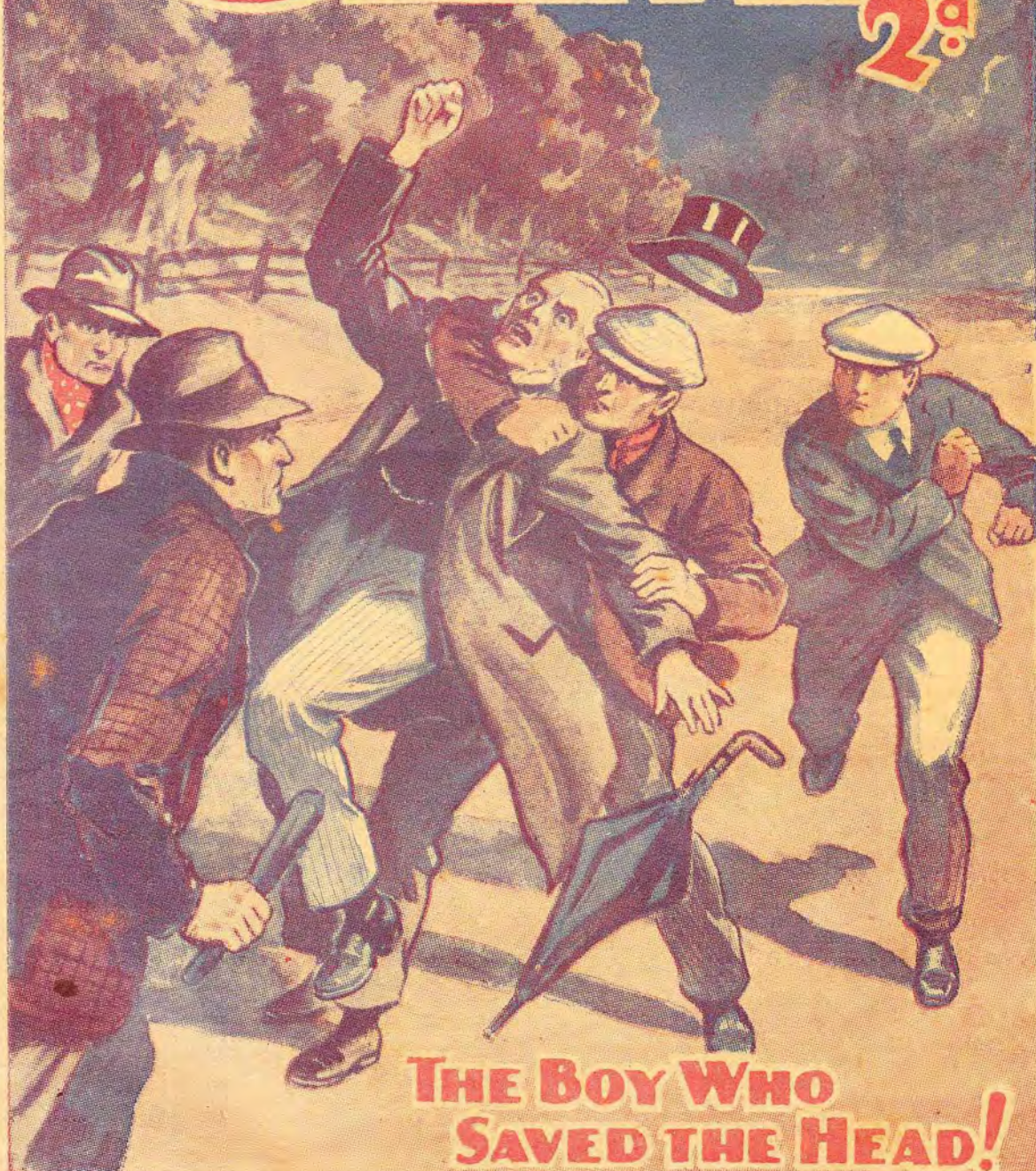


"THE COMING OF THE TOFF!" AND "WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?" Great Yarns of St. Jim's and Greyfriars Inside.

The GEM 2^d



THE BOY WHO
SAVED THE HEAD!

The COMING of the TOFF!



"My—my hat!" muttered Joe Frayne. He stared at Talbot as if he had received a sudden shock. The frying-pan dropped from his hand and crashed to the floor. "Crikey! The Toff!"

CHAPTER 1.

A Kind Invitation!

FRAYNE of the Third put his head in at the doorway of Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage.

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther—were there. They were gathered round the table, deep in discussion, and did not notice young Frayne for the moment.

For it was a very important discussion. It was past tea-time, and the matter under discussion was tea. The Terrible Three had been playing cricket, and they were ready for tea. The trouble was that tea was not ready for them.

They had made the discovery—a discovery not infrequently made in junior studies—that funds were low. There was a loaf upon the table. In a soap-dish was a fragment of butter. And there were three eggs. It was upon the eggs that the attention of the Terrible Three was concentrated.

"Fry 'em with plenty of pepper and salt," said Manners, in a very thoughtful way.

"We've had 'em a week," said Lowther, with equal thoughtfulness. "The question is, how long had they been in the shop before we had 'em?"

"Plenty of pepper and salt," repeated Manners, "and perhaps a little mustard."

"Leave 'em alone!" grunted Tom.

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Merry. "They're only fit for election purposes now."

Manners and Lowther nodded. They could not help feeling that perhaps those eggs were a little too far gone—that even plenty of pepper and salt wouldn't make them quite palatable, even with the addition of a little mustard. But they looked hopelessly at the tea-table.

Frayne of the Third grinned. The Shell fellows had not noticed him yet; the question of the eggs occupied them too much. But the Third Former ventured to break the silence now.

"Master Tom!"

The Terrible Three looked round. Frayne of the Third never could get out of the habit of addressing Tom Merry as "Master Tom." Frayne was a St. Jim's fellow now, on an equal footing with Tom Merry or anybody else; but he couldn't somehow forget that he had been a lonely, ragged little urchin in the London slums not so very long ago, and that Tom Merry had befriended him, and that Tom Merry's uncle paid his fees at the school.

"Hallo, young shaver!" said Monty Lowther. "What do you want?"

"Come in, kid," said Tom kindly.

Frayne of the Third stepped into the study. He was red in the cheeks, and looked rather nervous. He seemed to have come to say something that he found a little difficult to utter.

"Had your tea?" asked Lowther.

"Not yet," said Frayne.

"Then, if you like, you can have those eggs," said Lowther generously. "Take 'em away! No, don't thank me—you're quite welcome!"

Frayne grinned. Having heard the discussion concerning the eggs, he was not exactly overwhelmed by the generous offer.

"Thanks!" he replied. "I didn't come here to borrow." Frayne was getting on nicely in the Third Form. In the classics he was quite as good as his friends, Wally D'Arcy, Jameson, and Curly Gibson, but his English left much still to be desired. It was still, to a large extent, the English of the Angel Alley. "The fact is, Master Tom—"

"Go ahead!" said Tom.

"The fact is, Master Tom, we've got a feed in the Third Form Room," said Frayne, "and if you'd come and bring your pals, we'd be very 'appy!"

Monty Lowther assumed an expression of great severity, and shook an admonitory finger at the fag.

"Joseph," he said—"I think your name's Joseph?"

"My name's Joe," said Frayne.

"Joseph, on a serious occasion like this, I prefer to call you Joseph. Joseph, are you aware that you are talking to gentlemen in the Shell? Not fags in the Third Form—not common or garden members of the Fourth—but the Shell! The members of the Shell go to tea with fags? Joseph, I am surprised at you. I am

—A POWERFUL LONG STORY STARRING TALBOT, THE JUNIOR WITH A SECRET TO HIDE.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

shocked, Joseph, at your want of perception of the fitness of things! Joseph, it is like your cheek to ask us! You might as well ask Kildare of the Sixth, or the Head himself! Oh, Joseph!"

"I know'd you wouldn't come," said Frayne despondently. "I told D'Arcy minor so. But it's a jolly good feed!"

"Joseph," said Monty Lowther, "now you're talking! I put it to the honourable meeting," said Lowther, looking round at his grinning chums. "It is like Frayne's cheek to think that members of the high and mighty Shell would come to tea with fags in the Third! It would be infra dig! The dignity of the Middle School must be considered! But there are occasions when the dignity of the Middle School may be set aside for once, and I suggest to the honourable meeting that this is one of the occasions."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry and Manners.

"Any port in a storm!" added Manners.

"Shush!" said Monty Lowther. "That is a crude way of putting it, Manners. We are going to honour the Third Form with our company on this suspicious occasion—I mean, this auspicious occasion—and we turn our backs on our own festive board—a board groaning with viands—and accept Frayne's invitation. Youth, we will come!"

"Good!" said Frayne eagerly. "It will be orlight, Master Tom—a real bit of orlight. We're going to 'ave a 'igh tea."

"We were going to have a high tea—very high," said Lowther, with a glance at the eggs. "But 'nuff said! Lead on!"

"Oh, 'tain't ready yet!" said Frayne. "I come 'ere to ask you to come. Ready at 'arf-past six sharp in the Form-room."

And Frayne departed, whistling, evidently very glad that Tom Merry was coming to tea in the Third Form Room, but not so overwhelmed by the honour as he might have been.

CHAPTER 2.

Fallen Among Thieves!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's came to a sudden halt.

The most elegant junior at St. Jim's had been proceeding along the lane with his usual elegant saunter, coming home from Rylcombe. He had taken out his famous gold tucker to ascertain the precise time.

The sun gleamed upon that gold tucker, which, as all the juniors in the School House knew, had cost twenty-five guineas, and was a birthday present to the Hon. Arthur Augustus from his revered pater, Lord Eastwood.

"Quartah-past six, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I shall have to hupwy, or I shall be late, and I promised Wally to come to his feed."

The gold gleam of Gussy's famous watch had caught the eyes of three rough-looking characters, who were leaning on the stile in the lane. Arthur Augustus had not observed them, but they had observed Arthur Augustus. And as the swell of St. Jim's put his watch back into his pocket and walked

on, the three rough-looking gentlemen started out into his path, and the junior came to a sudden halt.

He could not walk on without walking into them, so he had to stop. The looks of the three roughs showed that they meant mischief, and Arthur Augustus stepped back a pace or two.

"Pway, what do you mean?" he asked.

The three men exchanged a grin. D'Arcy ran his eye over them. They did not belong to the quiet village of Rylcombe, that was certain. Rough characters sometimes came up the river with the barges, but they did not look quite like river toughs. But they looked decidedly rough and unscrupulous, and Arthur Augustus realised that he was alone, and that the road was a lonely one.

"Wot do we want, Rabbit?" said one of them, with a chuckle.

"Wot do we want, Hookey?" said the gentleman addressed as Rabbit.

And the third man chimed in: "Wot do we want, I wonder?"

"Pway allow me to pass," said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "I have no time to waste."

"Neither 'ave we," remarked Rabbit, who was a gentleman with a prominent nose, very large ears, and a crimson neckcloth. "So we'll trouble you for that there tucker, and also wot loose

No new boy has ever become so popular at St. Jim's as Talbot does in the space of a few hours. But there was one junior who regarded the coming of the new boy with suspicion and alarm. Joe Frayne, the waif of the Third Form, had a very good reason for distrusting Talbot!

change you've got about you—and 'urry up!"

"If you are thinkin' of wobbin' me, you wascals—"

"Robbing you!" said Hookey, in a tone of humorous surprise. "Nothing of the sort, m'lord. Simply a loan, sure as my name's Hookey Walker. Just a loan of a tucker, 'cause we've left our own gold watches at 'ome, on the grand piano. Likewise, a little ready change, 'cause we've mislaid our first-class tickets."

And the other two rascals chuckled in appreciation of Mr. Walker's humour.

"Kim on!" added Rabbit, in a more businesslike tone. "No time to waste. 'And it over!"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort. If you appwoach me any newwah I shall stwike you!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

And he faced the three footpads without a trace of fear. Arthur Augustus might be the swell of St. Jim's, and the glass of fashion in the School House, but he was as brave as a lion, and he never counted odds when his noble blood was up.

"Strike me pink!" said Mr. Walker. "Give 'im a lick with that there tickler, Nobby."

The "tickler" was a thick and knobby stick, which Nobby carried under his arm. He let it slide into his hand, and gave it a flourish. Messrs. Hookey Walker & Co. probably thought that that would be sufficient to

scare the schoolboy; but they did not know Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

There was no help at hand, and Arthur Augustus had no intention of being tamely robbed by the footpads. And as it was to be a fight, he resolved to have the advantage of the attack. He made a sudden rush forward, and his fist flew out straight from the shoulder. The next instant it crashed on the side of Hookey Walker's bullet head, and he reeled aside with a yell of pain.

Arthur Augustus rushed on and fled towards the distant school.

Hookey Walker sat down in the road, swearing, and holding his head in both hands.

"Arter him!" he shrieked. "Arter him, you block'eads! Don't let 'im git away!"

Rabbit and Nobby, thus admonished, dashed in pursuit, and Hookey Walker scrambled to his feet, still holding his damaged head, and lumbered after them.

Arthur Augustus ran like the wind, but in a couple of minutes Rabbit's hand was on his shoulder, and he was swung back. He hit out, even as he was swung round, and Rabbit gave a howl of anguish as a hard fist crashed on his jaw. He let go, but at the same moment Arthur Augustus was clutched over by Nobby, and rolled in the dust of the road with him. He struggled desperately with Nobby, but in a second more Rabbit was sprawling over him and he was pinned down.

"Got him!" exclaimed Mr. Walker, coming up panting. "Now 'old him while I get a lick at him, and I'll teach 'im to crack a gentleman's 'ead for 'im!"

"Bai Jove! You beastly wufians!" gasped Arthur Augustus, still struggling.

"'Old 'im!"

Rabbit and Nobby were holding the swell of St. Jim's, and Hookey Walker bent over him with a heavy fist upraised.

But that cowardly blow was never struck.

There was a sound of hurried footsteps in the lane, and Hookey Walker received a stinging blow on the side of the head that sent him spinning.

He rolled in the road, panting and swearing, and the other two rascals let go D'Arcy as if he had suddenly become red-hot.

"The Toff!"

That sudden exclamation broke from both of them at once, and they backed away. And Hookey Walker, sitting up again, showed no desire to come to close quarters with the newcomer.

Arthur Augustus looked at him breathlessly. He was a youth of about D'Arcy's own age, well-dressed, with a cigarette between his lips. His form was athletic; his face very handsome, with clear-cut features and dark eyes. The handsome face was almost convulsed with anger now. The three footpads shrank away in evident fear. And Arthur Augustus, seeing it, could not help noticing it, and wondering, in spite of the state of confusion he was in. It was amazing to see three powerful ruffians in open fear of a lad of his own age.

"You fools! You brutes!"

"We wasn't doing any 'arm, Toff"—began Hookey Walker apologetically.

"Only going through the young swell, sorter filling up time," murmured Rabbit. "He's got a gold tucker—"

"Clear off! Do you hear?"

"Oh, I sye——"

"Do you want me to start on you?" asked the boy, and he made a motion towards the three cowed-looking ruffians.

What followed seemed miraculous to Arthur Augustus. The three footpads, with one accord, ran as if for their lives. In a few moments a bend of the lane hid them from sight, and their footfalls died away.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

The newcomer gave him a hand to rise.

"Not hurt?" he asked cheerfully.

"Thank you—no! Thank you vewy much for comin' to my wescue like that! They were goin' to wob me, the wascals!"

"Lucky I came along," said the youth casually. "Here, let me brush you down! You're smothered with dust."

He began to dust Arthur Augustus down as he spoke, D'Arcy gasping the while.

"I'm awfully obliged to you, deah boy!"

"Oh, don't mensh!"

"But it is weally vewy wemarkable that those wulfians should wun away from you like that," said D'Arcy, in amazement. "I suppose you are not a boxah, by any chance?"

The newcomer laughed.

"Oh, they didn't want to tackle the two of us, that's all," he said.

"You don't know them?"

"Know them?" said his new friend. "How should I know them? They are tramps, I suppose."

"Oh, they looked as if they knew you! They called you somethin'——"

"Never seen them before," said the newcomer. "There, now you're all right. Do you live far from here?"

"I belong to St. Jim's."

"St. Jim's! What's that—a school?" Arthur Augustus looked at him in surprise. It had not occurred to him that there existed anyone who had not heard of St. Jim's.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm in the Fourth Form," he said. "My name's D'Arcy."

"Mine's Talbot. Glad to have met you!" said the rescuer affably.

And they shook hands before D'Arcy started for St. Jim's again.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as he strode away towards the school. "That chap can hit. But it is vewy wemarkable that those wottahs should have wun away from him like that! I thought they knew him, by the way they spoke; but, as he says he's nevah seen them before, it's imposs, of course. He's a vewy decent chap, and it was vewy lucky he came along just then. I should have been wobbed, bai Jove! I trust I shall meet that chap again."

Arthur Augustus was to meet that chap again sooner than he could possibly have anticipated.

CHAPTER 3.

No Birthday Celebration!

"Gussy, by Jove! Been dust collecting?"

The Terrible Three of the Shell were adorning the old gateway of St. Jim's with their persons as Arthur Augustus came in.

They looked at him with smiles. His new acquaintance had dusted him down, but his clothes still showed many traces of that struggle in the dusty road.

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"Been trying conclusions with a motor-car at close quarters?" asked Tom Merry.

"Wats! I've neahly been wobbed!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Great Scott!"

"Yaas. Thwee wotten footpads set on to me, and if a chap hadn't come along and helped, they would have wobbed me!" said Arthur Augustus. "I don't know whethah I'd bettah tell Mr. Wailton, and let him telephone to the police station. They may wob somebody else."

"Poor old Gussy!" said Lowther. "This is what comes of carrying a commercial traveller's outfit of jewellery about you."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Who was it helped you?" asked Tom Merry. "A St. Jim's chap?"

"No; a stwangah. Nevah seen him before. Chap named Talbot. Vewy decent chap. Pewwaps I had bettah weport the mattah to Mr. Wailton. I should be able to identify those thwee soundwels!"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, though—the feed's due now."

Lowther looked at his watch.

"Half-past," he said.

"I'm hungry," said Manners.

"Better be a bit late," said Lowther.

"Can't appear keen after a fag's feed. Are you going to the festive-board in the Third, Gussy?"

"Yaas. I've pwomised Wally to look in," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I must weport this mattah to Mr. Wailton first."

And the juniors walked to the School House together. Arthur Augustus tapped at the Housemaster's door and entered. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, heard his description of his adventures in the lane.

"Quite right to tell me," said the Housemaster, with a nod. "I will telephone to the police station at once. Can you give me a description of the men?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus gave the description, adding the peculiar names by which they had called one another, and Mr. Railton took up the receiver at once.

"That will do, D'Arcy," he said, when he put it down again. "If the men are found, you will be required to identify them."

"Yaas, sir."

Arthur Augustus left the study and joined the Terrible Three in the passage. Blake, Herries, and Digby, D'Arcy's study-mates in No. 6, were also there waiting for him. They looked him over curiously.

"So you've been looking for trouble and finding it, as usual," Blake remarked.

"I found it without lookin' for it, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus ruefully. "And I should have been wobbed if a fellow hadn't chipped in like a wewulah bwick. I trust those thwee wascals will be awwested."

Blake looked thoughtful.

"The Head's at the vicarage," he remarked. "He will be coming home down the lane alone after dark. I wonder——"

"Oh, that's all wight—those wottahs cleahed off at top speed," said Arthur Augustus, "and the police will be lookin' for them, too."

"Railton can look after that," said Manners. "Let's get along to the Third Form Room. I'm hungry."

It was quite a little party that arrived at the door of the Form-room. The Third, having no studies of their own like the higher Forms, usually used the

Form-room for their little celebrations. They had the room to themselves until Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, came in at half-past seven to take them in evening preparation. By that time all traces of their little celebrations had to be cleared away.

Mr. Selby was a very peculiar gentleman, and he had been known to become extremely "ratty" on finding the tail of a herring on the Form-room floor, or a patch of jam on the lid of his desk. Indeed, he did not approve of feeds in the Form-room at all, and he was not blessed with sufficient tact to be blind to matters which were better for him not to notice.

There was a festive scene in the Third Form Room when Tom Merry & Co. arrived. The evening was quite warm, but a big fire blazed in the grate. A luscious smell of cooking fish pervaded the Form-room.

Frayne, with a frying-pan, was frying bloaters. Wally—the younger brother of the great Arthur Augustus—was cutting bread, and Jameson was making toast with it almost as fast as he cut it. Curly Gibson was opening a large pot of jam. Several other fags were busily employed in preparations for the feed. There was a large pile of plates on a chair, and any number of knives and forks, and a considerable quantity of crockery of all sorts of patterns. The Third were evidently doing things in unaccustomed style.

