merry wrote out the reply on a form:

"Letter received. Very glad to bring a team over to-morrow. Will do best to give you good match. Expect us Abbotsford ground at half-past two.—MERRY."

The telegram was duly dispatched.

The chums of the Shell left the post office in great spirits.

"It seems like a giddy dream," said Tom Merry. "Never dreamed of such luck as this, though. It's jolly decent of the Thebans to play us."

"Yes, rather!"

"Even if they're only doing it for practice, to keep in form, it's an honour for us," said Manners. "Kildare would leap at it. My hat! It will be a feather in our cap for ever!"

"It's great!"

"Might as well call in at Dr. Short's while we're here, and inquire of him about that chap," Lowther remarked.

"Good egg!"

The Terrible Three stopped at the doctor's house. Dr. Short was out, but they were given information of the patient. The man was going on well, but had not yet recovered consciousness, and had not, therefore, been able to give his name.

The juniors returned to the school. They felt concerned about the unnamed stranger who had been so roughly handled by the footpads in Rylcombe Wood; but the thought of the morrow's match with the Thebans soon drove him out of their minds.

They returned to the school just in time for afternoon lessons. As the Terrible Three joined the crowd of fellows going into the Shell Form Room Kangaroo of the Shell nudged Tom Merry on one side and George Gore nudged him on the other.

"I say," whispered Kangaroo, "I suppose it's all right?"

"Yes; I've sent the telegram," said Tom Merry.

The Cornstalk stared.

"Telegram?" he said. "I'm not

talking about a telegram. I said I supposed it was all right—about me, I mean?"

Tom Merry glanced at the Cornstalk in surprise. The sturdy, ruddy-faced junior certainly looked all right.

"Yes, I suppose you're all right, Kangy," said Tom Merry.

"Ass! About the match, I mean."

"Oh!"

"I usually play in the junior eleven," Kangaroo remarked.

"Ye-es."

"I suppose it's all right."

"I'm going over the team after tea, and then I'll let you know," said Tom Merry.

"Better decide it now," said the Cornstalk. "No time like the present, you know. You'll want me, as sure as a gun."

"Then I'll let you know."

"Now, look here, Tom Merry—"

"Do shut up, and give a fellow a chance to speak, Noble!" growled Gore.

"I say, Tom Merry, I haven't played much for the junior eleven lately, but on an occasion like this I'm going to buck up and do my level best for the team."

"That's very good of you," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, I want to do the decent thing. Now, I can play either at half or back, and I'm willing to go into the team just where you like."

"I'm afraid—"

"I'll keep goal for you, if you like."

"Fatty Wynn will keep goal," said Tom Merry.

"Rats! Are you going to play a gang of New House bounders?" growled Gore. "I should think you might keep a match like this for the School House."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Fair play's a jewel," he replied.

"The junior team represents both Houses, and both Houses are going to have a show in playing the Thebans, if they've got the players. Fatty Wynn of the New House is the best junior goalkeeper at St. Jim's; and he'd surprise a lot of League players if he were keeping goal against them. I



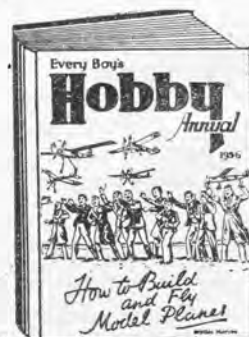
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think he'll be rather a surprise to the Thebans. I hope so."

"Well, look here, as a centre-half, I—"

"Ahem!"

"Or in the front line, if you like—"

"H'm!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"I'm afraid there won't be room for you, Gore."

"Why, you silly ass—"

"Come into the Form-room, you babbling burlers!" called out Monty Lowther politely. "You'll be late!"

And the Shell went in.

During lessons, several notes were passed along the desks to where Tom Merry sat. When he read them, they all bore the same words, more or less:

"Am I down for the eleven?"

Tom Merry grunted.

"The chaps are getting anxious about it," murmured Monty Lowther. "Everybody who can kick a footer half a yard in a straight line thinks he's entitled to play against the Thebans. It will be a feather in the cap of every member of the team, and they're all out for feathers."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes; if I let them have their way, we shall take over a team of ninety or a hundred fellows for the match—like one of the old Rugger teams we read about."

"Merry!"

Mr. Linton rapped out the name of the hero of the Shell.

Tom Merry looked meek.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Please do not talk in class."

"Certainly not, sir."

"You have been receiving notes for the past hour," said Mr. Linton. "You have a large collection of them under your desk. Kindly hand them over to me."

"Oh, sir—"

"Please hand me those notes, Merry!"

There was no help for it. The notes were handed over, and the master of the Shell read them in great astonishment.

"Got my name down—Thompson?"

"Put me in—Reilly." "I hope you're not leaving me out—Dane." "Don't forget my name—Glyn," and so on.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Linton.

"What ever does this mean?"

"Ahem!"

"What does it mean, Merry?" asked the master of the Shell sternly.

"The chaps want me to put their names down for a footer match, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly.

"Oh!" said Mr. Linton, with a grim smile. "Very well. You must learn, my boys, to settle these matters outside the class-room. Meanwhile, I will put down your names for a hundred lines each, and I shall expect the lines before bed-time to-night."

"Oh!" said the unfortunate letter-writers.

And Mr. Linton put the notes into the Form-room fire.

CHAPTER 6.

A Surprise for the Seniors!

KILDARE of the Sixth, captain of St. Jim's, was in his study with Darrell and Langton of the Sixth.

They were having tea.

Frayne of the Third had made huge piles of toast, and boiled eggs galore, and then left the seniors to themselves. Kildare and his chums were talking

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football, just now the one topic of exceeding interest at St. Jim's.

"Do you know the Thebans are over at Abbotsford?" Langton remarked.

Kildare nodded.

"Yes; I should have gone over to see them play if it had been a half-holiday," he said. "I hear that a lot of the juniors got leave from the Head to go."

"That's so," said Darrell. "Tom Merry among them; and they found a chap stunned on the footpath, who had been knocked out by a couple of tramps, and took him to Dr. Short's."

"And missed the Thebans' game, I suppose?"

"Yes, so I hear."

"Very decent of Merry," said Kildare.

Tap!

"Come in!" called out Kildare.

The study door opened, and the junior they had been speaking of entered.

"Hallo, Merry!" said Kildare cordially.

Kildare was very cordial to Tom Merry lately, for only a very short time ago he had been bitterly unjust to him, and he wanted to make up for it. But Tom Merry was not the fellow to remember injuries.

"Can I speak to you, Kildare?"

"Go ahead!"

"Matter very private?" asked Darrell, with a smile.

"Oh, no; I should like you to hear it, too—Darrell and Langton as well. In fact, it concerns you two fellows as well as Kildare."

"That sounds interesting," said Langton.

"Pile in, kid!"

"Are you chaps specially engaged for to-morrow afternoon?" asked Tom Merry.

"The Sixth are playing the Fifth," said Kildare.

"I suppose that could be postponed?"

Kildare stared. So did Langton and Darrell.

"Well, I suppose it could," said Kildare; "but it's jolly well not going to be! What are you driving at, Merry?"

"Well, the fact is—"

"Well?"

"I was going to ask you fellows if you'd care to play for me?"

"What!"

"We're playing the Thebans to-morrow," explained Tom Merry, "and—"

The three seniors jumped up.

"You're playing what?" asked Kildare.

"The Thebans."

"You silly ass! Why don't you say you're playing the Arsenal?" exclaimed Langton, laughing. "How do you expect us to swallow that?"

"You'll be in the Cup Final next, I suppose, Merry?" said Darrell.

"Don't be a young ass, Merry," said Kildare, frowning. "If this is a joke, I don't see where it comes in."

"But I've told you the truth," said Tom Merry. "We're playing the Thebans to-morrow afternoon at the Abbotsford ground."

"You young ass—"

"We received a challenge from their secretary, Stacey—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"I've got the letter here."

"Rats!"

"Read it!"

Tom Merry laid the letter on the tea-table. He did not blame the

seniors for the incredulity in regard to the challenge. Indeed, at moments he found it rather hard to believe in his good luck himself.

Kildare, Darrell and Langton bent over the letter and read it. They read it once, and read it again with blank amazement.

"Did you write this yourself?" asked Langton, looking suspiciously at Tom Merry.

"No fear!"

"Is it really the Thebans' secretary?"

"Of course!"

"There's no doubt on that point, Kildare," said Darrell. "I know that fist. My brother knows Stacey, the Thebans' secretary, and I've seen letters from him. It's his hand."

"There you are!" exclaimed Tom Merry triumphantly.

Kildare looked lost in astonishment.

"But it's impossible for the Thebans to send a challenge to a junior school-boy team!" he exclaimed. "Even if they were playing reserves, you kids couldn't touch them."

"We're going to do our best," said Tom Merry.

"Your best—against a team that has beaten both Universities, and beaten League teams!" exclaimed Kildare.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Can't do more than our best," he said. "They've challenged us, and we've accepted the challenge, and there you are!"

"You've accepted it?" said Kildare dazedly.

"Yes, rather!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'm trying to make up a really ripping team for the match," said Tom Merry. "I shall remain captain, of course. But I want to get the best players possible into the team, and I thought that, as it's a very special match, you might care to play, Kildare."

The captain of St. Jim's stared.

"To play in a junior team!" he ejaculated.

"Well, it's against the Thebans, you know," urged Tom Merry. "Precious few school chaps ever had a chance of playing the Thebans."

"Yes; but—"

"Why don't you ask Kildare to skipper the team against them, you young ass?" said Langton.

Tom Merry shook his head decidedly.

"No fear! That would make it a senior team. And the Thebans have challenged St. Jim's juniors. That's us."

"But what sort of a chance do you think you will have against a team of giddy giants like the Thebans?"

"We're going to play hard. And if Kildare will agree to play centre-forward for us, and Langton inside-left, and you, Darrell, centre-half, it will strengthen the team wonderfully."

"Go hon!" said Darrell, laughing.

"I'm going to ask Monteith, too. That will make four seniors in the team, if he accepts," said Tom Merry. "I think that will be all right. I'm going to ask Lefevre of the Fifth to play back. It's only fair to give the Fifth Form a look in. And he's a good back."

"And what are you going to do?" asked Kildare.

"Inside-right, and skipper."

"And you've got the cheek to ask your captain to play for you under your lead?"

"Well, think of the honour and glory for St. Jim's if we beat the Thebans!" urged Tom Merry.

"Beat them!" shouted Kildare.
 "Yes; beat them!"
 "You ass! Why, the first eleven, playing two masters as well, as we sometimes do, couldn't beat the Thebans."

"I dare say," agreed Tom Merry calmly. "But we're not talking about the first eleven now."

Kildare stared at him speechlessly, and Darrell burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! He thinks the juniors will have a better chance than the first eleven."

"Why not?" said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky young ass!" growled Kildare.

"You see, I'm selecting a team from all the Forms, and picking out the very best, wherever I find it," said Tom Merry. "I don't see why we shouldn't have a good chance against the Thebans. I know they're frightfully hot stuff, but nobody's invincible. We're going to have Fatty Wynn in goal, and I'll bet you that the Thebans won't find it easy to beat him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There will be four of the Sixth, one of the Fifth, three of the Shell, and three of the Fourth, as I figure it out at present," said Tom Merry.

"None of the Third or Second?" asked Darrell sarcastically.

Tom Merry laughed.

"No; we draw the line at fags."

"This is a very extraordinary thing," Kildare said, after another look at the letter from the secretary of the Thebans. "I suppose there's no mistake about it?"

"How could there be? Darrell even knows the writing."

"True enough," said Darrell.

"And you've answered the challenge, Merry?"

"Yes."
 "Well, that ought to settle it," said Kildare, rubbing his chin. "If there was any mistake in the matter, Stacey would set it right when he had your wire. He would send a wire back to say so."

"Well, he hasn't."

"That makes it clear," said Langton. "I suppose it's really a joke on the part of the Thebans to see whether these kids would have the cheek to play them."

"Might be simply good nature," Darrell remarked. "Of course, they know how any chap here would jump at the chance of playing them, and they seem to have an empty afternoon they can give to the match."

"That's so."

"Anyway, we're playing them," said Tom Merry. "Now, I think you ought to play for us, you chaps, for the honour of the school. Even if you play under a junior, you'll be playing the Thebans, all the same, and you don't often get a chance like that. And if you back us up, we may win."

Kildare nodded.

"I'll play for one," he said. "Langton and Darrell can suit themselves."

"Oh, I shall play, if you do!" said Darrell. "It's good enough for me if it's good enough for you. And you don't often get a chance of playing a first-rate team like the Thebans."

"My idea, too," said Langton. "I'm on!"

Tom Merry's face brightened up.
 "Good!" he said, taking a crumpled sheet of paper and a stump of pencil from his pocket. "I'll put your names down—Kildare, centre-forward; Darrell, centre-half; and Langton, inside-left. Good egg! Much obliged!"

And Tom Merry left the study. The

seniors looked at one another when he was gone.

"It's extraordinary!" said Kildare.

"Yes, rather—but I'm glad of the chance of playing the Thebans, for one," Darrell remarked.

"Oh, yes! Some of the fellows will sniff at the idea of us playing under a junior captain," said Kildare. "But I think it's up to us to do it. If St. Jim's could beat the Thebans, it would be a feather in our cap!"

"Hear, hear!"

And the Sixth Formers, amazed as they were, looked forward with great keenness to the match with the Thebans; in spite of the unheard-of circumstance that they, the champion senior footballers of St. Jim's, would, on this occasion, be playing under the lead of a junior captain!

CHAPTER 7.

Methods of Barbarism!

"HERE he is!"

There was a shout and a rush of feet as Tom Merry came out of the Sixth Form passage in the School House.

The hero of the Shell glanced round hastily; but in a second he was grasped in three or four pairs of hands.

"Bring him along!" shouted Kangaroo.

"Got him!"

"Hold on!" roared Tom Merry. "Look here—ow—what's the game—wow!"

"This way, kids!"

"Right-ho!"

Four sturdy juniors had grasped Tom Merry. He was whirled off the ground and hurried along into an empty box-room, bundled in, and left on the floor.

Kangaroo closed the door. Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, Bernard Glyn, and Thompson gathered round the gasping, breathless captain of the Shell.

Tom Merry stared at them as he panted for breath.

"What are you up to, you silly asses?" he roared. "What have you got me here for?"

"Business!" said Kangaroo.

"Cold business," said Clifton Dane, the Canadian, with a chuckle. "We want to know how you're making up the team for the Thebans' match."

"That's my business!"

"And ours, too!" grinned Bernard Glyn.

"What-ho!" said Thompson

Tom Merry staggered to his feet. In an instant the four Shell fellows had pinioned him. Tom Merry struggled in their grasp, but he struggled in vain.

"Now, Tommy, old man, take it quietly," said Kangaroo persuasively; "we're all your friends, and we want to be friendly."

"Let me go, you fathead!"

"We want to know how the team's to be made up!"

"Rats!"

"Are you going to tell us?"

"No!" roared Tom Merry.

"Very well; I'm sorry, but we shall have to bump you till you tell us," said Kangaroo regretfully. "You take his hoofs, Dane and Thompson, and we'll take his head. Now then, up with him!"

The struggling captain of the Shell was whirled off the floor.

"Going to tell us?" asked Kangaroo politely.

"No!" roared the prisoner. "I haven't fully decided yet! Go and eat coke!"

"Better make up your mind now," suggested Glyn.

(Continued on next page.)



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BUSINESS IS BUSINESS.

An Irish teacher offered sixpence to the boy who could tell him who was the greatest man in the world.

"Christopher Columbus," answered one boy.

"George Washington," said another.

"St. Patrick!" cried a little Jewish boy.

"The sixpence is yours," said the teacher. "But why did you say St. Patrick?"

"Right down in my heart I knew it was Moses," replied the Jewish boy; "but—well, business is business!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Woolf, 10, Avenue Normandie, Sea Point, Cape Province, South Africa.

* * *

NOT SO FREE.

Lowther: "I say, Blake, have you heard about the Scotsman who started to build his own house?"

Blake: "No. What about him?"

Lowther: "He sent to the Masonic Hall for two freemasons!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Robson, 23, Broomfield Road, Gosforth, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

* * *

THIRSTY.

Jones (hot and tired after mowing his lawn, to neighbour's son): "Father wants to borrow something, as usual, I suppose?"

Boy: "Yes, please, Mr. Jones. He says could you oblige him with a cork-screw?"

Jones: "Certainly. You run along; I'll bring it round myself!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss R. Tasker, 139, Wincheap Street, Canterbury, Kent.

* * *

ONE SHORT.

Teacher: "Now, Brown, have you finished your list of the eleven most important men in the world?"

Brown: "Almost, sir; I haven't got the goalkeeper yet!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. Sutcliffe, 16, Woodfield Street, Ferney Lee Road, Todmorden, Lanes.

* * *

TRUSTY FRIENDSHIP.

Tom: "I know nothing finer than the friendship of a man you can trust."

Tim: "I know something better than a man you can trust."

Tom: "What's that?"

