

Next Wednesday's
School Tale:

'THE WRONG TEAM.'

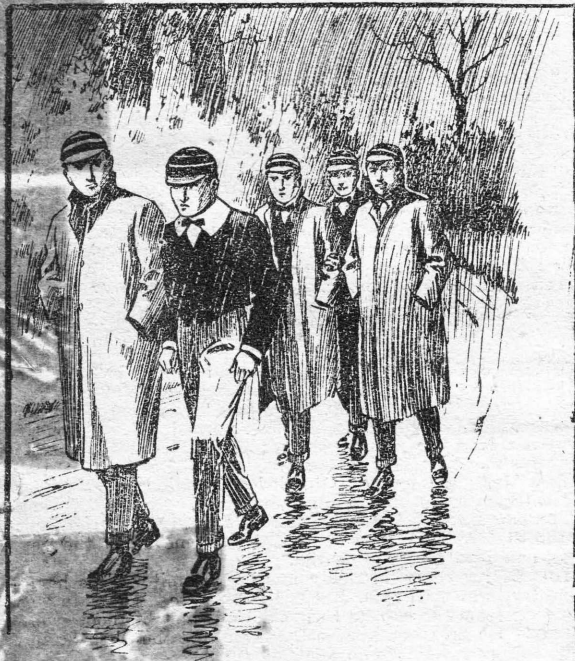
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
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CHAPTER I. Late Hours!

QUARTER to ten!" said Monty Lowther, glancing at the clock in the common-room, in the School House at St. Jim's. "Time you kids were in bed."

"Bai Jove!"

"Jolly queer the prefects don't give us a look-in," said Jack Blake, of the Fourth, with a puzzled look. "What's happened to them?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, thoughtfully. "As a mattah of fact, deah boys, we ought weally to go up to the dorm. without waitin' to be told!"

To which there came reply in a kind of chorus:

"Rats!"

It was a quarter of an hour past the usual bedtime of the juniors of St. Jim's. As a rule, the prefect whose duty it happened to be to see the lights out for the juniors, was prompt enough in seeing them off to their dormitories. But on this special evening there was certainly something wrong somewhere. The Third Form had gone; but the Fourth and the Shell were still untroubled.

Arthur Augustus seemed to be the only fellow who considered that it was possible to go to bed without being told. And even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not make any move in the matter. He only made the remark.

If the prefects had forgotten junior bedtime, there was no reason why the juniors should not forget it too; that was how the Fourth-Formers and the Shell fellows looked at it. Moreover, Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, was out, and had not come in yet, and his chums had naturally decided that they couldn't go to bed without him—unless they had to.

THE PREFECT'S PLOT.

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"It's queer!" said Blake, again. "Who's seeing lights out for the Shell chaps to-night?"

"Kildare!" said Monty Lowther.

"My hat! Kildare is generally as punctual as the giddy rising-bell," said Blake, in surprise. "Bingham is looking after us, and he's a careless ass—"

"Shut up!" murmured Digby, catching sight of Bingham of the Sixth, who had just appeared in the doorway.

"My dear chap," said Blake, who had his back to the door. "Everybody knows that Bingham is a careless ass—"

"Thank you, Blake!" said the prefect, stepping into the room.

Blake whirled round.

"Oh! Is that you, Bingham old man?" he said cheerfully. "We've just been wondering what had become of you. I was just remarking to Dig what a careful and punctual person you are—"

Bingham laughed.

"Well, cut off to bed," he said. "I've been studying, and I didn't notice the time. Off to bed with you."

Blake rose with a yawn.

"You Shell fellows had better go up, too," said Bingham. "Kildare's gone out, I believe, and he won't be pleased to find you up at this time when he comes in."

The Shell fellows looked at one another, and did not move. "We're waiting for Tom Merry," said Monty Lowther politely.

Bingham of the Sixth looked round.

"Isn't Merry in?" he asked.

"No; he's gone over to Wayland; you gave him a pass

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"THE WRONG TEAM!" & "THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"

out of gates yourself," said Monty Lowther. "Don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes, now I come to think of it; but he ought to be in by now," said the prefect. "Get a move on, you kids."

The Fourth-Formers marched reluctantly out of the common-room, and the room was left to the Shell. They had not taken Bingham's hint that it was time to retire. There was a very peculiar look upon Monty Lowther's face as he watched Bingham go out with the Fourth-Formers.

"Our respected prefect has forgotten the great and glorious example of George Washington," Monty Lowther murmured to his chum Manners.

Manners looked up from a chess problem.

"Eh! what's that?" he said. "What do you mean?"

"Bingy said he was studying, and didn't notice the time passing," said Lowther. "He isn't much given to burning the midnight oil as a rule. Did you notice his boots?"

"Blow his boots," said Manners. "How could I notice his boots when I was working out this problem? Look here, would you move the rook to king's fourth—"

"Blow the rook, and blow king's fourth," said Monty Lowther. "I'm thinking of Bingy's boots."

"What on earth's the matter with his boots?" demanded the astonished Manners.

"Wet!" said Lowther. "Muddy! It's raining."

"Well?"

"Well, how did Bingy get his boots wet and muddy by staying in his room studying?" asked Lowther with a grin.

"Blessed if I know," said Manners; "and blessed if I care. Why should he come in and tell us a whopper for nothing? Don't you set up as a Sherlock Holmes, Monty; but lend me a hand with this giddy problem. Now, look here, if I move the rook to king's fourth, and then white moves the bishop—"

"Yaw-aw-aw!" yawned Monty Lowther. "I'm too sleepy for chess problems. Still, we won't go to bed till Tommy comes in."

"Where on earth has Tommy got to?" said Kangaroo, coming over to the two chums. "He's very late, isn't he?"

"Seems so. But he's got a pass out; Bingham gave it to him."

"Everybody seems late to-night," remarked Bernard Glyn. "Kildare, and Tom Merry, and Bingham. Bingham's been out—he had mud on his bags; I noticed that."

"I noticed it on his boots," said Monty Lowther. "I wonder what he told a whopper for? No business of ours, though."

"Queer that Bingy should have given Tom Merry a pass out, too," said Kangaroo thoughtfully. "He doesn't like Tommy. They had a row only yesterday, and Tom Merry stopped him bullying young Frayne of the Third. I should have thought Bingham would have given him a thick ear sooner than a pass. Queer Tommy asking him for one, too."

"Tommy didn't ask him; he offered it," said Lowther. "He heard Tom saying that he wanted to go over to Wayland with Brooke, and said he'd give him a pass out for the evening if he liked."

"Very forgiving chap!" said Kangaroo.

"Ye-es," agreed Lowther. "Must be—though nobody's ever mentioned before that Bingham was a forgiving sort. But he must be; I expected him to give Blake lines for calling him an ass just now, but he took it quite sweetly."

Kangaroo looked at the clock.

"Ten!" he said. "Tom Merry is sticking it out to-night."

Hallo, here he is!"

There were hurried footsteps in the passage outside.

The chums of the Shell turned towards the doorway, expecting to see Tom Merry.

But it was not Tom Merry of the Shell who appeared; it was Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare had his coat on, wet with rain, and his boots were muddy and splashed. His face was excited, and he was breathing fast.

"Is Tom Merry here?" he exclaimed abruptly.

"No!" said Lowther.

Kildare glanced round the room.

"You are sure?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lowther, looking in surprise at the St. Jim's captain's excited face, and wondering what had happened. "He went home with Brooke—the day boy in the Fourth, you know, for the evening."

"He had a pass out," added Manners.

"Then he is out of doors!" said Kildare. "I thought so. A pass out doesn't hold good after bedtime; he ought to be back at half-past nine at the latest."

"Might be staying out of the rain," suggested Lowther, anxious to save trouble for his chum. "It's been raining hard, Kildare."

"I know it has," said Kildare. "I've been out in it. Did Tom Merry say he was going home with young Brooke?"

"Yes; they went away together."

"Brooke's mater invited him," said Manners.

"Oh!" said Kildare grimly. "Well, get off to bed, you kids. You needn't have waited up till I came in. Buzz off at once."