"Oh, here they are!" said Wally, looking round. "Walk right in. Glad to see you. Try to be young again for once, you old fogies!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"This is Frayne's birthday party," said Wally. "We are honouring him in style, I can tell you. We've got twelve bloaters."

"A regular feast of bloated aristocracy," remarked Monty Lowther. "I don't suppose there are many dukes, though, who have twelve bloaters at once."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Wally. "Keep that for the 'Weekly.' Squat down, if you can find anything to squat on. Buck up with that toast, Jimmy! Open the other pot of jam, Curly. We don't have a birthday feed every day."

"Frayne's birthday, is it?" said Tom Merry, a little puzzled. Frayne of the Third was not quite certain which year he had been born in, and certainly he was quite in the dark as to the month or the day.

Wally grinned.

"You see, we think it's time Frayne had a birthday," he explained. "We've all had birthdays excepting Frayne, and as we're in funds to-day, we decided to let Joe have a birthday, too. It's only fair."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, that is wathah a good ideah," said Arthur Augustus. "Congwats, Fwayne, deah boy. Many happy weturns of the day!"

"Many happy returns, Frayne!" chorused the visitors.

"Thank you," said Joe Frayne, grinning. "Very kind of you to come to my birthday, gentlemen. Which I 'ope——"

"You're burning those bloaters, you ass!" roared Wally.

Certainly a powerful smell of burning as well as of cooking pervaded the Form-room. The strong scent probably penetrated into the passage, the door having unfortunately been left open.

A thin and cross-looking gentleman passing down the passage stopped to sniff, and sniffed again.

"Shut the door," said Wally. "If old Selby should come along——"

The words froze on Wally's lips.

A cross and frowning face looked in at the open doorway, just as Blake was about to close the door. It was the face of Wally's Form-master, whom he had just alluded to.

"Oh!" murmured Wally.

Mr. Selby advanced into the room, sniffing. He had a long, thin, prominent nose, which seemed specially designed by Nature for the purpose of sniffing.

"Disgusting!" said Mr. Selby.

The fags looked glum. The visitors stood silent.

"And that," went on Mr. Selby—"that is how you allude to your Form-master in his absence, D'Arcy minor."

"I—I didn't know you were listening, sir," faltered Wally. It was rather an unfortunate way of putting it, as he realised too late.

"What!" thundered Mr. Selby.

"I—I mean, sir—I mean—"

"Disgusting! The whole room is pervaded with the smell of that—that revolting mass of fish! Take it off the fire at once!"

Frayne, looking decidedly gloomy, took the frying-pan off the fire. It was pretty certain now that the birthday celebration would not be a success.

"Take it away!" said Mr. Selby, with a wave of the hand. "Take the disgusting thing away. I forbid this—this gorging in the Form-room. Take all those things away, and dispose of them. D'Arcy minor, I shall cane you for your insolent reference to myself."

Swish, swish!

"And you!" said Mr. Selby, laying down his cane and staring angrily at Tom Merry & Co. "I am surprised to see boys of a higher Form encouraging these habits of gluttony in the Third Form. I am surprised at you—or, rather, I am not surprised, considering that you are the most unruly boys in this House."

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"What—what did you say, Lowther?"

"I begged you to continue, sir," said Lowther, with an air of great respect. "It is always a pleasure, sir, to hear you."

"If you were in my Form, Lowther, I should cane you," said Mr. Selby, his lips white with suppressed wrath.

"You are so kind, sir!" murmured Lowther.

"As it is, I shall report you to your Form-master for insolence! Now leave this room at once, and remember that I forbid you to take part—here, at all events—in these revolting orgies!"

"These what, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

"Orgies!" thundered Mr. Selby.

He raised his hand and pointed to the door. The juniors' eyes were gleaming; they would have given anything to "bump" Mr. Selby on the floor of his own Form-room. But that was evidently out of the question.

The Fourth Formers and Shell fellows moved to the door, with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus stood his ground. He had some expostulations to make, and he meant to make them.

"Pway allow me to wemark, Mr. Selby—"

"Leave this room!"

"I shall have gweat pleasuah in leavin' this woom, sir, when I have wemarked—"

"Go!"

"That you have no wight to intewwupt a birthday celebration that is bein' cawwied out in perfect ordah. In the cires, I wemark your intahfurence as tywannahical!"



"Shut the door," said Wally. "If old Selby should come along—" The words froze on Wally's lips. A cross and frowning face looked in at the open doorway. It was Mr. Selby, the Third Form master, himself!

"Boy!"

"Pway allow me, sir, to appeal to your bettah feelings. Would it not be more graceful, in the cires, to wetiah and allow us—"

Mr. Selby made a stride towards the swell of the Fourth.

Jack Blake dragged him out of the Form-room just in time, or the angry master would certainly have boxed his aristocratic ears.

Blake rushed him down the passage.

"I weally wish you wouldn't hawwy me away like this, Blake!" D'Arcy gasped. "I was only explainin' to Mr. Selby—"

"Come on, you ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I considah— Pway don't hawwy me so! You are thwowing me into quite a fluttah!"

But the juniors did not halt until they were a safe distance from the Form-room.

"And now what about tea?" said Monty Lowther lugubriously. "This is what comes of going to tea with blessed fags!"

"I'm hungry!" said Manners pathetically.

"And there's nothing in our study!" said Tom Merry.

"And not much in ours!" said Herries.

"Hallo! Here's Wally!"

Wally came up with a gleaming eye. "Feed's off!" he announced. "We've got an hour's extra prep. What do you think of that?"

"Wotten!"

"Beastly!"

"Hard cheese!"

"Frayne's going to have his birthday to-night," said Wally savagely. "You fellows will come, won't you? The feed won't be any the worse for keepin'. We'll have it in the box-room. Old

Selby can't chip in there. After prep to-night in the box-room. Ta-ta!"

And Wally walked back to the Form-room.

"Bang goes our feed!" growled Lowther. "Two blessed hours and a half! Groogh!"

"Rotten!"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "I move that it's up to us to make Selby sorry he has chipped in and reduced innocent and inoffensive youths to a state of famine! I move that it is up to us to stand up for the rights and liberties of the Third Form. As seniors—"

"Seniahs, deah boy?"

"Seniors in comparison with the fags," explained Tom Merry. "As seniors, comparatively speaking, it's our duty to protect the fags against tyranny. In other words, to make that miserable, bad-tempered, interfering boulder sorry he chipped in! Hands up in favour of the resolution."

"All hands on deck!" said Lowther.

All hands went up. The resolution was passed unanimously. And while Mr. Selby was busy with the Third Form, inflicting upon those unfortunate youths the extra hour of preparation, Tom Merry & Co. were scheming plots for the special benefit of the most unpopular master of St. Jim's. And it was seldom that Tom Merry & Co. put their heads together without something coming of it.

CHAPTER 4.

To the Rescue!

"STOP!" Dr. Holmes stopped in astonishment;

It was dark in Rylcombe Lane, only a faint gleam of starlight. THE CEM LIBRARY—No. 1,489.

coming down between the big, overhanging trees.

The Head of St. Jim's had left the vicarage late, and was walking back to the school, thinking of anything but footpads or danger.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed.

Three shadowy figures loomed up in the gloom. The Head could not see them very clearly, but he could distinguish that they were very roughly dressed, and that they had cudgels in their hands. As a single umbrella was not of much use opposed to three cudgels, the Head realised that he was at the mercy of the three footpads, as he concluded at once they were.

"And over yer cash, old codger!" said the hoarse voice. "Collar 'im, Rabbit!"

A sinewy arm was thrown round Dr. Holmes' neck, and he was held firmly.

"I warn you that you will suffer for this outrage!" the Head said, as calmly as he could.

"Old 'im, Rabbit! Now go through 'is pockets! Sharp's the word!"

"Old on! I kin 'ear somebody comin'!" muttered one of the ruffians.

"Rot! There ain't nobody 'ere!"

"Help!" cried the Head, who had also heard the footsteps in the dark lane.

The footsteps hurried, and a youthful figure appeared in the gloom.

It was the figure of a boy—as young as the boys in the junior Forms at St. Jim's, but he did not hesitate for a moment. He ran right at the three footpads.

Rabbit dragged the Head down and planted a knee upon him.

Dr. Holmes struggled, but his struggles were quite useless.

As he lay pinned down under the ruffian, he heard a sound of blows and struggling, and a boyish voice shouting: "Here they are! Come on!"

Then a sound of footsteps in rapid flight.

"Come on, Rabbit!"

The ruffian who was kneeling on the Head jumped up, and followed his comrades down the dark road.

Dr. Holmes sat up in amazement.

A boyish figure stood over him and gave him a hand to rise.

"Are you hurt, sir?"

"N-no!" gasped the Head. "I—I am very much shaken, but I am not hurt. You—you are not alone?"

"Yes, sir. Better get moving, in case they come back."

"But I heard you call out—"

"That was to make them think that I wasn't alone, sir," he explained. "If they'd known they had only a kid to deal with they wouldn't have run."

"Oh! I—I understand. That shows great presence of mind, my lad," said the Head, struggling to his feet with the boy's assistance—"great presence of mind and great courage to come to my aid like that."

The boy appeared to listen.

"They've stopped runnin', sir," he said. "Better clear before they come back."

"Certainly! Come with me, my boy; it is not safe for you to be on this road alone," said the Head.

"Very well, sir."

They hurried in the direction of St. Jim's. The boy listened again.

"It's all right," he said. "They're not following us. Hallo! Who's this?"

A tall form came running through the shadows from the direction of the school.

"Mr. Railton!" exclaimed the Head.

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The Housemaster stopped.

"I heard you call," he said. "I trust you are not hurt, sir."

"Not at all, thanks to this brave lad who came to my assistance," said Dr. Holmes. "But how came you—"

"I was coming to meet you, sir," the Housemaster explained. "D'Arcy of the Fourth was attacked by footpads in the lane, and he reported the matter to me; so, as you were coming home alone, I thought it best—"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Railton. Fortunately, I have received no hurt, but I should certainly have been robbed but for this boy." The Head peered at the lad in the darkness, and could barely make out the handsome face. "Do you live far from here, my lad? You cannot go home alone."

The boy was silent.

"Come, my lad!" said Mr. Railton. "I will walk home with you. It will not be safe for you to go home alone with those scoundrels hanging about."

"I—I have no home, sir," faltered the boy.

"What?"

The two masters looked at him more closely. He was evidently well dressed; they could see that much in the gloom. He was certainly not a street-arab, and his statement that he had no home took them by surprise.

"Do you mean to say that you have nowhere to go to-night?" asked Mr. Railton.

"That is the case, sir."

"Then you will come to the school with me," said Dr. Holmes.

The lad drew back.

"Thank you, sir! But I am not asking for charity," he said. "I answered your question because I could not avoid it. But I am not a beggar. I shall shift somehow."

"Come, come!" said the Head kindly.

"After what you have done I should be ungrateful indeed if I abandoned you. You will certainly come to St. Jim's—for the night, at least. If your circumstances are as you state you must be in need of a friend."

"Goodness knows I am!" said the boy, with a sigh.

"Then I shall be your friend," said Dr. Holmes. "Come! You must explain to me how you happen to be in this strange situation. And for to-night, at least, you must remain with us."

The lad made no further demur. When Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton entered the School House at St. Jim's the strange lad was with them. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was talking to Reilly in the Hall. He broke off as the two masters entered with their companion.

"Gwreat Scott!" he exclaimed. "You, dear boy!"

"You know this lad, D'Arcy?" asked the Head, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! That's Talbot, the kid who chipped in when those wascals were twyin' to wob me in the lane," said Arthur Augustus.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head.

Mr. Railton did not speak. His eyes were fastened upon Talbot. Perhaps it struck him as strange, to say the least, that the unknown lad should have been on the spot, ready to come to the rescue, on both occasions when the footpads had attempted a robbery. But if Mr. Railton pondered upon the peculiarity of that circumstance, not so the Head.

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes. "Then this is the second time, my lad, that you have acted with so much courage. Please come into my study, Mr. Railton, come with us, please!"

Talbot followed the Head to his study.

CHAPTER 5.

A Strange Story!

TALBOT sat down in the Head's study. Dr. Holmes had seated himself. Mr. Railton remained standing, his elbow on the mantelpiece, and his eyes on the boy's face.

It was not suspicion that was in the Housemaster's scrutinising glance; but certainly his look was very curious and very penetrating. It was evident that he did not know what to make of Talbot. But the boy seemed quite unaware of his scrutiny.

Talbot was certainly pleasing to look at. He was undeniably handsome, and his well-cut face had an open and frank expression. He was quite expensively clad, and certainly from his appearance no one would have guessed that he was a boy without a home. He would have passed quite easily among a crowd of St. Jim's fellows.

"Now, my lad, you must tell us something about yourself," said Dr. Holmes, with his benevolent smile. "Your statement was surprising—very surprising indeed. I should certainly not have guessed that you were in the situation you describe. Yet you tell me that you have no home?"

"It is true, sir."

"Your parents—"

"I have none, sir."

"But your guardian, then—your natural protectors—"

"I have no friends in this country, sir."

"You come from abroad?" asked the Head. "But you are English?"

Talbot smiled.

"Yes, sir. If you care to know about me I will tell you. It is not much. Indeed, I should be very glad of your advice, if you cared to give it to me. I don't think a boy of my age ever found himself in such a queer position before. I've always had plenty of money, but it is true that I have no home now, and no one to look after me."

"But it has not always been so?" said the Head, in wonder.

"Oh, no! I do not remember my parents, but my uncle took me with him to Australia when I was quite a nipper, sir. I have lived there ever since, until we came to England again last month."

"And your uncle?"

"I do not know what has become of him, sir."

"Bless my soul! You do not mean to say that he has abandoned you in a strange country?" the Head exclaimed in a shocked tone.

"I will tell you what happened. We landed at Southampton, and came on to a place called Luxford, in Sussex. There we stayed at an hotel. Before we left Australia I had reason to think that my uncle was in altered circumstances. I think he had lost money in some land speculation; but he never said a word to me about his affairs. As a matter of fact, he never cared much about me, and only looked after me because I had no one else to look to. But he did his duty to me, though he was not kind. We stayed some time at Luxford—I understood because my uncle had some connections in Sussex, and I think perhaps he intended to ask them for some assistance. He was often absent for several days at a time, and I was left in the hotel by myself."

"What hotel was it?" asked Mr. Railton.

"The Luxford Arms, sir. The landlord's name was Bowker. One day, when my uncle left me, he did not come back at all. I expected, as usual, he would come after a few days, but he

did not. On the fourth day I had a letter from him. He told me that he was quite penniless now, and that I was old enough to look after myself. It was not so much a shock to me as it might have been. Something in his manner had made me uneasy for some time. But that was the finish. He paid the hotel bill by post, and I was left to look after myself. I had five pounds in my pocket, and my trunk of clothes and things. I did not know what to do."

"My poor lad!" said Dr. Holmes softly. "It was a shocking situation—for one so young, too! And what did you do?"

"I stayed on a couple of days longer at the hotel, trying to think it out, sir," said Talbot. "Then I decided to return to Southampton, and get back to Australia, if I could. I hadn't enough money to pay my fare, but I thought I might be able to work my passage out. I thought I would tramp it to Southampton, to save money, and that's how I came here. I stopped to rest to-day at Rylcombe, and I was looking about for a barn to sleep in, when I came on you, sir, and those rascals."

"You know of no relations in England to whom you could have gone?" asked Mr. Railton.

"None, sir!"

"Where did you live before you went to Australia?"

"I cannot remember the place. I was too young when I left," said Talbot. "But I have always understood that it was in Yorkshire. I may have relations there—I do not know. But my uncle has never spoken of them."

"You have your uncle's letter?"

"Yes, sir."

Talbot felt in an inside pocket, and drew out a crumpled letter, which he passed to the Head.

"You wish me to read this?" asked the Head.

"Certainly, sir."

The two masters read the letter. It was brief:

"My Dear Reginald,—I am sorry to have to write this, but I think you must be expecting something of the sort by this time. I have come to the end of my tether. I can do nothing more for you; but you are of age now to look out for yourself. I have given you a good education, at least. I was younger than you when I started in life. If my affairs come round, you will hear from me again, otherwise not. I wish you good luck."

"Your affectionate uncle,

"JAMES TALBOT."

"I am afraid that is a most unfeeling letter," said the Head, passing it back to Talbot. "Your position, then, is that you have no home, and only a little money between you and destitution?"

"I can work, sir!"

"What can you do?"

"I can find something to do if I can get back to Australia. I shall have to give up the idea of finishing my education, I suppose. Beggars can't be choosers!"

"That is very hard."

Talbot was silent.

"You have no friends," said the Head gently. "You are in a very unfortunate situation, Talbot, and you must allow me to be your friend."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

"You have done me a very great service to-night," said Dr. Holmes. "I should certainly have been robbed, and probably injured by those ruffians. I hope to show my gratitude by something



more than mere words. For to-night, at least, you must stay here; to-morrow we will consult what is best to be done."

"If—if you really wish to help me, sir—I mean—forgive me; of course you wish to, as you have said so," said Talbot. "I mean, there is something—you are a master in this school, I think?"

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"I am headmaster," he said.

"Then you could do as I wish—if you liked. I am not exactly a pauper, sir. I have very little money, but I have some very expensive presents that my uncle gave me when he was well off. I don't know what they are worth, but I think they would fetch a good deal of money—a gold watch, and cuff-links and studs, and things like that. They might bring enough to pay my fees for some terms here—if you would let me stay as a pupil."

"As a pupil?"

"Yes, sir. If I could only finish my education, I shouldn't mind facing the world after that; I should be prepared for it. And—and I think that, if my things were sold by someone who understood their value, they would bring enough to pay my expenses, perhaps for a year or two—unless this school is very expensive."

"My dear boy," said the Head very kindly. "I cannot say how much I commend your ambition. I will certainly think over what you have said, and I hope we shall be able to arrange the matter as you wish. But we will talk it over further to-morrow. Now, are you hungry?"

Talbot smiled.

"Very, sir!"

"Then I will ask my housekeeper to look after you at present, and to prepare a room for you in my own house. As for your things—"

"I left my trunk at the hotel in Luxford. The landlord was going to send it on by railway when I should send him an address from Southampton."

"Very well; that can be seen to to-morrow. For to-night my housekeeper will provide you with what you need."

The Head touched the bell.

Toby, the page, was sent to summon Mrs. Mimms; and when that good soul

appeared, the Head explained the matter to her, and left Talbot in her charge.

"You are very kind, sir," Talbot faltered as he was leaving the study.

"I hope you will find me always kind, my boy. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

Talbot followed Mrs. Mimms, and the door closed behind him. The Head glanced at Mr. Railton, who was looking very thoughtful.

"A very sad case, Mr. Railton," said the Head.

"Very, sir!"

"I like the boy's face."

"He is certainly very good-looking."

The Head looked at him quickly.

"You do not doubt the story he has told us, Mr. Railton?" he asked, the idea entering his benevolent mind for the first time.

"No, sir," said the Housemaster, after quite a long pause. "But, at the same time, before he is admitted to the school, I should think that the strictest investigation would be advisable."

"I—I suppose so," said the Head.

"If you like, sir, I will go to Luxford to-morrow and see about his trunk. I shall soon ascertain if that part of the story is correct."

"I shall be much obliged to you, Mr. Railton, if you will. Though I cannot doubt the boy for a moment—especially after the courage he has shown, I am sure it will prove that every word he has told us is the exact truth."

"I am sure I hope so, sir."

But Mr. Railton's face was clouded with thought as he left the Head's study. What reason had he for doubting Talbot? The coincidence of his having been twice on the scene to come to the rescue, surely that was little! The strangeness of the story he had told: stranger stories had been true. Mr. Railton felt that he was unjust, and he strove to banish the lingering doubt from his mind. Yet it persisted in lingering.

CHAPTER 6.

The Wrong Customer!

"STEADY on! Quiet!"

"Yaas, pway keep quiet, deah boys! Don't talk!"

"Shurrup!"

"And don't make those ridiculous noises, Lowthah. If Mr. Selby hears us there will certainly be a wow."

"Are you going to leave off jawing, Gussy?" asked Jack Blake, in a low tone of concentrated ferocity.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Put the blanket over his head and muffle him!" said Tom Merry.