Tim: "A man that'll trust you!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Dennis, Woodstock, Bramley Avenue, Coulsdon, Surrey.

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"Rats!"
 Bump!
 "Yaroop!"
 "Now, then, have you decided?"
 "No! Oh! Yow! Help!"
 Bump!
 "Decided yet?"
 "Ow, ow, ow!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You see, we've talked this over, and decided that you can't be allowed to put in the wrong fellows and leave out the right fellows," Kangaroo explained.
 "Groo-oo-ogh!"
 "Who's centre-forward?"
 "Kildare!" growled Tom Merry.
 "Well, that's all right. What are you going to do for wingers?"
 "Myself—"
 "Well, that's rather conceited, Tommy; but we'll pass you," said Kangaroo generously. "I suppose you're inside, who are the others?"
 "Figgins, outside-right, myself, inside-right, Langton, inside-left, Blake, outside-left!" gasped Tom Merry.
 "I don't think that will do," said Kangaroo, with a shake of the head. "But it all depends. Who's in goal?"
 "Fatty Wynn!"
 "Well, we'll pass Fatty Wynn in goal. What about the half-back line?"
 "Darrell centre-half, and Lowther and Manners."
 "H'm! What about the backs?"
 "Monteith and Lefevre."
 "Why, that leaves us all out!" exclaimed Kangaroo.
 "Yes."
 "Is it settled?"
 "Not quite settled—I haven't fully decided yet—but I think that's how it will go. Now, leggo, you silly asses!"
 Kangaroo shook his head.
 "Can't be did! The team will have to be rearranged a bit before we let you go. We're going to play—not because we want to especially, but for the sake of the side."
 "Be-r-r-r-r!"
 "I suggest Glyn and Dane and myself as halves. Thompson wouldn't mind standing down, and he's only a New House chap."
 Thompson of the Shell glared.
 "Why, you silly chump—"
 "Now, be reasonable, Thompson—"
 "I'm going in as back!" roared Thompson.
 "What do you say, Tom Merry?"
 "I say rats!"
 "Am I going in as back?" roared Thompson.
 "No fear!"
 "Why not?"
 "Because you're not up to the mark!"
 "Why, you fathead—"
 "Yes, be reasonable, Thompson. What do you say to us three as halves, Tommy?" asked Kangaroo.
 "The same thing—rats!"
 "You don't mean to say that you've got the unearthly cheek to leave us all out?" demanded Clifton Dane warmly.
 Tom Merry snorted.
 "I can't put you all in, fathead! Do you want me to take twenty-two or thirty-three over to Abbotsford to play the Thebans?"
 "Put in the best men!" suggested Bernard Glyn.
 "That's what I'm doing!"
 "Bosh! You're leaving us out!"
 "Exactly!"
 "Lucky we thought of talking it over with him quietly, in a quiet place," remarked Kangaroo. "You see, Tom Merry, we don't play a footer match with a team like the Thebans every day, and we've simply got to persuade you to put in the best men. Are you going to put us in?"

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"No!" roared Tom Merry.
 "Then we shall have to bump you till you see reason," said Kangaroo thoughtfully. "I'm sorry, but I don't see that there's anything else to be done."
 "Same here," said Clifton Dane, with a nod. "I dare say he'll see reason in time. What do you think yourself, Tom Merry?"
 "I think you're a set of silly asses, and I'll jolly well give you thick ears all round if you don't stop playing the giddy ox."
 "Are you going to shove us in?"
 "No, fathead!"
 "Bump him!" said Kangaroo.
 "Sorry, Tommy, but it's the only way. Go it! One, two, three—"
 Bump!
 "Yaroop!"
 "Have you decided to put us in?"
 "Yow! No! Oh! Yah! Help!"
 Bump!
 "Ow! Rescue—rescue!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Rescue!" yelled Tom Merry.
 There was a rush of footsteps in the passage, and the door of the box-room was flung open.

CHAPTER 8.

A Bumping for Blake!

QUITE a crowd of visitors rushed into the box-room.
 There were Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6, and Reilly and Kerruish, also of the Fourth Form, and Bishop and Lorne.

They rushed headlong into the box-room before Kangaroo & Co. had a chance of getting to the door.

The four Shell fellows released Tom Merry, and turned upon the rescuers, with their fists up.

"Get out, you Fourth Form fags!" yelled Kangaroo.

"Rescue!" gasped Tom Merry, who had collapsed breathlessly upon the floor.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Go for 'em!" roared Jack Blake. "They've been trying to get into the team. I guessed as much when I saw them lurking at the end of the passage. It's a giddy plot!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Faith, and we'll wipe up the floor with em, Tom Merry," said Reilly.

"Give 'em socks!" roared Herries.

"Hurrah!"

The eight Fourth Formers closed in upon Kangaroo & Co., and as they were two to one, they soon had the Shell fellows on the floor. There they proceeded to sit upon them.

Tom Merry staggered to his feet, dusty and dishevelled.

"Bump them!" he exclaimed.

"They've been bumping me!"

"Because they've been left out of the team?" asked Digby.

"Yes."

"Then we'll jolly well bump them!" said Blake indignantly. "We don't allow our footer skipper to be coerced. Bump the bouncers!"

"Leggo!" roared Kangaroo.

"Bump the bouncers, deah boys!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

The four Shell fellows struggled desperately, and the din in the box-room was terrific. But the odds were on the side of the rescuers.

Tom Merry laughed as he dusted himself down.

"That will do!" he remarked. "Now, Kangy, old man, don't be a silly ass any more. I can't play the whole giddy school, and I've got to leave you out. Can't be helped."

"Yow-ow-ow!" was the only reply of the baffled conspirators.

"Come on, Tom Merry!" said Blake very affectionately, slipping his arm through Tom Merry's. "We'll see you safe home."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry.

"Not at all; it's our business to back up our skipper."

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy!"

"Faith, and we'll back you up through thick and thin, Tom Merry, darling!"

Tom Merry grinned. The affectionate regard of the Fourth Formers was a little new, and, without being unduly suspicious, he could not help setting it down to their keen desire to figure in the eleven to be played against the Thebans.

The rescuers marched him out of the box-room, leaving the plotters gasping there in the midst of clouds of dust.

Blake & Co. brought Tom Merry into the Fourth Form passage, but they did not allow him to go on to his own quarters.

"You're coming in to tea, of course," said Jack Blake, pausing outside the door of Study No. 6.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Thanks," he said. "I'm having tea with Monty and Manners."

"We'll give you a better tea, old man, and Manners and Lowther can come along as well," said Blake.

"Excuse me—"

"Can't take any excuses," said Blake. "Come in!"

"But I say—"

"This way!"

Tom Merry had not much choice in the matter. The Fourth Formers half led and half pushed him into Study No. 6, and Blake closed the door.

Tom Merry was placed in the arm-chair, and the Fourth Formers gathered round him.

"Tea isn't quite ready yet," Blake remarked. "I'll tell you what, Tom Merry. While we've got a few minutes to spare, we might run over the team."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Have you decided anything about the eleven yet?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, with a rather longing glance towards the door. It occurred to him that he had been rescued out of the frying-pan into the fire, and that he was not much better off in Study No. 6 than he had been in the box-room with Kangaroo & Co.

"Yes, I've practically decided on the team."

"I am willin' to play eithah forward or half, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy modestly. "In fact, I will keep goal, if you like."

"I'm afraid there's no room for you, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You see, in the special circumstances, I've strengthened the team by asking some of the seniors to play."

"That's a good idea," said Blake, "so long as you don't leave out the old guard. Of course, I don't see anything to object to in leaving out Kangaroo, or Dane, or Glyn, or Thompson. Manners and Lowther might go, too."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Faith, and ye might make a clean sweep of the Shell fellows," Reilly suggested. "I'm thinking that with some of the seniors and a good allowance of the Fourth we might make up a really illigant team, intirely."

"I don't see you could do without me at back," said Kerruish thoughtfully.

"To make a team really effective, there

ought to be at least one Manx chap in it."

"Sorry I can't put you in, Ker-ruish—"

"Eh?"

"Sorry I can't put you in."

"But—"

"Or you, either, Bishop. You're not up to this."

"Look here—" began Bishop.

"Or you, either, Reilly. I'm sorry, but I can't play more than eleven chaps."

"Faith, and what's the good of a footer team without an Irish chap in it to give it a backbone?" demanded Reilly.

"Well, Kildare's going in, and he's real Irish," said Tom Merry, "so that difficulty's met."

"Sure, there ought to be two—"

"Sorry, but it's settled."

"Faith, and I think—"

"Look here—"

"Hold on!" said Blake. "I don't think the footer skipper ought to be bothered by a lot of useless candidates. You fellows had better clear."

"What?"

"Yaas, wathah! Cleah out, deah boys, and leave Tom Mewwy with us."

"Rats!"

"Oh, buzz off!" said Blake. "We can't have you noisy kids in our study, you know. Run away and play!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Clear out! Buzz off! Vamoose the ranch!" roared Herries.

The chums of Study No. 6 advanced in warlike array upon Reilly & Co. Reilly, Lorne, Bishop, and Kerruish retreated out of the study, with many uncomplimentary remarks concerning Blake & Co., not sparing even their features, their manners, and their personal appearance generally.

Jack Blake closed the door after them and stood with his back against it—perhaps because he saw Tom Merry rise

from the armchair and make a movement towards the door.

"Now those fags are gone, we can talk the matter over quietly," Blake remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You see, Tom Merry, this study is bound to be represented in the team. You are practically a new fellow at St. Jim's yourself. We were all here before you; and, as a matter of fact, I really am junior captain," said Blake. "Taking all these things into consideration—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Shut up, Gussy, while your uncle's talking!" said Blake severely.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Taking all these things into consideration—"

"I considah—"

"Into consideration," roared Blake, "I don't see how you can possibly leave out Study No. 6."

"Wathah not!"

"The trouble is, I don't see how I can possibly put Study No. 6 in," grinned Tom Merry. "You see, there are other things to be taken into consideration; we want to win, for instance. A footer skipper is bound to think of that."

"Why, you ass—"

"You uttah duffah—"

"Look here!" roared Blake. "How are you making up the team?"

Tom Merry produced a crumpled paper.

"Figgins, T. Merry, Kildare, Langton, Blake—forwards."

"Good enough!" said Blake heartily.

"Yaas, but—"

"Manners, Lowther, Darrell, halves."

"H'm!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Monteith and Lefevre, backs."

"Ahem!"

"Fatty Wynn, goal."

"H'm!"

"I wegard the awwangement as pwa-postewous. You have left me out."

"I'll make you a linesman, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to be made a linesman. I wefuse to be left out of the team. I—"

"Sorry!"

"Vewy well; I accept your apology."

"I will play centah-forward!"

"No fear!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry crossed to the door. Blake politely stepped aside to make room for him. The information that he was to play outside-left in the great team had had a wonderfully mollifying effect upon Blake. His opinion of Tom Merry as a football skipper had gone up by leaps and bounds.

"Well, I dare say the team could be improved," said Blake. "But I must say that the selection is pretty good, and reflects credit on Tom Merry as skipper. I must say that, in fairness."

"You ass!" roared Herries. "Where do I come in?"

"And where do I come in?" demanded Digby.

"Yaas, wathah; and where do I come in?"

"Can't play everybody!" said Tom Merry. "Good-bye!"

"Stop him!" roared Herries. "We'll jolly well bump him till he finds out that this study ought to be played! Hold him!"

"Yaas, collah the silly ass!"

Tom Merry dragged open the door and fled. Jack Blake spread out his arms and stopped the rush of his excited chums in pursuit.

"Hold on," said Blake, "hold on, you know. You can't rag a footer skipper into putting you into the team; that's quite outside, you know."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why, what did we bring him here



"Get out, you Fourth Form fags!" yelled Kangaroo, as Blake hurled the door open. "Rescue!" gasped Tom Merry, who had fallen to the floor. "Go for 'em!" roared Jack Blake. "They've been trying to get into the team by bumping Tom Merry!"

for?" yelled Herries. "You said yourself that if he didn't play this study, we'd bump the boulder bald-headed."

Blake coughed.

"Ahem! That—that was only a figure of speech, you know. I think—"

"You're satisfied because you're in the team!" shrieked Digby. "You fat-head! He's got to play the whole study!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But there are so many claimants," said Blake pacifically. "Better take it calmly. You can all come and watch me play, you know, and cheer my goals."

The three juniors glared at him. The prospect of watching Blake play and cheering his goals, did not seem to appeal to them somehow.

"You frightful ass!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"You fathead!"

"You chump!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Blake warmly. "I think Tom Merry is doing very well in very difficult circumstances. He's picked out the best player in the study, and he can't be reasonably expected to do more than that."

"The—the best player! My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes," said Blake firmly. "I think Tom Merry is showing up very well in this matter. I really consider—"

"Well, Tom Merry's gone now, and we can't bump him!" growled Digby. "We'd better bump Blake instead, and see if we can bump out some of the giddy conceit."

"Good!"

"Here, hold on!" roared Blake, as his three exasperated chums advanced upon him. "I say, you know—chuck it—don't play the—ow!—giddy ox—yow!—leggo!"

Bump!

"Ow, ow! Wow!"

Bump, bump!

"Yoop! Leggo! You frightful asses—groogh—oh!"

Bump!

"There!" gasped Herries. "Now we'll go and talk to Tom Merry."

And leaving Blake in a dazed state upon the study carpet, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed along to Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage. But the door was locked, and they banged on it in vain.

There was a sound of cheerful voices and clinking teacups within; but no reply came to the sulphurous remarks they made through the keyhole, and they retired in great disgust.

CHAPTER 9.

In Great Demand!

TOM MERRY came quietly down the Shell passage about an hour later, and descended the stairs almost on tiptoe, as if he was bound upon some exceedingly secret expedition.

As a matter of fact, he was only going over to the New House; but he was afraid of being kidnapped at every step by eager seekers of football fame. Nearly every fellow in the School House had made up his mind that whosoever else was left out, he personally ought to be playing against the Thebans; and some of the juniors were planning really desperate measures for bringing Tom Merry to reason.

Tom Merry slipped out of the School House into the dusky quadrangle; but he was sighted in the quad, and there was a yell from D'Arcy minor of the

Third and a crowd of fags, who were evidently looking for the junior skipper.

"Here he is!"

"Collar him!"

Wally D'Arcy, Jameson, Carly Gibson and Joe Frayne, and a swarm of fags, came dashing up, and Tom Merry fairly took to his heels.

It was undignified for the head of the Shell, and the junior captain of St. Jim's, to run from the fags; but there was no help for it.

Tom Merry dashed across the quad at top speed, with Wally & Co. whooping on his track.

The captain of the Shell dashed breathlessly into the New House, and the fags of the Third chased him to the very doorway.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn met Tom Merry as he came panting in. They brandished their fists at the fags and Wally & Co. retreated to wait for Tom Merry in the quadrangle.

Figgins & Co. were very nice to Tom Merry. At any other time they might have bumped a School House fellow who came into their House, and especially Tom Merry, who was the great chief and leader of the School House juniors in the endless House raids.

But just now Tom Merry was a sacred person; it was in his power to select or reject candidates for the eleven that was to play the Thebans. Hence the great politeness with which Figgins & Co. received him.

"Jolly glad to see you, old man!" said Figgins hospitably. "Come up to the study and have some tea."

"We've got some new steak-and-kidney pies!" said Fatty Wynn temptingly.

"And a new jar of jam," said Kerr. "Better come to my study," said Redfern of the Fourth. "We're making toffee!"

"First-rate toffee!" said Lawrence. "Owen has nearly finished it. It's ripping!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"I've come over to see Monteith," he said.

"Better see us," said Redfern. "We want to talk over the Thebans' match with you. You want some New House chaps in the eleven; it will be necessary to have a really good team to play the Thebans."

"Ahem!"

"Oh, you cheese it, Reddy!" said Figgins. "You're only a new boy, anyway."

"New boy or not, Tom Merry wants the best possible material in the team," said Redfern.

"He's coming to our study for that!"

"Oh, don't be funny, Figgy!"

"Look here, you ass!"

"Look here, you fathead—"

Tom Merry slipped past the New House juniors while they were still arguing, and made his way into the Sixth Form passage. He knocked at Monteith's door and opened it.

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was there. He looked inquiringly at Tom Merry.

"Hallo!" he said. "What's this I hear about your being challenged by the Thebans? All spoof, I suppose?"

"No fear!" said Tom Merry. "Real bisney!"

"Oh, stuff!"

"Look at this letter!" said Tom Merry, holding out the famous letter from the secretary of the Thebans.

Monteith read the letter and whistled. "Well, that looks like the real thing," he admitted. "Blessed if I

can understand it! If they want to play a St. Jim's team, why the dickens don't they play the first eleven?"

"I dare say they know what they're about, you know. They may be wanting a really good match," said Tom Merry.

The prefect grinned.

"Kildare's going to play for us," said Tom Merry. "I've come over to ask you if you'd care to go in the team, Monteith?"

Monteith looked thoughtful.

"Well, that's sensible of you, anyway," he said. "You want me to captain the eleven?"

"Ahem!"