"All right!"

"I—I say, has anything happened, Kildare?" asked Lowther anxiously.

"Yes," said Kildare shortly.

"Nothing wrong with Tom Merry, is there?"

"Yes!" growled Kildare.

"Something happened to him?" exclaimed Manners and Lowther together, in alarm.

"Not yet," said Kildare. "Something's going to happen to the young rascal when he comes in, though! Don't jaw; get off to bed."

"But—I say—"

"Go to bed," exclaimed Kildare angrily.

Monty Lowther gave it up. Kildare of the Sixth was usually one of the best-tempered fellows at St. Jim's; but he was evidently in anything but a good temper now. The Shell fellows went up to their dormitory, and Kildare followed them in grim silence.

CHAPTER 2.

A Startling Accusation.

THE Shell undressed in silence, and turned in. All the fellows could see that something very unusual had happened; and that there was trouble in store for the captain of the Form when he returned to the school. Kildare's face was set and angry; angrier than the juniors had ever seen him look before.

Tom Merry's chums were puzzled and anxious. But it was evidently no use asking Kildare questions.

The captain of St. Jim's was about to turn out the light in the Shell dormitory, when footsteps came along the passage, and Tom Merry appeared.

Tom Merry came hurriedly into the dormitory, his handsome face wet with rain, and red with haste. The rain was dripping from the cap he had taken off, and his boots were muddy. He breathed hard as he came into the Shell dormitory, and gave Kildare an apologetic look.

"I'm sorry I'm so late, Kildare!" he exclaimed. "It really wasn't my fault."

Kildare fixed a grim look upon him.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

"I've been home with Brooke, of the Fourth."

"Anywhere else?"

"No."

"Then why are you so late?"

"I stopped for shelter from the rain. I hadn't my coat with me," explained Tom Merry. "It came on to rain just after I left Brooke's."

"Where did you stop?"

"In the wood. I came home by the short cut across Rylcombe Wood," said Tom Merry. "I should have been in by half-past nine but for the rain. I had a pass out till bedtime, you know. Bingham gave it to me."

"And you've been nowhere but at Brooke's, and waiting in the wood out of the rain?"

"Nowhere else, certainly."

"You didn't see me while you were out?"

Tom Merry looked surprised.

"See you, Kildare! No; I didn't know you'd been out."

"You didn't pass me on the Wayland road?"

"No; I haven't been on the Wayland road."

"You haven't seen anybody but Brooke, of the Fourth?"

"Brooke, and his mater and his sister," said Tom Merry, in wonder. "That's all."

"Then how do you account for this?" Kildare gazed in his pocket, and drew out a handkerchief, stained with mud and wet. "Whose is that?"

Tom Merry looked at the handkerchief.

"Mine," he said. "There are my initials in the corner—'T. M.'"

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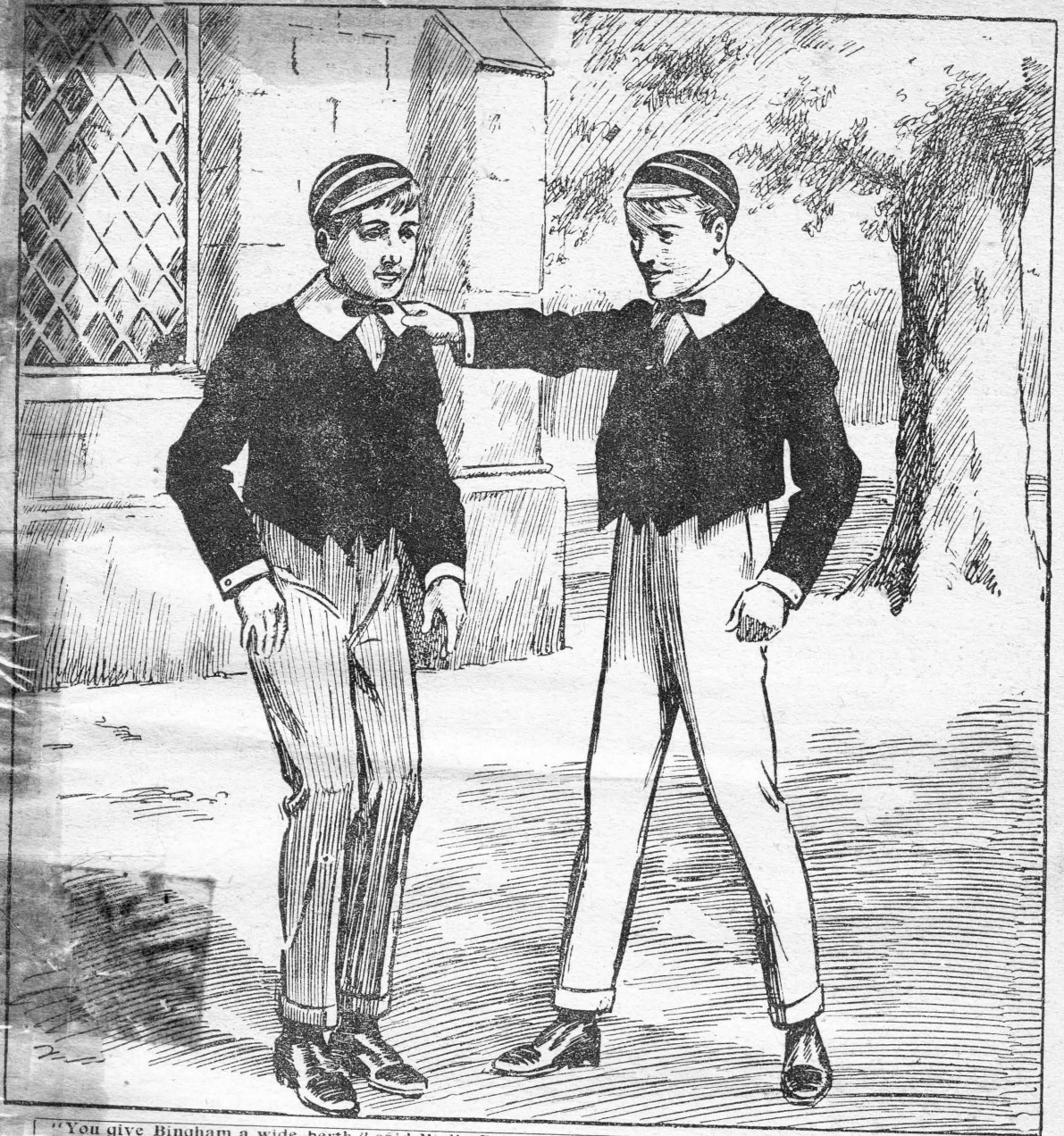
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"THE GREYFRIARS INSURANCE COMPANY" is the Title of the New and Exciting Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.



"You give Bingham a wide berth," said Wally D'Arcy, "and don't even fag for him if you can help it. My only Aunt Jane! You are looking down in the mouth! Grin!" "Oh, Master Wally!" said Joe Frayne, "Grin!" roared Wally. Joe grinned. "That's better. Now come in to brekker, and if I see you looking glum again, I'll punch your silly head!" (See Chapter 4.)

"Yes," said Kildare; "there are your initials in the corner—'T. M.' When I picked it up on the Wayland Road, I saw the initials on it, and knew that it was yours."

"You picked it up—where?"

"On the Wayland Road, half an hour ago," said Kildare. "You passed me there, and ran away as soon as I came by you; and you dropped that handkerchief as you ran."

Tom Merry flushed crimson. "I didn't!" he exclaimed. "I tell you I haven't been on the Wayland Road to-night! You have made a mistake!"

"Why don't you say I'm not speaking the truth, and have done with it!" exclaimed Kildare angrily. "I passed you and your companion on the Wayland Road, and I recognised him. I didn't recognise you, because you had your face muffled up; but I knew you were a St. Jim's fellow by your cap. When I picked up that handkerchief I knew that it was you, and when I got back here I found you hadn't come in."

Tom Merry looked blankly at the captain of St. Jim's.