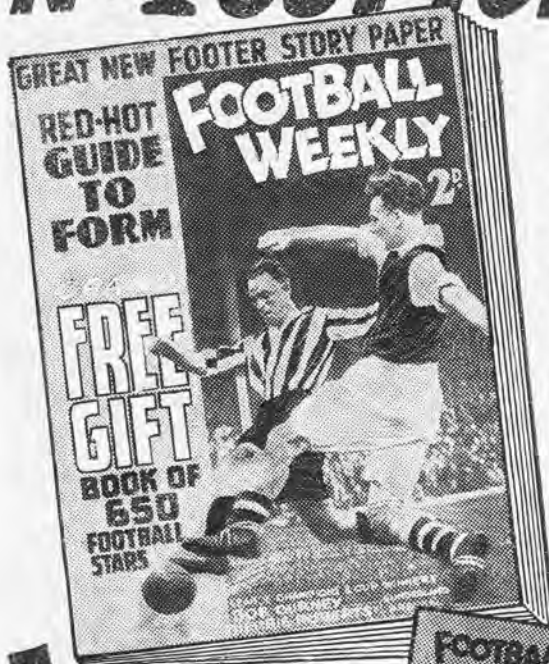
"I wefuse to be muffled. And I insist upon your keeping quiet. Don't you see that old Selby may spot us if there's any talkin'?"

Arthur Augustus had the last word. His chums breathed hard, but did not answer. To slay Arthur Augustus would have been to betray themselves. And it was necessary just then for the chums of the School House to understand Brer Fox and lie very low.

The scheme had been schemed, and the plot had ripened, as the novelist would say. Tom Merry & Co. were in ambush.

They were after vengeance. Mr. Selby's cup of iniquity had overflowed. Not only had the ill-tempered master stopped the feed in the Third Form Room, and reduced the guests to a state of famine; not only had he confiscated a great part of the eatables, thereby rendering the renewal of the

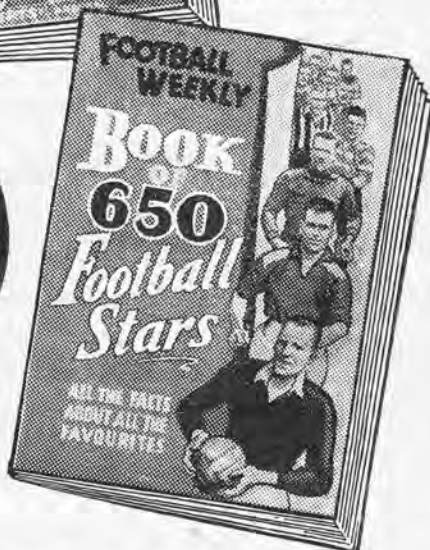
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birthday celebration a matter of doubt; not only had he caned Wally, and given the whole Third Form an extra hour's preparation; he had reported Tom Merry & Co. to their respective Form-masters.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, had given Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy a hundred lines each for impertinence to the Third Form master, though, as a matter of fact, only D'Arcy had spoken to him. But Mr. Lathom felt bound to accept Mr. Selby's assurance that they had been impertinent.

And Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, who was much severer in his methods than the Fourth Form master, had come down still more heavily upon the Terrible Three. He had given Tom Merry and Manners two hundred lines of Virgil each, and caned Monty Lowther—six cuts for his humorous remarks to Mr. Selby.

And all because the juniors, in the kindness of their hearts, had consented to grace a fag feed with their presence.

It was the limit—in fact, past the limit. So the juniors had made up their minds to bump Mr. Selby, and they took their measures with great precaution. It was a serious matter, and if they had not been in such a state of exasperation the juniors would hardly have thought of going so far. But now they were exasperated, and they did think of it.

Their plans were well laid. After finishing preparation in the Third Form Room, Mr. Selby would come up to his own room. Mr. Selby's room was at the end of the passage; that passage ended in a big window. There was only one room beyond Mr. Selby's—an extra bedroom, which was unoccupied. When there were guests in the House the room was used. But there were no guests just now that the juniors knew of. Therefore, only Mr. Selby would be coming along that part of the passage, and it was safe to turn the light out there, and lie in wait for him in the darkness.

At the end of the passage where they were ambushed the darkness was intense. They could not see one another, except as dim shadows. Tom Merry held the blanket. That blanket was to be thrown over Mr. Selby's head, and then he was to be bumped. Then there was to be rapid flight.

Before the Form-master recovered from his astonishment the delinquents would be in their studies, hard at work on their preparation, and looking quite innocent.

It was a wild and reckless scheme, but the juniors were so exasperated by the tyranny of the Third Form master that they did not stop to think.

They waited. It was time now for Mr. Selby to appear if he came up directly the Third Form preparation was over.

There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs.

"Hush!" Tom Merry whispered.

"Shut up, deah boys!"

Footsteps in the dark passage! Someone had come up the stairs and stopped on the landing. The light on the landing had been turned out, so he could not be seen. If it were Mr. Selby, he would come towards his own room, of course, and walk right into the trap.

The ambushed juniors waited breathlessly. The pause of the footsteps was only for a moment or two. Then they came on again down the dark passage, directly towards the seven juniors who were hidden in the gloom.

Their hearts beat harder as the footsteps approached. Perhaps, now the crisis had come, they realised the seriousness of the jape on so august a

person as a Form-master. But it was too late to back out now. They waited—two or three of them holding the blanket ready.

A moving form came along the middle of the passage. The victim had walked into the trap. The juniors could see only a moving figure dimly, but it was enough. In a twinkling the blanket was thrown over the top of the shadow, and a struggling form was borne to the floor.

There was a sound of wild gasping under the blanket. The juniors did not heed it. They collared the wriggling form and raised it, and bumped it down on the linoleum.

Bump, bump!

"Yar-ar-ar-ah!" came in muffled tones from beneath the enveloping blanket.

"Wun, deah boys!" panted D'Arcy. "Don't speak, or the beast will recognise your voices! Wun like anything!"

"Shut up, you idiot!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom snatched the blanket from the struggling figure and ran, and the juniors pelted down the passage after him.

A dim, wriggling form was left on the floor, gasping and panting.

Down the dark passage they went at top speed, leaving the wriggling form behind. They were just passing the landing when the light was suddenly switched on. They halted just in time to avoid a collision with a thin, acid-looking gentleman, who had just come upstairs, and stopped to put on the light.

In the light they recognised him.

"Great Scott, it's Selby!"

"Then who—"

Mr. Selby fixed cold, basilisk eyes upon the startled juniors. They stood panting, gazing at him open-eyed and open-mouthed. It was Mr. Selby, the master of the Third. Then who was it they had left in the dark passage, wriggling and gasping on the floor?

CHAPTER 7.

A Real Brick

MR. SELBY eyed the juniors grimly.

"You again!" he said, in acid tones. "Perhaps you will kindly explain what you are rushing about the passages in the dark for?"

Silence.

"Did you turn this light out?"

Silence.

"What trick have you been playing here?" asked Mr. Selby. "I suspected something when I saw that the light was out. You are the most unruly boys in the House. I demand to know why you have turned the lights out in this passage, and what you have been doing?"

Gasp, gasp! came from the dark passage, near the Form-master's room. Mr. Selby started.

"Who is there?" he called out.

"It is I, sir!" said a boyish voice.

"I do not know your voice. Come here!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus in dismay. "We've bagged the w'ong chap! It's a kid!"

"Shurup!" murmured Blake.

A handsome lad came down the dark passage and paused in the light. He looked in some disorder, and was very red and ruffled. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon him, and uttered an ejaculation.

"Talbot, by Jove!"

Mr. Selby fixed his eyes upon the newcomer.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"My name is Talbot, sir," gasped the stranger. He had not yet recovered from his severe handling.

"What are you—a new boy? I have not seen you before."

"I am a guest of Dr. Holmes, sir. I was going to my room—the room at the end of this passage," Talbot explained.

Mr. Selby scanned the boy.

"I presume that these boys have been playing some trick upon you," he said. "Is that it?"

Talbot hesitated. He looked at Tom Merry & Co. and understood that they had japed him, though why he did not understand. But he did not want to get them into trouble with this ill-tempered-looking master.

"Oh, it's nothing, sir!" he said cheerfully. "I don't mind. I can take a little joke."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Selby harshly.



Barber: "This man wants a shave."

New Assistant: "Let me practice on him."

Barber: "Well, be careful you don't cut yourself!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Wright, 45, Wells Road, Wolverhampton.

"Merry, what have you been doing with that blanket?"

"This—this blanket, sir?" stammered Tom Merry.

"Yes. Answer me at once!"

"I—I chucked it over Talbot, sir."

"And why?"

"It was a—a jape, sir," stammered Tom.

"What?" thundered Mr. Selby. "You deliberately turned out the light in the passage and threw that blanket over a person coming along in the dark?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"A practical joke, I presume?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"I do not approve of practical jokes, Merry, especially upon guests of your headmaster. Talbot, kindly come with me, and the Head shall be acquainted with this outrage. All of you will follow me."

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "We're in for it now!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Talbot, however, did not stir.

"Come, boy!" said Mr. Selby impatiently. "These boys shall be severely punished for having played such a trick upon a guest of their headmaster."

"Excuse me, sir," said Talbot quietly.

"I don't want anybody to be punished on my account."

"That is nonsense, Talbot! They must be punished, of course!" said Mr. Selby impatiently. "You will kindly come with me."

"I do not wish to complain, sir," said Talbot, quietly but very firmly.

Mr. Selby paused, and the juniors breathed again. Unless Talbot complained of the blanketing and the bumping, Mr. Selby could hardly carry the matter before the Head.

"Bai Jove, you are a byick, deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Selby fixed a most unpleasant look upon Talbot. The boy's firm refusal to get the juniors into trouble made him take a dislike to the lad on the spot.

"Very well," said the Form-master awkwardly, at last. "If you do not complain—"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"I shall report your conduct, Merry, in turning out the lights, to the House-master," said Mr. Selby. "You may go!"

"Thank you, sir," said Tom demurely. And the juniors departed. Mr. Selby gave Talbot a look of dislike and passed on to his room.

Talbot looked after the juniors and smiled. Then he passed Mr. Selby's door and went to his own room.

"That chap's a brick!" said Tom Merry, when the juniors reached the Shell passage. "We should have got it pretty warm from the Head if he'd let Selby lead him by the nose."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Jolly decent chap!" said Herries. "I wonder who he is?"

"He's the chap I told you of, deah boys—the chap who clipped in and helped me when those twamps were wobbin' me."

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Well, he's a good sort. I think I'll trot along and have a word with him. We ought to thank him for what he's done. It would have meant a good licking all round if he hadn't stood up for us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry left the others, and tipped past Mr. Selby's door. He did not want to have any further dealings with the Third Form master just then. He tapped lightly at Talbot's door.

"Come in!"

Tom Merry opened the door.

Talbot greeted him with a cheery smile as he came in.

"I say," began Tom, "you acted jolly decently just now. I want to thank you for standing up for us as you did!"

Talbot laughed.

"That's all right. I could see that old chap was simply yearning to get you licked. I don't mind a joke, though really it was rather a rough joke to play on a chap you don't know, wasn't it?"

"It was," said Tom, "and that makes it all the more decent of you to stand up for us as you did. But I want to explain. You see, it was a mistake. We took you for somebody else. We couldn't see in the dark. We didn't know you were in the House at all. Nobody ever comes along this passage but Selby, and so you see—"

Talbot whistled.

"You were waiting for him?"

"Yes, he's a beast!" said Tom frankly. "He stopped a feed for us and got us into trouble, and we were going to blanket him. You could see"

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what an ill-tempered rotter he was, couldn't you?"

"That old chap? Yes, rather."

"But I'm glad we made the mistake, now I come to think of it," said Tom. "It would very likely have come out who did it, and it would have meant a flogging going for a Form-master. You came along in the nick of time to prevent us from getting into serious trouble, as a matter of fact. So we're doubly obliged to you."

"Then I'm glad I came," said Talbot, laughing. "It was rather a surprise to me when I was collared in the dark. But I don't mind a bit."

"Well, you are a brick!" said Tom. "I thought I'd come along and tell you we're obliged."

"That's all right," said Talbot cheerily. "I hope we shall be friends if I stay at the school."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with interest. "You're a new boy, then?"

"I don't know," said Talbot. "I want to come to the school, and if it can be arranged, I shall come. To-night I'm the Head's guest, that is all."

"I jolly well hope you'll come, then," said Tom. "You're just the sort of fellow who'll get on here. You helped Gussy when those tramps went for him, didn't you?"

"Oh, that was nothing!"

"It was jolly plucky," said Tom warmly. "Going to bed now?"

"I was going to read a bit before turning in," said Talbot. "It's rather early to go to bed."

"Would you care to come to a feed in the box-room?" asked Tom. "You can make the acquaintance of the fellows there. It isn't much of a feed, I'm afraid. Selby has confiscated some of the tummy; but if you care to come, we'll be jolly glad."

"Thanks. I'll come with pleasure. I've had my supper, as a matter of fact; but I'll be very glad to come, all the same."

"Come on, then," said Tom cordially.

And they quitted the room together.

CHAPTER 8.

The Toff!

WALLY & CO. were already in the box-room.

A crowd of Third Form fags were making preparations there for the deferred feed. Half the good things had been lost, owing to Mr. Selby's reckless confiscation. The dozen bloaters were gone, also the pots of jam and a bag of tarts. But Wally & Co. had rallied round nobly. True, the Terrible Three had very little to contribute—merely a loaf, the offer of three eggs having been declined without thanks. But the chums of Study No. 6 and Kangaroo of the Shell had all contributed to the feast.

In the box-room they were safe from interference by Mr. Selby. There was a fire going, and Frayne was frying eggs by the dozen, and rashers of bacon. The scent of frying bacon was very grateful and comforting to the hungry juniors as they came in.

Empty boxes and trunks served as chairs and tables. The fags had brought in the crockery and the cutlery, and most of the guests had thoughtfully provided themselves with knives and forks. The feed was almost ready, and all the participants were on the scene, with the exception of Tom Merry.

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"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally, looking round over the preparations with an air of great satisfaction. "It's going to be a good feed, after all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How are those eggs getting on, Frayne? Don't burn them like you did the bloaters."

"Orlright," said Joe cheerfully.

"Nearly finished."

"Finished the toast, Jimmy?"

"Every slice," said Jameson. "Blow old Selby! It's time I was in my own House."

"Never mind, it's worth staying for. Gussy, old man, make yourself useful. Butter the toast," said D'Arcy minor briskly.

"Certainly, deah boy."

"Buck up with those eggs, Frayne!"

"This is the last lot," said Frayne.

He bent over the frying-pan, devoting all his attention to the eggs, which he was doing to a turn.

"Hallo, Tommy!" said Monty Lowther as the door opened again.

"Hallo, another guest!"

Talbot came in with the captain of the Shell.

"Bai Jove, what a weally wippin' ideah to bring Talbot!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Wally, deah boy, this is Talbot."

"Welcome to the festive board, my pippin!" said Wally cheerfully.

"Weally, Wally—"

"Jolly glad to see you here," said Wally, unheeding. "I've heard about you, and I think you're a brick. Are you going to stay at St. Jim's?"

"I hope so," said Talbot, smiling.

"Then I hope you'll come into the Third," said Wally cordially.

"Bosh!" said Tom Merry. "If Talbot stays at St. Jim's he's coming into the Shell. We shall insist upon it!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners, Lowther, and Kangaroo.

"Into the School House, anyway," said Blake. "I suppose you know we have two Houses here, Talbot—this and the other one?"

"I didn't know."

"Great Scott, then you've had a narrow escape! Mind they don't shove you into the New House," said Blake in a tone of warning. "The New House is a regular casual ward—a home for duffers."

"Don't jaw the new chap now about the New House," protested Wally. "Sit down, Talbot, old man, and make yourself comfy."

"Here's a box for you," said Lowther hospitably.

Talbot sat down, smiling. There could be no doubt of the cordiality of his reception. Talbot had made a very good impression on the St. Jim's juniors to start with; and whatever Form he was put into—if he stayed—he was certain of a warm welcome. And he had a frank, easy manner that made him at home at once. The fellows felt already as if they had known him for a whole term at least.

"Make up your mind to stay here," said Lowther, as Talbot sat down beside him on the box. "This is the best school going."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I shall certainly stay if it can be arranged," said Talbot. "I don't think there's anything I should like better."

"Good! And you'll come into the School House—this House?"

"Yes, rather."

"Hear, hear!"

"Finished those eggs, Frayne?"

"Yes, I've just about finished," said Joe Frayne, turning a warm and

ruddy face from the fire. "Old that dish, Curly, and I'll turn 'em out."

"Ere you har," said Curly humorously.

Frayne lifted the frying-pan from the fire, and turned round. Curly Gibson held the dish ready for the eggs to be turned out. Frayne had not seen the latest addition to the party yet, having been too busy with the cooking, but as he turned from the fire with the frying-pan in his hand, he looked over to where Talbot was sitting.

Talbot was sitting on the box beside Lowther, with a plate on his knees, in the full glare of the light overhead. The light fell clearly upon his handsome face, with its well-cut features and dark eyes.

Frayne looked at him, and a strange change came over Frayne's face. His gaze was glued on Talbot.

His lips moved, but no word came from them. It was as if Joe Frayne had received a sudden unaccountable and paralysing shock, and could not speak.

"Buck up!" said Curly. "How long am I to hold this dish?"

"What's the matter with you, Frayne?" asked Wally.

The juniors all stared at Frayne, Talbot looking at him with the rest.

A slight, almost imperceptible change came over Talbot's face as he saw the waif of the Third. He had not noticed him before.

"My—my hat!" muttered Frayne.

"Joe! What the deuce—"

Crash!

The frying-pan dropped from Frayne's hand and crashed to the floor; the last lot of eggs splashed out of it.

"Frayne—"

"You ass—"

"What's the matter with you?"

Frayne did not seem to heed. He did not seem to know that the juniors were staring at him in blank amazement. He did not seem to be aware that the frying-pan had slipped from his hand; his starting eyes were fastened on Talbot.

"Crikey!" he muttered hoarsely.

"The Toff!"

CHAPTER 9.

The Feed!

TALBOT looked at the startled fag, with a smile still on his lips.

There was a buzz of astonishment from the rest.

Wally caught his chum by the shoulder and shook him.

"Joe, what's the matter with you? Are you going off your rocker?"

"The Toff!" muttered Frayne hoarsely.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you know Talbot?" asked Tom Merry, in wonder.

"Talbot!" repeated Frayne.

"Yes, this chap is Talbot."

"I should say he knows me, by the way he stares at me," said Talbot lightly. "Who is the kid?"

"It's Frayne of the Third—"

"Weally, Fwayne, you are actin' in a vewy odd mannah," said Arthur Augustus severely. "What do you mean by staring at Talbot in that wude way?"

"Oh, never mind!" said Talbot calmly. "It's all right, kid. Don't be scared—I'm not a ghost. What's the matter with you?"

Frayne did not reply.

His eyes were still glued upon Talbot, and he seemed unable to speak. His face was quite white.

"He looks as if he's going to have a fit," said Talbot. "Does he have fits?"

"No, he doesn't," said Wally, rather gruffly. Wally was quite ashamed of the extraordinary behaviour of his chum. "Don't play the giddy goat, Frayne. What's the matter with you? Do you know Talbot?"

"Know him?" muttered Frayne. "Wot's 'e doin' 'ere?"

"He's our guest, and you might be civil to him!" said Wally sharply. "Don't mind him, Talbot. Blessed if I know what's the matter with the young ass!"

Wally dragged Frayne to a seat. Frayne seemed rather to collapse than to sit down. The sight of Talbot had evidently given him a shock that he could not easily recover from.

But he did not speak again. He seemed to be trying to pull himself together. The juniors were exchanging looks of wonder.

Frayne recognised Talbot, that was evident, and he had called him by a peculiar nickname. What could it mean?

Talbot was perfectly calm and self-possessed. He was eating fried eggs and bacon now with perfect coolness. Evidently the sight of Frayne had not had a similar effect on him.

There was a buzz of talk at once. All the fellows wanted to obliterate the curious incident, as it were. Certainly Frayne's remarkable conduct was not likely to impress Talbot with a good impression of the manners and the hospitality of St. Jim's.

Joe Frayne did not join in the talk, however.

He sat quite quiet and still. But the other feasters made it a point not to look towards him. Wally meant to have a very plain explanation from him afterwards; but the immediate business in hand was to make the party go as pleasantly as possible. Fortunately, that was not difficult. The crowd of juniors had good appetites, and the feed was a very good

one, and Frayne's peculiar action was soon almost forgotten.

Frayne, as he sat silent, was covertly scanning Talbot's face. He seemed unable to take his eyes from it.

Talbot seemed to have forgotten the existence of the waif of the Third. He was chatting and laughing cheerily with the Terrible Three, and the Fourth Formers. He was the centre of a cheery group of fellows, and seemed to be quite at ease, and quite at home in his new surroundings.

It was some time before Wally appeared to remember the existence of his old chum, and clapped Joe Frayne on the shoulder.

"Cheer up, Joe!" he muttered. "Don't sit there like a giddy graven image! Have you forgotten it's your birthday?"

"Yes—no, Master Wally!" stammered Joe.

"You've got to make a speech directly."

Joe looked dismayed.

"I—I think I'll mizzle, if you don't mind, Wally," he stammered, getting up from the box.