"I don't mind. Of course, it will be not playing any juniors in it, but I would leave you in, Merry, as you had the challenge," said Monteith generously. "I should fill up the rest of the places with seniors. It's all right; I'll take it on!"

"Ahem!"

"It's settled," said Monteith.

"Ahem! It's not quite settled," said Tom Merry.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not looking for a skipper," Tom Merry explained. "If I wanted that, I should ask my own captain. I'm going to captain the team myself."

"What rot!"

"Well, that's how it is," said Tom Merry. "Rot or not, I'm skipping the eleven. But if you'd like a chance of playing the Thebans, I'd like to put you in as back."

"Under your lead?" sneered Monteith.

"Yes."

"You cheeky young ass!"

"Well, Kildare's going to play under my lead," said Tom Merry warmly. "I don't see that you need object to playing, too. What's good enough for Kildare is good enough for a New House prefect."

"Oh, buzz off!" said Monteith.

"You won't play?"

"I'll skipper you, if you like."

"No, thanks!"

Tom Merry turned to the door. Monteith watched him undecidedly, and as his hand was on the door he spoke again.

"You say Kildare has agreed to play under your lead, Merry?"

"Yes."

"What place do you want to give me?"

"Right-back!"

"All serene! I'll play!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "We shall be jolly glad to have you, Monteith. Now you're in the team, we've got practically all the first-class players in the school. Thanks very much."

Monteith was not above a little compliment, and he smiled quite genially.

"All right, Merry; you can depend upon me."

"Thanks, Monteith; I'll put your name down."

And Tom Merry quitted the study.

At the end of the passage Figgins & Co., and Redfern & Co., and four or five other fellows, were waiting for him. They surrounded him, and gently but firmly barred his further progress.

Tom Merry paused in dismay. He felt that he was in for it again.

"Might we inquire how you're making up the team?" inquired Redfern politely.

"Yes, if you like," said Tom Merry, with a yawn.

"How many New House chaps?" asked Figgins.

"Three."

"Oh, that's us, I suppose?"
 "Us, you mean," said Redfern. "We three, self, Lawrence and Owen."
 "What price me?" demanded Pratt of the Fourth.
 "And me?" said Dibbs.
 "And me?" demanded Thompson of the Shell.

"I can't play the whole giddy school," said Tom Merry.

"Of course he can't," said Redfern indignantly. "I'm surprised at you fellows. When he comes over here to especially tell us he's playing us, I really think you bouncers might give him a little peace."

"But I'm not playing you!" said Tom Merry.

"Eh?"
 "I'm not playing you, Reddy."

"Well, you ass—"
 "Of course, he couldn't leave us out," said Kerr.

"I'm not playing you, Kerr—"
 "Why, you silly fathead—"

"Who are you playing, then, you ass?" demanded Figgins warmly. "I suppose your selection is about the rottenest that any silly ass could possibly make."

"Most likely," said Fatty Wynn. Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, I'm playing Figgins and Wynn—"

"Oh!"
 "H'm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Redfern. "You're right, Figgy; he's made about the rottenest selection any silly ass could possibly make."

"H'm! I take that back!" said Figgins. "What about Kerr, though? You know what a ripping player Kerr is."

"I know Kerr is ripping," said Tom Merry, "but as I said before, I can't play the whole school. I'm looking for a footer eleven, not an army."

"It's all right," said Kerr generously. "So long as he plays Figgy and Fatty, our study will be well represented. I'm willing to stand down. I'll come and yell 'Goal!'"

"Well, you're a reasonable chap, anyhow," said Tom Merry, in relief. "I wish the others were as reasonable as you are, Kerr. I'm being chased and kidnapped up hill and down dale by fellows who think they can select a team better than I can."

"Who's the third New House chap?" demanded Redfern.

"Monteith, of the Sixth."

"Well, he's all right. But where do we come in?"

"You don't come in at all!"

"If you're being funny, Tom Merry—"

"I'm not being funny," said Tom Merry, in a tired voice. "I'm doing the best I can. Do give me a rest. I can't play forty or fifty chaps."

"I don't want you to. Play me, and—"

"Rats!"

"Figgy is a reasonable chap—he'd be willing to make room for a better man—"

"So I would, if I could be introduced to the better man," said Figgins. "I haven't seen anything of him so far."

"Now, don't be an ass, Figgy—"

"Good-night," said Tom Merry, starting for the door.

"Hold on!" shouted a dozen fellows. "Wait a bit! Look here—"

Tom Merry made a rush for the doorway. Nine or ten fellows made a rush for Tom Merry. Figgins & Co. loyally rushed to the rescue, and held back the eager candidates, while the captain of the junior eleven escaped into the quadrangle.

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling!



Hallo, everybody! I've forgotten my gags. It's no laughing matter.

"Millions of pounds are spent on tobacco," we read. Money to "burn."

A Scotsman is 5 ft. 8½ ins. high. This is the "mean" average. Don't throw it!

"Welshmen cannot keep a secret," we read. Hence their national emblem, the leek! Ah, I ducked!

Englishmen have big feet. But do "big feet."

There's a tree that's two trees. What is it? A pear.

"What shall I take before singing?" asks D'Arcy. Your breath, old chap.

Kerr says he was born in the lightest town in the world. "Ayr."

Must tell you: Most of the St. Jim's masters were going in a big car to a conference. "Where are you taking them to?" D'Arcy minor asked the chauffeur.

"To Burnham." "Wait a minute," said Wally: "you can take old Selby, too!"

Of course, you know which birds eat most food? The swallows.

He got a rude answer. Who did? The chap who cheeked the mocking bird!

An actor says the great open spaces inspire him. But not those in the auditorium!

I hear phoning to America is cheaper. Scots now save less by writing.

"You appear to be leading a great

Tom Merry ran down the steps of the New House, and disappeared into the darkness of the quad.

He left Figgins & Co., and Redfern & Co., and the rest engaged in a decidedly heated argument.

Tom Merry chuckled as he crossed the quad. He had forgotten for the moment about the watchful fags. A rush of feet warned him of his danger, and he broke into a run; but before he could reach the School House, Wally & Co. of the Third were upon him.

CHAPTER 10.

Wet!

"COLLAR him!"

"Got him!"

"Hold him!"

"Don't let him get away!"

Tom Merry struggled desperately in the grasp of the inky-fingered heroes of the Third. There were ten or twelve of the Third Formers, and they meant business. They dragged the Shell fellow away, and backed him up against one of the elms, and held him fast there.

"Now, then," said Wally. "I've got something to say to you."

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry. "If you want my friendly advice, I would suggest your washing your neck, and putting on a clear collar."

Some of the fags chuckled, and Wally frowned.

"I don't want any of your cheek," he said. "The fact is, I'm rather anxious about this match with the

crowd," said the crystal-gazer. "How much start have I?" asked the welshing bookie eagerly.

"Shepherds are invariably long-lived," we read. The boys of the f-old brigade!

As the housewife said to the plumber: "Quick—open the leak again; the house is on fire!"

"Juggler caught stealing clubs," runs a headline. Yes, he was "jugged"!

"Wayland Post Office pens are a disgrace," says Mr. Ratcliff. Yes; a scratch lot.

Which side of his face does a man shave first? The outside.

Meant to have told you this before: "I hope your ices are perfectly fresh?" said Mr. Selby suspiciously, on holiday.

"What d'yer think they are—yesterday's warmed up?" snapped the vendor.

How's this: "What does 'Not Transferable' mean on the ticket?" asked Hammond. "Shure," replied Reilly, who is Irish, "it means if you don't go yourself you won't be admitted!"

Then there was the speed king who was arrested for doing forty-five miles per hour and said he thought he was in reverse!

A pickpocket stole a journalist's note case at the races. They were both there to "take notes"!

Cricket memory: "You're out, under the new rule!" said young Gibson.

"What's that?" asked Wally D'Arcy. "I dunno," admitted Gibson.

Some tramps are reported to be producing a play. "The Beggars' Opera"?

A bank cashier is reported to be a clairvoyant. He "tells" many a rich man's "fortune."

"I'm a man of culture," boasted the city dweller. "And I'm a man of agriculture," retorted the countryman.

How's this: "I've just given you a half-hook," explained the boxing instructor. "Well, don't give me the other half at present!" gasped the pupil. Duck your heads, boys!

Thebans. I'm afraid that if it's left in your hands, you'll muff it up."

"Hear, hear!" said Joe Frayne.

"Pretty certain, I should say," remarked Curly Gibson. "Blessed if I know why they sent him the challenge. Kildare was the proper person to get it—or else us."

"What I'm thinking of is this," said Wally. "On a tremendous occasion of this sort, the whole school ought to be represented in the eleven. It's not a time for ordinary methods; good players ought to be picked out wherever you can find them."

"That's what I'm doing," said Tom Merry.

"What's the list so far?"

"Figgins, Tom Merry, Kildare, Langton, Blake, Manners, Darrell, Lowther, Monteith, Lefevre, Fatty Wynn!" said Tom Merry wearily.

"Well that's not a bad team," said Wally grudgingly. "I think you stick to your own study a bit too much, though. You can easily leave out Manners or Lowther, and they won't be missed. I don't approve of favourites myself. I'm very friendly with Curly here, for instance, but if I were making up a footer team, I should leave him out."

"Oh, would you, you silly ass!" roared Curly Gibson.

"Yes, or Jameson, or either—"

"Why, you cheeky young fathead!" howled Jameson.

"I don't say that you ought to shove in a crowd of the Third," continued Wally, addressing Tom Merry, and ignoring his followers' remarks. "I

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think that if you put in one Third Form chap, it will be all right."

"Go on!"

"I'm willing to take any place you like. I prefer centre-forward, but I'd play on the wing, or keep goal, if you like," said Wally generously.

"You're too good," said Tom Merry. "I'm not going to take advantage of your goodness, though. I'm not playing any fags."

"I expected some rot of that sort," said Wally patiently. "If you're playing my major, you can play me. I can make rings round Cussy—"

"But I'm not playing your major," grinned Tom Merry.

"My only Aunt Jane! You don't mean to say that you've got the cheek to leave my major out of the team?" exclaimed D'Arcy minor.

"Yes; I've got the cheek, and I've done it."

"Well, I'll overlook that, if you put me in," said Wally magnanimously.

"Can't be did!"

"You must play at least one of the Third, you know!"

"Can't be did!"

"Look here!" roared Wally. "Are you going to listen to reason? I'm being very patient with you."

"We're all being very patient!" growled Jameson. "If you think the Third are going to be left out of the match like this, Tom Merry, you're mistaken."

"Yes, rather!"

"Ear, ear!" said Frayne.

"Now, then, what's the verdict?" asked D'Arcy minor.

"Can't be did."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Bring him along," said Wally.

"When we've ducked him in the fountain he may change his mind. Yank him along!"

"Hold on!" roared Tom Merry in alarm, as the crowd of fags dragged him bodily along in the dusk. "Hold on! Chuck it! Don't you dare—"

"Yank the silly ass along!"

"Hurrah!"

"Stop it! I'll—I'll—"

"Will you play one of the Third?"

"No!" roared Tom Merry.

"Duck him in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swarm of fags had reached the fountain with their helpless prisoner. Tom Merry was raised aloft, struggling wildly, and then shot head-first into the water.

Splash!

"Gerro—ooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo—poof—poof—groogh—ooogh!"

Tom Merry's head came out of the marble basin of the fountain, and he gasped and snorted. He rolled out of the fountain, bringing a flood of water with him, and the fags were splashed, right and left.

"Now, then!" howled Wally. "Are you going to play one of the Third?"

"Groogh! No! Ow! No!"

"Chuck him in again!"

Tom Merry seized Wally and whirled him in the air, and tossed him into the fountain. There was a terrific splash of water, and a great wave came over the verge of the marble basin, and fairly flooded the crowd of fags.

They backed away, gasping. And Tom Merry, seizing his opportunity, broke through them, and fled towards the School House.

Wally rolled, dripping, from the fountain.

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"Groogh! My only Aunt Jane! Yow! After him! Collar him! Don't let him get away!" he spluttered.

The fags dashed in wild pursuit.

Tom Merry ran at top speed for the open door of the School House, squelching out water at every step.

He was a good runner, and he kept his lead, and dashed up the steps of the School House, and into the Hall, drenched and dripping.

There was a yell of surprise from the fellows who saw him come in.

"Bai Jove!"

"Is it raining?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat! You look wet!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Have you been taking a bath with your clothes on, or walking into the river by mistake?"

"Bai Jove! Your clothes will be ruined, Tom Mewwy!"

"Ow!" gasped Tom Merry.

"It's those blessed fags. They've ducked me in the fountain because I won't play fags against the Thebans."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at!" roared Tom Merry indignantly. "I'm wet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly, cackling asses—"

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

Tom Merry snorted, and tramped away upstairs to change his clothes.

He left a trail of water behind him as he went. He rubbed himself down in the Shell dormitory, and put on dry clothes. As he came out of the dormitory he caught sight of Kangaroo & Co. in the passage. They were looking for him.

"Here he is!"

Tom Merry fled desperately downstairs, and burst into the Common-room with Kangaroo & Co. at his heels.

He jerked the poker out of the grate, and brandished it.

"Buzz off!"

"About that eleven, Tommy—"

Tom Merry lunged out with the poker, and the Cornstalk jumped away.

"Hold on!" he gasped. "Are you potty? I—"

"Buzz off! I'm going to carry this poker around after this!" gasped Tom Merry. "Every fellow who speaks to me about a place in the team will get it in the neck! I mean business! Buzz off!"

And Tom Merry sat down with a poker between his knees. And for a short space he had a rest. And the eager candidates for football honours ceased to press their claims.

CHAPTER 11.

Good for Redfern!

THE next morning Tom Merry stopped Kildare as he came out of the dining-room after breakfast.

The captain of St. Jim's looked down at the junior with a smile.

It was a new position for the captain



The swarm of fags reached the fountain with their head-first into the water. Splash! "Gerroogh!"

of St. Jim's to regard a Shell fellow as his football skipper.

"I finished fixing up the team last night, Kildare," said Tom Merry. "But it's rather important for us to get some practice together before we meet the Thebans, don't you think so?"

Kildare nodded.

"But we meet the Thebans this afternoon," he remarked.

"Yes. As head prefect you might speak to the Head," suggested Tom Merry. "An hour off lessons this morning, for members of the team, would give us a chance to get a little practice. Don't you think so?"

"Good!" said Kildare. "I'll put it to the Head. It's a very special occasion, and I don't see why we shouldn't get it. We want twenty-two, though, if we're to have a really effective practice."

"That would be better. We ought to play a senior eleven, and see how we shape."

"Right-ho!"

And after prayers Kildare paid the Head a visit. Dr. Holmes was considerably surprised when he heard what the captain of St. Jim's had to say.

"Extraordinary!" said the Head. "So you are playing under the captaincy of Merry of the Shell, Kildare?"

Kildare coloured a little.

"Yes, sir. It's a bit unusual, of course, but I wanted to back up the school. It will be a big thing for St. Jim's if we can beat the Thebans, or



prisoner. Tom Merry was raised aloft, and then shot plattered Tom. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the fags.

even draw with them. I can't understand how they came to challenge a junior team; of course, the juniors wouldn't have the slightest look-in with them. Tom Merry is acting very sensibly in asking seniors to play with them. He has put in five seniors—four of the Sixth and one of the Fifth—and the team is really a good one. Of course, one can't expect him to give up the captaincy, though that would really be better."

The Head smiled.

"You may certainly have leave this morning, as long as you think fit, for practice, Kildare," he said. "I trust to your judgment entirely."

"Thank you, sir."

And during the morning, while the other fellows were at lessons, Tom Merry & Co. were hard at practice on the footer field. They did not over-do it, as they did not wish to be stale for the afternoon.

The mixed eleven, seniors and juniors, pulled together very well; and they easily got the better of an eleven picked out of the Fifth and Sixth to oppose them.

Fatty Wynn, in goal, was in his very best form. Every shot that went into the goal found the Welsh junior ready for it; a foot or a fist or safe hands always met the leather and sent it hurtling out again.

When the practice was over Kildare clapped Fatty Wynn on the shoulder.

"That was ripping, Wynn," he said.

"Keep that up, and even the Thebans won't find it easy to score this afternoon."

Fatty Wynn grinned modestly.

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther. "And if they don't score at all, Fatty, we'll stand you a first-class feed when we come home—steak-and-kidney pies ad lib."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry was very well satisfied with the result of the practice. He certainly had the best footballers in the school in his team, seniors and juniors. There were two other fellows he would have liked—Kangaroo and Redfern. But he could not play thirteen against the Thebans' eleven.

After morning lessons, when the fellows came out of the Form-rooms, however, Kangaroo was on the warpath once more. He slipped his arm into Manners' in the most friendly way, and walked with him down the passage.

Manners looked at him suspiciously.

"I've been thinking," Kangaroo remarked.

"About getting into the eleven?" grinned Manners. "You're wasting your mental powers on that subject, Kangy. You can come and watch."

"Not only about that," said Kangaroo. "What about keeping records of the match?"

"Eh?" said Manners.