There was a dead silence in the dormitory.

The Shell fellows were sitting up in bed, looking on at the strange scene in wonder. They understood now the meaning of Kildare's strange looks when he came in, and his inquiries after the missing Shell fellow.

"Well," said Kildare grimly, "what have you to say now?"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath. "Only what I've said already," he replied. "I came back directly from Brooke's, and never set foot on the Wayland Road at all. I don't know how anybody else came to have my handkerchief about him."

"Do you expect me to believe that?" "Yes, I do!" he exclaimed. "All the fellows here can tell you whether I'm in the habit of telling lies or not."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther. "Hold your tongue, Lowther!" said Kildare sharply. "Oh, draw it mild!" said Lowther undauntedly. "You

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can't expect me to hold my tongue when you're calling Tommy a liar!"

"No fear!" said Manners. "I'm jolly well not going to hold my tongue, either! Tom Merry has told you the truth!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted Kangaroo.

Kildare frowned angrily.

"I wish Tom Merry deserved your faith in him, that's all," he said. "But he doesn't. He was on the Wayland Road to-night, and he has denied it."

"I wasn't there!" said Tom Merry.

"Suppose he was there," said Bernard Glyn, "what then? It's no crime to be on the Wayland Road, I suppose?"

"It's not the way home from Brooke's," said Croke maliciously.

"Oh, you shut up, Croke!"

"Tommy might have come round that way," said Clifton Dane.

"But I didn't," said Tom Merry. "I came through the wood by the short cut. Look here, Kildare, there's a mistake somewhere, but I think you might take my word. If I had come round by Wayland, why should I deny it—even if I wanted to lie?"

"Yes, answer that," growled Lowther. "There would be no need to make a secret of it."

"You know perfectly well why you've denied it, Tom Merry. You knew that I recognised your companion," said Kildare, sternly.

"My companion! What do you mean?"

"You were with a man nobody at this school is allowed to know—a rascal who is known to be the worst character in Wayland. You were with Pudsey Smith."

Tom Merry started.

"Pudsey Smith! What rot! I don't even know the man!"

"You ought not to know him, and I wouldn't have believed that you did," said Kildare. "Only I saw you with him!"

"You didn't! I wasn't there! It was somebody else!"

"Somebody else who had your handkerchief in his pocket, and was called by your name, I suppose," said Kildare, sarcastically. "Pudsey Smith called out 'Hook it, Tommy,' as I came up, and you hooked it."

"My hat!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Now what have you to say?" demanded Kildare.

Tom Merry looked dazed.

"I—I can only repeat what I've said," he replied. "It wasn't I who was there, that's all. I came home by the short cut through the wood."

"You stick to that?"

"I stick to it because it's true!"

"Very well," said Kildare, between his teeth. "Very well, you will have a chance of sticking to it before the Head in the morning. Go to bed now."

"Kildare! I give you my word——"

"Go to bed!"

Tom Merry went to bed in silence. Kildare extinguished the light, and quitted the Shell dormitory, without another word. As soon as he was gone, there was a buzz of voices in the dormitory.

CHAPTER 3. Quite Convincing.

"TOMMY!"

"Tom Merry, old man!"

"You ass, Tommy!"

"What have you been up to?"

"Pudsey Smith! My word!"

"The high and mighty Tom Merry is found out at last," said Croke, with a chuckle. "The model youth is discovered! The good little boy who could never do wrong is shown up! My hat! Pudsey Smith! What a choice friend!"

Whiz!

Monty Lowther's pillow sailed through the air, and descended upon Croke.

"Ow!"

"Shut up," said Monty Lowther, in a sulphurous voice. "If you cackle again, Croke, I'll get out of bed and slaughter you."

"Ow! You rotter——"

"Shut up!" roared Lowther.

And Croke thought he had better shut up.

"Now, Tommy, let's know what this means," said Manners.

"Blessed if I know what it means," said Tom Merry, in a dazed way. "I can't make it out. It's extraordinary the fellow having my handkerchief."

"Very extraordinary!" sneered Croke.

"Quite remarkable!" observed Gore.

"And his name being Tommy, too," said Bernard Glyn, "that's jolly queer, Tom. I suppose you're quite sure you wasn't there?"

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"You ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Of course I'm sure, I suppose I ought to know whether I was on the Wayland Road or not?"

"Well, you ought to," said Gore.

"I wasn't there! I left Brooke's place at a few minutes to nine, and I should have been back here by half-past but for the rain."

"Very unlucky, that rain!" said Croke.

There was the sound of somebody getting out of bed.

"Look here, Lowther," began Croke, in alarm. "Oh! Ah! Yaroo!"

Monty Lowther's grasp was upon the cad of the Shell. He was dragged out of bed, and descended with a bump upon the floor.

"Ow! Ow! Leggo!" he roared.

"Yes, I'll leggo, when I've spanked you," said Monty Lowther, savagely.

Spank! spank! spank!

"Ow! ow! ow!"

"Let him alone," said Gore. "I suppose he has a right to doubt Tom Merry's word if he wants to!"

"That's where you make a mistake," said Monty Lowther blandly. "He hasn't, and you haven't. Will you kindly attend to Gore, Manners?"

"Yes, rather," said Manners, leaping out of bed.

"If you come near me——" began Gore, sitting upright and grasping his pillow. "Yaroo!"

Bump!

Gore rolled on the floor, and there was a renewed sound of spanking.

"Yow-ow!" roared Gore.

"Go it!" yelled Kangaroo. "Do you want any help?"

"N-no! I think I can manage!" gasped Manners.

Spank, spank, spank!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, then, are you quite satisfied that Tommy has stuck strictly to the bounds of veracity?" asked Monty Lowther, sitting on Croke's chest, and pinning him down by sheer weight to the floor.

"Ow!" roared Croke. "No! Yow!"

"Not satisfied yet? Kangy, old man!"

"Hallo!" said Kangaroo.

"Hand me my jug, will you?"

"Certainly," said the Cornstalk.

"Yow!" roared Croke. "Don't you spill that water over me? Yow—ah—oooooh! Groo!"

Water swamped upon the head of the unfortunate cad of the Shell. He gasped and roared and struggled wildly.

"Yow! Oh! Lemme gerrup! Ow!"

"Are you quite satisfied of Tommy's veracity?" asked Lowther sweetly.

"Yow! Oh! Yes!"

"Fully satisfied?"

"Groo! Yes!" groaned Croke. "Oh, you beast! I'll pay you out for this! Yow! I'm wet! I'm drenched! Ow!"

"Good!" said Lowther calmly. "I thought I should be able to satisfy you, if I used enough water."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther released his victim, and Croke staggered up, with water running in little rivulets from his hair.

"Now, if you'd like to finish this little matter with your fists, I'm ready for you," said Monty Lowther.

"Ow!" groaned Croke.

Apparently he did not want to finish the matter. He scrambled away to his washstand, and began to mop his head furiously with his towel. Monty Lowther turned towards George Gore, who was extended upon his back, with Manners sitting on his chest.

"Gore, old man, it's your turn," he remarked.

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"Keep off!" yelled Gore.
 "Are you satisfied with Tommy's veracity?"
 "Ow! Yes! Keep that jug away, you beast!"
 "Fully and completely satisfied!"
 "Ow! Yes!"
 "Sorry you spoke?"
 "Yow! Yes! Keep off!"
 "Well, if you're satisfied already, I needn't swamp you, and it's a waste of water," Lowther remarked. "But if you're not really fully satisfied, I should be quite happy to oblige. You've only got to say the word."
 "Gerraway!"

"You're more easily satisfied than Crooke," remarked Lowther, setting his jug back on the washstand. "Better for you. Let the cad go, Manners."
 Gore was allowed to rise. Gore was breathing fury; and as soon as Manners released him, he made a wild rush at Monty Lowther. Lowther was ready for him, and they embraced quite affectionately. In two seconds Gore's head was in chancery, and Lowther was hammering away cheerfully at his features.