"What rot!" said Wally. "You won't do anything of the sort! Chap's got to be at his own birthday feed, you duffer—"

"But I—I—"

"Gussy's going to speechify, and you've got to return thanks," said Wally. "Now pull yourself together. Gussy's just going to begin."

"Orlright!" said Joe heavily.

It was evident that something weighed on his spirits, and would not be got rid of.

Arthur Augustus was on his feet. He had a glass of ginger-beer in his hand, fizzing.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," said Arthur Augustus. "I wish to make a few remarks!"

"Hear, hear!"

"To-day—I mean, to-night—is a

gweat occasion. On this occasion, gentlemen, we are met togethah to felicitate—"

"Bravo!"

"Good word!"

"Pile in!"

"To felicitate our young fwiend Fwayne on havin' attained his—his—I weally do not know how old our young fwiend Fwayne is, but that is a mattah of no moment. He has attained his birthday—it does not mattah which."

Loud applause.

"I need not dwell on the chawactah and mewits of our young fwiend Fwayne. He is known to all of you—"

Applause.

"Our young fwiend Fwayne came to this school from a wathah queeah quatah. Tom Mewwy discovahed him wastin' his gweat talents and his high chawactah in a feahful slum, and wescued him from those shockin' suwwoundings. But I ventuah to suggest, gentlemen, that had our young fwiend Fwayne remained in Angel Alley, he would have made his mark there. You are all aware, howevah, of the gweat pwogress he has made since he has honahed St. Jim's with his pwesence. Gentlemen, there is no membah of this ancient and respected foundation that I would wathah wise to—I mean, wise to pwopose the health of—than our young fwiend Fwayne, and I wejoice that the occasion of his natal day gives me the opportunity of puttin' into words what we all think—that our respected fwiend, young Fwayne, is a jolly good fellow—"

Thunders of applause.

"A cweedit to his school, and a cweedit to his country—"

Tremendous applause.

"I, therefore, pwopose the health of our young fwiend Fwayne. Long may he wave—I mean, long may he blowish! Gentlemen, I dwink to



A figure came along the passage towards where Tom Merry & Co. were in hiding. The victim had walked into the trap! In a twinkling the blanket was flung over his head, and there was a wild gasp from under it. The juniors little knew they had blanketed the wrong customer!

young Fwayne, and to many happy returns of the day to our young friend!"

And Arthur Augustus sat down. "Good old Gussy!" chirruped Blake. "Won't you make things hum when you get into the House of Lords?"

"Weally, Blake—" "Frayne! Young Frayne!" "Speech!"

Wally jerked Joe Frayne forward. Frayne was looking anything but happy. The birthday feed, since he had seen Talbot, was anything but a joy to him. He stood flushing before the crowd of fellows, and quite dumb.

"Speech, you ass!" said Wally. "Wot—wot am I to say?" stammered Frayne.

"Any old thing, but pile in!"

"Go it, Frayne!"

"Hear, hear!"

Thus encouraged, Frayne went on:

"Genelmen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Genelmen, which you've all 'eard the kind things wot Master Gussy 'ave been so kind as to say—"

"Hurrah!"

When poor Joe was nervous or confused, his old diction, learned in the slums, always came back to him unchanged as if he had never had a single lesson at St. Jim's.

"Genelmen, which I say it's very kind of Master Wally to give me a birthday—which I don't know whether it's my birthday or not, but Master Wally says as 'ow it is—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Which Master Gussy says a lot of nice things of me which they ain't true, which I don't mean to say as Master Gussy tells an untruth. Far from it. But I mean for to say as 'ow I ain't deservin' of them kind things which Master Gussy says—"

"Rats!"

"But I thank Master Gussy, all the same, and all you genelmen for comin' to the birthday feed, and I'm sorry as 'ow old Selby 'ave nailed the bloaters, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And—and I drinks this 'ere toast with pleasure," concluded Joe; and he forthwith drank his own health amid roars of laughter and applause.

"My only hat!" gasped Blake. "Joe will be making things hum in the House of Commons by the time you're making them sit up in the House of Lords, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

The box-room door opened and the good-humoured face of Darrell of the Sixth looked in.

"Are you kids aware that it is bed-time?" he asked.

"Bai Jove, is it? Vewy kind of you to remind us, Dawwell."

The prefect laughed.

"Third Form off to bed," he said.

"Right-ho!" said Wally. "It's a celebration, Darrell; young Frayne's birthday. You've come just too late for the great speech—your loss."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the meeting broke up.

CHAPTER 10.

Face to Face!

"AND now, you young ass, you'll explain," said Wally as soon as the Third Formers were in their dormitory. Jameson and the rest of the New House portion of the Form had trooped off to their

own House. Darrell had shepherded the School House fags off to their dormitory, and left them to turn in.

Joe Frayne was very silent.

The gloomy expression had returned to his face and stayed there. He gave a little start as Wally addressed him, but did not reply.

"Yes, tell us what you were glaring at Talbot like that for," said Curly Gibson. "Do you know the chap?"

Joe was still silent.

"You were jolly rude to him," said Wally.

"Was I?" muttered Frayne.

"Yes, you were. What did you mean by it?"

"Nothin'," said Frayne, with an effort.

"Oh, rot!" said Wally. "You must have meant something. Do you know the chap?"

"I—I thought as I knowed 'im," said Joe reluctantly.

"Where did you meet him?" asked half a dozen voices.

"I ain't nothin' to say," said Joe. "I suppose I've made a mistake. Suttinly I 'ave if the young gent's name is Talbot."

"Why, his name must be Talbot," said Wally in wonder. "He said so."

"Course," admitted Joe.

"Do you mean to say that you mistook him for somebody else?"

"I—I s'pose that was it."

"Then you're a silly young ass!" said Wally severely. "He must have thought you were off your rocker, glaring at him like that. What did you call him the Toff for?"

"I—I—"

"Is he like somebody you used to know that you called the Toff?"

"Yes, that's it."

Joe Frayne looked worried. It was clear that the questioning of the Form fellows was troubling him greatly.

"You've made an idiotic mistake, Joe, and made the chap think you're potty," said Wally. "But you needn't look so blue about it. No harm done."

"So he's coming to St. Jim's?" said Joe thoughtfully.

"So he says."

"And he's stayin' 'ere the night?"

"Looks like it."

"He's got the bed-room next to Selby's," said Jones minimus. "Didn't you hear those Shell chaps saying how they'd bumped him in mistake for old Selby?"

"The next room to Selby's?" repeated Joe Frayne.

He did not say anything more. He turned in, and all the remarks of the Third Formers after that failed to draw any reply from him.

Darrell came in and put out the lights. There was a cheery buzz of talk in the dormitory, as usual, before the fags went to sleep, but Joe Frayne did not take any share in it. He lay quite silent, and the others thought he had gone to sleep.

But the wail of St. Jim's was very far from sleeping.

When the rest of the Third dropped off one by one into slumber, Joe Frayne lay sleepless, staring into the darkness with wide-open eyes.

There was a vision before his eyes in the darkness; he could still see the handsome, smiling, somewhat mocking face of Talbot.

Ten o'clock struck.

All the Third were asleep by that time, and the higher junior Forms had been in bed half an hour.

Then Joe Frayne slipped quietly from his bed.

Moving with great caution, not to awaken the others, he dressed himself in the darkness, and stole silently towards the door of the dormitory. He opened the door quietly, passed out into the passage, and drew the door shut after him without a sound.

The passage was dark, but there was still a light burning downstairs. The seniors were not gone to bed yet.

Joe Frayne's heart was thumping uncomfortably. If he were found out of his dormitory at that hour, it would mean trouble for him, for he would not be able to explain. He could not tell anyone at St. Jim's that he had to see Talbot—that he could not sleep till he had seen him and spoken with the boy who had come so strangely to St. Jim's.

And to reach his room he had to pass Mr. Selby's door, and the master might be in his room. But the risk had to be run, if he was to see Talbot.

But he was very careful. He tiptoed down the flight of stairs and along the passage and past the door of the Third Form master.

There was no light under the door. Either Mr. Selby was not there, or he had gone to bed. Neither was there a light under Talbot's door. It was most probable that Talbot was in bed; but that made no difference to Frayne. He had to see him—to wake him from his sleep, if necessary.

He turned the handle of the door silently. It opened at his touch.

The room was in darkness. Only a faint glimmer of starlight came in at the window; and it showed dimly the bed and a figure sitting up in it.

"Who's that?"

The voice was only a whisper; but it struck on Frayne's ears with a sudden shock, and he gave a gasp.

"Me!"

"Shut the door!"

Frayne shut the door quietly.

"Come here!"

Talbot's voice was low, but quite calm. He was in pyjamas, sitting up in bed; he had heard the door open, though Frayne had made scarcely a perceptible sound in opening it. Talbot had very keen hearing.

It was very clear that he had not slept, though he had gone to bed at the same hour as the juniors. Frayne understood that.

"You was awake?" he muttered.

"Yes."

"You—you expected me?"

"I thought you would come."

Frayne caught his breath.

"Then—then it wasn't any mistake!" he muttered. "I knewed it wasn't a mistake! I knowed it was the Toff! You—you villain! Wot are you doin' at St. Jim's?"

CHAPTER 11.

The Toff's Programme!

TALBOT did not speak for a moment.

He sat in the bed, looking curiously at the fag of the Third, scanning his pale and troubled face.

Joe Frayne watched him, waiting for his reply.

"Speak, can't you?" he muttered, his voice rising. "Wot are you doin' 'ere? You've come 'ere for some villainy, I know that!" "Hush!"

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"Wot for? I'll raise my voice and call the whole 'Ouse 'ere if you don't explain," said Joe. "I 'oped as it might be a mistake—though I knowed it wasn't. I never thought that even you would 'ave the cheek to come 'ere. And then it's a long time since I see you—a long time since I was in Angel Alley. But I knowed you! You didn't know I was 'ere when you came?"

Talbot shook his head.

"How should I know? I didn't even know you weren't in Angel Alley still. I don't waste much time thinking about little ragamuffins!"

"Master Merry made me come 'ere—to give me a chance," said Joe. "But 'tain't that as has brought you 'ere. You've 'ad all the chances you want. You was always the Toff—always with plenty of money—you, and your father afore you! Where's your father now? In prison, I suppose!"

"My father's dead."

"Oh!"

"And if you say another word about him, I'll get out of bed and wring your neck!" said the Toff, in a low, concentrated tone.

"I—I didn't know as 'e was dead," muttered Frayne. "I wouldn't say anythin' agin 'im if I knowed. But that don't excuse your comin' 'ere, and you knows it. You ain't the sort to come 'ere honest. You're on a new lay."

"Exactly!"

"You've come 'ere to rob——"

"Don't be a fool, Joe! Do I look as if I were going to rob anyone?"

"Then what do you want?"

"Nothing."

"Look 'ere——"

"You have heard how I came," said Talbot. "The Head was attacked by a gang of footpads, and I chipped in, and he gave me shelter for the night out of gratitude."

"The same footpads wot went for Master D'Arcy?"

"It seems so."

"I've 'eard 'im speakin' of it," said Frayne bitterly. "I 'eard 'im mention one name—a name I'd 'eard before."

"Indeed!"

"It was 'Ookey Walker," said Frayne. "'Ookey Walker, the cracksmán, a great pal of your father's in his time. Don't tell me no lies, Toff! Them roughs was 'ere on your account. I know it now that I know you. That job on the 'Ead was a put-up job. 'Ookey Walker and the rest worked it for you—a dodge to git you into the school!"

Talbot smiled.

"You are as sharp as ever, Joe——"

"I ain't a fool!" said Joe sturdily. "When I knowed that you was 'ere, and that 'Ookey Walker was around, I knowed you was in some gime together. And you say you ain't 'ere to rob anybody; but they tried to rob Master D'Arcy."

"If you've heard that, you've heard, I suppose, that I chipped in and stopped them?"

"Yes, I remember that."

"That doesn't look as if I'm here on a new lay, does it?"

"Then wot——?"

"As you have so sagely guessed, it was a put-up job on the Head," said the Toff, in a curious tone of sarcasm. "Hookey Walker, Nobby, and the Rabbit were here for that purpose, and the blundering fools tried to fill in time by going through D'Arcy, as they had seen that he had a gold watch, and they had nothing to do. But I stopped them. They came very near spoiling the whole

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling!



Hallo, Everybody!—Can the cardboard box? No, but the tin can.

Crooke didn't laugh a bit when he sat on an upturned pin. He couldn't see the point. Quite "beneath" him!

A reader wants to know the best way to keep down bills. Use a paper-weight!

Story: "Sorry, sir!" said the Wayland barber, as he cut the customer once again. "As a matter of fact, I'm thinking of opening a butcher's shop." "And will you close this one?" gasped the victim feebly.

'Nother: "Five thousand men have risen in Wayland to-day," said Figgins. "What for?" asked Pratt. "To go to bed again to-night," smiled Figgins.

New Definition: A sportsman is a chap who can play the saxophone, but doesn't!

The Head's gardener wants to know what is the best way of raising peas. On a fork!

Special: Sapphire watchchains are all the rage just now. You can get a

game. But, as you see, there's no harm done. The put-up job on the Head come off all right, and I'm here!"

"You won't stay here, Toff!"

"No? And why not?"

"Why not?" Joe Frayne's voice rose again. "Do you think I'm goin' to keep quiet and let you play your gime 'ere? I come to warn you. I don't want to give you away, for old times' sake. I ain't forgot you 'elped me at times when I was 'ard up. You always 'ad a kind 'eart, I'll say that for you. I liked you; and in them days—afore I knew Master Merry—I wasn't particular. I never knew the difference between honesty and the other thing, the way I was brought up in Angel Alley. But I know now. Since I've knowed Master Tom I've been as straight as a die, and I'm going to keep so. Do you think I'm goin' to let you stay 'ere—you, the Toff, the kid cracksmán that can crack any safe you lay your 'ands on? I come 'ere to warn you, I say. You've got to get out to-night!"

The Toff laughed—a low, musical laugh.

"That's rather sudden, isn't it, Joe?"

"You've got to go!"

"The Head would be a little surprised to find that his guest had vanished during the night," said the Toff, in an amused tone.

"He'd be more surprised to 'ear that you was a cracksmán, and wanted by the police in a dozen towns," said Joe. Talbot laughed.

really good sapphire for £270. I just thought you'd like to know!

I hear a Scot has had fifty different jobs in four years. A Jock of all trades.

Did you hear about the motorist taking a row who put out his hand when crossing the bows of the giant liner? Gave the captain a "turn"!

Mr. Ratcliff had just had an awful round of golf. "And yet there must be worse golfers than I am!" he exclaimed. "Yes, but they don't play!" murmured the caddie.

Try this: "Hasn't that cow got a lovely coat?" remarked Skimpole. "Yes, it's a Jersey," said Gore. "There now," said Skimpole, "I thought it was its skin."

Figgins says he knows a man who has no hands and plays the piano. That's nothing—Gussy has no voice but sings!

Hedgehogs are useful because they eat insects, we read. Evidently they have their good points somewhere.

Blake says the place he stayed at had a book in which guests recorded their grumbles. Sort of whine list!

I hear many Esquimaux have never seen a sheep. Wonder what they count when they want to go to sleep?

News: A famous explorer was half buried in the sand in Egypt. Same thing happened to my uncle when he took his young nephews to Bognor!

Short One: "I want you to know I'm a big gun," said Gore to his uncle. "Then why don't I hear better reports?" snapped his uncle.

Bang-ho, boys!

"He would; I can imagine his face," he assented. "But you're not going to tell him, Joe?"

"I'm going to tell him if you don't clear!"

The Toff settled himself more comfortably in the bed.

The fag's threat did not seem to move him in the least. Boy as he was, he had an iron nerve.

"You ain't goin'?" asked Frayne, clenching his hands.

"No!"

"Mind, I mean business!" Frayne's voice came sharp and loud. "You go out of this house, or I go to the 'Ead before I get back to bed to-night! Arter all they've done for me, I'm not goin' to see them robbed!"

"Quiet!"

Frayne's voice sank again. He seemed strangely under the influence of the handsome, mocking face before him.

"Well, then, out you go!" he said.

"I'll explain the situation to you, Joe." The Toff spoke quietly. "You think I'm here to play the old game?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Well, you are wrong. I'm here to start fresh."

"Start fresh? And 'ow?"

"The same as you have done," said the Toff. "What were you? A ragged

(Continued on the next page.)

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kid in a slum—a pickpocket when you had the chance! What are you now?"

"Honest, at least!" said Joe fiercely.

The Toff made a soothing gesture.

"I don't doubt it," he said. "You always were honest in your way, Joe. At one time you were grateful, too."

"I'm grateful now!" muttered Frayne. "I ain't forgot as 'ow you 'elped me many a time. But—"

"I'm left alone in the world, Joe, excepting for the kind of friends that a boy is better without," said the Toff—"Hookey Walker and the rest! I've thrown the old life over for good!"

"You've thrown it over?"

"Yes. I'm going to make a fresh start. I've got some money behind me; I've had a pretty good education."

"I often wondered that you didn't chuck the pinchin' game," said Frayne. "You was always too good for that."

"I'm going to be too good for it, at least. I tell you I've thrown it all over."

Joe shook his head.

"You could always come over anybody with palaver, Toff! But it don't look like throwin' it over—this 'ere put-up job on the 'Ead, with the old gang 'elpin' you!"

"That was necessary. I determined that I'd get into a decent school, where I should have a chance of making a decent name for myself—a chance for a decent future. But I couldn't come to St. Jim's or any other school, and say: 'Here I am—the Toff, son of Captain Crow; boy cracksman, wanted for half a dozen robberies—here I am!' What sort of a reception should I have got, Joe?"

Joe could not help grinning.

"You see, it had to be worked. I thought it all out. Hookey Walker helped me, too, and we laid the little plan. I'd got a good yarn made up ready, and I made a good impression on the Head by what's happened to-night. Of course, we've been watching the place for days, and I had it all cut and dried. But it's worked. I'm here to-night as a guest of the Head."

"I came here with a clear character and a chance. I'm going to work—to make a name for myself. Instead of a member of the swell mob, I'm going to be an ordinary, decent chap like the rest of them here. What do you think of that, Joe? Well, you say yourself you've wondered why I didn't chuck it and become something better. I've done it now. That put-up job was necessary to get me an entrance here. It's the last. Now all's plain sailing—unless you betray me, Joe, and drive me back to—you know what!"

Joe shuddered.

"Not that, Toff. If you've given it up, I should never 'elp to send you back to it."

"I've given it up, Joe. I'm here to start fresh."

There was silence.

"You mean that, Toff?"

"Of course I mean it!"

"I—I never thought of that," confessed Joe. "I—I never thought—I reckoned you was 'ere on the old lay."

"But now you know—"

"If you mean business, Toff—"

"Give me a chance. Simply hold your tongue; you nearly gave the show away at the feed in the box-room. If I'd been as big a fool as you, it would have been all U.P. It gave me a start when I saw you. But I'm glad you're here—glad you've got a chance in life as well as myself, Joe. Only don't spoil my chance. If you remember anything I did for you in the old days, when you were a starving nipper—"

"I do remember, Toff."

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"Then don't spoil my chance."

"You give me your 'and on it, Toff!"

The Toff held out his hand.

"I believe you!" said Joe simply. "I won't give you away. But if you've took me in, Toff, it's the worse thin' as you've ever done!"

Perhaps the handsome boy, sitting up in the bed, winced for a moment; but, if so, the fag did not observe it in the dim light.

"I'll go," whispered Frayne. "I won't say a word. You're goin' to 'ave your chance, same as I've 'ad mine! Play the game, Toff, and you'll be all right! Good-night!"

"Good-night, Joe!"

The door closed silently behind the fag. Joe Frayne returned to the Third Form dormitory as silently as he had left it, with his heart and his mind at ease, and he was soon sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER 12.

Talbot Explains!

TOM MERRY, who was generally one of the first down in the School House, came out into the quadrangle, bright and fresh in the early September sunshine, before the rising-bell had ceased to clang. But he was not the first out; he caught sight of Talbot sauntering across the quad, with his hands in his pockets, looking about him with keen interest.

The captain of the Shell joined him at once.

"Top of the morning, as Reilly says!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You're an early bird, Talbot."

"You seem to be the same," said Talbot. "I say, what a ripping old place this is! You are lucky to be here."

It was a remark to make a St. Jim's fellow feel cordial. All the fellows were proud of the old school—proud of its history and its traditions.

"What-ho!" said Tom cheerily. "Let me show you round a bit. Lots of time before early chapel. So you like this place?"

"Yes, rather! Jolly old—what?"