"If I were a ripping photographer like you, I should want to take photographs of the match and the players," said the Cornstalk junior solemnly. "I should go to Abbotsford with a camera instead of footer boots, and I should take photographs."

Manners started. In his keen interest in the Thebans' match, he had forgotten even his ruling passion. Manners was a very excellent amateur photographer, and certainly this was an opportunity that would never recur.

"By Jove!" said Manners. "There's something in that. Not much good playing the Thebans if we don't keep some pictures of the game. It looks like being a fine day, too. I could take two or three rolls of films with me, and have a splendid set of pictures."

Kangaroo nodded.

"Just what I was thinking," he said. "Of course, if you take photographs, you'll have to stand out of the match. But I should be willing to play half in your place."

Manners chuckled.

"I dare say you would."

"Well, you know, if you get a good set of pictures it's better than just playing half, isn't it?" urged Kangaroo.

"Quite right! We can have some of them enlarged and stuck up round the studies," said Manners enthusiastically. "That would be ripping."

"Splendid!" said Kangaroo, with equal enthusiasm.

"I'm jolly glad you mentioned this, Kangy."

"So am I," said Kangaroo sincerely. "It came into my head this morning when I was thinking about—ahem—about photographs."

Manners hurried away in search of Tom Merry. He found him talking to

Redfern in the quadrangle. He tapped the captain of the great eleven on the shoulder.

"Tommy, old man," said Manners anxiously. "If I stood out of the eleven, do you think you could fill my place?"

Redfern's eyes gleamed.

"I suppose so," said Tom Merry. "Kangaroo or Redfern would do all right, or Reilly, for that matter. But surely you don't want to stand out?"

"I don't want to," said Manners; "but there's the camera, you know."

"What the dickens—"

"If I took my camera, I could take a set of photographs of the match, and all the giddy players, and keep them as records of our match with the Thebans," Manners explained. "That would be worth having—what?"

"By Jove, yes!" said Tom Merry. "I'd like some pictures like that to hang up in the study. If you're willing to take photographs instead of playing, it would be ripping to keep a record like that of the game."

"Well, I'm willing," said Manners heroically. "I know it's a lot to give up, but for the sake of having some really good souvenirs of a match like this I think I ought to do it. Put somebody else in as half."

"Put me in!" said Redfern promptly. "The New House isn't too well represented in the team, you know; only three against eight School House, so far."

"Well, that's so," said Tom Merry. "You and Kangaroo are much of a muchness; but I think he expects—"

"Blessed are those who don't expect!" grinned Redfern. "Come on, it's only cricket to give the New House a look-in."

"Well, yes—"

"I'll play up like thunder," said Redfern. "Besides, you know I can play half first-rate. And I'm in top form to-day! Put me in, there's a good chap!"

Tom Merry took a crumpled paper out of his pocket.

"All serene," he said. "I suppose it's only fair to give the New House a show."

"Got my name down?"

"Yes; here it is!"

"Hurrah!"

And in the exuberance of his feelings Redfern hugged Tom Merry enthusiastically.

Meanwhile, Manners went to his study to prepare his camera. He intended to take a good allowance of films, and use them all, if necessary. Manners was an economical fellow, and films cost money; but on an occasion like this, Manners felt that it was time to be liberal. Certainly he was never likely to have another opportunity of photographing St. Jim's juniors in play with a team like the Thebans.

Kangaroo came into the study while Manners was packing up his camera and films. The Cornstalk was looking rather anxious.

"Have you decided?" he asked.

"Yes," said Manners. "I thought I had another roll of films here. I wonder where they've got to?"

"You've spoken to Tom Merry?"

"Yes. Have you seen a roll of films about?"

"Is he leaving you out?"

"Yes. Oh, here they are! Just like that ass Lowther to shove them on the mantelpiece."

"Then I'm going in!"

"Eh?"

"I suppose you mentioned my name for your place?"

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"My hat!" said Manners. "I forgot all about you. I was thinking of the photographs, you see. That's two rolls of films I've got; that will make sixteen pictures; I should think that will be ample."

"Then I'd better go off and see Tom Merry myself!" growled Kangaroo, moving towards the door.

"No good," said Manners. "I forgot to tell you, Redfern's in."

Kangaroo stood petrified. "Redfern!" he gasped, glaring at Manners as if he would eat him.

Manners nodded. "Yes. Redfern's got my place in the team. It was only fair to give the New House a show, you know; this only makes them four against seven School House. Do you think sixteen pictures will be enough, Kangy?"

"Sixteen pink rats!" yelled Kangaroo. "Blow your pictures! Blow your silly films! Blow your rotten photographs!"

"Eh?" "Do you think I care twopence about your silly photography?" yelled the exasperated Cornstalk. "Redfern! My hat! What's the good of squeezing in out of the eleven if Redfern squeezes in instead of me? Blow!"

"I'll give you some of the photographs—"

"Bust the photographs!"

"I say, Kangy—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" And Kangaroo rushed away in a towering rage to look for Tom Merry.

He found Tom Merry; but he found also that the vacant place had been irrevocably bestowed upon Redfern of the Fourth. Tom Merry was sorry, but it could not be helped. He kindly offered to take Kangaroo over to Abbotsford as a reserve. Kangaroo received the offer with a snort. And he snorted still more euphatically when Redfern thanked him politely for having been the means of getting him into the eleven!

CHAPTER 12.

No Luck!

"LOWTHER, old man!" Monty Lowther smiled softly.

The gentle and affectionate cadence in Kangaroo's voice warned him that an attack was coming on his place in the eleven.

The St. Jim's fellows had had their dinner, and the eleven were making preparations for the journey to Abbotsford.

Nearly everybody else at St. Jim's was making preparations for a similar journey. Such a match was not often to be seen; and as it was a half-holiday, St. Jim's was transporting itself bodily to the scene of the match.

Some of the fags, who had to walk, had already started, and some fellows were getting out their bicycles to ride.

Monty Lowther was in the Shell dormitory, getting his footer boots out, when Kangaroo came in, sat on a bed, and addressed him in affectionate tones.

"Lowther, old man, I've been thinking—"

"How to get a place in the team?" inquired Monty Lowther blandly. "My dear chap, you could think till you're black in the face, without being able to do it!"

Kangaroo coughed. "Not exactly that," he said. "You see, I—I've been thinking about that chap who was biffed on the napper the other day, in Ryleombe Wood."

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"What about him?"

"You fellows took charge of him, you know, like Good Samaritans," said Kangaroo. "The latest news from Dr. Short was that he was all right, but wasn't able to speak yet."

"Well?"

"Well, you know, don't you feel a bit anxious about him?"

"No," said Lowther; "if he's getting on all right, what is there to be anxious about?"

"Well, he—he—he might have had a relapse."

"So he might," said Lowther. "You might go and inquire after him, while we're gone to play the Thebans."

Kangaroo breathed hard through his nose.

"You fellows took charge of him, you know," he said. "It's very mysterious who he is, isn't it? Might turn out to be somebody important. It's a half-holiday to-day, you know, and it occurred to me that one of you chaps—if you happened to think of it—might like to go and sit with the invalid for a bit."

"Never thought of it," said Lowther. "It would be a jolly good deed, wouldn't it?" said Kangaroo. "Quite in keeping with the part of a Good Samaritan, you know."

"So it would!" agreed Monty Lowther, blandly. "It never occurred to me, but now you mention it, I think it is a jolly good idea."

Kangaroo looked eager. "It would look well, too," he said.

"Yes, it would—quite."

"It would show that a fellow didn't think more of playing a game of footer than of the—claims of moral duties, and—and that sort of thing."

"Exactly!"

"I am glad you look at it like this, Lowther."

"Not at all! Now you mention it, I wonder I never thought of it," said Monty Lowther.

"Then you're going?" asked Kangaroo.

"Oh, no."

"What?"

"I can't," explained Lowther. "I shall be at Abbotsford. But you can go."

"I?" roared Kangaroo.

Monty Lowther nodded.

"Yes, you, Kangy. You are unoccupied this afternoon, you know, and you could do it as well as I could. It would look well, you know. Show a chap didn't think more of watching a footer match than of the claims of the—ahem!—moral duties. And you've really got a nice, pleasant bedside manner, you know, when you try."

Kangaroo glared.

"You silly ass!" he roared.

Lowther looked astonished.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Don't you think it's a good idea?"

"B-r-r-r!"

And Kangaroo went out of the dormitory and closed the door with a terrific bang. And Monty Lowther chuckled softly.

Kangaroo looked in at Study No. 6 as he went downstairs. The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could be heard addressing Blake.

"I regard it as wathah wotten, Blake. I trust you do not suppose I'm thinkin' of myself in this mattah. But I do want the eleven to win."

Blake chuckled.

"I was goin' to do my best for St. Jim's," D'Arcy remarked.

"You're doing that now," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake, what do you mean? I'm out of the team."

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"You uttah ass—"

Kangaroo stepped in. Jack Blake was carefully packing his football things into a bag, to take over to Abbotsford.

"You're going?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes, rather!"

"I've been thinking, Blake, that as Herries and Dig and D'Arcy are left out, perhaps you'd rather be left out, too," suggested Kangaroo. "You ought to stick to the study, you know."

"You've been thinking that?" asked Blake.

"Yes."

"Well, there's something wrong with your thinking apparatus, then," said Blake. "I should recommend having it seen to."

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

"B-r-r-r!" said Kangaroo.

And he departed.

He met Lefevre of the Fifth in the lower passage. Lefevre was looking in a particularly good humour. He had a bag in his hand.

"Ready to start?" asked Kangaroo.

The Fifth Former nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Bit offside for a senior to be playing under a junior skipper—that's what I say. But I'm going to do it."

"Just what I was thinking," said Kangaroo eagerly. "Don't you think it's rather infra dig for a member of the Fifth Form—captain of the Form, too?"

"It certainly is!" agreed Lefevre.

"It means a loss of personal dignity, playing in a junior team, doesn't it?" said the Cornstalk. "I'm not surprised that you think so, Lefevre. I'll tell you what. If you like to chuck it up I'll take your place."

Lefevre stared at him.

"You cheeky young ass!" he said. "If you say I'm losing personal dignity I'll give you a thick ear for your cheek, you young rascal!"

"Ahem! I didn't mean exactly that," said Kangaroo pacifically. "I—I meant that it's hardly up to you, you know. I should be quite pleased to take it off your hands."

"You'll take a dot in the eye off my hands if you don't buzz off," growled the Fifth Former.

"Look here, Lefevre, old man—"

"Oh, get out!"

Kangaroo got out.

He strolled into the quadrangle and sighted Fatty Wynn.

Fatty Wynn was outside the school shop, casting longing eyes into the interior. But the Falstaff of the New House was barred from entering.

Figgins and Kerr had threatened him with dire threats of what would happen if he ventured to stuff himself with pastry just before the Thebans' match; and as an additional precaution, they had taken all his money away and locked it up in the study, and cautioned Dame Taggles not to give him any credit.

Kangaroo tapped Fatty Wynn on the shoulder. The fat Fourth Former gave him a doleful look.

"Hungry?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes, rather! I'm going to have some sandwiches in the train," said Fatty Wynn lugubriously. "What is the good of a few sandwiches to me? I've pointed out to Figgins that you can't play a good game unless you lay a solid foundation first. He says I had a solid dinner; but I hadn't, you know. Only the usual school dinner, with some sausages and a pie and a steak-and-kidney pudding extra, and the tarts and cake."

"I—"

(Continued on page 18.)



Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, Chums! Have you ever noticed when looking at the Pen Pals below the many different countries in which the GEM has readers? From all quarters of the world come Pen Pal notices for insertion, which shows how widely read is the old paper. It is just as much a favourite in the Dominions and foreign climes as it is in Great Britain.

I should say that the GEM has been the means of establishing hundreds of friendships between readers at home and abroad. The steady increase of Pen Pal notices is a clear indication of the great help this feature affords to readers in forming friendships. But let me give a word of explanation to those readers who have sent in notices and are anxious because they have not yet appeared. All notices have to take their turn, and as there is a long waiting list, and only a limited space can be devoted to them in the GEM, readers cannot expect to see their notices in print for some little time. But every one received will be published.

Now let us see what Martin Clifford has provided for your entertainment in next week's number. His latest story is called

"THE BOY WHO DEFIED HIS FORM!"

It tells of the adventures of a newcomer to St. Jim's. Eric Page is his name, and from the beginning his supercilious and obnoxious manner stamps him as an outsider. He treats with disdain the friendship of juniors who endeavour, out of goodness of heart, to help the stranger in a strange place, and it's not long before everyone is his enemy. But Page doesn't care twopence, and is openly defiant of his school-fellows. It is evident that the new boy is the spoilt darling of over-indulgent parents. In coming to St. Jim's, however, Page has come to the right school for knocking all the nonsense out of him! This powerful, long yarn of real human interest, fun, and lively adventure will be voted by

all as the best school yarn of the week bar none.

"THE BLACK HAND AT ST. FRANK'S!"

The fight between the boys of St. Frank's and the sinister Dr. Zangari and his killers is working up to a climax now, and thrill follows thrill in the succeeding chapters of this great serial.

Safe in their island fortress, Nipper & Co. are prepared to make things hot for Zangari. But what they have yet to learn is that Nelson Leo is now a prisoner. When they do discover this they lose no time in going to his rescue at Gallows Mere. In next week's gripping instalment you will read what happens there.

Lastly, the Jester awards more half-crowns for readers' jokes, and Monty Lowther is full of wit and humour again. Don't forget to make sure that your GEM is reserved for you next Wednesday.

HARNESSING THE COLORADO!

The Boulder Dam, which was only recently completed, is one of the largest in the world, John Bowers, of Grimsby. It is built across the Black Canyon, Nevada, harnessing the waters of the Colorado River. The dam is the most marvellous of modern American engineering feats. Work was begun on it in 1930, and since then 5,000 men have been constantly employed in its construction, the cost of which was about £24,000,000. Actually, it was completed eighteen months inside the schedule time, which must be a record for an undertaking of this size.

The dam is 727 feet high and 1,180 feet wide, and the thickness at the base is 560 feet. The waters behind the dam have a capacity somewhere about ten million million gallons, which forms the

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largest artificial lake in the world. To give you some idea of its immense size, the water would cover the whole of England to a depth of one foot! The lake, which is 115 miles by 40 miles in extent, will bring fertility to thousands of acres of dry and desert land. In addition, the waters develop 2,000,000 horse-power, providing endless power to the large dynamos which will supply electricity for hundreds of miles around. It is estimated that in fifty years the money derived from the sale of electricity alone will meet the cost of construction.

THE SAUSAGE-EATING CHAMP!

Freak contests, such as discovering who can eat the most doughnuts, are fairly common in America. But Australia stole a little of their "thunder" when a new contest in the eating line was held at Victoria. Imagine a number of men champing away with their jaws at sausage after sausage and you will gather the nature of the contest. Yes, it was a sausage-eating match between twenty-five men to see who could put away the most.

With a staff of waitresses to keep up the competitors' supply of sausages, the men got under way. One by one they were forced to retire as the "pace" got too hot for them, and the favourite had to give up after consuming only fifteen sausages. But a farm-worker kept on steadily, and eventually outstayed his rivals. He ate twenty-five sausages! After eating that lot, I should imagine that if anyone offered him a sausage he would throw it at him! His reward, however, for becoming sausage-eating champion was only ten shillings. It is not stated whether he had to pay for the sausages he ate out of his prize!

A MONSTER OF THE DEEP!

Yet another rival to the Loch Ness monster, which is now almost forgotten, has popped up in the sea off Boston, U.S.A. A fishing-boat was putting back to port when the crew were astonished to see a long, snake-like monster rear its ugly head twenty feet out of the water! The sea-serpent, estimated to be seventy feet long, was close to the boat, and swam along with it for a time. The fishermen got ready to harpoon it, but before they could do so the strange creature swam off, its long, snakey body undulating over the waves. So one of the monsters that are from time to time seen in different parts of the world has yet to be caught.

TAILPIECE!

Motorist: "Will you paint underneath my car?"

Garageman: "What ever for?"

Motorist: "To make it look more presentable. It's the part I look at most!"

THE EDITOR.



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Miss June Robertson, 55, Le Cren Street, Timaru, New Zealand; girl correspondents; age 18 up; sports.

J. Tarstrol, 4, Gladstone Street, Cape Town, South Africa; correspondents interested in stamps.

Billie Lloyd, Albemarle Hotel, Brighton; age 13-15; correspondents interested in stamps.

Miss Ivy Godfrey, 331, Elton Street, Islington, London, N.16; girl correspondents; age 16-18; films.

Norman Beckett, 14, Salisbury Avenue, Goole, Yorks; age 12-15; desires correspondents.

Ferdinand Rideau, 5815, Avenue du Parc (No. 3), Montreal, Canada; correspondents in the British Empire.

Dave Kieeman, Olive Street, Albury, N.S.W., Australia; age 13-17. British Empire, Holland, Spain; Stamps.

A. White, 51, Park View, Winchmore Hill, London, N.21; age 14-16; wireless correspondents.

Laurence Parsonson, 6, Roservoir Road, Queenstown, Cape Province, South Africa; wants correspondents.