Gore bellowed.
 "My hat," exclaimed Kangaroo, "shut up that row! You'll have all the giddy prefects here soon!"
 "Cave!" shouted Glyn.

The warning came too late. The dormitory door was thrown open, and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, strode in, and switched on the electric light. The Housemaster looked thunderstruck as he gazed at Gore and Lowther.

"What—what does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Boys, separate at once! How dare you fight at this hour? It is disgraceful! What does this mean?"

Monty Lowther obediently released Gore, and Gore staggered away from him, with his nose streaming red, and one of his eyes closed, gasping with pain and fury.

"What is the cause of this?" demanded Mr. Railton sternly.
 "Only a little argument, sir," said Lowther respectfully. "Gore was not open to conviction, and I was trying my hardest to convince him."

There was a chuckle from the Shell fellows; and Mr. Railton frowned.

"Take a hundred lines, Lowther. Go back to bed at once, both of you. If there is another sound from this dormitory, I shall come back with a cane."

And the juniors turned in.
 Mr. Railton, with a frowning glance at them, turned out the light and withdrew.

"Ow!" groaned Gore. "Oh, crumbs! Oh!"
 "Your own fault," said Monty Lowther politely. "I don't allow anybody to cast giddy aspersions upon Tommy. Tommy, old man, now the interruptions are over, what have you got to say for yourself?"

Tom Merry laughed.
 "Nothing," he replied. "Kildare's made a mistake, that's all; but how it's come about, I don't know any more than you do."

"It looks bad for you, Tom," said Manners. "Kildare's going to have you up before the Head in the morning."

"I know it; but it can't be helped. It's a queer business; but the facts are just as I've told you. I can't say more than that."

That it was a queer business all the Shell fellows agreed. Tom Merry's chums took his word without a doubt; and if anybody else felt inclined to doubt it, no one felt inclined to share the unhappy fate of Gore and Crooke, so no doubts were expressed. But the Shell puzzled very much over the matter; and it was a long time before they slept.

Tom Merry was the most wakeful.
 It was almost midnight before the hero of the Shell fell asleep; and then his sleep was troubled, and he dreamed that he was being chased along the Wayland Road by Kildare and Mr. Pudsey Smith, waving handkerchiefs at him, from which vision he was aroused by the clanging of the rising-bell.

CHAPTER 4. Cheer Up!

"JOE!"
 Joe Frayne, of the Third Form at St. Jim's, gave a start as his name was rapped out close by his ear. He was standing under one of the old elms in the quadrangle of St. Jim's, leaning against the trunk, and with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. His youthful brow was corrugated in an expression of deep thought. Wally—otherwise D'Arcy minor, of the Third—had come out to look for him, and he regarded Frayne's thoughtful brow with disapproving astonishment.

"Joe, you young ass!"
 "Yes, Master Wally," said Joe Frayne meekly.
 Wally snorted. Wally was the younger brother of Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, but he did not much resemble that elegant junior in his ways. He did not err upon the side of politeness.

"Look here, you young cuckoo, what's the matter with you?" he demanded. "You've been looking down in the mouth for two days now. You started it on Monday, you kept it up all day yesterday, and now this morning you slithered off from the dorm. before rising-bell, and I didn't know what had become of you. Look here, Joe Frayne, I'm not having it."

Frayne smiled faintly.
 "I'm all right, Master Wally."
 "Rats!" said D'Arcy minor. "Breakfast will be ready soon. You can't take a chivvy like that into the dining-room. Cheer up!"

"I—I can't!"
 "What's the matter with you?" demanded Wally.
 "Nothing."

"Then what are you downhearted about?"
 "I—I—it's all right."
 "Heard something from those giddy old acquaintances of yours, chaps who knew you before you came to St. Jim's?" asked Wally, eyeing the waif of the Third in a suspicious sort of way.

Frayne shook his head.
 "Then what's the worry?" demanded Wally. "I know Bingham of the Sixth was ragging you on Monday. But I suppose that isn't hanging on your mind, is it?"

Joe was silent.
 "My only Aunt Jane," exclaimed Wally, in surprise, "is that it?"

Joe coloured.
 "Master Bingham is 'ard on a feller," he said. "There's some people as think that a lad ain't straight because he was born in a slum, and only come to this 'ere school through the kindness of Master Merry."

Wally snorted more emphatically than before. Joe Frayne, as all St. Jim's knew, was a waif of a London slum, and it was through Tom Merry's kind-heartedness that he had been brought to St. Jim's. Tom Merry's uncle was paying his fees there, and Tom Merry was his friend and protector. D'Arcy minor had stood by Joe from the first; partly, perhaps, because some of the more snobbish fellows in the Third had been down on him.

Wally, being the son of a lord, could afford not to be snobbish. And nothing made Wally more furious than to hear a sneer or gibe about poor Joe's early days in the slum. Most of the fellows, indeed, were too decent to give Frayne any trouble on that score.

"Look here, Joe," said Wally savagely, "do you mean to say that Bingham, of the Sixth—a giddy prefect, too—has been chipping you about the slum?"

"Not exactly that, Master Wally."
 "Oh, don't Master Wally me, you young ass. Can't you call me Wally?"

"Yes, Master Wally."
 "Fathead! Now, what has Bingham been doing?"
 "N-n-nothing."

"You said he didn't think you were straight, because you'd been born in a slum," said Wally. "I'll show him! What did he say to you?"

"It—it's all right! Master Tom stopped him ragging me," said Frayne. "He ain't said anything to me since."

Wally growled.
 "I'll jolly well teach him not to rag you," he said. "Prefect or no prefect, he's not going to hit below the belt."

"I—I say, Master Wally, don't you go for to say anything to him!" exclaimed Joe, in alarm. "Master Tom has stopped him, and he can't do anything now, so long as Master Tom has the letter, and—"

Wally stared at him.
 "The letter! What letter?"
 "I—I—"

"Look here, I don't like riddles," said Wally crossly.
 "Tell me what you're talking about."
 Joe's face was crimson with distress.

"I—I can't, Master Wally."
 "Why can't you?"
 "Because—because I wasn't going to say nothing about it, you know."

"About what?"
 "About—about that, you know."
 "What letter are you talking about?"

Joe was silent.
 "Do you mean that Bingham gave you a letter to take somewhere?"

"Ye-e-es."
 "Where?"
 No answer.

"And Tom Merry's got it?"
 Silence.
 "Won't you tell me, Joe?"

"I—I can't, Master Wally. I've said too much already. I—I promised not to speak about it—not to say a word," said Joe, in distress.

Wally grunted.

"You young ass! Why didn't you say so before? Do you think I'd have asked you questions if I'd known that?"

"I—I s'pose not," faltered Joe. "I'm sorry, Master Wally."

Wally regarded him with doubt and anxiety.

"Is the affair, whatever it is, all over now?" he demanded.

"Yes, yes!"

"Then what are you so down in the mouth for?"

"I—I—"

"I'll jolly well go to Bingham, and give him my opinion of him," said D'Arcy minor savagely. "I'll jolly well—"

Joe uttered a cry of alarm.

"Don't, Master Wally! Hold on! You can't say anything to him; it'll look as if I've broke my word."

Wally paused.

"Well, yes; that's so," he said. "But look here; I'm not going to have this go on, Joe. You shouldn't have promised. You ought to have come to me and told me all about it."

"Ye-es."

"Now, cheer up, and don't look so beastly glum," said Wally. "If the affair's all over, what is there to worry about? You're not afraid of Bingham, are you?"

"Oh, no, Master Wally!"

"Then what's the trouble with you?"

"I'm thinking of Master Tom," confessed Joe. "I—I'm afraid that Bingham will go for him, somehow, over that letter. I—I—" He paused.

Wally looked perplexed.

"Blessed if I can make head or tail of it!" he exclaimed. "It seems to me you've acted like a silly young ass, anyway. Cheer up. Do you hear?"

"Yes, Master Wally," said Joe meekly.

"Can't you grin?" demanded Wally.

Joe grinned feebly.

"That's better," said his chum. "Keep that up. You needn't worry about Tom Merry. He's able to take care of himself."