"Lost in the giddy mists of antiquity!" said Tom, laughing. "There was a school here in the reign of King John—you can see the records in the school library, if you like; old parchments in Latin. But St. Jim's first began to flourish in the reign of Henry the Eighth—there was a big monastic establishment here, you see, that the old school belonged to—and when old Harry wiped up the monasteries, the abbey lands went to some old johnny who founded the present foundation—and a good thing, too. It was the Abbey of St. James, and the school kept the name. Some of the buildings are earlier than that, though—the ruined tower is part Saxon and part Norman. Yonder's the New House."

Talbot gazed at the New House.

"Quite modern," said Tom Merry. "Put up the other day, when the School House couldn't accommodate the chaps any longer."

"The other day?" asked Talbot. "It doesn't look as new as all that."

Tom Merry grinned.

"The other day, comparatively speaking," he said. "The date is on it—1780—a little over a century and a half old. Not of much account. The School House is Cock House, and always has been. But the chaps over there fancy themselves. Figgins or Kerr or Wynn would tell you that the New House is Cock House, which is, of course—"

"Rot!" suggested Talbot.

"That's it—rot!" agreed Tom Merry. "We hold the top record in cricket, footer, running, jumping, swimming, everything; only Figgins labours under a delusion that the New House holds it. If you come to St. Jim's, Talbot—I mean, when you come—you've simply got to come into the School House."



As the juniors leap-frogged their way down the passage, he just clearing Tom Merry's back, bumped right into him—he sat down suddenly.

"You're very kind to want me there," said Talbot.

"Oh, we know you're the right sort. You'd be wasted in the New House. Besides, we've got the best Housemaster. Railton is a brick. Ratcliff is a beast—ahem! I mean nobody likes Ratcliff, the New House master. Besides, we have twice as many fellows in the School House, and always outvote the other House on school questions. The captain of St. Jim's is always a School House chap. So is the Head himself, for that matter. The Head's house is only an addition to the School House. Built in the reign of Charles the Second—electric light put in later—ahem!"

"Yes, I suppose so!" laughed Talbot.

"Now come and have a look at the playing fields. Here's Little Side—that's the junior ground. Over there,

Big Side, where the seniors amuse their little selves. Are you a cricketer, by the way?"

"You bet!"

"We'll give you a chance to show how you shape, then, as soon as you belong to us," said Tom Merry. "Here's the junior pavilion."

Talbot paused outside the pavilion and gazed on the scene before him.

The wide stretch of playing fields, the ancient buildings, the quadrangle shaded by the elms that had been standing for long centuries, a glimpse of the river winding in the distance—it made a wonderful picture.

Unconsciously, as if from habit, Talbot drew a cigarette-case from his pocket, selected a cigarette, and lighted it, and blew out little clouds of smoke as he gazed on the scene.



came unexpectedly round the corner. Talbot, who Oh, oh! Ah!" gasped the Third Form master, and the floor.

Tom Merry stared a little as he observed him.

Smoking was forbidden at St. Jim's, but more serious than that was the fact that it was regarded as "bad form." If Talbot had been a St. Jim's fellow, Tom Merry would have told him so at once, but he felt that he had no right to remark upon the manners and customs of one who was, after all, the Head's guest.

The involuntary expression on his face, however, caught Talbot's eye. Few things escaped that keen, wary glance.

Talbot removed the cigarette from his lips.

"You don't smoke?" he asked.

"No," said Tom, rather shortly.

"It's a bad habit," said Talbot, throwing the cigarette away. "Is it considered bad form here?"

"Yes."

"Then the sooner I drop it the better."

"Oh, I didn't mean—" stammered Tom, a little taken aback.

Talbot laughed.

"I'm coming to St. Jim's if I can manage it," he said. "The sooner I get into the way of things the better. I've roughed it a good deal at times, and picked up some ways I'd better learn to drop. I'd be glad of any tips you could give me."

This was said so frankly that Tom's heart quite warmed towards him.

"That's all right," he said. "Of course, until you belong to us you can do as you like."

"Not at all," said Talbot. "Can't begin too soon."

He turned the contents out of his cigarette-case and ground them under his boot. It was unmistakable evidence of good faith.

"That settles it," he remarked, returning the empty case to his pocket.

"Good for you!" said Tom.

They strolled round the buildings, Tom Merry pointing out the objects of interest, and he found Talbot a very keen and attentive listener. The bell rang for early chapel.

"Hallo! I must cut off!" said Tom.

"Can I come?" asked Talbot diffidently.

"Yes, rather, if you like!"

"I should like to."

"Right-ho, then! The Head will be glad to see you there. He always takes early service himself."

And Talbot went in with Tom Merry and the rest of the Shell. After the service he quitted the juniors, as he was to breakfast in the Head's house. Tom Merry went into the School House to breakfast with his chums.

"Been showing the kid round?" asked Manners.

"Yes. He's as keen about the place as if he'd been here half a dozen terms," said Tom. "I hope he'll come into the Shell."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he joined them.

"I hope he'll come, too. I quite approve of that chap. But he had better come into the Fourth."

"By the way, what did young Frayne mean by calling him the Toff?" asked Lowther. "Does he know Talbot?"

"Yaas, that's wathah cuvius—in fact, vewy cuvius indeed," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "It struck me when I was thinkin' it ovah last night. Vewy cuvius that young Frayne should call him by the same nickname as those wottahs!"

"What rotters?" asked Tom, looking at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Those wottahs who twied to wob me in the lane," explained Arthur Augustus.

"You wemembah I told you that Talbot went for them like a weal bewo. They seemed to know him by sight, and one of them called him the 'Toff.'"

The Terrible Three looked rather oddly at one another.

"That's a bit curious," said Tom.

"I'm not surprised at his having a nickname like that. He looks the part. But it's queer that Frayne and those footpads should know him. Of course, it's nothing against him."

"Oh, of course not!" said Manners and Lowther at once.

"Wathah not," said Arthur Augustus.

But they could not help thinking it a little odd. During brekker Tom Merry thought about it a little, and he decided to speak to Talbot about it. He felt so friendly towards the new fellow that he wanted to have that odd circumstance explained. It worried him a little, and he had no doubt that a word or two from Talbot would clear it up. After breakfast the chums of the School House found Talbot in the quadrangle, and Tom plunged into the subject at once in his own way.

"It seems that you've got a nickname?" he began. "They call you the Toff?"

A steely look came into Talbot's eyes for a moment; but he laughed.

"Yes, I have been called that," he said.

"You'll excuse my speaking," said Tom, "but there's a little thing that puzzles us. Young Frayne called you by that name."

"Yes."

"And those rascals who bothered Gussy yesterday did the same."

Talbot nodded.

"I believe they did," he replied. "It's an old saying that more people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows. I'd never seen them before, but I suppose they had seen me somewhere—perhaps in Angel Alley."

"You know Angel Alley?" asked Tom.

"Certainly. I did some slumming in London once, and came upon that salubrious spot. I made the acquaintance of young Frayne there—in fact, I did him some little service. Probably those roughs who tackled D'Arcy yesterday came from the same quarter, and they may have seen me while I was there. I was surprised to see young Frayne—I mean, I was surprised when I found out who he was. I didn't know him at first. It's rather a far cry from Angel Alley to St. Jim's."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Tom. "It's rather a change of surroundings for Joe. But he's a splendid little chap."

"Yes, I believe he is. He was surprised to see me here, I gather. I was surprised when I found out who he was. He came to see me in my room last night," Talbot explained, with an air of great frankness, "and we had a little talk."

Talbot's frank explanation quite satisfied the juniors. They had not had any doubts of him—only a feeling that they would like that very odd circumstance explained. Talbot had explained it. And that his explanation did not tally with the story he had related to the Head they could not know, for they knew nothing of what had passed between the Toff and the Head of St. Jim's, and were not likely to know anything.

Tom Merry was quite satisfied, and he would not admit to himself that he had felt anything like a doubt of Talbot's bona-fides; and yet, thinking of it afterwards, he realised that his mentioning the matter to Talbot at all implied some lingering kind of a doubt, and he wondered, in a rather worried way, whether it appeared to Talbot himself in that light. And that made him more than ever cordial and friendly towards the new chum.

CHAPTER 13.

Talbot of the Shell!

MR. RAILTON was absent from the school that morning.

Only Talbot and the Head knew that he had gone to Luxford, and only the Head, as he thought, knew that he was there to inquire into the bona-fides of the boy who had so strangely come to St. Jim's. But, as a matter of fact, Talbot knew. He waited the results with equanimity.

Talbot explored St. Jim's and the vicinity, and went on the river while the fellows were in the Form-room that morning. He seemed to take an inexhaustible interest in the old school. He dropped in at the school tuckshop, and quite won Dame Taggles' heart by his keen appreciation of her pastries. He chatted with Taggles, the porter, in his lodge, and succeeded in even making friends with that crusty old gentleman.

Indeed, Talbot, with his handsome face, pleasant manners, and winning smiles, made friends wherever he went—with a single exception. Mr. Selby, the master of the Third Form, had not forgiven or forgotten. Talbot's refusal to complain of the jape played on him in the dark passage had robbed Mr. Selby of the pleasure of seeing Tom Merry & Co. caned by the Head, and Mr. Selby could not forget that. Fortunately, he was not likely to have much to do with Mr. Selby if he came to St. Jim's to stay.

When Mr. Railton returned to the school he went at once to the Head's study, where Dr. Holmes was awaiting him a little anxiously.

"Well?" asked the Head.

"Everything is as Talbot stated at Luxford, sir," said the Housemaster. "I have seen Mr. Bowker. He did not think much of Talbot's uncle, but he has a very high opinion of the boy—indeed, Talbot seems to have made many friends there. He played cricket with the local team while he was staying there, and they made him their captain. And Mr. Bowker told me that Talbot had rescued his little boy from a pond he had fallen into, at some risk to himself."

"He is certainly a courageous lad," said the Head. "It was, of course, necessary to make these inquiries; but I was quite certain that nothing would be learned to his disadvantage. He is a very fine lad."

The Housemaster nodded assent.

"I am glad you agree with me, Mr. Railton. And now about the lad's ambition. You will agree that it is a very laudable desire on his part to wish to go to a good school and finish his education."

"Undoubtedly."

"There seems to be nothing against his admission to the school. It would be very much against my conscience to abandon the lad, especially after his service to me last night," said the Head. "I acknowledge that it is a serious matter to assume the charge of him. But—"

"He seems to be a clever lad," said the Housemaster. "It is quite possible that he might gain one of the scholarships, and so become independent."

"I have been thinking of that. The scholarships were founded especially for the benefit of school scholars, and I think I should be justified in helping Talbot from this fund. I have no doubt that the governors would give their consent. Will you call him in, Mr. Railton?"

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Talbot was in the quadrangle, chatting with Frayne of the Third, in sight of the Head's window. Mr. Railton beckoned to him from the open window.

The boy entered the study in a couple of minutes.

"Mr. Railton has been to Luxford," said the Head. "He has heard an excellent report of you there, Talbot. Of course, you understand that this does not imply that there was any doubt of your story in any way whatever."

"Thank you, sir."

"And now, about your desire to enter this school," said the Head kindly.

"You have thought about it, and are quite sure that that is your desire?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I see no reason, and Mr. Railton sees no reason, why you should not become a pupil here," said the Head.

Talbot's face lighted up.

"You are very kind, sir."

"In the matter of the fees, that can be arranged, I think."

WANTED—A BAT FROM THE BELLRY!



School Porter: "But why have you come to me to borrow a cricket bat?"

Boy: "Well, I was distinctly told that you had bats in the belfry!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Palmer, 27, Le Brun Road, Eastbourne.

"Pardon me, sir," said Talbot respectfully but firmly. "I do not wish to enter the school on different terms from the other fellows. I am sure that I can raise enough money by selling my things to pay the fees for a year at least, and by that time I hope to hear from my uncle again."

"My dear boy—"

"Don't think I am ungrateful for your kindness, sir, but I want to be independent. If any favours are done me in that way I shall feel that I have come here like a beggar."

The two masters exchanged glances. It was certainly a very right spirit in the lad, and it impressed them favourably.

"But, my boy," said the Head, "there is a fund left by the founder for this very purpose—to assist poor scholars—and upon my recommendation the board of governors would certainly allow—"

Talbot shook his head.

"I—I would rather not, sir, if you don't mind."

"But your little capital, whatever the amount, could then be preserved to

help you to start in life when you leave St. Jim's."

"Oh, no, sir! Let me pay my fees in the ordinary way, if I have enough money—and I am sure I have. I have a good many valuable things; and, indeed, my uncle, when he gave them to me, told me that they would help me in the future, by their money value, if anything should go wrong with his affairs. It was a kind of provision for me. If you will let me send for my things and put them in the hands of someone who understands their value, I think they will raise quite a large sum."

"I will not refuse your wish," said the Head slowly. "It is a very proper spirit—very proper indeed. It shall be as you wish. Go to Luxford this afternoon, then, and bring your things here. First, however, Mr. Railton will examine you and assign you your Form and study."

"Thank you, sir."

Talbot followed Mr. Railton from the room.

His face was very bright now, and he seemed to be walking on air. There was no doubt that the certainty of becoming a St. Jim's fellow delighted him. He followed the Housemaster into his study. He passed the Terrible Three in the passage, and found time for a word with them.

"It's all right," he said.

"You're coming?" asked Lowther.

"Yes."

"Good egg! Mind you get into the Shell."

Talbot nodded and smiled, and went into the Housemaster's study. He was there for half an hour, and when he came out he found the Terrible Three waiting for him.

"Well?" asked the trio together.

Talbot's face beamed.

"Mr. Railton says I'm to be in the Shell—"

"Hurrah!"

"And Study No. 8 in the School House."

"That's Gore's study," said Tom Merry. "But it's next to ours. Come along, my pippin, and we'll show you your quarters."

And Tom Merry and Lowther marched the new fellow up the stairs, and Manners followed, whistling a march. The welcome the new boy received in his Form and House was heartiness itself.

Tom Merry thumped on Gore's door and opened it. There was a sound of voices in dispute in the study. George Gore shared it with Skimpole, and they did not thrive together.

"You silly chump—"

"My dear Gore—"

"I've a jolly good mind to bump your silly head against the wall."

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"More trouble in the family?" Skimpole blinked at the newcomers through his big spectacles.

"Gore is very unreasonable," he said.

"I have used his impot paper to write a chapter of my book—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My book which will make a great sensation when it is finished," said Skimpole, who was a very wise youth and given to deeply learned pursuits.

"Gore can easily obtain a further supply of impot paper by asking for it. The trouble of going downstairs is really not worth this display of temper on Gore's part."

"I've got lines to do, you thumping idiot!" said Gore.

(Continued on page 13.)

The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal!
Drop him a line to-day,
addressing your letters:
The Editor, The GEM,
Fleetway House, Farring-
don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, chums! The football season is almost here again. The kick-off is next Saturday, and it is a reminder to us that summer is rapidly passing. But what a wash-out it has been! More harsh words have been said over the weather this summer than for many years past. I cannot remember a summer when we have had so much rain. All the heat-waves that should normally give us a look-in seemed to have taken the wrong turning! But it would be just like old King Sol to come up shining when football begins and give the players a really hot time with which to commence the season's activities. That is what usually happens. But that, of course, won't be much consolation to cricketers.

However, so much for the weather. A brighter topic for discussion is offered in the next programme of the GEM. As one reader said in his letter the other day, when adding his grouse about the weather: "Thank goodness no rain, wind, or cold can ever dim the sparkle of the good old GEM!"

I have just finished reading the next gripping story of the grand series which starts in this number, and good as "The Coming of the Toff" is, the second yarn of Talbot's adventures at St. Jim's is even better.

"THE SCHOOLBOY CRACKSMAN!"

is the title of this great yarn, and, of course, readers don't need telling who the cracksmen are. Reginald Talbot is a curious mixture of bad and good, but, except for one junior, St. Jim's has yet

to discover the bad side of his nature. Talbot's "game" in coming to St. Jim's is one of treachery and deceit, living the life of an innocent schoolboy in the day-time, and becoming a cracksmen at night. But already the kindness of his new companions and the cheeriness of his new surroundings have brought pangs of remorse to the schoolboy cracksmen. But as yet he has not found it in him to turn back from a life of crime. In next Wednesday's yarn, while Talbot is the hero of the hour in saving Wally D'Arcy's life at Glyn House, where the St. Jim's junior cricket team has been invited, he is yet to be found "cracking" his host's safe in the dead of night!

I foretell that this powerful series will bring in hundreds of letters of praise from readers, and I shall welcome them all. Meantime, look out for the second magnificent yarn.

"WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?"

That burning question in the Greyfriars Remove has yet to be settled. The captaincy of the cricket team rests between Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, and there is little to choose between them at the moment. If anything, Bob Cherry is slightly favourite, for the Remove has not forgotten what Wharton was like when he first came to Greyfriars. But nothing could be more sporting than for the candidates to fight for the honour on the cricket field, the one who distinguishes himself most in the match being made captain. Frank Richards deals with this exciting

episode in his usual masterly style, and readers will enjoy every word of it.

This popular author is also in tip-top form with his latest grand cover-to-cover yarn of the chums of Greyfriars which appears in our companion paper, the "Magnet." All GEM readers will greatly enjoy:

"THE HERO OF THE CIRCUS!"

which deals with the further amazing adventures of Billy Bunter in Muccolini's circus. Just imagine Bunter—hero! It sounds rather surprising, what? But the Owl of Greyfriars is as wily as a wagon-load of monkeys, and there's a catch in it somewhere! Read all about it in this magnificent yarn of schoolboy and circus adventure. It's out now, price 2d.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL"

Another grand edition of this popular "Annual" will be on sale next week, September 1st. The 1937 volume is better and brighter than ever, and the chums of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood Schools are all waiting to entertain you with their lively and exciting escapades. In addition to three grand long yarns of these popular schoolboy characters, there is a host of shorter school stories, sparkling poems, and humorous articles, and, as usual, there is a jolly play for amateur actors. The "Holiday Annual" will be the usual price, 5s., and now's the time to remind your parents that this old favourite will be with us again in a few days.

ST. FRANK'S STORIES.

By the way, I've had several more inquiries for St. Frank's stories, and I'm doing all I can to give these readers what they want. As I said last week, there is a strong possibility that yarns of Nipper & Co. will be appearing again soon. To this I will add, that if my plans materialise, St. Frank's stories will be published regularly, quite apart from the GEM, and will completely satisfy the readers who are clamouring for them.

TAILPIECE.

Two American convicts were discussing their sentences.

"How long are you in for, buddy?"

"Ninety-nine years."

"Huh! You're lucky! I'm in for life!"

THE EDITOR.

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The GEM Club at the Modern School, Surbiton, set to work to win the girls' section for the GEM. Here is a smiling group who "fell" for Tom Merry, and now read about him regularly.

"My dear Gore—"

"Hallo, who's this chap?" asked Gore.

"Your new study-mate," said Tom.

"Oh, rats!" said Gore ungraciously. "I don't want a new study-mate. Skimpole's enough to turn a fellow's hair grey. I thought we were going to have this study to ourselves when Vavasour left."

"Sorry!" said Talbot. "Mr. Railton has put me in here. I hope I shan't be much trouble to you. I'll try not to be."

"Well," said Gore, mollified, "if Railton put you here, I suppose you're bound to come. You can trot in."

Talbot smiled and came in. Skimpole blinked at him.

"I am very glad you are coming here, Talbot," he said in his solemn way. "Perhaps you will keep Gore in order. He is a very brutal person."

"Oh, we shall get on all right," said Talbot.

"You will find it difficult to get on with Gore," said Skimpole, with a sigh. "Vavasour used to thrash him, and he was much better then."

"I'd like to see that new kid trying to thrash me," said Gore truculently. The bully of the Shell was always ready to take offence and generally looking for trouble. "Do you think you could do it, Talbot?"

The Terrible Three looked uneasy. They did not want their new friend's arrival to be marked by a fight with the bully of the Form. But Talbot only laughed good-naturedly.

"Don't let's think about anything of the sort," he suggested. "Let's try to live peaceably in the study. I don't want to row."

Even Gore could not quarrel with that. He nodded surlily, and walked out of the study in quest of a new supply of impot paper. And Talbot, after looking round his new quarters, walked away with the Terrible Three. Talbot certainly had the gift of making friends, and it was a surprise to all the Shell when he took possession of his new quarters that day without a row with Gore to begin with. And the Terrible Three were surprised and relieved, too, when Gore was heard to declare in the Junior Common-room that evening that the new fellow was a jolly decent chap.

Talbot had not been a day at St. Jim's, but he was well upon the way to becoming one of the most popular fellows there.

CHAPTER 14.

Kind Attentions!

DURING the next few days Talbot's popularity increased rather than diminished.

His Form-fellows liked him, and Figgins & Co. of the New House, having made his acquaintance, pronounced him a good sort.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declared that he was one of the best, and was extremely friendly towards him.

He was still on friendly terms with Gore of the Shell, and at the same time his presence in Study No. 8 kept the peace between Gore and Skimpole, and the latter junior found the study much more agreeable with Talbot there.