Sidney Korson, 1, Wesley Street, Cape Town, South Africa; age 12-14; interested in mecano, photography.

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"You must be famished," said Kangaroo, sympathetically.

"Well, not exactly famished," said Fatty Wynn slowly, "but peckish, you know. The best thing I could do would be to lay a solid foundation before the match. But Figgins is an obstinate ass, you know. Kerr's an obstinate ass, too."

"And you're so delicate, too," said Kangaroo. "You want feeding up. I'll tell you what we'll do, Fatty. If you like, I'll take your place in goal this afternoon—"

"Eh?"

"I'll take your place in goal, and you can stay here and have a jolly good feed, Fatty. I—I've been thinking of it for some time. Steak-and-kidney pies—"

"Look here, Kangaroo—"

"And ham patties, and currant buns—"

"Look here—"

"Jellies, and preserved fruits, and ginger-beer—"

"Oh," murmured Fatty Wynn dreamily. "Don't!"

"And cake—seed and currant cake—and buns, and doughnuts—"

"I—I must play, you know."

"And jam—whole jars of jam—"

"My hat!"

"And meringues, and cream-puffs—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed the voice of Figgins. "I've been looking for you, Fatty. I thought I should find you round the tuckshop. Come on! It's time to pack up your things."

And Figgins dragged Fatty Wynn away.

Kangaroo glared after them. For once he had been near to success, and his chance was gone! Perhaps Figgins suspected something; at all events, he kept his grip upon Fatty Wynn, and marched him into the House, and did not leave his side again until they were starting for Abbotsford.

CHAPTER 13.

A Mistake Somewhere!

A MOTOR-COACH carried Tom Merry's eleven to the railway station in Rylcombe, and it carried as many other fellows as could crowd into it.

It was followed by fellows on bicycles, who meant to go by the same train.

As the motor-coach drove into the old High Street of Rylcombe, Tom Merry caught sight of the stout figure of little Dr. Short. He asked the driver to stop, and jumped down from the motor-coach to speak to the doctor.

"How is the patient, doctor?" he asked.

"Very well," said the medico, with a nod. "He has recovered sufficiently to speak this morning, fortunately, and I have been able to send for a friend of his, who was in Abbotsford, and who will be with him soon. He is going on very well, but he has had a narrow escape from concussion of the brain. But I think he will be almost himself again in a few days. I have told him about what you and your friends have done for him, and he is very anxious to see you."

"Good! I'll come in and see him with pleasure, sir, after I come back," said Tom Merry. "We're just off to a football match, doctor. Playing the Thebans," he added.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Good-bye, sir!"

And Tom Merry raised his cap and ran after the motor-coach, which had

gone on and nearly reached the railway station.

Kangaroo jumped down. He was in the motor-coach with the footballers.

"How's the giddy invalid?" he asked.

"Going on well," said Tom Merry cheerily.

"Good! Can he talk yet?"

"Dr. Short says yes."

"Then he'd like one of you chaps to go and sit with him," said Kangaroo hopefully. "It's up to you, Lowther."

Monty Lowther laughed.

"Or Blake."

"Rats!" said Blake cheerfully.

"Bai Jove, it's not a bad idea!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You can go and sit with the poor chap, Blake, dear boy, and I will take your place in the team. I'm wathah a dab at playin' outside-left, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you ass," said Kangaroo warmly, "if Blake stands out, I take his place, of course!"

"Weally, Kangaroo!"

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"I wegard you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "You needn't quarrel over the lion's skin before you've caught the lion, you know. I'm not standing out."

"Come on!" called out Tom Merry, from the station.

The footballers and their numerous followers were crowded upon the platform. The local train to Wayland Junction was crammed, and some fellows were left behind to wait for the next train.

At Wayland Junction the team had to change into the train for Abbotsford, which was at a good distance; and at the junction they found many St. Jim's fellows who had walked through the wood to take the train there.

The train from Wayland to Abbotsford was simply alive with St. Jim's fellows, all of them in the greatest of spirits.

"No chance of a giddy accident on this line," growled Kangaroo, as the train ran out of Wayland Junction.

"Why, you ass, do you want an accident?" demanded Blake.

"Of course I do; I'm a reserve."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you got a leg broken, or Lowther got his brains knocked out—though that would be rather difficult in the biggest railway accident—"

"Why, you silly ass—" said Monty Lowther.

"Or if Monteith or Figgins would only get run over," said Kangaroo, with a sigh. "So long as one gets crocked, I don't mind which."

"No blessed fear!" chuckled Blake. "We're not getting crocked on the eve of a match like this. No fear!"

"Not at any price!" said Redfern, with a grin. "But you can look on and see us play, Kangy. It was jolly thoughtful of you to suggest to Manners to take photographs instead of goals. Very thoughtful indeed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, gr-r-r!" growled Kangaroo.

"Abbotsford!" shouted Wally from the last carriage, as the train stopped; and D'Arcy minor and a crowd of Third Form fags were the earliest out of the train.

Abbotsford platform was alive with St. Jim's caps in a few seconds.

Tom Merry looked round for the Thebans, thinking that perhaps Vivian or Stacey or some of the amateur team would be there to meet the St. Jim's eleven.

But there was no sign of them.

"Nobody here to meet us!" said

Kildare. "Well, it's only a few steps to the ground."

Abbotsford Football Ground, belonging to the Abbotsford Ramblers, was close by the station. The St. Jim's team walked out, with their bags in their hands. A regular army of juniors and seniors followed them.

The ground was well enough known to the St. Jim's seniors, who had played the Ramblers there before.

The gates were open, and St. Jim's juniors, and fellows from Abbotsford School, and townspeople of Abbotsford, were going in.

Everybody wanted to see the Thebans play, and there was no charge for admittance, which probably increased the local enthusiasm.

Tom Merry's heart beat faster as he walked into the ground with his team. In spite of the undoubted fact that he had been challenged by the Thebans and that he had the Thebans secretary's letter in his coat pocket, it seemed almost too good to be true.

Here was he, a St. Jim's junior—a Shell fellow—actually leading in a team to play the Thebans, most famous of amateur elevens. And that tall, handsome fellow with sunburnt face and flaxen hair was Vivian, the Thebans captain—Tom Merry knew him at once from photographs he had seen in the papers, and fellows who had seen him play on Monday knew him.

Vivian came to meet him, with a puzzled expression upon his handsome face.

He was evidently surprised.

The bags the St. Jim's fellows carried showed that they had come to play footer, and the Thebans captain ought to have been expecting them, but apparently he wasn't.

Kildare and Darrell exchanged quick glances. The thought that there had been a mistake flashed into their minds at once as they looked at the Thebans captain.

In fact, the thought had been in their minds on and off from the beginning; only the secretary's letter was so explicit that it did not seem to admit of doubt.

"Mr. Vivian?" asked Tom Merry, raising his cap.

The Thebans skipper nodded.

"Yes; I'm Vivian," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Ahem! We've come."

Vivian smiled.

"Yes, I can see you've come," he assented. "I don't remember having had the pleasure of meeting you before, but you're welcome. I suppose you've come to see the match?"

"See it!" gasped Tom Merry.

"I suppose so. The other team hasn't come yet, but they'll be here soon, I expect."

"Eh?"

"My only hat!"

"But we're the other team!" blurted out Tom Merry, growing crimson.

Vivian stared at him.

"You?" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"You're not Merry?"

"Yes, I'm Merry!"

Vivian almost jumped.

"But—but you're only a kid!" he exclaimed in amazement. "You don't seriously mean to say that Stacey has planted this on us?"

"Didn't you know?" demanded Tom Merry warmly.

"I certainly didn't," said the Thebans captain. "You're a schoolboy team, I should suppose?"

"St. Jim's juniors," said Blake.

"Juniors! My hat!"

"But we're playing some seniors,"

said Tom Merry hastily. "This chap is Kildare, the captain of our school, and quite up to any Theban, ancient or modern."

Vivian grinned and nodded to Kildare.

"But there's some mistake in the matter," he said. "We're down here to-day, and we thought we might as well play a match to keep in practice: and Stacey said he had a friend in the neighbourhood who could get a team together—a chap who captains an amateur team somewhere in this county. He wrote to him to fix it up, and will be over here this afternoon. But—"

"Well, I'm the chap!"

"Impossible!"

"Where's Stacey?" asked Tom Merry.

"He can settle it," said Vivian. "He's not here now," replied Vivian. "He had a wire from Rylcombe, and he's gone over to visit a friend who has been injured. He said only a word or two before he went, but I certainly understood from him that the man who was injured was his friend Merry, who was going to bring a team over here. I was wondering whether the team would turn up, after all, in the circumstances."

"We're the team!"

"B-b-b-but—"

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Here's Stacey's letter."

"What!"

"Read it!"

Tom Merry fumbled in his pocket and fished out the letter from the Thebans' secretary.

Vivian took it and read it, and several more of the Thebans team, who had come up, read it over his shoulder.

"That's the letter right enough," said Vivian. "I was with him when he wrote it. And you say he sent this letter to you?"

"Yes."

"Your name's Merry?"

"Yes."

"And you sent him the wire in reply yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm blessed if I can understand it!" said Vivian, in amazement. "Stacey must have planted this on us for a joke, I suppose; though he isn't the kind of fellow to play an idiotic joke of that sort. But I can't understand it otherwise. I suppose from this that you are the genuine team; but I certainly never expected a schoolboy team to come over and play—us!"

"My hat, no!" said Hilton, the Thebans' goalkeeper. "It's too funny!" "I don't see anything funny in it!" said Tom Merry stoutly. "We're a jolly good team, and we'll give you all the game you want."

"What-ho!" said Lefevre of the Fifth. "That's what I say."

Kildare bit his lip. "It's all a mistake," he said. "I don't see how it came about; but it's a mistake somehow. We've come over here for nothing, and we can't force the Thebans to play us. We'd better get out!"

"And the sooner the quicker!" murmured Monteith. "Fancy being dragged into a ghastly mess like this! Oh, my only aunt!"

"Rotten!" growled Langton.

Vivian wrinkled his brows. "Hold on!" he exclaimed good-naturedly. "I don't want you chaps to come over here for nothing. And there's a big crowd come to see the match; they'll be disappointed if there isn't one. There isn't any other team coming, evidently; and as you are here, you may as well play up. It will

be a little exercise for you, and we'll go easy."

"We don't want you to go easy, thanks!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "There are some fellows in this team who will give you all the trouble you want."

Vivian laughed.

"Well, the Thebans are not in the habit of playing schoolboys," he said. "Still, it seems to me all the mistake of our sec, though goodness knows how it came about. Look here, you must excuse what I've said—I was very much surprised; but we don't want to cut the match. We'll play you with pleasure."

"Right ho, then!" said Tom Merry.

"Look here!" said Kildare. "If you'd rather the matter dropped—"

"But we wouldn't," said Vivian genially. "It will be a bit of an experience for us, anyway; and we don't want to turn out for a match for nothing, any more than you do. As you're on the ground, and we're on the ground, we'd better play out the match. We'll play a couple of men short to give you a chance."

"That you jolly well won't!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "You'll play us man for man, or you won't play us at all."

"Hear, hear!" said Redfern.

Vivian chuckled.

"All serene!" he said. "Man for man, then. Let me show you to your dressing-room. We're ready as soon as you are."

And the footballers were soon changing for the match.

"Seems to have been a giddy mistake somewhere," Jack Blake remarked. "But it's not on our side; and, mistake or no mistake, we're here, and we're going to play the giddy Thebans. So that's all right."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, that's all right," he agreed. "We're going to play footer, even if we are only a schoolboy team."

And the team said "Hear, hear!"

CHAPTER 14.

Light at Last!

THE Thebans were smiling as they went into the field.

Tom Merry had won the toss, and he selected his goal, leaving it to Vivian to kick off.

The St. Jim's team were not smiling; they were in deadly earnest. Fatty Wynn, in goal, was looking as if the whole weight of the contest lay upon his shoulders, like a new Atlas supporting the world. The smiles of the Thebans spurred the Saints on to great efforts. They vowed inwardly that the Thebans should soon have something else to do than to smile.

Round the field there was a large crowd; nearly all St. Jim's had come over, and they cheered the eleven as they lined up.

Conspicuous

among them was Manners of the Shell, with his camera ready for business. He had already been snapping, and at every interesting point in the game, snap went the camera again. And there were very many interesting points in that game.

Kildare, Darrell, Langton, and Monteith, at all events, were worthy antagonists, even for the Thebans; and Fatty Wynn, although only a junior, was a marvellous goalkeeper. Some of the spectators remarked that the ball hadn't much room to pass him, even if it came between the posts.

Fatty Wynn's glance was like lightning, his judgment never at fault, his movements almost too rapid for the eye to follow. In the first five minutes of the game Vivian and the other fellows came sweeping through the defence, and piled shots upon Fatty Wynn. But the Welsh junior was "there" every time, and eventually he cleared the ball out to Darrell at last, and the centre-half sent it away to midfield, and then the forwards were upon it.

Then Vivian & Co. discovered that the schoolboy team were not only hot stuff, but very hot indeed.

Figgins, Tom Merry, Kildare, Langton, and Blake, the forward line of St. Jim's, worked together like clockwork, and they swept up the field by a series of short passes to and fro, baffling the defence of the Thebans. They brought the ball right up to goal, Tom Merry centring to Kildare at the last moment, and Kildare putting in a shot that very nearly beat Hilton, the Thebans' custodian.

Hilton just contrived to save, and the backs had difficulty in clearing. By that time the Thebans had ceased to smile.

They had had a quarter of an hour of work as hot as they wanted, and they realised that the schoolboy team were going to give them plenty to do.

They settled down to a tussle, and the vicissitudes of the game kept the spectators watchful and alert.

Loud cheers greeted the Saints at every little advantage they gained; all St. Jim's were hanging upon their movements.

But the first goal fell to the Thebans, and it was no discredit to Fatty Wynn that he was beaten by a

(Continued on the next page.)



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drive from the boot of Vivian, the skipper.

Wynn just missed the leather, throwing himself at full length after it, and it lodged in the net. And there was a shout from the crowd.

"Goal!"

But half an hour had passed. It had taken the famous Thebans thirty minutes to score a single goal against the schoolboy team.

Fatty Wynn's face was glum as he tossed out the ball.

"Never mind, Fatty!" called out Tom Merry encouragingly. "You've done splendidly, old man!"

"Yaas, wathah!" came Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice from behind the goal. "I couldn't have done better myself, deah boy."

Fatty Wynn grunted.

"Buck up, Fatty!" said Figgins. "No more of those, you know."

The fat Fourth Former nodded.

"It shan't happen again!" he growled determinedly.

"That's right! Stick to that!"

The teams lined up again.

Tom Merry kicked off, and a rush of the Thebans followed. They had the leather down to the visitors' goal in a minute or less, and there was a rain of shots from the Thebans' forwards for Fatty Wynn to save.

But Fatty Wynn was fairly on his mettle now.

Whatever shots the Thebans sent in, Fatty Wynn was "there" every time. His fists or his feet seemed always ready, and as quick as lightning. He sent the ball out to Redfern at last, and Redfern drove it far, and the game swooped away to midfield on the touchline.

Fatty Wynn panted after his exertions, and a cheer came from behind him:

"Bwavo, Fatty, deah boy!"

"My hat!" murmured Vivian. "For a giddy schoolboy team they're giving us a lot of trouble. Wire in! We want another goal!"

But to the great astonishment of Vivian and his men, the goal, when it came, did not come to the Thebans.

The right wing of St. Jim's worked the ball along the touchline at top speed, and with wonderful skill, beating the Thebans' defence all the way. Figgins passed to Tom Merry as the left-back tackled him, and Tom Merry centred to Kildare just as he was charged, and Kildare drove in a fast ground shot, beating the goalkeeper easily.

There was a gasp from the Thebans; a yell of joy from the St. Jim's crowd.

"Goal—goal! Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Kildare!"

"Well passed, Tom Merry!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Yaas, wathah! Huwvah, deah boys! Huwvah!"

The Thebans' goalie lifted out the ball, and looked blue.

It was the first time in his career as a first-class footballer that a schoolboy had put a ball into his net. But it was there. The score was one to one.

St. Jim's had equalised, and, beaten or unbeaten, they would for ever be able to boast of having scored a goal against the great Thebans.

"Great Scott!" said Vivian. "They've scored!"

St. Jim's lined up again in high spirits.

The Thebans were playing with deadly earnestness now; and St. Jim's were very hard pressed. But soon

came the welcome shriek of the referee's whistle. The first half was over, and the players had a well-earned rest.

Just as they came off, breathing hard after a gruelling half, a man came striding up, and Vivian called out:

"Hallo, Stacey!"

"Hallo!" murmured Tom Merry. "Here's the giddy secretary—the man who makes mistakes!"

Stacey came up with astonishment writ large upon his face.

He was evidently amazed at the sight of the St. Jim's juniors just coming off for the interval.

"What on earth does this mean?" he asked.

"That's just what I want to know," said Vivian, rather tartly. "You'd better tell us what it means."