"Yes; I—I suppose so," said Joe.

"As for Bingham, he's a rotter," growled Wally. "You don't want to have anything to do with him. It's jolly well known by some fellows that he's no better than he should be. Fellows have seen him breaking bounds at night; and he doesn't go out to set night-lines, or to jape anybody; he goes out for things he wouldn't care to explain to the Head or Mr. Railton. He's a giddy blackguard, and that's the long and the short of it."

"I think you're right, Master Wally."

"I know I am," said Wally. "He'll come a cropper one of these days, like that chap Sleath we've heard about, who was expelled before we came here. You give Bingham a wide berth, and don't even fag for him if you can help it. My only Aunt Jane, you're looking down in the mouth again! Grin!"

"Oh, Master Wally!"

"Grin!" roared Wally.

Joe grinned.

"That's better. Now come in to brekker, and if I see you looking glum again, I'll punch your silly head."

And Wally linked his arm in Joe Frayne's, and marched him into the School House. They met Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth in the hall, and all the four Fourth-Formers were looking decidedly glum. Wally stared at them.

"Blessed if it isn't catching!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with you chaps? What are you down in the mouth for?"

"Haven't you heard?" growled Blake.

"Heard what?"

"About Tom Merry."

Joe Frayne started.

"Master Tom ain't in trouble, is he?" he asked quickly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, it's all wot; but it looks like very sewious trouble for him. We shall stick to him, and back him up."

"But what's happened?" exclaimed Wally.

"He was out late last night," said Blake. "Kildare's going to have him up before the Head this morning. I've heard it from Kangaroo. There was a row in the Shell dorm. last night."

"Well, he went home with Brooke," said Wally. "Nothing serious in staying a bit late, is there? It only means lines."

Jack Blake shook his head.

"It's worse than lines this time," he said. "Kildare declares that he saw Tom Merry on the Wayland road, in company with Pudsey Smith, the prizefighter. It can't be true."

Joe Frayne turned white.

"Pudsey Smith?" he said faintly.

"Yes. Of course, it's all rot."

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"Yaas, wathah."

"Tom Merry denies it?" asked Wally.

"Of course."

"Then it's not true."

"Wathah not," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But it's jollay queeah. If Tom Mewwy has anythin' to do with Pudsey Smith, we have all been vewy much mistaken in him; and I, for one, won't believe it, unless Tom Mewwy tells me so himself."

"It's not true," said Joe Frayne, in a low voice. "It can't be! Only—" He broke off.

"Don't you be cut up about it, kid," said Blake kindly.

"It will come out all right. Tom Merry will clear himself."

Joe Frayne was silent. There was a frightened expression in his eyes, and he moved away, without speaking again. Wally strode after him, and caught him by the sleeve.

"What's the matter, Joe?" he asked sharply. "You don't believe this about Tom Merry surely?"

Joe gave him a miserable look.

"Master Tom 'as gone and got hisself into trouble," he muttered; "and it's all my fault."

"What on earth do you mean? You don't think that Tom Merry was really with that awful rotter, do you?" demanded Wally.

But Joe Frayne declined to say another word; but when he took his place at the Third Form table for breakfast, he looked as if all the troubles in the world had descended upon his young shoulders.

CHAPTER 5.

Nothing to Say!

TOM MERRY was the cynosure of all eyes as he sat at the breakfast table with the rest of the Shell that morning. The Shell fellow kept his head very erect, and his face, though a little pale, was composed and calm. All the School House knew of the trouble in store for him now; the affair in the Shell dormitory of the previous night had been talked about up and down the quad, and the fellows over in the New House knew almost as much about it as the School House fellows.

Gore was looking very much of a wreck at the table; one of his eyes was closed, and his nose seemed nearly twice its usual size. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, glanced at him sharply, but made no remark. Monty Lowther and Manners looked worried and miserable. At the Sixth-Form table, Kildare was very taciturn. The matter was worrying the captain of St. Jim's very much. Tom Merry had as good a reputation as any fellow in the House, and it was a painful surprise to Kildare to discover him, as he believed, to be guilty of such duplicity. He would have trusted Tom Merry to any extent, previous to that occurrence; and the feeling that his faith and confidence had been unscrupulously abused, naturally made the captain of St. Jim's very bitter.

Kildare did not make his usual good breakfast that morning; a proof how the affair had disturbed him.

When breakfast was over, Kildare called to Tom Merry, as the fellows came out of the dining-room. The Shell fellow quietly followed the captain of St. Jim's to his study.

Kildare closed the door, and stood with his eyes fixed upon Tom Merry's face.

"Well?" he exclaimed.

"Well!" said Tom Merry.

"Have you anything to say?"

"Only what I said last night."

"You still deny knowing Pudsey Smith, the prizefighter, and the biggest blackguard in the neighbourhood?" said Kildare savagely.

"Yes."

"Look here!" said Kildare, more quietly. "I don't want to be too hard on you, Merry, if you own up and do the decent thing. So that you needn't tell any more lies about the matter, I'll explain to you."

"I've told no lies!"

"Don't interrupt me. I'll explain to you how I came to find you out. It's been known for some time that some St. Jim's fellows, or, at least, one, chummed up with that outsider, Pudsey Smith. He's having a London boxer down to his place in Wayland for a glove contest, and it's perfectly well known that one St. Jim's chap, at least, has been over there. He's been seen. The Head heard something about it, and he asked me to make inquiries, and to see whether there was anything in it. That's how I came to be over there last night, when I found you with Pudsey Smith."

"You did not find me; it was somebody else."

"Somebody else with your handkerchief on him, and your Christian name," said Kildare, with angry sarcasm.

"The name is nothing. Tom isn't an uncommon name," said Tom Merry. "As for the handkerchief, I don't know how to account for that. I might have dropped it somewhere, and that fellow may have found it."

"I'm afraid that kind of explanation won't do much good,

Merry. Look here, I cannot believe that you have been playing a double game all the time, that you have always been in tow with that gang of rotters at Pudsey Smith's place. If you will explain to me how you got into it, and give me some reason to believe that you will keep clear of such things in the future, I'll do my best to make this easy for you."

Tom Merry's eyes met Kildare's calmly.

"I can't do that," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know Pudsey Smith, and have never spoken to him in my life."

Kildare's eyes gleamed.

"You are going to keep that up, then?" he demanded.

"I must keep it up, as it's the truth."

"Can't you see that you're doing the worst thing possible for yourself, Merry?" said Kildare, with much patience. "Now you're found-out, the best thing you can do is to make a clean breast of it."

"I've nothing to make a clean breast of."

"I want to know whether any other fellow at St. Jim's is mixed up in this," said Kildare. "If any older fellow has led you into it. I know what the fellows say about Knox and Sefton, and if they have influenced you—"

"Knox and Sefton have never spoken to me about Pudsey Smith."

"Then you have got into it all by yourself?"

"I never got into it. I know nothing about the man."

Kildare clenched his hands.

"I won't go to the Head about it now," he said. "I'll give you until this afternoon to think it over, Merry. If you're sensible, you'll confess."

"I'd confess if I had anything to confess," said Tom Merry quietly. "But I haven't anything."

"You have never had anything to do with Pudsey Smith?"

"Never!"

"And you don't know any fellow at St. Jim's who has?"

Tom Merry did not reply.

"Ah!" said Kildare. "We are getting to something now. You do not deny that you know some fellow here who has had dealings with that rascal?"

"It's not a fair question," said Tom Merry. "I'm not called upon to sneak about another fellow."

"Then there is someone?"

"I don't think you ought to ask me that."

"You've admitted it, at all events. Is it a friend of yours?"

"No!"

"Give me his name!"

"I can't tell you anything. It's not fair to ask me to accuse anybody."

"Very well," said Kildare. "I'll say no more at present. But this matter is going to be thrashed out to the very end, and your part in it will come to light, and that of any other St. Jim's fellow who is mixed up in it. I may as well tell you that the Head spoke on the subject to all the prefects in the school, and warned them that he expected the matter to be cleared up, one way or the other."