Frayne for some time paid special attention to Talbot, perhaps with a lingering doubt of his good intentions.

But the new Shell fellow succeeded in reassuring the wail of the Third.

He was very kind to Frayne when

they met, but he did not meet him oftener than could be helped. And Frayne never spoke of him to the other fags. The fact that they had met before Talbot came to St. Jim's was a fact that Talbot wished to have forgotten. The less that was said about their previous acquaintance the better the Toff liked it. But he had no reason to fear Frayne's discretion. Once convinced of the Toff's good faith, nothing would have induced the loyal little fag to betray him.

Talbot's property had been brought over from the hotel at Luxford. Both the Head and Mr. Railton were surprised at the number of articles of value he possessed. His uncle, if not kind to him, had apparently been very generous. After another conversation with the new boy on the subject, and finding him determined, the Head allowed the sale to be made, as Talbot desired, and more than sufficient was realised to pay Talbot's expenses at the school for a year, with an ample allowance over. His circumstances, however, were known only to the Head, the Housemaster, and himself. To the rest of the fellows he was simply an ordinary new boy.

There was only one person in the school who did not wish him well, and that was Mr. Selby.

That gentleman never forgot or forgave. The fact that Talbot had "stood up to him" was a thing Mr. Selby could not forget.

Talbot, naturally, shared the sentiments of the juniors towards Mr. Selby. He had been four or five days at St. Jim's when the master of the Third found an opportunity of "dropping" on him.

The Shell fellows had come out of the Form-room after morning lessons, and Talbot and the Terrible Three and Kangaroo, and one or two others leap-frogged their way down the passage in the exuberance of their youthful spirits.

Mr. Selby came round a corner unexpectedly—Monty Lowther declared afterwards that he had heard the noise, and was sneaking round to catch the delinquents—and Talbot, who was just clearing Tom Merry's bent back, bumped right into him.

"Oh! Oh! Ah!" gasped Mr. Selby. He sat down suddenly on the floor.

The leap-frog ceased as if by magic. It was not a light matter to floor a Form-master, even by accident, especially so irascible a Form-master as Mr. Selby.

"I'm sorry, sir!" exclaimed Talbot. "I didn't hear you coming."

Mr. Selby staggered up painfully, rejecting angrily the helping hand of the Shell fellow.

"It is false!" he exclaimed furiously. "You have done this intentionally!"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Silence, Merry! I repeat, Talbot, that you have done this on purpose! It is of a piece with your previous conduct."

"What previous conduct, sir?" asked Talbot quietly.

"Don't argue with me!" snapped Mr. Selby, who would have found it difficult to answer that question frankly. "You are a most impertinent boy, as might be expected of a boy coming from goodness knows where, without antecedents and without connections."

"You've no right to say that, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly.

"What, Merry! You dare—"

"Yes, I do! And I'll repeat what I've said before the Head, too!"

Mr. Selby glared at him and walked away. Perhaps he realised that he had said a little too much—more than he would have cared to have repeated to the Head, who was known to have a very high opinion of Talbot.

"The rotter!" said Kangaroo, with a deep breath.

"The mean boulder!" growled Manners. "Don't mind him, Talbot. He's got his knife into you because you wouldn't play his game the other night by complaining of us."

Talbot nodded.

"It's all right. I don't mind him," he said.

But the Terrible Three minded. At tea in the study that evening, Tom Merry declared war on Mr. Selby—in strict private, of course.

"It's too thick!" he said. "He mucked up young Frayne's birthday feed for nothing—licked Wally—bothered us all round—and now he's insulted Talbot, than whom there isn't a more decent fellow breathing."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther sympathetically.

"Selby's got to be taught manners. He's gone out now," added Tom. "Follow your leader!"

And Tom Merry, keeping a wary eye open, led the way to Mr. Selby's study. They had seen the Third Form master cross the quadrangle towards the gates, and so felt secure from interruption in his quarters. But as they paused outside the door there was a sound of movement within.

Tom Merry held up his hand. "Somebody's in the room," he murmured.

"But Selby's gone out," said Lowther.

"Somebody else japing him, perhaps," whispered Manners. "Look through the keyhole."

"Yes, very likely."

Tom Merry looked.

"Talbot," he said.

And he opened the door.

Talbot was in the Third Form master's room. He swung round with a start as the door opened.

"All serene!" grinned Tom Merry. "Only us—innocent and harmless us! What are you up to?"

"What's the jape?" asked Lowther. Talbot laughed.

"I—I thought I'd pay him a visit," he remarked. "I was thinking of filling his inkpot with glue."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry admiringly. "You're picking up our manners and customs wonderfully."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And a little treacle in his favourite slippers," suggested Lowther.

"Hear, hear!"

"What about mucking up his blessed collection?"

The Terrible Three considered. Mr. Selby was the owner of a very expensive and valuable numismatic collection. Numismatics was his hobby, and he had spent the leisure hours of twenty-four years or more on his collection of coins. He had a set of gold pieces of ancient Roman times that was almost unique, and had cost him more money than he could well afford, though his salary was a liberal one.

But Mr. Selby had chosen his hobby wisely. The value of his collection increased with the years, and he generally secured his specimens at a bargain price whenever opportunity offered. The collection reposed in his study in a large case with a glass top, and was proudly shown to visitors, and envious numismatics often came to see it.

"Rather a joke to tumble the whole blessed lot out, and put the giddy labels in the fire," Monty Lowther suggested. "One way of giving him lines—what!"

Tom Merry shook his head. "Better not meddle with valuables," he said. "If any of them get lost, there will be a row. Some of those coins are worth twenty pounds each."

"A valuable lot to be left in a case with a glass top," Talbot remarked.

"It's locked," said Manners, examining the case. "We couldn't get at them, anyway."

"Easy enough to open it," said Talbot, looking at the lock. "Anybody could pick it with a penknife."

"Blessed if I could!" said Tom Merry. "But it would be easy enough to open it with a chisel. The lock wouldn't hold it long; it's not strong. But that would be a bit too thick. Stick to his slippers."

"Easy enough to stick to them," grinned Lowther, as he poured treacle into the Third Form master's slippers, having brought a pot for the purpose. "Now some in the seat of the arm-chair."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now let's get out. We shall have to prove a jolly strong alibi after this."

And the Shell fellows departed, chuckling.

CHAPTER 15.

The Missing Coins!

MR. SELBY was in a decidedly bad temper with the Third Form at preparation that evening. Wally, Jameson, and Frayne especially came in for the rough edge of his tongue, and Mr. Selby's tongue could be very bitter.

When prep was over and the fags were left to themselves, there was much gritting of teeth and gleaming of eyes. Wally punched an imaginary countenance in the air, and Joe Frayne made passes with a ruler expressive of what he would like to do with his respected Form-master.

"When I'm grown up," said Wally ferociously, "I'm coming back to St. Jim's especially to see Selby. I'm going to take him by the scruff of his neck and give him a hiding!"

And the fags chuckled at the idea.

The chuckle stopped short as Mr. Selby strode into the Form-room with a flaming face, a pair of slippers in one hand, from which treacle was dripping.

He held the slippers up to view.

"Which of you did this?" he asked.

There was silence. Nobody there had done it, though they were pleased enough to see that it had been done. They only hoped that Mr. Selby had put his feet into the slippers before discovering the treacle there.

"Will you answer me?"

No reply.

"Very well!" said Mr. Selby, in a choking voice. "If the rascals who have perpetrated this outrage do not immediately confess, I shall cane the whole Form!"

There was a buzz in the Third. If the delinquent had been there he would probably have owned up. As it was, there were "no takers," so to speak.

Mr. Selby selected a cane from his desk.

"Well?" he said.

There was a grim silence.

"You refuse to confess? Then I shall conclude that the whole Form was concerned in this. You first, D'Arcy minor." And Mr. Selby swished the cane.

Wally advanced reluctantly to take the caning. He took it, and retired squirming. Mr. Selby was not an athlete, and he was not in good form, but his right arm that evening seemed to be wonderfully sinewy. Every member of the Third Form passed before him in turn and received a caning.

Then Mr. Selby retired, taking his treacly slippers with him, and feeling somewhat solaced. But he left the Third Form in an almost homicidal frame of mind.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" groaned Wally, rubbing his smarting palms. "The awful beast! The chap who treaced his blessed slippers ought to have owned up. Yow-ow-ow!"

"Who was it?" groaned Frayne.

But nobody was found to admit it. It was clear that the delinquent was not

"What's the row now?" he demanded. "I think Selby's been down on us enough."

"Some of you young sweeps have been playing tricks in his study," said the captain of St. Jim's. "What have you done with his coins?"

"His what?"

"His coins!"

"I haven't done anything with them," said Wally, in wonder.

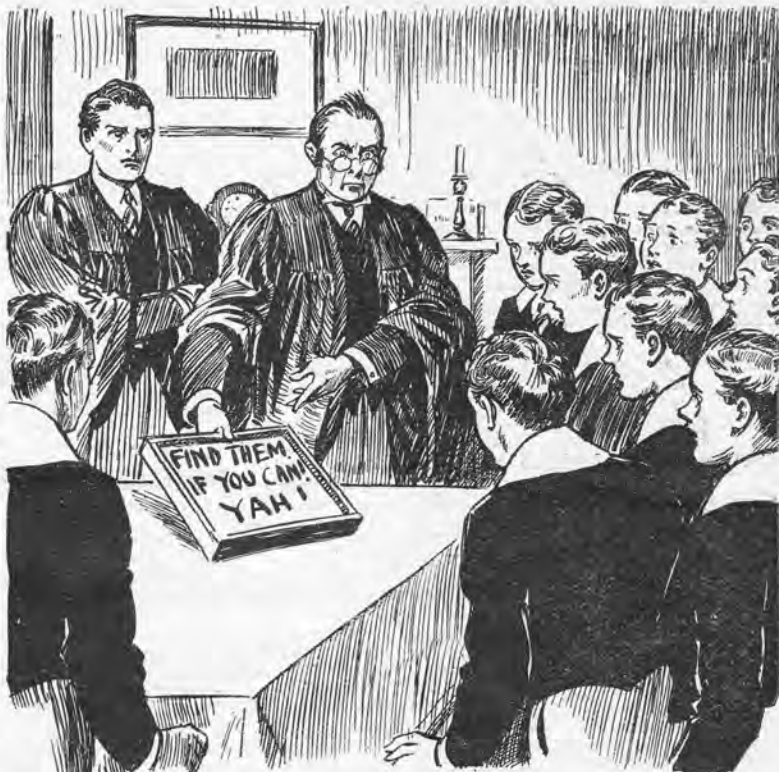
Kildare looked at him keenly.

"Well, some of you know," he said.

"You're to go to his study at once!"

"Oh, all serene!" said Wally resignedly. "I suppose we shall get it hot again, though we haven't done anything!"

And the School House portion of the Third Form trooped off to their Form-master's study.



Mr. Selby's eyes burned as he turned them on the crowd of nervous fags. "You see what has been done?" he said. "Where are my coins which were in this case? If they are not restored to me immediately you will be accused of theft!"

in the Third Form at all. That discovery intensified the resentment of the fags. They had been punished on suspicion only, and punished severely.

For the rest of that evening there was only one topic in the Third Form at St. Jim's—schemes of vengeance on their unjust master. A dozen impracticable schemes were mooted and abandoned, and when the fags went to bed at nine o'clock, they were no nearer to their desire to "get their own back" on the obnoxious Selby.

They were still thinking of their wrongs when they turned out at the clang of the rising-bell the next morning.

As the Third Form came downstairs, Kildare of the Sixth met them, with a stern brow.

"All of you go to Mr. Selby's study!" he rapped out.

Wally gave a snort.

Mr. Railton was there with the Third Form master. He looked very stern, and Mr. Selby was white with rage.

The fags crowded in, and their glances turned at once to the numismatic case. The lid of the case had been wrenched open, and almost all the coins had been taken out. A sheet of cardboard lay in their place. On the card was daubed roughly in Roman letters with a brush:

"FIND THEM IF YOU CAN!
YAH!"

Wally whistled softly. It was evident that some unknown person had stolen into Mr. Selby's study overnight, abstracted the collection of coins, and hidden them, and left that defiant notice for the Form-master to find in the morning. The daubed letters offered no clue whatever to the writer.

Mr. Selby's eyes burned as he turned them on the crowd of nervous fags.

"You see what has been done!" he said. "Where are my coins? If they are not restored to me immediately, you will be accused of theft!"

"Patience, Mr. Selby," said the Housemaster quietly but very firmly. "There is no question of theft here. Your collection has been taken away and hidden—apparently for a practical joke; and there is as yet no proof that it was done by boys of your own Form."

"I am certain of it! Last night I had to cane the whole Form for a trick played upon me in this room—"

"And we hadn't done it!" burst out Wally angrily. "Mr. Railton, I appeal to you! Nobody in the Third knows who put the treacle into Mr. Selby's slippers!"

"I have also found glue in my ink-pot!" said Mr. Selby, his voice shaking with rage. "Hold your tongue, D'Arcy minor. It is useless to tell falsehoods!"

"I am not telling falsehoods!" said Wally fiercely. "And we've a right to appeal to our Housemaster against injustice!"

"Injustice! Take care!"

"One moment!" said Mr. Railton. "What do you Shell boys want here?"

The Terrible Three and Talbot appeared in the open doorway.

"We—we've got something to say, sir," stammered Tom Merry.

"Do you know who has done that?" asked Mr. Railton, pointing to the wrenched-open case.

Four juniors stared at it.

"Oh, no, sir! We—we thought—"

"You thought what?"

"Ahem! We—we were under a—a—a misapprehension, sir—"

"Explain why you came here, Merry, instantly!"

"Ahem! We—we thought the Third had been sent for because of the treacle in Mr. Selby's slippers," stammered Tom; "so we—we came to own up!"

"Then it was you!" shouted Mr. Selby.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry meekly.

"And I put the glue in the inkpot, sir," said Talbot. "I was here with the others!"

"You—you dare—"

"It appears, then, Mr. Selby," said the Housemaster, in a somewhat ominous tone, "that you caned the whole of the Third Form for an offence of which they had not been guilty, and upon suspicion merely!"

Mr. Selby stammered. He realised that he had been very hasty.

"It—it appears so," he said awkwardly. "I—I am sorry to say it appears so. However—"

"It was certainly very unfortunate. In the circumstances, if your collection of coins had been hidden by a boy in the Third Form, I suggest that the boy shall be pardoned if he will restore the coins immediately!"

"Mr. Railton! He should be severely punished—"

"The punishment has already been inflicted, without just cause," said the Housemaster dryly. "I am willing to leave the matter to the Head's decision, if you wish."

"I—I will take your advice. Let him be pardoned, if the collection is restored to me undamaged."

"Very well. Now, my boys," said Mr. Railton, "you hear? Someone has taken the coins and concealed them somewhere. Whoever has done it will be forgiven if the coins are brought back at once."

There was a pause.

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"I don't know anything about them, sir," said Wally.

"Same here!" said Curly.

"Nor I don't, sir," said Frayne.

"I was fast asleep all last night, sir," said Hobbs.

And the fags all answered to the same effect. Mr. Railton looked at them searchingly, while the Third Form master became more angry.

"Come, come!" said Mr. Railton. "Someone has taken them, and I am convinced that it was only a practical joke. Indeed, that absurd and impertinent message left there in the case proves as much. Please confess, whoever has done it."

Silence.

Mr. Railton thought he understood that silence. Whoever had played the trick was afraid to own up, lest he should be marked out for future vengeance by the Form-master.

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, after a pause. "I will give you time. I expect Mr. Selby's coins to be replaced intact before morning lessons commence. If this is not done, I shall have to place the matter before the Head. I may point out to you that the collection is more valuable than you may have supposed; it is worth more than five hundred pounds. Now go!"

The fags filed out of the study.

At breakfast that morning Mr. Selby was white and furious, with difficulty suppressing his fury. His hobby was his only relaxation, and he valued his collection far higher than its money value, though that was very considerable. That the collection had been swept off for a "jape" he did not doubt, but he had fears that when the japer realised the value of the coins, he might think twice about letting them be discovered.

If they could be concealed in safety for a considerable time, it would then be easy for the thief to dispose of them one at a time; and there were a thousand nooks and crannies about the old, rambling buildings where such small objects could be concealed.

CHAPTER 16.

Not to be Found!

"SERVE him right!" That was the verdict of all the Lower School when the news of Mr. Selby's loss spread through St. Jim's.

The general belief was that some fag in the Third had played the trick, and meant to keep Mr. Selby on tenterhooks by keeping the coins hidden for an indefinite time.

That any St. Jim's chap intended to steal them was not thought for a moment. It was feared by Mr. Selby, but by no one else. It was a jape, and it served old Selby right. That was the unanimous verdict.

"I jolly well hope they won't be found!" said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It weally serves the old boundah wight!"

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther. "We've got three hundred lines each for treaching his slippers. I hope it'll be three hundred years before he finds his giddy coins!"

"Rather rough on him to lose such a valuable collection, though," said Talbot thoughtfully. "Surely the chap will own up."

"I fancy not," said Tom Merry. "If it were anybody but Selby—yes. But they know him too well!"

"But they're promised a free pardon and—"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"That's all very well, but they know that Selby would keep his eye on the chap, all the same, if he owned up. He couldn't punish him for this, after what Railton said, but he would watch for chances afterwards, and make him smart for something else."

"Yaas, wathah! There's no twustin' Selby's sense of honah."

"I suppose it was some Third Form kid," Kangaroo remarked.

"Most likely."

"I don't know," said Tom. "Nearly every fellow in the House dislikes Selby. It might have been a Shell chap, for all we know. As a matter of fact, I heard someone moving in the dorm last night when I woke up for a minute. Wasn't any of you chaps, I suppose?"

There was a general shaking of heads.

"But if the chap nevah owns up Selby will nevah get his collection back," said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, he's only got himself to thank. Why doesn't he play the game?"

"Yaas, that's vewy twue."

"But the things are bound to turn up sooner or later," observed Talbot. "They must be hidden about the school somewhere, and it's only a matter of time."

"Yes, I suppose so. Selby's only got to be patient."

"He doesn't look very patient!" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That was the amount of sympathy that Mr. Selby received—and it was probably as much as he deserved.

The culprit did not come forward. The matter was taken before the Head, and all the School House realised that it was serious. The New House were outside the possibility of suspicion, but after morning lessons all the School House boys, from the head of the Sixth to the youngest fag, were collected in Big Hall. There they were questioned by the Head.

Mr. Selby persisted in his belief that the Third Form—or some of them—were guilty, and he would willingly have caned the whole Form. But the matter was in more just hands now, and the Head would certainly allow nothing of the kind.

Everybody in the School House was

asked individually if he knew anything about the matter, and every boy replied in the negative. That someone had lied was certain, and fellows who were known to be indifferent to the truth, like Levison, Mellish, and Crooke, found themselves subjected to very searching scrutiny. But nothing came of the examination, and the assembly was dismissed.

That day Mr. Selby bore a very strong resemblance to a caged wild animal. The Third Form felt the full force of his acid temper. But his severity was more likely to make the fags keep the secret, if they had one, than to reveal it. Mr. Selby almost believed by this time that his collection had been stolen, though everybody else was convinced that it had simply been hidden, and would turn up in the course of time.

Perhaps there was one who doubted—Frayne of the Third. During afternoon lessons Frayne was sunk in a deep and troubled reverie, from which even Mr. Selby's bitter tongue and cane could not effectually rouse him.

After lessons Frayne hurried away by himself, avoiding his comrades. Tom Merry & Co. had gone down to cricket practice, taking Talbot with them. Frayne seemed to feel an unaccustomed interest in Shell cricket, for he stood and watched Tom Merry & Co. till they had finished. When they adjourned to the tuckshop for refreshment, in the shape of ginger-beer, Frayne followed them and waited outside. When they came out he caught Talbot by the sleeve.

"I want to speak to you," he muttered.
Talbot looked down at the fag with a good-natured smile.
"Right-ho!" he said. "I'll come after you fellows."
"Tea in the study in ten minutes," said Tom Merry.
"All serene!"

Talbot paused under the elms with Frayne. The waif of the Third was searching his face with eyes that seemed to burn.

"Well, what is it, kid?" asked Talbot.
"Toff, tell me—you got to own up—was it you?"
Talbot looked at him in amazement.
"Was what me?" he asked. "I don't understand."
"You know wot I mean, Toff," said Joe Frayne.
"I haven't the faintest idea," said Talbot. "If you'll explain what you mean I may understand. Buck up! I'm going to tea with Tom Merry."

"About Selby's coins. They was worth five 'undred pound," said Frayne. "Do you know anythin' about them?"