"What's this team?" demanded Stacey.

"St. Jim's," said Tom Merry, speaking up cheerfully as the captain of the team Stacey wanted to know about.

"St. Jim's?" repeated Stacey. "Never heard of it! What do you mean? Where do you come from?"

"If you've never heard of St. Jim's, it only shows that your education has been neglected," remarked Monty Lowther.

Stacey frowned.

"But look here!" he said. "I don't understand this—"

"I don't, either," said Vivian. "But it doesn't matter; we're getting a good match."

"And I don't, either," said Tom Merry. "But we're playing the Thebans, and that's all we care about."

And the St. Jim's footballers grinned.

"As for your not having heard of St. Jim's, I don't catch on," said Tom Merry. "You must be dreaming, Stacey! If you haven't heard of St. Jim's, how on earth did you come to write me a letter there?"

The Thebans' secretary jumped.

"Write you a letter?" he said.

"Yes. Asking me to bring a team over."

"I didn't do anything of the sort!" argued Stacey. "I shouldn't be likely to write to a schoolboy to bring over a team to play the Thebans!"

"Well, I thought it was queer," said Tom Merry modestly. "Still, we were glad of the chance, and we jumped at it."

"But I didn't write to you," said Stacey. "I wrote to a friend staying in Rylcombe. I've seen him to-day, and it seems that he never had the letter. He met with an accident; but, as far as I can make out, the letter wasn't even delivered. I've not written to anybody else, and certainly not to you."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Vivian. "I've seen the letter."

The Thebans' secretary staggered.

"Seen the letter?" he gasped.

"Yes."

"My letter—to this kid?"

"Yes."

"Then I must have developed a habit of writing letters to schoolboys in my sleep," said Stacey, in bewilderment, "for I certainly don't remember writing a letter to him. And I never even heard of St. Jim's."

"Show him the letter, Merry."

"Merry!" roared Stacey.

"That's my name," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, I see!"

"Blessed if I do then!" said Vivian.

"This kid Merry has received the letter I wrote to my friend Torrence Merry at Rylcombe," said Stacey. "Some idiotic mistake of the postman, I suppose."

"But it was addressed to me!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Have you the envelope?"

"Here it is."

Stacey looked at the envelope.

"That's right," he said. "T. Merry, Esq., St. James', Rylcombe." That's the envelope I addressed to Torrence Merry."

"St. James is the name of our school," said Tom Merry. "We call it St. Jim's for short; but the name is St. James. I wondered why the word 'school' wasn't put in. I put that down to an oversight in addressing it; it came to me all right."

"It came to you all wrong, you mean," said Stacey. "It ought to have been delivered to Torrence Merry, at St. James—Sir Julian Marlow's house, near Rylcombe, where Merry was staying as a guest."

It was clear enough now.

"Well, the postman is in the habit of bringing letters to me, addressed to T. Merry, at St. James' School," said Tom Merry. "Your giddy T. Merry was new in the district, and he didn't know the name; that's how it came about. Can't be helped now. But it's jolly queer that your Merry didn't let you know something on the subject. Of course, I wired in reply to this letter, as you asked me to do—I mean, as I thought you asked me to. If you hadn't asked for a wire in reply, I should have written you on the school paper, and you'd have found out the mistake. But a wire from the post office didn't give it away, of course. It's jolly odd, all the same. If your friend Merry was expecting a letter from you about playing the Thebans, how is it that you haven't heard from him, as he certainly didn't get this letter?"

"He's been hurt," said Stacey.

"Oh!"

"He was knocked down on the footpath in the wood on Monday, as he was coming over to see us play the County Ramblers," Stacey explained.

The St. Jim's fellows exchanged glances. Tom Merry remembered the initials "T. M." in the hat of the injured man, and he thought he understood.

"He was stunned by one of the rascals, and left insensible," went on Stacey. "Some schoolboys found him, and took him to the house of the local doctor in Rylcombe. He didn't recover sufficiently to speak until this morning, and then I had a wire from Dr. Short, and went over to see him. I found him laid up, and I was coming back here to tell Vivian the match was off. As Merry hadn't had my letter, and hadn't sent the reply telegram, I couldn't make head or tail of that matter. But—"

"If he had his name on him we should have known," said Blake.

"You would have known?" queried Stacey.

"Yes. We were the chaps who found him in the wood and took him to the doctor," explained Tom Merry.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Thebans' secretary, in astonishment. "You—"

"Yes, rather! But we didn't know his name. He had the initials 'T. M.' in his hat, but we didn't know what name that stood for."

Stacey held out his hand.

"If you looked after my old chum I'm much obliged to you," he said. "Give me your list. Torrence is full of

gratitude to the schoolboys who brought him in. He doesn't know who they were, and he's anxious to see them."

"Jolly queer business!" said Vivian.

"Well, I'm glad it's explained."

"And you're playing the match after all," said the Thebans' secretary.

"Yes."

"Well, it's only fair, as the kids have been brought over here," said Stacey.

"Where are you now—fifty up?"

"One to one!" said Vivian grimly.

"My aunt! Not really?"

"Yes, really!"

"Oh, great Scott! Then this team is quite as good as the one Torrence was going to bring along, and you've lost nothing," said Stacey, in astonishment.

"They've lost nothing so far," mur-

would otherwise have been. Both sides needed the rest, however, and were glad of it.

The Thebans had not quite recovered from their astonishment at being given so hard a game by their youthful opponents. But they had fully realised that they had to play hard if they wanted to win. The St. Jim's fellows were in the grimmest of humours. They still remembered the lofty smiles with which Vivian & Co. had started the match, and they intended to avenge those smiles.

Round the ground the crowd were keen and eager. From the moment of the kick-off every movement of either team was followed with intense interest by hundreds of eyes. The St. Jim's goal

Pass—pass out to Figgy! Hurrah—hurrah!"

"Huwwah, deah boy!"

The crowd roared and stamped.

Almost at the start of the second half St. Jim's had had wonderful luck. The ball came out to Figgins on the wing, and the Thebans' left-back rushed to tackle him; but Figgy, instead of attempting to dribble him or pass, took a long and daring shot for goal.

It was a thousand-to-one chance, and for that very reason, perhaps, it materialised, for Hilton, in goal, certainly wasn't ready for anything of the sort.

The crowd went almost into hysterics as the goalkeeper, clutching a second



The Thebans skipper sent in a low drive, and Fatty Wynn threw himself full length to save. But his outstretched fingers just missed the leather, and it lodged in the net. The famous Thebans had scored, but it had taken them thirty minutes to do so against the schoolboy team!

mured Tom Merry to Figgins, as they went into the dressing-room; "but they're going to lose something if we can possibly work it—what?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Yes, rather, old man—the giddy match!"

And the St. Jim's fellows prepared for the second half in a grim humour, resolved to conquer or die.

CHAPTER 15.

Bravo, St. Jim's!

TOM MERRY & Co. looked pretty fresh when they came into the field again.

The arrival of the Thebans' secretary, and the explanation of the strange mistake and how it came about, took some time; and so the interval was a considerably longer one than it

in the first half had given the Saints great hopes. The possibility of not only playing the famous Thebans, but of actually beating them, almost dazzled the St. Jim's fellows. There were few Saints there who would not have given a whole term's pocket-money to see the red and white shirts of St. Jim's victorious.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked to Manners, as the amateur photographer of the Shell slipped a fresh roll of films into his camera ready for the second half. "Bai Jove, Manners, old man, the youngsters look vewy fit, don't they? I'm sowwy I'm not in the team; that would make it a sure thing."

"It would!" agreed Manners. "But a sure licking isn't so much to be longed for that I know of."

"I did not mean that, you ass—"

"There they go!" roared Kangaroo. "On the ball, Tom Merry! Go it!

too late, missed the ball, and it lodged in the net.

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Figgy!"

"Good old Figgins!"

"Hip-pip—"

"Hurrah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy clutched off his silk topper and flung it frantically into the air, not caring whether it ever came down again. He clapped his hands and danced, quite forgetful of the dignity of a scion of the noble race of D'Arcy.

"Huwwah!"

"Yaroooh!" yelled Manners, as D'Arcy's hat came down.

The silk topper descended upon Manners' camera, which was aimed at the group of footballers before goal.

"Huwwah! Bravo!"

"You ass!" roared Manners.

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"Weally, Mannahs—"

"If you've damaged my camera, you fathead, I'll jolly well damage your boko!" yelled the photographer of the Shell.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"Wats! Huwwah! Hip-pip! This isn't a time to think of wotten camewahs! Huwwah!"

"Goal!" roared Kangaroo. "Bravo, St. Jim's!"

The crowd rocked and swayed, and yelled and roared.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, gasping for breath after his effort. "Bai Jove! I couldn't have beaten that myself! Huwwah! By the way, where's my hat? Have you seen my hat, Mannahs, deah boy?"

"There's something crunching under my boot," said Manners, who was examining his camera carefully. "All right; it's not hurt."

Arthur Augustus glanced down at his beautiful topper, which had Manners' foot upon it, and was a complete wreck.

"You fuhtful ass!" he gasped.

"Not hurt?"

"Not at all! It had a knock, but it hasn't damaged it."

"You uttah ass! Look at it, then!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"I'm looking at it, ain't I?" said Manners, in astonishment.

"I'm speakin' of my hat—"

"Oh! I was thinking of my camera!" said Manners.

"You uttah ass—"

Snap!

"Got Tom Merry patting Figgy on the back!" said Manners, with a chuckle. "This will make a beautiful set of pictures. Did you speak, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, you feahful ass!" said Arthur Augustus, in a sulphurous voice. "Take your silly hoof off my toppah, will you?"

"Certainly!"

Manners disentangled his boot from D'Arcy's topper, and the swell of St. Jim's picked it up. He jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the topper ruefully. It was a complete

wreck, and as D'Arcy tried to punch out the dents in its sides, his fist came through.

"Oh, you uttah ass!" he murmured.

"It will do to wave," said Kangaroo comfortingly.

"Weally, Kangawoo—"

"Bravo, St. Jim's! Hurrah!"

The rival teams lined up again.

Tom Merry's word ran along the St. Jim's ranks:

"Stick to it, and don't let them equalise!"

And the Saints did stick to it.

The Thebans fought hard for victory. They were a splendid team, and but for the presence of Fatty Wynn in goal, probably all Tom Merry & Co.'s efforts would have been in vain.

The Thebans charged up to the St. Jim's goal again and again, but they could not penetrate that impregnable citadel. Fatty Wynn was on his mettle, and he defended like a Trojan.

The fat Fourth Former seemed tireless, and he was never caught napping. Good shots who had been accustomed to beating all sorts of goalkeepers, found themselves baffled by the Welsh junior.

Fatty Wynn was a born goalie, and on this famous day he surpassed all his previous records.

The enthusiasm of the St. Jim's crowd, especially the New House fellows, grew and grew. It Fatty Wynn did not let the leather through, St. Jim's would finish up a goal ahead, and the Thebans would be beaten.

It was a goalkeeper's game now; and never did a goalie merit more hearty cheers than Fatty Wynn on this great occasion.

He was simply unbeatable.

Again and again the St. Jim's halves and backs were beaten by the Thebans' forwards, but ever, as they swooped down upon the goal, they found Fatty Wynn ready—alert, quick, cool, unconquerable.

Six or seven times at least, in the second half, the Thebans were on the very point of scoring; again and again it looked as if they were certain to win

with goals galore to their credit, but every time Fatty Wynn put "paid" to their efforts.

And the time was getting close now!

The referee was seen to glance at his watch; the spectators were looking at their watches, too; Fatty Wynn had only to defend his citadel successfully for ten minutes more—five minutes more—three minutes!

The shouts of the St. Jim's crowd rose and swelled to a mighty roar.

"Stick it out, Fatty!"

"Don't let them through, old man!"

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"Never say die!"

Fatty Wynn did not seem even to hear the shouts. He was as cool as a cucumber; he had eyes only for the game.

Two minutes more—one minute!

The Thebans made a last desperate effort. To be licked by a schoolboy team—a team that had provoked their smiles when they entered the field—the mere thought was intolerable; and the Thebans played up at the finish as if they were fighting the last struggle for the English Cup!

In that last minute, Fatty Wynn played the game of his life! And he won it! Even as the whistle went, the ball went out to midfield from Fatty Wynn's boot, taking the last chance of the Thebans with it.

Ph-e-e-p!

It was the whistle—and the finish!

The game was won and done.

The crowd roared.

"St. Jim's wins! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Vivian and his men looked blank. The schoolboy team had won—the schoolboys had beaten the Thebans; it was incredible, but it was true.

The famous amateur team had been beaten by St. Jim's!

When the whistle had blown for the finish, the field was blackened with a rushing crowd.

Shouting, yelling, cheering, the St. Jim's fellows surrounded their champions, bore them shoulder-high off the field.

(Continued on page 23.)

PEN PALS

(Continued from page 17.)

Ian Suliman M. Patel, 64a, High Road, Fordsburg, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa; age 15-17; wants correspondents.

G. Wardle, 93, Brace Street, Walsall, Staffs; age 13-15; stamps.

Alex Walton, 29, The Ravine, Shiregreen, Sheffield 5; will readers interested in old copies of the Companion Papers write to him.

J. L. Crosbie, 8, Kintoch Avenue, Cambuslang, Lanarkshire, Scotland; has old copies of GEM.

Christopher Foster, 45, Queensborough Terrace, Bayswater, London, W.2; would like to hear from readers interested in old "Jack, Sam, and Pete" and "Empire" stories.

Miss Eleanor Stubbs, 30, Rhodes Street, Carterton, New Zealand; girl correspondents; age 15-17; sports, snaps; India, Canada, Europe.

Noel White, 589, Lincoln Road, Halswell, Canterbury, New Zealand; stamps; age 10-12.

Neville White, 589, Lincoln Road, Halswell, Canterbury, New Zealand; age 12-14; stamps, postcards.

Miss Sybil Parsons, Eynhallow, Bolters Lane, Banstead, Surrey; girl correspondents; Surrey preferred; dogs, photography swimming, hiking.

Mervyn Marshall, 189, Abbots Drive, Wembley, Middlesex; age 14-16; motors, engineering; Canada, Australia, U.S.A.

Miss Margery Priestman, 37, Morehampton Terrace, Donnybrook, Dublin, Ireland; girl correspondents; age 17-20; stamps, films, hockey, tennis.

Audy L. Chambers, 208, North East Belt, Ashburton, New Zealand; correspondents in France, Belgium.

Eric Jubb, 409, Wellfield Street, Warrington, Lancs; wants correspondents in British Empire; stamps, films, wireless.

Miss Joan Wright, 7, Brocklebank Road, Fallowfield, Manchester 14; girl correspondents; age 13-14; Kenya, Akra, New York, Oxford; sports, science.

Arthur Mason, 461, Boom Street, Pietermaritzburg, Natal, South Africa; age 15-17; Great Britain and the Empire; stamps, photos.

Leonard Maree, 13, Verwey Street, Tréyeville, Johannesburg, Transvaal, S. Africa; correspondents interested in outdoor games.

Miss Nita Samuel, Church Street, Riversdale, Cape Province, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 12-14; London, the Empire, U.S.A.

British and Dominions Film Club wants members. Address Miss Noel Dean, 660, Rhodes Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; or F. S. Burton, 8, Cordelia Street, South Grove, London, E.

Miss Enid Allen, 274, Carrington Road, Coogee, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia; girl correspondents; sports, stamps, etc.; Modern Cocee Correspondence Club.

Len Willis, 1a, Cunningham Street, Northcote, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; stamps; wants correspondents outside Australia.

Miss Elsie Lowes, 30, Albert Road, Aston, Birmingham; girl correspondents; age 12-14; preferably U.S.A., South America; films, Companion Papers.

Miss Creina Mayne, 33, O'Curry Street, Limerick, Ireland; girl correspondents; age 13-15; sports, films, etc.

Oswald Perira, Trevenna, 101, Upper Main Road, Moulmein, Burma; age 16-18; desires correspondents.

Clifford Ritchie, 125, Rosethorne Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; members for the GEM and "Magnet" Club; age 9-14.

G. Fogg, 6, Spodden Street, Rochdale, Lancs; would like to hear from readers interested in old Companion Papers.

Basil Harris, 40, Lannett Road, Gloucester; age 18-20; correspondents in Australia, Germany; dance music, architecture.

THE EIGHT SCHOOLBOYS WHO BROKE OUT OF PRISON!

The BLACK HAND at ST. FRANK'S!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

Escape!

NELSON LEE, the schoolmaster detective of St. Frank's, is investigating a mystery connected with Dr. Zangari, of Gallows Mere. Also involved in the affair are eight boys of St. Frank's. Lee knows that Zangari, leader of a gang of masked men in black, is engaged in some unlawful enterprise, but exactly what it is the detective has not yet discovered.