"All the prefects?" asked Tom Merry, in a rather peculiar tone.

"Yes, in both houses."

"Well, I hope it will be cleared up," said Tom Merry.

"I can only say that I've got nothing to tell you."

"Very well, you can go. I'll leave this matter over for the morning. Come to my study after third lesson, and tell me all about it, and I'll do my best for you. Otherwise, you will be taken before the Head."

"Then I must be taken before the Head," said Tom Merry quietly. "I think you might have a little more faith in me than this, Kildare. You've always known me to be decent."

"I've always supposed you to be decent, you mean," snapped Kildare. "I'm finding out my mistake now. Get out!"

Tom Merry left the study without another word.

"Master Tom!"

Joe Frayne was waiting for the captain of the Shell in the passage. Tom Merry looked at the waif of the Third rather grimly.

"Hallo, Joe!" he said.

"Have you told him, Master Tom?"

"Told him what?"

"About what you saw Pudsey Smith for."

Tom Merry stared at the fag.

"You young ass!" he replied angrily. "I haven't seen Pudsey Smith. Can't you take my word, either?"

"But—but I—I thought— Kildare said he saw you with him," said Joe.

"He was mistaken."

Joe Frayne drew a deep breath.

"Then you ain't seen that man, Master Tom?"

"Of course I haven't, you young fathead!"

"I—I thought you'd p'raps 'ave seen 'im about that letter," faltered Joe.

"Well, I didn't, Joe. I never thought of seeing him," said Tom Merry curtly.

And he walked away, leaving Joe Frayne, looking very worried and distressed. Mr. Linton found Tom Merry very much preoccupied in the Shell Form-room that morning, and Tom Merry received a hundred lines for carelessness in his lessons. But he did not mind that. Indeed, he hardly noticed it. He was thinking of something more serious than lines.

CHAPTER 6.

Mr. Smith Confesses.

MR. PUDSEY SMITH was seated upon a bench outside his little public-house on the Wayland Road, with a mug of ale upon the table beside him, and a black pipe in his mouth. Mr. Pudsey Smith looked very cheerful, and contented. He was in his shirt-sleeves, as the afternoon was warm, and the many colours of his fancy waistcoat glowed in the sunshine. Mr. Smith's check trousers, of a loud and worrying design, contrasted nicely with the glare of his waistcoat, but were quite put into the shade by the colours of his crimson and azure tie. From a distance, Mr. Smith might have been taken for some gorgeous tropical beetle, transplanted from its natural clime, and dropped on the bench under the ash tree, outside the low door of the Peal of Bells.

Mr. Pudsey Smith drank his beer, and puffed at his pipe with enjoyment. He seemed to be enjoying his thoughts as well as his beer and his tobacco, for occasionally he broke into a little chuckle.

He looked up lazily as a footstep paused outside the public-house. Then, as he saw who the new-comer was, the old pugilist straightened up in his seat, and took the pipe from his mouth. The new-comer was Kildare of St. Jim's.

The handsome, athletic senior of St. Jim's stood before the old "pug," fixing a grim look upon him. Pudsey Smith affected to be at his ease.

"Arternoon!" he said.

Kildare did not answer the greeting.

"I've come to ask you a question or two, Mr. Smith," he said abruptly.

Mr. Smith nodded.

"Sit down, sir!" he said affably. "I know wot you're arter!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes," said Pudsey; "you've got a little bit on the glove contest, atween the Bermondsey Chicken and Clobber Jim." Kildare made a gesture of disgust.

"It's goin' to be a nice little scrap," said Mr. Smith, apparently not noticing Kildare's gesture. "But if you want a tip from me, bless yer, I ain't giving information away. I don't 'ave nothing to do with betting. I keep a respectable 'ouse, and I've got to consider my licence. This 'ere contest is jest boxing with the gloves on, nothin' like a prize-fight, you believe me. If you'd care to see it—"

"I shouldn't care to see it, thank you!" said Kildare.

"No betting wouldn't be allowed on my premises, anyway," said Mr. Smith. "I've got to think of the name of my 'ouse. Feller can be respectable, I 'ope, though he's 'ad his day in the ring, and stood up to 'eavy-weight champions in his time."

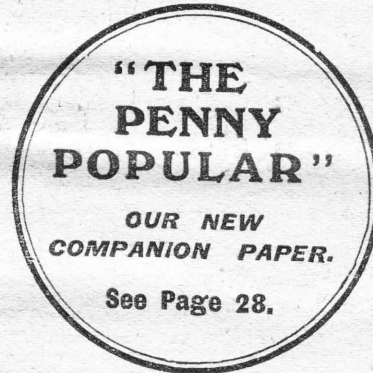
And Mr. Smith emptied his mug.

Kildare looked him over keenly. Mr. Pudsey Smith had been a powerful and brawny man in his time, but like many old heroes of the ring, he had run to seed since his retirement from active service. He had developed corpulence, and his cheeks were fat and red and flabby, and a triple chin descended in rolls of fat upon his collar. Mr. Pudsey Smith had had a name in the ring once, but he did not look as if he could have put up much of a fight just now. The athletic St. Jim's fellow could have made rings round him, and Mr. Smith was quite aware of that fact, and perhaps that was one cause of his excessive civility.

"I met you on the Wayland Road last night, along yonder," said Kildare abruptly.

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A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Mr. Smith nodded.
 "Allers take a little stroll up the road of a hevning," he said. "It keeps me in condition."

"You had a lad with you."

"Struth, I did!" assented Mr. Smith.

"Who was it?"

Mr. Smith grinned.

"Don't you know?" he asked.

"I think I know; but I want you to tell me."

"That wouldn't be playin' the game," said Mr. Smith. "I ain't giving anything away. No 'arm in a boy speaking to me, I s'pose? S'pose it was a young gentleman interested in the manly art of self-defence, stopped to pass the time of day with me? What 'arm in that?"

"Plenty of harm in that," said Kildare. "But that wasn't all. You can say what you like, Mr. Smith, but most people know that betting does go on in this place of yours, and if the police about here were a little sharper, you would be run in!"

"If you've come 'ere to insult me, young gent, you'd better go!" said Mr. Smith, with dignity. "I ain't taking any lip from anybody!"

"Some fellow from St. Jim's has been seen about here," continued Kildare, unrepentant. "I came along here last night to look for him."

"Indeed!"

"I found him talking to you on the road. It's pretty clear to me that he had just left this place, and you were walking down the road with him."

"Quite a mistake," said Mr. Smith. "I 'ope you don't think as I'd allow any boys on these 'ere premises out of school, arter hours, too?"

"I am quite sure you would, if they had money enough to make it worth your while," said Kildare coldly. "Now, I want to know the name of that St. Jim's fellow who was with you last night."

Mr. Smith's jaw set obstinately.

"I ain't nothing to tell you," he said.

"What was his name?"

"Find out!"

"I'm going to!" said Kildare grimly. "Get up!"

"Eh?"

"And put your hands up!"

"Wot!"

"I'm going to give you a hiding!" said the captain of St. Jim's coolly. "You're too cunning to let the law touch you, although everybody knows what goes on in this place. But you won't be allowed to get St. Jim's fellows here for gambling on prize-fights. You'll give me the name of that fellow who was with you, or I'll give you a hiding!"

Mr. Pudsey Smith blinked at him.

"I s'pose you know I've been in the ring?" he said. "You'd better be careful 'ow you pick a scrap with me, Master Kildare!"

"I'll take my chance."

"Look 'ere, I don't want a row with you!" said Mr. Smith, showing no disposition to get up. "If I was as young as I uster was, I'd wallop you till you 'owled! But I ain't! I'm not going to scrap with you!"

"You will, unless you give me the name of the fellow who was with you last evening on the road when I met you!"

"You 'eard me speak his name, unless you're deaf!" growled Mr. Smith.

"I heard his Christian name, that's all. If he had been with you for no harm, you wouldn't have called to him to run when I came up."

Mr. Smith chuckled.