"Oh, is that it?"
"Yes, that's it," said Frayne, his lips twitching convulsively. "You know wot I thought when you came 'ere—that you was on the old lay. Was it you, Toff? Have you stolen that five 'undred quid? If you 'ave—"

Talbot's face became very grave.
"Now, look here, Joe," he said quietly. "I've told you once that I'm not here on the old lay. I'm going straight. I don't want any more of this. Mr. Selby's collection has been hidden by somebody, and I suppose it will turn up in time. It's bound to. I don't know anything about it. Does that satisfy you?"

Joe Frayne eyed him dubiously.
"But wot if it don't turn up?" he said.
"I think it will; but, anyway, it's no business of mine."
"And—and you don't know anythin'?"
"What should I know?"

Frayne gave him another hard look, scanning the handsome, careless face, and then he sighed helplessly.

"I dunno wot to do," he muttered. "If I thought it was you I'd go straight to the 'Ead. But—but—you was good to me in them old days, and I'll try to believe you, Toff. But—but if I find out that you ain't straight, then look out, that's all."

"Agreed!" said Talbot.

Frayne moved away with heavy steps and a troubled face. Talbot glanced after him with a smile, and then walked cheerfully into the School House. He was the merriest of the little party in Tom Merry's study, like a fellow who had not a care in the world. Was it possible that that handsome and careless face hid a black and guilty secret? Was there any grounds, after all, for Frayne's half-formed doubt and suspicion? The future alone could tell.

THE END.

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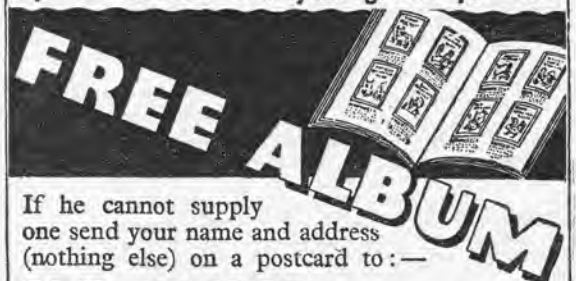
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WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?

Rival Candidates!

HARRY WHARTON came into Study No. 1, in the Remove at Greyfriars, and found the room in a buzz of talk. Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Singh were all eagerly discussing cricket.

The reign of King Football was nearly over, and the juniors at Greyfriars—and the seniors as well—were talking and thinking of nothing but the great summer game.

Greyfriars was a cricketing college, and three teams were run. In the season the boys talked, thought, and dreamed of cricket, and played it with a serious determination, which seemed to indicate that it was rather a business than a pleasure to them.

So far as matches were concerned, the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars—had hitherto been content to fill vacant places in the junior eleven the great men of which belonged to the Upper Fourth and the Shell. But this season the Removeites, with new and more vigorous leaders, meant to make a change.

There was no reason, so Harry Wharton declared at the committee meeting, why the Form eleven should not be quite independent of assistance from Upper Forms, and why it should not meet teams of equal strength from other schools, captained by a fellow in the Remove itself.

There was no reason why not, that the Removeites could see, though Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Upper Fourth, sniffed and shrugged their shoulders. But they were at liberty to sniff and shrug till they were black in the face, Bob Cherry said; and the Remove went on its way with its great idea.

The question of Form captain was a very interesting one, and bade fair to become a really burning question.

It was this matter that the chums of the Remove were discussing as Harry Wharton came into the study.

"I can depend on all you chaps, I suppose?" said Bob Cherry, looking round the study at friendly faces.

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent. "I'm not putting up as cricket captain myself, and you're the next best."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"And you, Inky?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, the Indian member of the Greyfriars Remove, nodded with an expansive smile.

"The pleasurefulness of supporting the candidate of my heart will only be equalled by the usefulness of our esteemed chum as a cricketful captain," he said, in the beautiful English he had learned under the very best native masters in Bengal.

"Ha, ha! What about you, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove, looked up from the teapot he was washing out, and blinked at Bob Cherry through his big spectacles.

"Oh, certainly, Cherry! I shall support you with great pleasure," he said.

"If you are elected I shall stand a feed in the tuckshop to celebrate the event, if I happen to be in funds. I'm expecting a postal order for a considerable amount to arrive any day now."

"Good! That's three votes."

"Oh, I can't vote for you, Cherry!" said Billy Bunter.

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By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

Bob Cherry stared at him.

"But you have promised me your support."

"Yes, I shall certainly support you as much as I can, but I can't vote for you."

"Are you going to vote for somebody else?"

"No; but—"

"Then why can't you vote for me?"

"You see, I shan't have a vote."

"Eh?"

"I don't belong to the Remove Cricket Club," explained Bunter. "I regard it as useless to pay a subscription when I don't play cricket, and, of course, only paying members of the Form club have a vote."

"You young ass!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! It isn't my

Who shall be captain of the cricket team? That's the burning question in the Remove at Greyfriars; and one of the favourites for the honour is Harry Wharton—once the most unpopular fellow in the Form!

fault that non-members are not allowed to vote."

"Ass! What's the good of your support if you haven't got a vote?" said Bob Cherry, in disgust. "You can go and give your support to some other ass—I mean to some ass!"

"But—"

"Oh, cheese it! Hallo, Wharton! Of course, you're going to vote for me?"

Harry Wharton came into the study.

There was a curious look on his handsome face and a slight colour in his cheeks.

The chums of the Remove looked at him as he hesitated to reply to Bob Cherry's question. It appeared to embarrass him.

"You'll vote for me, Harry?" said Bob again.

"Of course he will!" said Nugent promptly, though wondering at Harry's silence. "Of course, he's bound to stand by a member of his own study. We've all got to support Cherry."

"The truth of the honoured remark is apparentful," said Hurree Singh. "Bob Cherry will have the heartfelt support of every esteemed fellow present. As your English proverb says, 'Many cooks make light broth, and a stitch in time saves a larger number at a later period.'"

"The fact is—"

He paused, with the eyes of his chums on him.

Bob Cherry turned rather red.

"I don't want to ask any chap for his support if he doesn't want to give it," he said, rather huffily. "Of course, I

naturally expected my own chums to stand by me at a time like this."

"Of course," said Nugent. "Wharton doesn't mean to refuse."

"The painfulness of the refusal to the esteemed chum would be great," purred Hurree Singh. "But perhaps Wharton has some wheezy idea in his mind, of which he has not yet made the candid communication."

"That's it," said Harry.

"If you think I'm not up to the mark as a cricketer, Wharton," said Bob Cherry.

Harry shook his head.

"Not in the least, Bob. From what I've seen of your practice so far, I imagine your cricket is better than most of the junior players at Greyfriars, even including that of the great pandjandrums of the Upper Fourth and the Shell."

"Then why don't you—"

"Well, the fact is—"

Harry Wharton paused again.

"I say, Wharton, you're surely not thinking of that little row we had the other day?" said Bob Cherry.

Harry turned crimson.

"Oh, no!" he exclaimed. "Surely you know me better than that."

Bob grinned.

"Well, I don't know," he said. "Your temper is so beastly uncertain, Harry, and a chap never knows whether you're bearing a grudge or not."

"Something in that," said Nugent.

Harry bit his lip. He knew well enough that his passionate temper had all but estranged his chums more than once, and of late he had learned to keep it in better control than he had been wont.

"Well," said Bob Cherry, "if you've got nothing up against me, and you're satisfied with my form as a cricketer, why can't you vote for me?"

"Well, the fact is I'm thinking of putting up for cricket captain myself."

Bulstrode Bowled Out!

BOB CHERRY gave an expressive whistle.

"Oho! So you're thinking of blossoming forth as a giddy cricket captain, are you?" he asked.

Harry Wharton coloured again.

"Why not?"

Bob Cherry nodded cheerily. "Certainly! Why not? Why not as well as myself? You're quite as good a cricketer as I am."

"Better," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Thank you, Inky," said Bob Cherry.

"Please do not imagine that I fail in admiration for your excellent and honourable cricket, Cherry," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But a regardfulness for the truth compels me to state that the cricketfulness of the esteemed Wharton is what you English call an upper-cut."

"Ha, ha! I suppose you mean a cut above," said Nugent. "Well, Harry is certainly a bit stronger in the bowling line, but when it comes to batting—"

"I think I can keep my end up there," said Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Of course, I wasn't thinking of instituting any odious comparisons," he remarked. "I thought I should make a pretty fair captain, that's all."

ANOTHER RIPPING YARN OF THE EARLY SCHOOLDAYS OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.



"Now we'll put it to the vote," said Skinner. "Hands up for Bulstrode!" Only about a dozen hands went up. Bulstrode looked round with a scowl. It was obvious to the bully of the Remove that he had no chance against the other two candidates.

"But are you popular enough to put up for the post, Harry?" Nugent asked.

"Oh, that's all right!" Bob Cherry struck in. "I believe I should collar more votes than Wharton on a question of popularity, but it's a question of cricket pure and simple. If Wharton could show the Remove that it's better to have him leading the Form eleven, they'll have him."

"I don't know about better, Cherry; and, as a matter of fact, now I know that you intend to put up, I don't think I—"

Bob Cherry cut him short with a decided gesture.

"Nothing of that, Harry, please. I don't want any candidate to stand out for me out of any personal consideration for myself."

"No, but—"

"The Remove Cricket Club can choose between us," said Bob. "There will be other candidates, too, for that matter—Bulstrode for one."

"We can't let Bulstrode get it," said Nugent quickly. "He's no captain for the Remove. He's a bully, and his cricket is not good enough."

"The factfulness of the matter is," said the nabob, "that a cricket captain must be able to do more than play cricket. He requires the firmfulness of the character and the iron will, and must not be talked over by obstreperous persons. Bob Cherry is too good-natured for the post. Wharton can be as hard as rock."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Well, that's true to some extent, and I don't deny it," he said. "But I can always dot a fellow on the nose when required if I have too much cheek, you know."

"The dotfulness on the nose might not meet the case—"

"Then I could add some thickfulness for the ear," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Really, Inky, I shall be inclined to

start on you if you give me any more of your painful truths."

"The painfulness is equally matched with the truthfulness."

"Oh, cheese it! Now, look here, you chaps, a meeting of the cricket club en masse is to be held in the Form-room to-night, by order of the committee. We'll put to the meeting the important question, and let 'em settle it. Every member of the club is to be allowed a vote for the captain, and so it will be fair play all round."

"Good!" said Wharton.

"That's the idea," said Nugent.

"And now, as it's a fine afternoon, I vote that we get out and get in a little cricket practice."

"The suggestfulness is appropriate."

"Come on," said Harry Wharton.

"That's what I came here for, you lazy

bounders, to fetch you out to practice."

The chums of the Remove were soon going down to the cricket pitch, and they found a good many fellows already busy.

Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, was there, wielding a bat, and Hazeldene was bowling to him from the other end. The Form bully glanced at the chums as they came down, and a scowl came over his heavy brows.

There was no love lost between Bulstrode and the chums of Study No. 1. Bulstrode had been the bully of the Remove until he had fallen in a fair fight before Harry Wharton. He had belonged to Study No. 1 at that time, but one result of the fight had been that he had changed out and allowed Bob Cherry to have his place there. This was very comfortable for the chums of the Remove, and really more comfortable for Bulstrode himself, but he bore a grudge against the Famous Four on account of it.

"Look out!" called out Skinner, who was fielding.

But Bulstrode's eyes were on Harry Wharton, and the ball from Hazeldene

scattered his bails before he could look out.

"How's that?" grinned Hazeldene.

"Out!" said Skinner.

"I wasn't looking!" growled Bulstrode. "Of course, that doesn't count."

"Oh rats!" exclaimed Hazeldene.

Bulstrode picked up the ball, gritting his teeth. It was merely a practice, but he was deeply annoyed at being bowled out under the eyes of the chums. He glared at Hazeldene.

"Did you say rats to me?" he snarled.

"Yes, and many of 'em!" said Hazeldene, preparing to run if the bully of the Remove started towards him.

But that was not Bulstrode's intention. He gave his hand a sudden jerk, and the cricket ball flew and smote Hazeldene on the chest. Hazeldene staggered back with a yell and sat down on the grass.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Bulstrode.

"One good turn deserves another!

How's that?"

"Bowled out!" said Skinner.

Hazeldene sat up, clutching the cricket ball. It came back from his hand with a spiteful whiz, and Bulstrode dodged, and the ball clumped heavily on the chest of Hurree Singh, who was in the line of fire, and the nabob staggered.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated. "Take care where you are bowling, Hazeldene! I'm not a wicket, neither am I standing here as a target!"

"I'm sorry!"

"Get out of the way, then, you nigger!" growled Bulstrode. "It was your nigger's face that put me off my stroke just now. Throw that ball to me!"

"Certainly!" said the nabob politely.

He threw it.

"Catch!"

Bulstrode caught it—with his nose!

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He gave a fearful yell. Then he gripped his bat and sprang towards the Hindu with vengeance in his eyes. Harry Wharton stepped in his way.

"Stop that, Bulstrode!"

The bully glared at him savagely. Harry's voice was very quiet, but the tones carried weight. Bulstrode stopped.

"Get out of the way, Wharton! I'm going to lay this bat round that nigger's hide!" he snarled.

"You're going to do nothing of the sort," said Harry Wharton. "Don't be a fool, Bulstrode! If you want some practice I'll bowl to you a little. I hear that you are setting up as cricket captain in the Remove."

"Why shouldn't I?" growled Bulstrode, not sorry on the whole to change the subject.

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"No reason at all, that I know of, Bulstrode; only Cherry and I are both setting up for the same post."

Bulstrode stared at him in amazement.

"You? You've got the cheek to set up as cricket captain? I can understand Cherry; but you—well, of all the nerve!"

"I don't see any nerve in it."

"You're about the most unpopular fellow in the Form, I suppose, except Hazeldene," said Bulstrode. "You're a sulky brute, and nobody ever knows how to take you. I should think the Remove would be off its rocker if it ever had you for captain."

"Well, it's for the Remove to say," said Harry carelessly. "I don't want the post unless the Form wishes me to have it. I think I should be of some use, that's all."

Bulstrode sneered savagely.

"Oh, of course, your only object is to be of use! No idea of thrusting yourself forward in any way, and grabbing all you can get."

"Nothing of the sort, I hope," said Harry quietly. "But it's no good talking about it to you, Bulstrode. It largely depends on the kind of cricket we can put up, I suppose."

"Well, I can knock spots off you in that line, I rather imagine!"

"I rather imagine you can't do anything of the kind. But we'll see. How long do you think you could keep your wicket up against my bowling?"

"All day, I suppose, and the night thrown in, if there were a moon," said Bulstrode sarcastically; "then all the following morning."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, that's rather a big order. Are you willing to try?"

"Bowl, and see."

"Good! I will!"

The wicket was set up again, and Harry Wharton took the ball and went down to the bowler's end. Bulstrode dropped the end of his bat on the crease, and stood with a hard grip on the handle, his eyes keenly on the alert.

In spite of his boastful words, the Remove bully knew that Harry Wharton was a fine bowler, and he was by no means so confident in his own prowess as he had appeared to be.

"Play!" shouted Skinner.

The chums looked with interest at the scene. So did a great many more of the Remove who were hanging about the cricket field. If Bulstrode kept his end up well against Wharton's bowling, it would materially assist him when the time came for the election of the Remove cricket captain.

But it was not to be. Harry Wharton took a short run; his arm came swinging over, and the ball flew from his

hand. Down it came with the force of a 4.7 shell, and Bulstrode played; but he did not play the ball. It whipped under his bat, and a moment later there was a crash of a falling wicket.

"Out!" yelled Skinner.

Bulstrode glared at his wrecked wicket, and then at the successful bowler.

"That was a fluke, of course!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"You'll see a lot of flukes like that, Bulstrode, if you stand up to the bowling of Study No 1."

"Oh, shut up, Cherry! You can try that again, Wharton."

"Certainly," said Wharton. "Let's have the ball."

"Here you are."

The ball was tossed back and the wicket restored. Bulstrode gripped his bat, prepared to do or die this time. He was really a passable batsman, but there was more swagger than real quality in his play. He felt that he was no match for Wharton's bowling, but he would not think of admitting as much.

Harry Wharton grasped the ball and took his little run, a quiet smile for a moment flickering on his face. He knew that his bowling was too strong for the batsman, and far better batsmen than Bulstrode was ever likely to be. He had practised bowling assiduously, and he had a natural easy style. Down came the ball again.

Bulstrode was looking for a fast ball, like the last, but it came down slow, and suddenly broke in from the off. Clatter! How it happened, the Remove bully never knew, but his stumps were reclining at various angles, and the bails were lying on the ground.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Flukes are cheap to-day. I suppose that was another fluke, Bulstrode?"

"Oh, shut up, Cherry!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Try it once more, Harry."

"Certainly!"

"I don't feel like batting just now," said Bulstrode, anxious not to give Wharton's bowling any further prominence if he could help it. "Some of you other fellows take a turn."

And he put his bat under his arm and walked away. Bob Cherry grinned.

"I don't suppose he feels like batting against Wharton," he remarked. "He can't bat for toffee. I say, send us down a few balls, Harry."

"Right you are, Bob!"

There was a thickening crowd round the Remove ground now. Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, was standing there, looking on with interest. He took a big interest in junior cricket, and a word of encouragement for the juniors from the captain was never wanting.

Harry Wharton bowled to Bob Cherry, and Bob batted in a way that Bulstrode could never have done against the balls he received. But at the tenth ball down, the bails went flying. Bob Cherry wore a rather rueful look.

"Take the bat, you bounder!" he exclaimed.

Harry laughed, and changed the ball for the bat. Bob Cherry bowled to him, and delivered twelve good balls in succession, but it was not till the twelfth that Harry's wicket fell. And then, as some of the spectators thought, it was rather due to the failing light than Cherry's bowling.

Wingate patted Harry Wharton on the shoulder as the juniors came off the cricket ground. Harry looked at him.

"You'll do," said the captain at Greyfriars. "If the Remove don't make you

cricket captain, Wharton, it won't be because your cricket is wanting."

Harry flushed a little. He understood what was implied by the captain's words. His cricket was good enough, and if he had taken a little more trouble to make himself popular, he would have been sure of the Form captaincy.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "I shall do my best to deserve the post, Wingate, whether I get it or not."

"That's right."

The chums of the Remove strolled away together. Bob Cherry's arm was linked in Harry Wharton's, showing that he had no feeling of annoyance at being slightly outdone at the great game. He felt that his chances of becoming cricket captain had received a blow; but, as a matter of fact, he overrated the extent of it. Harry's cricket was undeniably good, but Cherry's personal qualities were much more popular, and it was extremely probable that, after all, the Remove would plump for Bob Cherry.

The Upper Fourth Object!

THE kettle was singing away cheerily in Study No. 1 as the chums of the Remove came in.

There was a pleasant smell of hot muffins. Billy Bunter looked up from the fire with a crimson countenance, and blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"Tea's ready!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you'll want it before you go to the Form meeting. I've opened the sardines. Shall I make the tea?"

"I'll do that," said Nugent. "You butter the muffins. They smell prime."

"Yes, I rather think I can toast muffins," said Bunter. "I intend to stand a regular feed of muffins when my postal order comes."

"Ha, ha, ha! Come and feed my infants," said Bob Cherry. "We're rather late, and we don't want to get in late for the cricket meeting. Important members like ourselves ought to be on the ground early."

"Rather!" agreed Nugent. "Pass the sardines. You can go on buttering the muffins, Bunter. There'll be time for you to feed after we've gone."

"Oh, really, Nugent! It doesn't look as if there will be anything—"

"Don't start gassing now, Bunter, old chap. We've got to talk business. I suppose both you bounders are going to put up for the cricket captaincy?" said Nugent.

"The bothfulness will occasion doubtfulness among the Form voters," said Hurree Singh. "Why not have the tossfulness of the shilling to decide?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I'm willing to stand out, if it's the general verdict of the study," Bob Cherry remarked, looking round.

"Not a bit of it, old fellow."

"Same here!" said Wharton immediately. "I admit I should like to be cricket captain for the Remove, and I think I could carry out the job well; but—"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Nugent. "The only difficulty is this, that you two will divide the voting, and possibly Bulstrode may get in by reason of that."

"That won't do!" said Harry Wharton decidedly. "Bulstrode isn't fit to be captain. He would cause trouble in the cricket club in no time."

"Exactly. Bulstrode will have to be kept out—not that we love Bulstrode less, but that we love the cricket club more. There's no room for him as captain. Still, I suppose we can see how the voting is likely to go at the

meeting. If it appears likely that Bulstrode will get in, one of you two chaps can stand out, and back up the other, and that will settle it. You can decide, in that case, by tossing up, as our inky friend suggests."

"Exactly. I say—"

"Hallo, here's some of the Upper Fourth rotters! I wonder what they want?" said Bob Cherry, glancing at a couple of juniors who appeared in the doorway of the study.