Zangari fears the interference of the detective and the schoolboys, and several times his gangsters attempt to kill them. Eventually, Lee sends Nipper & Co. away to a safe retreat, but they fall into the hands of Zangari's men. They are imprisoned in the underground cells of an old, disused convict prison on Bannington Moor, near St. Frank's. Archie Glen thorpe and McClure, however, who are together in one of the cells, succeed in making a hole in the cell roof and escaping into a passage overhead. They creep along a corridor and down some stairs, with the intention of releasing their companions; but they little know that a figure in black is dogging their footsteps!

The man in black crept silently behind Archie Glen thorpe and McClure as they approached the door of the cell passage. He was the guard who had been left in charge. Coming down the stairs after parting from his companions, and thinking that his task would be simple, he had been amazed and startled to hear the voices of Archie and Mac. Then he had seen them. How they had escaped from their dungeon was a mystery the guard could not pause to consider; he thought only of overpowering them before they could release the others—which was their obvious intention.

As he crept, he produced a curious looking pistol. It was a gas gun. One discharge and the boys would collapse.

Then things happened. Archie, with the speed of a lightning flash, and the agility of a rugger player, suddenly made a twisting dive. His

arms wound themselves round the man's legs, and McClure, turning with a gasp of surprise, was just in time to see the sequel. The man in black, thrown off his balance by the swift attack, went over like a ninepin.

Crash!

Falling heavily at the bottom of the stone stairs, the man's head made violent contact with the hard floor. The only sound he uttered was a gasping sigh. His gun fell from his nerveless fingers and he lay in a crumpled heap. He was out.

"Ods luck and cheers!" said Archie calmly. "The blighter's knocked out. Priceless luck for us, what?"

"Great Scott! I don't even know what happened!" gasped Mac. "You were as quick as a giddy panther! How did you know the beggar was behind us?"

"How did I know?" repeated Archie. "Well, old grapefruit, to tell you the truth, I didn't know. Not absolutely. I happened to spot something shadowy out of the corner of my eye, if you follow me. No time for asking questions and all that. These dashed chappies are frightfully dangerous. I just dived for the spot where I thought his legs would be, and there you are. I mean to say, why not?"

"Archie, you've saved us," said McClure, taking a deep breath. "Better make sure of this rotter, hadn't we? Tie him up with our scarves, or something."

"Absolutely!"

Archie picked up the curious-looking gun from the floor, handling it gingerly. Then, with a shrug, he put it in his pocket, and helped McClure to secure the prisoner. It was an unnecessary precaution, for the man was not likely to come to his senses for some time.

"Better work fast now, Archie," murmured the Scottish junior. "There might be some more of these brutes on the premises. The sooner we can get out of this place, the better."

"And how!" exclaimed Archie.

There was no difficulty in getting into the cell passage; the great door

was not locked, and as soon as the heavy bolts were pushed back, the door creaked open. The two Removites passed through into the lighted passage, and a moment later they had pushed back the bolts of one of the cell doors. Nipper, sitting up in his blanket, stared at them in amazement. His cell mate slept.

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Nipper, leaping to his feet. "What the dickens—"

"Kindly keep your hair intact, old pippin," said Archie calmly. "Just a spot of rescue work, that's all. You're in command from now on, and I'm dashed glad to hand over the reins."

A subdued babble of voices sounded in the other cells; McClure had been shooting the bolts, and acquainting the startled inmates of the development. Handforth, Church, and Browne came crowding round. A minute later all eight prisoners were in the passage, one or two of them still heavy-eyed with sleep.

A word or two of explanation from Archie sufficed; Nipper, who had had no hope of escaping, was the coolest of them all.

"Good old Archie!" he said approvingly. "Chaps, we've got to get out."

"You're telling us!" murmured Browne. "Out, brother, is the watchword."

"Good gad! That reminds me," said Archie. "You'd better take charge of this, Nipper, old scout. A frightful looking weapon. Not in my line at all."

He gave Nipper the strange gun, and one glance at it was sufficient for the Remove skipper.

"A gas gun," he said grimly. "It may be charged with poison gas, or only some harmless stuff to cause insensibility. It might come in useful later."

An idea occurred to him. The unconscious guard was untied, and his black get-up was removed. The man proved to be a foreigner, evidently an Italian, with a vicious cast of countenance.

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There was a lump on his head of considerable size. He was carried into one of the cells, wrapped in a blanket, and the door was bolted on him.

"Well, there's one of 'em out of harm's way," said Nipper. "I'll take charge of this costume. We may need it later."

The others were all full of excitement. Their release from the cells, coming so unexpectedly, had bucked them up considerably. They could scarcely believe in their good fortune.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Church tensely.

"Get out, and go back to St. Frank's," said Tommy Watson. "That's the sensible thing—"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "You're off your rocker! As soon as we show ourselves to Mr. Lee, he'll pack us off—"

"You're right, Handy," put in Nipper grimly. "Besides, if we go back to St. Frank's we might walk into the enemy's hands again. St. Frank's is being watched. It's too risky. These devils mean business."

"And so do we," said Handforth fiercely.

"Right again," agreed Nipper. "We're not going to be side-tracked out of the game any longer. We're going to attack! We've got a golden chance here. Once we're free of the prison, we can make our own plans; we can establish ourselves in a fortress of our own, and defy Zangari to do his worst."

Handforth was wildly enthusiastic, and the others, too, caught the fever.

"There's one thing we've got to keep constantly in mind," said Nipper. "We're up against killers. Zangari and his crowd are absolutely ruthless; they only spared our lives this time because they're using us as hostages. If we get out of here we must have a safe base from which we can operate; and that means food, too. I've already got one or two ideas. If we try to sneak away from the district, Zangari's spies might follow, and then we should be grabbed again."

"And next time brother, there would be no escape such as this," observed Browne.

"You're right," said Nipper. "We've got to grab this opportunity with both hands; we've got to come out into the open and defy Zangari to do his worst. There's been enough hole-and-corner business."

"But where can we go?" asked Tregellis-West.

"We'll decide that later," replied Nipper. "If we can establish a stronghold for ourselves without a soul knowing, all the better. The main thing at the moment is to get out of this beastly place. It may not be so easy. Everybody ready?"

"Waiting for you, old thing," said Archie.

"All right, I'll lead the way." Nipper took out the gun and held it ready. "If we meet anybody I'm going to let them have a dose of this—and ask questions afterwards. We're in a tight spot, and we can't afford to be squeamish. Come on."

"Wait a minute, said Handforth. "What about a light?"

"Daren't chance it; we shall have to feel our way in the dark," said Nipper.

"If we took a light with us we should be visible yards away, and that might finish us off. I remember pretty well how we came; all you've got to do is to keep as quiet as mice and follow close behind me. Remember, not a sound! Nobody must speak!"

Gun in hand, he commenced mounting

the mouldering stairs; the others, their hearts beating faster, followed in dead silence. Soon they were swallowed up in the darkness, and Nipper was obliged to feel his way. But he had an excellent memory and he had taken careful note of the route they had followed whilst being escorted to the dungeons.

By the time they had reached the top of the staircase their eyes had grown so accustomed to the intense blackness that they at once saw two greyish oblongs apparently in the distance. Windows. They had successfully ascended from the depths. The night outside was not absolutely dark now, and the window oblongs stood out distinctly and helped the boys to shape their course.

They were now in a long, draughty corridor; and when presently they drew level with a window, high above, they could see the night sky outside. A half-moon had risen since their dramatic ride in the lorry, and the storm clouds had broken. A gale was still blowing, but the rain had ceased. Ragged clouds were marching at a great speed across the stars.

"This way," murmured Nipper. "I think this corridor leads to one of the main halls, and we ought to find a door there which will take us into the open."

"No need for all this caution," objected Handforth. "There's nobody in the place except us. There was only that one guard, and he's locked up. Let's make a dash for it."

"Not yet," warned Nipper. "We mustn't take anything for granted."

It was wise counsel; for after they had crept as silently as shadows along the corridor, and were in a big chamber where the wind hooted and howled through the paneless windows, Nipper suddenly whispered a warning.

"Back!" he hissed. "Back into the shadows here!"

"What the dickens—" began Church.

"Not a sound, anybody!" interrupted Nipper. "Do nothing until I give the word!"

His ears were sharper than those of the others, and dimly he had heard voices. In all truth they were not out of the wood yet. They crouched back against a wall and stood as motionless as statues.

And from the opening of another long dismal corridor came a faint glow of flickering light. It was an anxious moment. Two figures emerged from the corridor opening into the big chamber. Men in black! One of them was carrying an electric torch, which, fortunately, he held in a downward direction, so that the beam illuminated only a patch of floor just in front. Zangari's men evidently had no suspicion that anything was wrong; they were talking in normal voices, and the language they used was Italian. They had discarded their black headgear, and in the reflected light from the torch the boys could see their faces; they were both youngish men with dark, evil features. From the direction they took it was fairly evident they were on their way to the underground cells.

Nipper did some rapid thinking.

He believed that he and his companions, by lying low, would escape notice. But, in that case, the two men would go down to the dungeon cells, and within a few minutes they would discover the truth. Inevitably there would be an immediate alarm, and the countryside would be scoured for them. Bleak moorland as it was, the boys might easily be surprised and recaptured. Nipper clenched his teeth grimly. He wasn't ready for the news

of their escape to be broadcast. There was only one thing, therefore, to be done.

"Come on, chaps!" he hissed suddenly. "On 'em! Don't ask questions—just hit!"

There was an immediate movement among the others; and the two men, hearing the unaccustomed sounds, halted in their tracks and flashed the electric torch round. The beam of light played full upon the eight figures which rushed upon them from the shadows. But the two men were taken completely by surprise. They had no chance of drawing their weapons.

Just one swift rush—and then conflict.

"Back up, the Remove!" roared Handforth excitedly.

Crash!

His right fist, swinging round like the hind leg of a mule, struck one of the Italians on the jaw. The man crashed to the floor with a gasping grunt, and Handforth's arm was numb from the wrist to the elbow from the effects of the blow. But he didn't know it at the time. He followed up his attack with a leap which carried him on top of the fallen Italian, and Church and McClure were in close support.

They literally fell on the man, and while Church threw his weight on the man's legs, McClure sat on his chest. Handforth punched at the man's head again—which was quite unnecessary, for the first blow had nearly broken his jaw and put him right out.

Nipper and Browne, meanwhile, had done almost identical damage to the second man. Nipper's right fist and Browne's left struck the fellow in the face at the same moment, and those two mighty punches did all that was necessary. The Italian's front teeth were broken, and Nipper's knuckles were lacerated almost to the bone. But in the excitement of the moment he did not feel the pain, and did not even know that his hand was bleeding.

"Good work, brother!" said Browne approvingly.

He retrieved the fallen electric torch and flashed the light on the fallen foe. The two men were lying untidily on the damp floor; one was groaning, and the other silent.

"Well, by George, that was quick!" panted Handforth. "Jolly good thing you told us to keep quiet, Nipper!"

"I don't think there'll be any more," said Nipper. "Come on! We'll strip these black things off them, and then we shall have three complete black suits. They might come in jolly useful."

"What are we going to do with these brutes?" asked Watson, breathing hard.

"Here's your answer," said Browne, flashing his torchlight round.

There were some cells quite close at hand, for this chamber was one of the main halls of the old prison. The boys quickly divested the unconscious men of their black outer clothing; then they were dragged to a cell, bundled inside, and the door was locked on them.

"Well, that's that!" said Nipper, looking at his knuckles. "My hat, my hand's bleeding a lot! Tie your handkerchief round this, Tommy! Thanks! That'll do."

In addition to the black clothing, the boys had secured two electric torches, two regulation automatic pistols, and two of the strange-looking gas-guns.

"This puts us on equal terms, more or less!" said Nipper grimly. "We won't hesitate to use these guns, either, if it comes to a pinch. But I don't think we'll meet any more of the beggars just yet."

Flashing the torchlight openly now, they soon found a door which led into

an open courtyard. It was good to feel the night wind on their flushed faces. The ground was soaking from the recent rain, but the sky was clearing; only a few ragged clouds were visible. The boys, running through tangled weeds and dead leaves, reached an outer wall. By standing upon one another's shoulders, they climbed the wall with ease, and then they dropped into the gloom on the other side.

Before them stretched the barren moorland—and freedom!

The Message!

NELSON LEE was a very worried man.

The failure of his plan to get the boys safely away from the district troubled him deeply; but at least he knew how the wily Dr. Zangari had probed the secret. The hidden microphone in Nelson Lee's desk explained all. The detective had discovered the microphone; but, what was more important, the enemy was unaware of the fact. They still believed the microphone to be of assistance to them in learning his plans. But the detective intended to use it for his own ends—not yet, however. The time was not ripe. There was other work to be done.

Lee was still in his study at St. Frank's; he was examining the message which had been flung through his window attached to a dagger. The boys were in the enemy's hands, but unharmed. Very great caution was necessary now. Lee had had ample proof that the mysterious Italians were ruthless. They had instructed Lee to cease his investigations, and if he openly defied the order tragedy might be the result. Zangari, he was convinced, would not hesitate to kill one of his schoolboy prisoners if, by so doing, he

could bring the activities of Lee and the police to a standstill.

The detective decided on his course of action. Earlier he had made a fake telephone call to Inspector Lennard, saying that he would not move from St. Frank's that night. That supposed telephone call was for the benefit of any possible spy who might be listening-in. Actually, Lennard was waiting in Bannington for Nelson Lee to join him, and Lee intended going. To do so openly was impossible, for he had no doubt that spies were posted outside in the darkness.

Nelson Lee, accordingly, took certain measures.

Leaving his study light burning, he went upstairs to his bed-room and drew the heavy curtains over the window before switching on the light. Within ten minutes he had transformed his appearance. A grey wig and a grey beard gave him a learned, scholarly appearance; over his ordinary clothing he donned an old-fashioned overcoat with an Inverness cape. Horn-rimmed spectacles and a wide-brimmed, black soft hat completed the make-up.

He sallied forth from the Ancient House, a stick in one hand, an attache-case in the other. If spies were watching, they would take no particular notice of the learned-looking elderly man who was evidently leaving the school. Lee walked down Bellton Lane to the village, and he timed his arrival nicely, for he caught the bus which passed through Bellton on its way from Caistowe to Bannington.

By the time he arrived in Bannington the rain had ceased. He alighted from the bus, walked across the wide High Street, and entered the police station.

"Anything I can do, sir?" asked the sergeant in charge.

He spoke politely, but in a tired

voice. This absent-minded-looking old fellow had probably lost a bag or something.

"Is Inspector Lennard here?" asked Lee abruptly.

"Why, yes, sir!"

"Then take me to him. My business is important."

Lennard, who was in the inner office with Inspector Jameson, looked up impatiently as the visitor was ushered in. Lennard could not understand why Nelson Lee had not yet arrived, for the detective should have been in Bannington long since.

"The gentleman says he wants to see you, Mr. Lennard," said the sergeant.

"Yes?" said Lennard, looking at Lee without recognition or enthusiasm.

"I dare say you've been wondering what delayed me, Lennard," said the detective in his ordinary voice. "I thought it necessary to take a few precautions. The enemy is very active—and very dangerous. I have a rooted objection, too, to being shot in the back."

"Great Scott! 'You, Lee!' ejaculated the Scotland Yard man, leaping to his feet. "What on earth—"

"Really, I thought this sort of thing was only done in detective stories!" said Jameson, his eyes opening wide. "You astonish me, Mr. Lee. Is it—er—really necessary to go to these lengths?"

"We're dealing with a relentless gang, Jameson," replied Lee, removing his glasses and sitting down. "It's no ordinary criminal organisation we're up against. To-night this organisation has kidnapped eight boys of St. Frank's. We've got to move warily. The police hunt must cease at once."

"Cease?" said Lennard, staring. "Do you mean you don't want the boys to be found?"

"Read this," replied Lee.



As the St. Frank's juniors waited tensely, two figures came along the corridor, one of them directing the beam of a torch to the floor. Men in black! And they were going down to the cells from which the juniors had escaped!

Lennard looked at the warning note, and then passed it to Jameson.

"They mean it," said Nelson Lee quietly. "We can't take the risk, Lennard. We've got to call off the hunt. If it still continues the boys might suffer—and you know what I mean when I say 'suffer.' At any cost, they must be protected."

Lennard was abashed. "But we can't operate on such lines," he protested. "It's like an American kidnapper warning his victim's relatives that if they communicate with the police—"

"Yes, I know; but hear me out." "We're stumped!" growled the inspector. "We're bound hand and foot. I don't understand it. How on earth did these devils get to know that the boys were in the lorry?"

"I think I understand that, too," said Lee. "But here's the point. We've got to suspend all activities against this gang and concentrate our energies on rescuing the boys. They must come first, Lennard."

"But you just said—"

"I said we must put a stop to all police activities," interrupted Lee. "That is to say, the obvious activities which are now in progress. But you and I, alone, will do some investigating, and we will start with that lorry, which, I understand, is in the hands of the police at Helmford. There might be a clue. I'm not very optimistic, but we must hope for the best."

"Let's go, then," said Lennard. "What do you want me to do? Dress up like a clergyman, or a bus conductor, or something? I don't mind telling you this business is getting on my nerves. It's—it's fantastic that such things should be taking place down here in Sussex."