"I was jest torkin' to him," he said. "If you want to know who it was, you needn't ask me. I s'pose all the fellers at your school ain't named Tom. Make a list of the Toms, and find out which was away from the school. It ain't fair to ask me to give a pal away."

"Give me his name!" said Kildare, pushing back his cuffs. "I give you one minute!"

"Look 'ere," said Mr. Smith, "the kid was doin' no 'arm! He was jest asking me a bit about the form of the Bermondsey Chicken."

"His name?"

"That's all it wos, and I ain't tellin' you any more! Find out fer yourself!"

Kildare stepped towards the publican. Mr. Pudsey Smith shrank back in his seat, looking very much alarmed.

"Ands off!" he roared.

"Get up!"

"I won't! 'Ands off! I'll 'ave the law of yer!"

Kildare's grip closed upon the shoulder of the fat man, and he was jerked to his feet. He promptly dodged round the little table.

"Old on!" he exclaimed. "I don't mind tellin' you the name, as far as that goes."

"What is the name?"

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"THE GREYFRIARS INSURANCE COMPANY" is the title of the New and Exciting Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"You see, I don't want to get the young gent into trouble. He wasn't doin' no 'arm—jest askin' a question about the Bermondsey Chicken—takin' an interest in boxin', you know, which I'm sure is natural enough in any young gent."

"His name?" growled Kildare. "I'm pretty nearly out of patience!"

"Tom Merry!" snarled the publican.

Kildare drew a deep breath.

"That is enough!" he said quietly. "Thank you!"

He strode away.

Mr. Pudsey Smith stood looking after him, and blinking in the sun. There was a very peculiar look upon the fat face of Mr. Smith. As Kildare turned from the road into the footpath through Rylcombe Wood, and disappeared from sight, Mr. Smith burst into a loud and prolonged chuckle.

"My heye!" he murmured. "Well, he asked for it—he was determined to 'ave the name! My heye! I want a drink arter that!"

And Mr. Pudsey Smith went into his bar, and mixed himself a particularly strong cocktail, and chuckled with enjoyment as he consumed it.

CHAPTER 7.

Before the Head.

"MASTER MERRY!"

It was the voice of Toby, the School House page. He came plodding across the quadrangle of St. Jim's, to where Tom Merry & Co. were chatting by the football-field.

Tom Merry turned round. He knew what was wanted.

"Well, Toby?"

"Ead wants you in his study, Master Merry!"

"Thank you!"

"Master Kildare is there, Master Tom," said Toby. "I'd look out, if I was you!"

And Toby, having delivered this friendly warning, departed.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Well, I've got to go through it," he said.

"It's rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's beastly wotten, Tom Mewwy, deah boy! But surely the Head will take your word!"

"Kildare doesn't!"

"I wegard Kildare as an ass!"

"He's several sorts of an ass!" said Monty Lowther.

"He ought to know that Tommy wouldn't tell any lies about it, if he had seen that old pug. But it was jolly queer about the handkerchief."

"Must have been a St. Jim's fellow who was with Smith," said Jack Blake. "The question is—What fellow was it?"

"Bai Jove! Suppose we try to find out how many chaps were out last night, deah boys, and we may be able to show up the weal wottah!"

"I don't think anybody was out," said Manners glumly.

"Monty and I have been asking some questions. We've asked Figgins & Co., and they've asked the New House chaps, and it seems that nobody belonging to the New House had a pass out."

"And nobody in the School House excepting me," said Tom Merry.

"The only chap who was out, besides Tom Merry, was Brooke," said Manners. "He had gone home, of course, as he's a day boy. But Tom Merry left him in his house, so he's out of it."

"It wasn't Brooke," said Blake. "We all know that. His people could clear him, too; they'd know whether he went out after Tom Merry left."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then who the dickens could it have been? I suppose it's certain that Kildare saw somebody?"

"Well, that's pretty certain," said Kangaroo. "Kildare isn't ass enough to fancy it. He said clearly that the chap was wearing a St. Jim's cap."

"Nobody had a pass out excepting myself, and nobody seems to have missed calling-over," said Tom Merry. "The only explanation is, that it was a senior."

"Phew!"

"Do you know whether Bingham was out, you fellows? It was Bingham's turn to see the lights out for the Fourth last night, I believe."

"My hat!" said Blake. "He didn't come to see lights out till a quarter to ten. Kildare was later; but we were all remarking about Bingham being late. He said he had been studying, and had forgotten the time—I remember."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!" said Manners excitedly. "And Bingham is a



"Pay up, Fishy!" said Vernon-Smith. Fisher T. Fish turned out his empty pockets. "You can see I'm stony," he said. "I've got nothing. The company's closed down; gone into liquidation. It's a bankruptcy." "I'll have your bat, then," said Bolsover, picking it up. "You can have it when you pay up the three bob you owe me." "And I'll have your Latin dictionary," said Morgan. "Oh, all right," said Fish, with desperate recklessness. "Better take my boots and trousers while you're about it. Don't mind me." (The above incident is taken from the splendid long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "THE GREYFRIARS INSURANCE COMPANY!" which is contained in our popular companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

little chap, you know. He's broad built, but he's short, and in the dark, he could easily be taken for a junior."

Tom Merry nodded.

"And he had mud on his boots last night," said Monty Lowther. "You remember, I mentioned it, Manners, and said he was whopping?"

"I remember it!"

"You'd better buzz off and see the Head, Tommy," said Blake. "No good keeping him waiting. But we're jolly well going to look into this!"

Tom Merry gave his chums a nod, and hurried away towards the School House. He left the juniors engaged in an excited discussion.

Bingham, of the Sixth, met him in the passage as he came in, and signed to him to stop. Tom Merry paused, with a look of dislike upon his face. The short, thick-set senior was no taller than the Shell fellow as he stood facing him.

"I hear you're in trouble, Merry," Bingham remarked.

"Yes," said Tom Merry shortly

"I'm sorry. When I gave you that pass last night I had no idea you were going to do anything so reckless. I thought you were simply going to see Brooke at his home."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"I did simply see Brooke at his home," he said. "You know jolly well that I've never had anything to do with Pudsey Smith, Bingham."

Bingham looked surprised.

"How should I know?" he exclaimed.

"You know well enough! If I'd had anything to do with the man myself, why should I have interfered when you wanted to send young Frayne on a message to him?" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly.

Bingham laughed.

"And I've got a jolly strong suspicion who it really was with Pudsey Smith last night," said Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming.

"Who, then?"

"You!"

The prefect laughed again.

"Oh, are you thinking of squirming out of it by pushing another fellow in, then?" he said sneeringly. "Well, you won't find it answer. As it happens, I've talked to Kildare about the matter, and it seems that when he met you and Pudsey Smith it was just on half past nine, and I was seeing the Fourth Form to their dormitory about that time."

"You were late seeing lights out for the Fourth."

"Yes, I believe I was a few minutes late—"

"A quarter of an hour," said Tom Merry.

"I was in my study—"

"Making your boots muddy indoors?" said Tom Merry.

Bingham started.

"Who saw my boots were muddy last night?" he exclaimed sharply.

"Fellows who saw you come into the common-room at a quarter to ten."

The prefect gritted his teeth.

"Thank you for telling me," he said bitterly.

Tom Merry bit his lips. He felt that he had been imprudent in speaking so freely to the prefect; but it was too late to think of that now. He hurried on to the Head's study, and knocked at the door.

"Come in!" came the deep voice of Dr. Holmes.

Tom Merry entered the study.

Dr. Holmes was seated at his writing-table, and Kildare stood by the window. Both of them were looking very grave and serious.

The Head of St. Jim's fixed his eyes upon Tom Merry.

"You know what I have sent for you for, Merry?" he said.

"I can guess, sir."

"Kildare has made a very serious charge against you."

"I know it, sir."

"You deny it?"

"Totally, sir."

Kildare made an angry gesture; but the Head signed to him to be silent.

"Let Merry speak, Kildare," he said. "Where were you last evening, Merry?"

"At Brooke's place, sir!"

"I have questioned Brooke," said the Head. "He says you left his place about nine o'clock, so near as he can remember."