The two were Temple and Dabney, the heads of the Upper Fourth—two rather elegant youths, who, assuming the advantage given them by being a few months older, usually referred disparagingly to the Removites as "kids," and assumed fatherly airs towards them—airs which were very ill-received by the Remove, the most unruly Form at Greyfriars.

"We've just dropped in to speak to you youngsters," said Temple, affecting not to have heard Bob Cherry's unflattering allusion to himself and his companion.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney, who was a faithful echo of his leader.

"Go hon!" said Bob Cherry. "Don't trouble to come in."

"Safer on the other side of the door," said Nugent, "if you're going to refer to members of the Remove as youngsters."

"Well, you are youngsters, you know," said Temple, "and jolly cheeky youngsters, too—"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"What the dickens do you fellows mean by coming into a respectable study?" he asked. "Lend me a hand to chuck them out, chaps."

"Certainly!"

"The chuckfulness shall be immediate and extremely violent," said the nabob. "Let's frogmarch the esteemed rotters."

"Pax!" exclaimed Temple, holding up his hand. "We've come here to talk—"

"Like your cheek!" said Wharton. "You do enough talking in that debating society of yours without invading our study for the purpose."

"Look here—"

"Shan't! You've no right to ask a fellow to look at a face like that!"

"If you want me to warm you, you've only got to say so!" roared Temple, growing excited.

Dabney tapped him on the arm.

"Oh, come on, kids!" said Wharton. "We do want to be warmed. In fact, we're simply yearning to be warmed up by you. Come on!"

"Look here—"

"I won't—for reasons already stated!"

"I want to speak—"

"I've noticed you're often troubled that way."

"You confounded cheeky young rotter—"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"I want to tell you about the cricket—"

"There's nothing you can tell us about cricket," said Harry Wharton, with a shake of the head. "We knew all there was to be known about cricket before you were born."

"It's about that silly idea of yours of starting an independent Remove cricket team."

"Hallo, what have you got to say about that?"

"Just listen a minute and you'll see. I—"

"I say, you fellows, you're letting



"It was your nigger's face that put me off my stroke just now," growled Bulstrode. "Throw that ball to me." "Certainly!" said Hurree Singh politely. "Catch!" Bulstrode caught it—with his nose!

the muffins get cold," interjected Billy Bunter.

"By Jove, so we are!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "That won't do. There's no reason why Temple shouldn't go on talking while we eat muffins. Go it, Temple!"

"Good idea," said Nugent.

The Famous Four turned to the muffins again. Temple and Dabney exchanged wrathful glances and came a step farther into the study.

"Well, I can't say I exactly like to watch kids guzzling," said Temple loftily. "Still, I know how much it means to a Lower Fourth kid to be kept off his feed, so eat away while I talk—"

"Cut it short, old chap."

"I'll talk as long as I like!" exclaimed Temple, showing signs of losing his temper again.

"Oh, very well!" said Wharton resignedly. "Go on till we've finished tea. When we've done we're going to a Form meeting, but you can stay here and go on talking if you like. Bunter won't mind."

"Not at all," said Billy Bunter hospitably. "He can go on talking for all I care. I don't mind in the least, so long as there's something to eat."

"That's what I call really kind," said Bob Cherry approvingly.

Bunter's kindness did not seem to gratify the captain of the Upper Fourth very much. He restrained himself with a great effort.

"Look here, you kids, I hear that you are thinking of getting up an independent cricket club in the Remove—"

"You do seem a bit behind the times, Temple," said Wharton. "We've already had a cricket club running in the Remove from time immemorial, so to speak, and the difference is that we're going to run a Remove team and let

you keep your rotten eleven to yourselves."

"That's the wheeze," said Bob Cherry.

"I suppose this is your silly idea, Wharton—"

"Well, I had a hand in it," said Harry Wharton modestly. "It was certainly first thought of in this study. We share equally in the credit."

"Credit!" sniffed Temple. "Not much credit due to anybody for a silly idea like that. There are already three teams at Greyfriars, Upper Form, Middle School, and Junior—"

"Now there's going to be a fourth."

"The junior team serves all purposes," said Temple. "We in the Upper Fourth are naturally the heads of it, but we've never raised any objection to you chaps having four or even five members in the team, as well as a lot of reserves."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Yes, I remember how it was with the football. I wasn't here last cricket season. We had plenty of names put down as reserves for the junior eleven, but you hardly ever played more than two or three Removites."

"There weren't more than two or three fit to play—"

"I don't know. Do you mean to say that you played the fellows strictly in order of merit?"

"Yes, I did. I suppose you don't suspect me of favouritism?"

"Oh, no! But you've got an idea into your head that your Form is a cut above ours, and we, of course, think the exact contrary."

"Oh, that's all rot, you know!" said Temple.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Dabney. "You must admit that, Wharton."

"Not much. If you played fellows

strictly on their merits you'd have made one of us captain, and played six or seven Removeites in the eleven."

"What!"

"That's our view, at any rate!"

"Well, that only shows you're a set of conceited asses!" said Temple. "I've come here to talk business. A fourth team isn't wanted at Greyfriars. I don't think it's proper for a low Form like the Remove to get its tail up in this manner. If you fellows have a separate team you'll get putting on all sorts of airs. You'll get challenging Lower Forms at other schools, and village teams—"

"That's just what we intend to do."

"There, I knew it! You'll get licked, of course, and make yourselves look ridiculous, and Greyfriars, too."

"H'm! We shall see."

"That's all very well, but after it's done it will be too late. You youngsters are too cocky already. Now, I don't like this wheeze of a Remove eleven—"

"Sorry, but that won't make much difference to the Remove, I expect."

"I regard it as being cheeky on your part."

"My dear chap, you can regard it as being anything you like; it won't trouble us. We don't want to interfere with your kind regards."

"Well, we're not going to stand it, Wharton, so I warn you. It's a rotten idea, and will lead to cheek and disrespect on the part of the Remove. We set our faces against the whole idea—"

"Well, that ought to finish it, if anything will," Bob Cherry remarked. "There are few things that could stand such treatment and survive."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, I shouldn't be surprised if later on you had the cheek to challenge us to a match, and set yourselves up as the champion junior cricketers of Greyfriars!" exclaimed Temple.

"My dear kid, we're going to."

"Oh, come away, Temple! It's no good talking to those cheeky infants!" said Dabney. "The only argument that can understand is a jolly good licking!"

"Then why not wade in and bestow the lickfulness without the delayfulness?" questioned Hurree Singh. "The delightfulness on your side will be terrific!"

Temple and Dabney seemed inclined to take the junior at his word. But the odds were too great. The Remove at Greyfriars was a fighting Form, and the Famous Four of Study No. 1 were a fighting quartet. The Upper Fourth chiefs looked at the Removeites and looked at one another and stepped out into the passage.

"Well, just remember what I say," said Temple. "We're against all this rot, and we're going to put our foot down on it."

"Well, there won't be much of it seen after that," said Nugent.

"I tell you—"

"Don't tell us any more, Temple. You've talked quite a long time now, and you must think of your vocal chords. Suppose you were to lose your voice from talking too much. What a fearful loss for the Upper Fourth Debating Society!"

"You young rotters!"

"Come along, Temple; no good talking to them. I expect they'll just row, and the thing will come to nothing. If

it doesn't we'll bust it up for them later."

And the heroes of the Upper Fourth went their way. A yell of derision from Study No. 1 followed them, which almost made them turn back for summary vengeance. But they did not, and the chums of the Remove were left victorious.

"Time to go to the meeting," said Harry Wharton, getting up from the table with a smile. "I thought this wheeze of ours would make the Upper Fourth pretty wild, but I hardly expected Temple and Dabney to give themselves away over it like this. They're afraid of getting put in the shade by the Remove—that's the trouble—and they're right, too. We're going ahead at cricket this term. Come along, kids!"

And the Famous Four, in high spirits, marched along the passage to the Remove-room, to attend the general meeting of the Lower Fourth Form Cricket Club.

The Election Meeting!

THE Remove-room presented a lively appearance. The whole Form—or nearly the whole of it—had met to discuss the importance of the matter which was now occupying the attention of the Remove.

The idea, which had emanated from Study No. 1 in the Remove, had caught on like wildfire. It had been seconded and passed unanimously, and adopted by the Greyfriars Remove amid general enthusiasm.

In the junior eleven, during the football season, it had been very (Continued on next page.)

PEN PALS

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generally and sorely felt that the Remove had really not had a "look in."

The captaincy had naturally been in the upper of the two Forms that supplied the team. Temple had been captain, and Dabney his right-hand man. And although the chums of the Upper Fourth were not accused of favouritism, it was certain that they had a leaning—really natural enough on their part—towards members of their own Form. They regarded the Removites as cheeky kids, who had to be kept in their place. If too many Removites were admitted to the team, they would be wanting to run the show, and so on.

Undeniably good players like Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Bulstrode could not be kept out. But only the very best were taken into the fold of the junior eleven. And the Remove angrily maintained that a good many Removites who had not the ghost of a chance of getting into the junior team were far and away better players than some of the Upper Fourth fellows who were in the junior eleven.

It was a point on which the two Forms could not be expected to agree. The suggestion of an independent Remove eleven had been the result.

The Remove already ran a Form cricket club, with all the officers duly elected, and so the way was made smooth for the innovation.

Instead of humbly attending the cricket committee presided over by the lordly Temple, they decided to have a cricket committee of their own, and to pick out eleven good men to uphold the colours of the Remove on the cricket field.

And the idea, later on, of challenging the Upper Fourth to a cricket match and beating them was simply delightful to the Removites.

There was a buzz in the Remove-room as the chums of Study No. 1 entered.

"Here they come!" Bulstrode looked towards the newcomers with a scowl on his face. Before Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry came to Greyfriars he had been cock of the Remove, and his word had been law in the Form-room. Now things were changed. Bulstrode was little better than a bully, at the best, and the Form had found new leaders. Even Harry Wharton was living down the unpopularity his temper had at first excited, and was coming to be looked upon as something like the head of the Form.

"Here they are," said Skinner. "You're late, you bounders!"

"Sorry!" said Harry Wharton. "We've been listening to the voice of the charmer. Temple and Dabney don't approve of our proceedings, and they came to tell us so."

There was a yell of derision. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lot of difference that will make!" grinned Hazeldene.

"Well, no, it won't make much difference," said Harry Wharton. "Of course, it will make some difference."

"To you, perhaps," sneered Bulstrode; "not to us!"

"My dear chap, it will make some difference to all of us—that the more the Upper Fourth is down on our idea, the more we shall go ahead with it!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Good!" said Russell. "We'll jolly soon show Temple, Dabney & Co. that we're not going to have them interfering in Remove affairs."

"Yes, rather!" "The question is," said Bulstrode, "about electing a Remove captain. I was football captain in the Remove, as far as practice went."

"And as far as playing matches went you seem to have let the Upper Fourth have pretty much of its own way," Harry Wharton remarked.

The Remove bully scowled.

"Well, this new wheeze hadn't been started then."

"No; and what I say is that the fellows who started it ought to be thought of when it comes to electing a captain," put in Skinner.

"Oh, that's rot, Skinner!"

"Oh, is it? I don't see it, Bulstrode."

There's Bob Cherry—

"Blow Bob Cherry!"

"You can blow him if you like, if he'll let you, but I think that he will make a jolly good cricket captain for the Remove."

"Hear, hear!"

It was a hearty approval, and it showed that Bob Cherry had plenty of backers in the Greyfriars Remove.

"Oh, shut up that row!" said Hazeldene.

"Let's get out the list of candidates, and then let's have a show of hands. That's the businesslike way to proceed."

"Good for Vaseline!"

"Go it, then!"

"The first question is, how many candidates? Every chap who thinks he is qualified to shine as cricket captain of the Remove is hereby requested to get up on his hind legs and say so," said Hazeldene.

"Well, I'm one," said Bulstrode, coming forward, with a rather aggressive glare. "I'm a candidate, and chance it."

"I'm another," said Bob Cherry, stepping towards him. "And Harry Wharton's another."

"Show yourself, Wharton."

"Here I am."

"That rotten outsider!" exclaimed Bulstrode scornfully. "Why, it's not so long ago that we had to carry him down by main force to the football practice."

There was a general laugh at the reminiscence. Harry Wharton coloured. He was not particularly proud of some passages in his early career at Greyfriars, but fellows like Bulstrode were not likely to let him forget them easily.

"Well, it's not long since I gave you a licking, Bulstrode," he said. "And, as a matter of fact, it won't be long before I give you another if you can't keep personal matters out of the discussion."

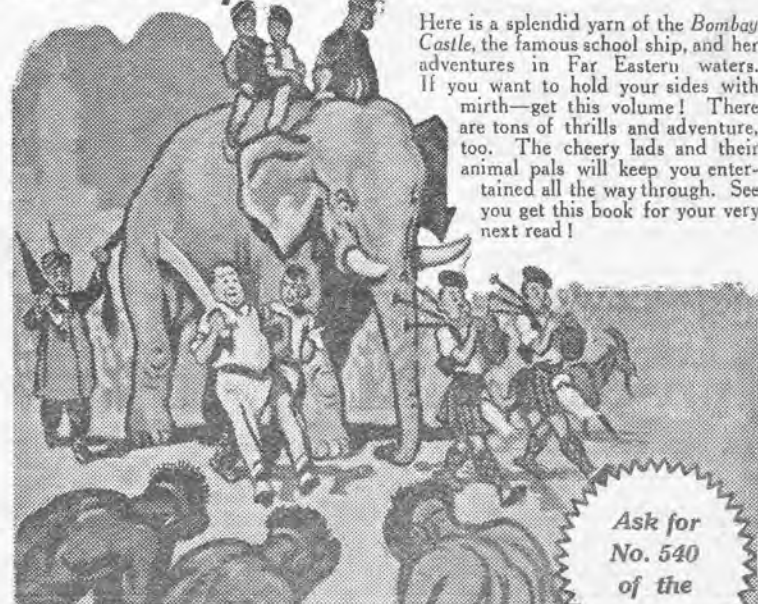
"That's right!" exclaimed Nugent. "Keep personal matters out of it. What Wharton did or didn't do when he first came to Greyfriars has nothing to do with the affair in hand, as far as I can see."

"Of course it hasn't," said Russell. "Keep off the grass, Bulstrode. There's no time here for you and Wharton to start chipping one another. Now we've got three candidates. Anybody going to make a fourth?"

There was no reply. Probably a good many of the Removites were anxious enough to gain the honour of captaining the Form eleven, but considered that they had no chance against the trio of candidates who had already come forward.

"Don't be backward in coming forward," said Bob Cherry, looking round. "It's a free country, you know, and you've only got to speak. Any more coming on? Now then."

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There were no more coming on. Bulstrode, Cherry, and Wharton were the only candidates.

"Good!" said Skinner. "Now we'd better proceed to the election."

"Right-ho!" said Nugent. "Hands up for—"

"Oh, rats! Let's proceed in order," said Skinner. "You have to appoint tellers first, as there's such a crowd of voters. Then I think the candidates ought to make a speech."

"Very well, let them make a speech," said Nugent.

"You first, Bulstrode, as the oldest and ugliest," said Bob Cherry.

Bulstrode gave the facetious Bob a far from amiable look.

"I haven't much to say—" he began.

"Well, that's a jolly good thing, anyway," said Nugent.

"Shut up!"

"Order!"

"Get on, Bulstrode!"

"I haven't much to say. I think I ought to be captain, not only because my cricket's the best in the Remove—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha!"

"But because I'm the oldest fellow in the Form."

"And ugliest," said Bob Cherry, sotto voce.

"Shut up, Cherry!" said Skinner.

"Keep those painful truths for a more fitting occasion. Get on with the washing, Bulstrode."

"I'll punch that rotter Cherry's head!"

"No time for that now. Are you finished?"

"No!" snapped Bulstrode. "I'm not finished."

"Well, get finished, then. We shall have to turn out the gas here in another couple of hours, you know."

"I'm the oldest fellow in the Form, and was captain of the Remove till those rotten outsiders shoved themselves in. I ought to be cricket captain. That's all."

"About enough, too," remarked Russell.

"The encephalitis is terrific," said the nabob. "Bulstrode has made an esteemed and honourable rotten speech, and—"

"Oh, cheese it, Inky!"

"Next man in—I mean, next speech, and for goodness' sake buck up! I don't see why the Remove should stand here like a lot of patient little lambs to be pawed at," said Hazeldene.

"Well, stop jawing then," said Skinner. "Your jaw next, Cherry."

"I haven't much to say—"

"H'm! The candidates lie on that point," said Russell.

"I haven't much to say—"

"There's nothing original about that remark, Cherry, and you needn't trouble to keep on repeating it."

"I haven't much—"

"You haven't much sense, I think," said Skinner. "For goodness' sake come to the point and give us a rest!"

"If you are looking for a thick ear, Skinny—"

"Cherry's finished. Next man in!"

"I haven't finished. I haven't started yet—"

"Well, you ought to have. We've heard enough, anyway. Now—"

"Look here, I'm going on, so dry up!"

I haven't much to say. Gentlemen of the Remove—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I haven't much to say, but here it is. I play better cricket than Bulstrode, and I'm not half so conceited as that bouncer is—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I think I would make a better cricket captain. I'd do my best, anyway, and you wouldn't find me spoiling my wind by smoking cheap cigarettes on the sly, either!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's one for you, Bulstrode!"

"That's how I stand," said Bob Cherry. "I think I should make a pretty good skipper. You can elect me or not, as you like. That's about all!"

"Then for goodness' sake shut up!" said Hazeldene. "Come and jaw, Wharton, if you want your turn."

"I don't particularly want—"

"Oh, come and get it over!"

"I haven't much to say—"

"My hat! They're all in the same boat. The chumps haven't much to say, and they're taking up the whole evening to say it."

"I'm putting up as candidate for cricket captain of the Remove—"

"We know that already!"

"Because I think I should fill the post pretty well—better than Bulstrode, anyway. A cricket captain who smokes cheap cigarettes is no good."

"Mind your own beastly business!" snapped Bulstrode.

"It is my business when you want to take the lead in the Form cricket!" retorted Harry Wharton. "The first duty of a cricket captain, I suppose, to keep himself fit. You don't do that. About Cherry I've nothing to say. I've no doubt he'd make as good a captain as I would, if not in one way, then in another—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I don't want to brag about my cricket, but I believe I play a pretty good game; and you've seen me play, anyway. If you elect me I'll be as good a skipper as I know how, and I'll make it a point to get the eleven into first-class form and lick the Upper Fourth."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's about all!"

"Good!" said Skinner, when the cheers had died away—cheers which

showed what an advance Harry Wharton had made in the good opinion of the Form during the past few weeks. "Now put it to the vote. Cherry's my candidate, but give every man a chance. Hands up for Bulstrode!"

About a dozen hands went up. Bulstrode looked round with a scowl. Even those who voted for him were mostly the smaller Removites, who did not venture to back up the bully's rivals with the bully's eyes on them. It was perfectly clear that the one-time cock of the Remove had no chance. There were enough against him to give the other two candidates each a majority over his party.

"That settles Bulstrode!" said Skinner. "It's between Cherry and Wharton. Bulstrode, old chap, you're dead in this act!"

"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode, and he swung out of the room with a scowl.

"Now for the others!" said Skinner. "His lordship is offended, but I dare say we'll be able to survive it. Hands up—"

"Wait a bit!" said Harry Wharton, interposing.

Skinner glared at him.

"I'm running this election!"

"I can see you are," assented Harry. "You're running it in rather a huffy, too. I don't want a show of hands against Bob Cherry."

"Are you withdrawing, then?"

"No, not exactly that, either. I've got a suggestion to make—"

"Oh, get it over, then!"

"Go it, old fellow!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "You shut up, Skinny! You want to do all the talking. Give a chap a chance."

"Oh, if that's all I get for backing you up, Cherry—"

"Cheese it! Go ahead, Wharton. I don't want a show of hands against a pal, and if there's any other way—"

"This is my idea," said Harry Wharton. "It's between Cherry and myself; that's admitted. My idea is to settle the question on our cricket form. We can get up a scratch match to-morrow afternoon between two Remove elevens, with Bob Cherry the skipper of one side and myself the skipper of the other. The one of us who makes the best show to be elected captain of the Remove."

There was a cheer at once.

The suggestion was popular with the Remove, and it was evident that it would be unanimously adopted. The contest, too, promised some excitement for the Removites. Bob Cherry slapped Harry Wharton on the back.

"Good for you, Ha!" I'm agreeable!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Suggestion's adopted unanimously!" said Skinner. "The election's suspended for the moment. Bulstrode's knocked out and Cherry and Wharton are going to settle the question on the cricket pitch. Gentlemen of the Remove, this meeting is now over, and I'm off to my study for some tea!"

And the meeting of the Remove broke up.

(Who will win the honour of captaining the Remove cricket eleven—Bob Cherry or Harry Wharton? Look out for next week's exciting chapters.)

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