"Fantastic or not, they're happening—and we've got to be mighty careful," said Nelson Lee. "The message I have just shown you was delivered through my shattered study window—attached to a dagger. There wasn't a ghost of a chance of capturing the messenger. These people may be crude in some ways, but they are original, too—and as dangerous as dynamite. It's no good blinking at the facts, Lennard. Ordinary methods are useless against—"

Craaash!

Nelson Lee was interrupted by a shattering smash of glass from the window. Lennard leaped up, grabbing for his gun. Jameson went white. He was not accustomed to this sort of thing. During all the years he had been attached to the Bannington Police, life had been more or less humdrum.

"Good heavens!" he panted. "What—what was that?"

"Another dagger, I suppose," said Lennard grimly. "I don't call it very clever. The enemy repeats himself within a few hours. It's surprising he didn't think of something different."

Nelson Lee, striding to the window, had picked up an object wrapped in paper which had fallen to the floor after striking the drawn blind. When Lee opened the paper, a flint stone was revealed inside. Then, as the detective saw writing on the paper, an ejaculation of astonishment and relief escaped him.

"Nipper's handwriting!" he ejaculated.

"What?"

"This is extraordinary," continued Lee. "Listen, Lennard! This is what Nipper says: 'Sorry for breaking your window, Mr. Jameson; couldn't risk coming to the police station, in case of spies. Please tell Mr. Lee and Mr. The Gem Library.—No. 1,445."

Lennard that the eight of us have escaped and are quite O.K. From now on we're in the fight! That's why we're not showing ourselves; we're not going to be packed off again. Later on you'll hear more from us. We were taken to the old prison on the moor, but we escaped. You'd better go there at once with plenty of men. You'll find two prisoners in a cell on the ground floor, and one other prisoner in an underground cell. Better go and get 'em.—THE FIGHTING EIGHT."

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Inspector Lennard.

"They're enterprising youngsters," commented Lee. "Well, this is a big relief, gentlemen. No need to examine that lorry for clues now. I wonder how the boys escaped from the old prison?"

"The young idiots! Why couldn't they act sensibly and put themselves in our hands?" demanded the Yard man. "They're going to hamper us a lot, Lee. Boys have no business interfering in work of this kind."

"They take the view—and quite reasonably—that our efforts to ensure their safety only landed them in the enemy's hands," said Lee dryly. "So this time they're going to act for themselves. Well, it was very sensible of them not to return to St. Frank's. The school is the one dangerous place for them just now—and they realise it. I somehow think we can trust them to keep out of danger, Lennard. Nipper has some idea of his own."

"I wonder," said Lennard, as he took the crumpled paper.

"What do you wonder?"

"This message," said the inspector, tapping it with a forefinger. "Any chance of it being a fake, do you think?"

"It's not a fake; I know Nipper's handwriting."

"I don't mean that. We're advised, here, to go to the old prison," said Lennard thoughtfully. "What if it's a trap? How do we know that the enemy didn't force Nipper to write this message—with the object of tricking us into going to the prison? There's probably an ambush there, waiting for us."

"Yes, yes! I believe you're right," said Jameson. "We mustn't be fools enough to fall into the trap."

Nelson Lee shook his head. "It's no trap," he said decisively. "Nipper wrote this of his own free will."

"How do you know that?"

"I know it for two reasons," replied the detective, with complete confidence. "First, Nipper's made of stern stuff, and he would never have written a decoy letter, knowing that it would take us into a virtual death-trap."

"But, if they applied force—"

"Even then Nipper would not agree," interrupted Lee, almost curtly. "To clinch the thing, however, I will give you my second reason. Nipper and I have a private understanding; we have used it for years. Do you notice that the commas are unnecessarily large, Lennard?"

Lennard inspected the scrawled message.

"Now you mention it, yes."

"That is a secret sign between Nipper and I that everything is O.K.," explained Nelson Lee. "Had he made the commas faint and small, I should have known that there was a trap somewhere; it would have been a warning to me to act with extreme caution."

"Well!" said Lennard admiringly. "That's rather a cute dodge. It clinches the thing, of course, as you say. Well, we'd better make a quick move, hadn't we? We've got some men in

readiness, and we'll go straight out to the prison."

"I was going to suggest the same thing," said Lee.

Two powerful cars were in readiness, and they set off at once, filled with armed police. By the time they reached the grim old prison buildings on Bannington Moor, clouds once more obscured the moon, and the night was as black as pitch. But the rain had ceased long since, and this was an advantage.

Nelson Lee and Inspector Lennard led the way in; they and the police officers kept their weapons ready, and they maintained a keen vigilance. But it seemed that they had the moor to themselves; no other human being was in sight. The wind moaned mournfully over the wasteland, and it was chill.

Inside the building, on the ground floor, just as Nipper had said in his note, two battered prisoners were found in one of the cells. They were sullen and silent.

In answer to Lennard's questions, they shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders. Either they understood no English, or they pretended. They were handcuffed and placed within a cordon of police officers.

Lee and Lennard, with three other men, then went down into the underground cells. The third man was found locked away; and he, too, refused to speak. Lennard handcuffed him and then went to Nelson Lee, who had called to him. Lee had discovered the hole in the ceiling of one of the cells.

"This is how the boys escaped," said the detective, flashing his light through the opening. "They evidently found a loose stone in the arched roof, and one of them climbed through. Perhaps two of them did so. Then they got into an upper chamber, descended the stairs, and surprised the guard. Easy enough, then, for all of them to escape."

"Well, we've got to thank the kids for giving us three more prisoners," said Lennard, with satisfaction. "We're gradually reducing the enemy's strength, Lee. We've bagged quite a few now."

"But I imagine there are still plenty of others," said Nelson Lee. "Curious that they should be all foreign—and Italian at that. You saw the black hand imprinted on that warning note they sent me?"

"What do you mean?"

"Let it go for the moment," replied Lee. "We'll talk about it later. The three men we have captured were evidently left here in charge, and it's not likely that there'll be any others."

They made their way up the damp stairs with their prisoner, and joined the others. There was nothing to be gained by making a search of the rambling buildings. Lee intended to return in daylight, however.

They emerged into the open, and walked through the intense darkness towards the cars which waited on the road.

"Not a bad night's work, on the whole," said Lee. "I wish I knew where the boys were, though—"

He broke off, for it seemed to him that the blackness on his left side had become blacker. Lennard was walking on his right, and the other police officers were ahead.

"Young scallawags!" granted the inspector. "It's all very well for them to be bold and brave, but they'll come to a sticky finish if they're not careful."

Nelson Lee did not answer—and for

a very excellent reason. Before he could actually grasp the sudden suspicion which was forming in his mind, the intensified blackness by his side materialised into three black-garbed human figures.

Without a sound they pulled Nelson Lee sideways; something which felt like a folded blanket was thrust over the detective's face, so that he could make no outcry. He and his assailants rolled to the grass, and lay in a silently writhing heap.

It all happened in a moment, and any sound there had been was drowned by the boisterous voice of the wind.

"What I can't understand," said Lennard, "is the nerve of those kids. Two or three of them have come pretty near death once or twice, and—"

He broke off, peering keenly. Without his knowledge, Nelson Lee had left his side.

"Hey! Where the dickens have you got to, Lee?" asked the inspector, looking round.

But there was no reply. Nelson Lee had been spirited away into the darkness—right from Lennard's side as they walked.

The Stronghold.

NIPPER chuckled to himself as he hurried away from Bannington. He had deemed it essential to get a message through to the police—and to Nelson Lee—before anything else was done. It would have been folly to go anywhere near St. Frank's—where, presumably, the enemy's spies were active. That would have been asking for trouble.

Nipper had not taken much risk in slipping into Bannington alone; he knew the position of Inspector Jameson's office window, and he had thrown his stone accurately. He had done so from the dark, shadowy side of the road which the office window overlooked.

Then, without waiting a second, Nipper had slipped away. He went out of Bannington by means of the byways, keeping away from all street lamps.

Soon he was in the open country again, and some distance along a quiet, rural lane he climbed a five-barred gate, got into a meadow, and made his way to a thatched barn which stood there. He tapped on the door and was admitted.

"You've been pretty quick," said Tommy Watson. "Did everything go off all right?"

"As far as I know," replied Nipper. "I threw the stone through the window, but didn't wait. Anyhow, they know we're safe—so they won't worry."

"A waste of time, I call it!" grumbled Handforth. "We might have been doing all sorts of things—"

"But, my dear ass, we had to let them know," said Nipper. "I expect the police were scouring the whole county for us. Well, now they'll stop. Besides, those three men at the prison had to be taken in."

The boys could not see one another in the darkness of the barn's interior. They were all chilled, and one or two of them, indeed, were beginning to waver. Their first excitement was over.

"I'm not denyin' it's a frightfully good idea to defy Zangari an' his blightin' henchmen," said Sir Montie. "But where exactly do we stand, old boy? I mean, what can we do? It's an awkward position—it is, really. We can't sleep in this damp old barn, and

we must have food. It rather seems to me that we've been bitten off more than we can chew."

"That's what I've been thinking, too," said Church, shivering. "Wouldn't it be better for all of us to go straight into Bannington—to the police station? We'd be safe enough there, and they'd give us beds."

"And in the morning we should be packed off to Scotland, or somewhere—anyhow, miles and miles away from here," said Nipper. "That doesn't suit me."

"Me either!" grunted Handforth.

"We were the first to suffer at Zangari's hands, and we're going to be in the game to the bitter end," continued Nipper. "All we need is a stronghold of our own—a place where we can remain in secret, and from which we can sally out, now and again, to take a stab at the enemy."

"That's all," said Tregellis-West. "Perfectly simple."

"Leave it to me," said Handforth. "I'm going to do some thinking. It won't take me long to discover a way. We'd better all think, if it comes to that. Concentrate. One of us is bound to get an idea pretty soon—and I bet it'll be me."

They were all silent for a spell. "Rough on the River House chaps," remarked Nipper, after a while. "Hal Brewster and his pals—"

"Blow the River House chaps!" interrupted Handforth. "How can I think if you keep talking?"

"I was only saying it's rough on them," went on Nipper. "Two of the chaps went to Southampton, or somewhere, for the day, and caught scarlet

fever. Didn't you hear about it? We've had so much excitement at St. Frank's that we've had no time to think about the River House."

"Why, only a couple of days ago Dr. Hogge decided to send the whole giddy school away—into quarantine. The River House is empty now for a bit. They say half the chaps are coming back next week, but just at present there's not a soul there. Only a caretaker, and—"

"Will you be quiet?" broke in Handforth. "Rats to the River House!"

"Only a caretaker there," repeated Nipper.

"What the dickens—?" "Plenty of mattresses at River House—blankets, too," said Nipper. "What about grub, too? I'll bet the store-rooms are packed with all sorts of grub—sides of bacon, sacks of flour, biscuits, tinned stuff, potatoes—"

"By George!" burst out Handforth suddenly. "I've got it, you chaps! I've got an idea!"

"Spill it, brother!" suggested Browne.

"Let's raid the River House!" said Handforth excitedly. "Who's going to stop us? Mattresses—blankets—grub and—"

"Why, you howling ass!" broke in Nipper indignantly. "That's my idea. Haven't I just been telling you? My sons, it's the goods! We know how to get in. We can grab everything we need, and if the caretaker does happen to interrupt us we can gently explain the position to him and send him back to bed. If he isn't reasonable we can lock him in a cupboard or something. What about it?"

"Ods wheezes and stunts!" said Archie

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Cleuthorne. "Strikes me, old cheese, that it's absolutely hot! There's only one point. Where are we going to take the stuff?"

"And how?" put in Browne. "Don't think I'm carping or critical, Brother Nipper, but mattresses and blankets and food for a siege are pretty heavy."

"The River House School is next to the river," explained Nipper patiently. "Being next to the river, there's a nice-looking boathouse. And in the boathouse there are nice-looking boats. All we've got to do is to take two or three of the boats, load them up, and push off. I'll tell you later where we're going. One thing at a time. Let's get our supplies first—sleeping accommodation and food. They're the main things."

"It's coming pretty near to burglary, isn't it?" asked Tommy Watson doubtfully.

"It's a case where the end justifies the means, my son," replied Nipper. "Dr. Hodge will be the first to approve when, later, he knows all the facts. In any case, I'll let the guv'nor know pretty soon, and he'll square things. Don't worry. It's a golden opportunity. It's our chance to remain in the district—and to be safe, too."

"The others were freshly excited. It was lucky indeed for them that the River House School should be empty at such a time. Normally, of course, at this period of the year, it would be full of boys. They had only been sent away because of the scarlet fever scare, and as soon as this passed most of them would come back."

"Come on, let's get busy," said Handforth eagerly.

The programme which Nipper had outlined proved surprisingly simple to

execute. Making their way across country, the "Fighting Eight" had no fear of encountering any of Zangari's spies. It was "Yee" late now, and the night was pitchy black. If any spies were abroad they would be in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's. Even so, Nipper counselled caution. They did not speak as they walked, and in silence they arrived at the empty River-House School.

A window was soon forced, and, once inside, the boys were on familiar ground. They selected Marshall's House for their depredations, and soon they were upstairs in the Fourth Form dormitory, securing eight mattresses, with a pillow and blanket for each. They saw no reason why they should not be comfortable. The spoils were carried out, taken across the grounds to the riverside, and placed in the two boats which had been got ready.

Another journey was then made to Marshall's House, and this time the store-rooms were raided. Flour, baking-powder, biscuits, a whole cheese, a side of bacon, sugar, tea, were then carried out, to say nothing of a case of tinned condensed milk and another case of canned fruit. It necessitated two or three journeys. Frying pans, saucepans, kettles, plates, and cups and saucers and knives and forks were taken, too. There was no telling how long they would be obliged to remain hidden.

At last, with the boats heavily laden, they pushed silently off. The caretaker, fortunately, had not awakened, so there had been no interruption.

In darkness and silence the boats went up the river.

"Why this way?" whispered Tommy

Watson. "We're going towards St. Frank's."

"But where we get to St. Frank's we shall reach Wilfred's Island," replied Nipper, serenely.

"Great Scott! Why didn't I think of it?" gasped Handforth. "Willard's Island—and the Folly! My only sainted aunt! The place is made for us—a fortress in itself!"

"Just what I thought," said Nipper complacently.

On that little island, in the middle of the River Stowe, a man named Willard, many years ago, had built a miniature castle—a place of solid stone, with towers and battlements. A miniature fortress, indeed! The boys had used it on many occasions, and they knew that some of the rooms were comparatively dry. There were great oaken doors, which could be barred from the inside, and at this time of the year, too, scarcely a soul ventured near the island.

The adventurous eight soon arrived, and in silence they discharged the cargo and carried it into their new stronghold. Both boats were then lifted out of the water and concealed in the dense undergrowth.

"Well, here we are, and all we've got to do now is to put everything shoddy," said Nipper. "Not a soul has seen us come here, and there's no reason why anybody should know we are here. We can hold out for a month, if necessary—and if Zangari thinks he can get us again, let him try!"

(Look out for the further thrilling developments in this wonderful serial. Order your GEM early to make certain of reading next week's gripping chapters.)

Merry had shown in his selection of the team.

Needless to say, St. Jim's celebrated the glorious victory loud and long.

There was a really gorgeous feed in Tom Merry's study, to which the senior members of the team came as well as the juniors; but the place of honour was given to Fatty Wynn. And what Fatty Wynn valued even more highly than the place of honour, was an unlimited supply of the best tuck that Danes Taggles' establishment could afford.

The next day, Mannors' photographs were in great demand, and enlargements of them were hung up in dozens of studies as perpetual souvenirs of the great victory Tom Merry & Co. had won as the Wrong Team.

(Next Wednesday: "THE BOY WHO DEFIED HIS FORM!"—another powerful long yarn of the exploits of St. Jim's, telling of the adventures of an untamed new boy. Don't miss it.)

THE WRONG TEAM!

(Continued from page 22.)

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was waving his wrecked topper in the air, careless now whether it was a wreck or not. Mannors, equally enthusiastic, was waving his camera; Kangaroo had snatched a bowler hat off a perfect stranger, and was waving that.

All the St. Jim's team came in for a wild ovation; but Fatty Wynn was the hero of the hour.

Fatty Wynn had saved the match; there was no doubt about that. Fatty Wynn had snatched victory from the jaws of defeat, and his comrades could not make enough of the plump hero.

Fatty Wynn bore his blushing honours thick upon him with becoming modesty. The only remark he had to make was

that he was hungry, and he devoured sandwiches while the other fellows sang his praises; and he gave much more attention to the sandwiches than to the praises.

Vivian shook hands heartily with Tom Merry when the St. Jim's team left.

St. Jim's marched to the railway station in a body, the victorious team in their midst; and the march was like a Roman triumph of old. Eager fellows had whizzed on to St. Jim's on their bikes already, to announce the wonderful victory.

When the victorious eleven arrived at the school, they were carried in on the shoulders of their confederates; and the Head himself met them at the door to congratulate them.

There had been a great deal of criticism of Tom Merry's selection of the team. But criticism was silent now. The only thing that was remarked upon was the wonderful judgment Tom



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