"That is correct, sir."

"You did not arrive at the school until ten."

"I stopped for shelter from the rain, sir."

"You did not meet the man, Pudsey Smith, the landlord of the Peal of Bells, on the Wayland Road, Merry?"

"No, sir. I did not go that way; that way would have taken longer. I took the short cut through the wood from Wayland Moor."

"You are aware that Kildare heard Mr. Smith address his companion by your Christian name, and that the lad, in fleeing, dropped a handkerchief which you acknowledge to be yours."

"Kildare says so, sir."

"You do not mean to imply a doubt of Kildare's word?" exclaimed the Head sternly.

"Oh, no, sir," said Tom Merry, at once. "I know Kildare wouldn't say anything that wasn't true, sir. But he might have been mistaken about hearing the name."

"He was not mistaken," said the Head. "He has visited Mr. Smith at his home this morning, and extracted from him a confession as to the identity of his companion last night."

"Then that settles the matter, sir."

"Quite so."

"I'm glad of it, sir," said Tom Merry, with a breath of relief.

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"Glad of it, Merry! What do you mean?"

Tom Merry looked surprised.

"I mean that I'm glad I'm cleared, sir. If Mr. Smith told Kildare the name of the fellow concerned, that clears me surely. Kildare doesn't think he saw two fellows there."

Dr. Holmes looked at him long and hard.

"Either there is some extraordinary mistake in the matter, or else you are the most consummate young rascal I have ever encountered!" the Head exclaimed. "The name that Mr. Smith gave to Kildare was your own!"

Tom Merry staggered.

"Mine, sir?"

"Yes."

"M-my name? Mr. Smith gave Kildare my name? He said that I was with him?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes!"

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"THE GREYFRIARS INSURANCE COMPANY"

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"It's a lie!" shouted Tom Merry, forgetting everything else in his anger and excitement. "It's a lie!"

"Merry! Do you dare to say that Kildare—"

"Not Kildare sir; he's been taken in, that's all. But that villain, Pudsey Smith, has told him a lie, I know that!"

"You do not know this man Smith?"

"No, sir."

"He is neither a friend nor an enemy of yours?"

"Neither, sir. I've happened to see him on the Wayland Road sometimes, sir, but I've never spoken to him."

"Then he can have no cause to dislike you?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Then why should he seek to injure you, by giving your name, if you were not with him last night?" demanded the Head.

Tom Merry looked dazed.

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Kildare reports to me that Mr. Smith was very unwilling to give the name; he prevaricated for some time; and it was only with great difficulty that he was made to speak," said the Head.

"And then he gave my name?"

"Yes."

"Then he must have done it to deceive Kildare, and protect the fellow who was really with him," said Tom Merry. "I certainly wasn't there. Another fellow from St. Jim's is thick with Pudsey Smith, and Smith was trying to screen him by dragging me into it."

"Why should he drag you into it, when he does not know you?"

"I—I don't know."

"Have you any reason to suppose that he even knows your name, if your statement is correct that you have never spoken to him?"

"I—I don't see how he could know it."

"Then you are condemned out of your own mouth, Merry."

"He—he may have heard my name—and it was the first that came into his head, perhaps, when Kildare asked him," stammered Tom Merry.

"Nonsense!"

"He told a lie, anyway, sir."

"You persist, in spite of this conclusive evidence, that you have never had any dealings with this man?" asked the Head patiently.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; the investigation must go further. If you have been mixed up with these rascals, I think it is probable that you may have something in your personal belongings to prove it—some communication, perhaps," said the Head. "It is Kildare's suggestion."

"I didn't think of it myself, sir," said Kildare. "One of the prefects suggested it to me, and I thought there might be something in it. There might be notes about bets, or records of debts or something, or a letter."

"Quite possible. Have you anything of the kind, Merry?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Are you willing for your belongings to be searched?"

"Quite willing, sir."

"And your person?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Very well!" The Head touched the bell, and Toby the page appeared so quickly, that a suspicious person might have fancied that he had been very near to the outside of the door. "Toby!"

"Yes, sir," said Toby, with a glance of commiseration at the pale, harassed face of the hero of the Shell.

"I wish you to search Master Merry; to turn out all his pockets, and place the contents on this table," said the Head.

Toby looked hesitatingly at Tom Merry.

"Go ahead, Toby," said Tom Merry, forcing a smile. "I don't mind."

"Yes, Master Merry."

And Toby, with a very shamefaced air, began the search. From the inside breast-pocket of Tom Merry's jacket he drew a sealed letter, and Tom Merry, as he saw it, gave a sudden start, and his face flushed crimson.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "That letter isn't mine."

"Give it to me!" said the Head, in a voice of iron.

The letter was handed to him. Tom Merry made a movement as if he would catch at it; Dr. Holmes placed it upon his desk, and laid his hand upon it.

ANSWERS

CHAPTER 8.

The Letter!

CRIMSON and silent, Tom Merry stood there. It was not surprising if both the Head and Kildare read, in his flushing and troubled face, the signs of conscious guilt.

Dr. Holmes fixed a stern look upon him, as he stood with his hand upon the letter on the table.

"I shall look at this letter, Merry," he said.

"It is not mine, sir."

"Whose is it, then?"

Tom Merry did not answer.

"How did it come into your possession, if it is not yours?"

The troubled look deepened upon Tom Merry's face, but he did not answer. Dr. Holmes made a gesture to Toby.

"You may go," he said. "I do not think any further search will be necessary."

"Yes, sir," said Toby.

And with a look of commiseration at Tom Merry, the page left the study, and closed the door softly behind him.

Dr. Holmes picked up the letter, and glanced at it. It was sealed, but there was no superscription upon the envelope.

The Head took a paper-knife in his hand, and slit the envelope. A single sheet of paper was inside, written upon in a backward, slanting hand, in pencil.

Dr. Holmes unfolded it, and read it, and a terrible frown gathered upon his brow.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible that there can exist such duplicity in so young a lad!"

Tom Merry's lip trembled.

"It is not my letter, sir!" he stammered.

"Silence!"

Dr. Holmes handed the letter to Kildare.

"I wish you to read it," he said.

"Yes, sir."

The captain of St. Jim's glanced at the letter, and started.

"My word!" he murmured.

"It is clear proof," said the Head. "Tom Merry, there is no further doubt in my mind. That letter is a clear proof."

"I do not know what is in the letter, sir," said Tom Merry steadily. "It came into my hands sealed, and I have never opened it."

"Let him see it, Kildare."

Kildare handed the letter to Tom Merry. The junior's senses almost swam as he read it, and realised what a fearful proof it was against him. The letter ran:

"Dear Pudsey—I shall try to get over to-night, but I don't know whether I shall be able to manage it, as K. has his eyes very much open now. Somebody must have been talking. But I shall manage to see the scrap, you may bet on that.
—Your Pal."

There was no other signature.

"You can see that that is not my writing, sir," said Tom Merry.

"It is nobody's writing," said the Head; "the hand is slanted backwards for purposes of disguise. Whoever wrote that letter, disguised his hand; perhaps he did not wish it to be even in the power of Pudsey Smith to betray him. You did not trust even your associate."

"I did not write that letter."

"How can you tell such impudent falsehoods?" cried the Head, losing patience. "The letter is found sealed in your pocket, all ready for the post, and yet you deny having written it!"

"I did not write it."

"I should never have dreamed that Merry could lie like this, sir," said Kildare aghast. "I've been as much deceived in him as anybody."

"He shall not have an opportunity of deceiving us any further," said the Head grimly. "I ask you to confess, Merry."

"I will confess how this letter came into my possession, sir, if you will listen to me," said Tom Merry miserably. "I hope you will believe me."

"I think that is very improbable, Merry; but I am willing to listen to what you have to say, at all events."

"It was given to a fag, on Monday, sir, by another fellow," said Tom Merry steadily. "A fag of the Third Form—a kid I've always stood by, and who always comes to me for advice when he's in a bother of any sort."

Tom Merry paused. The evident disbelief in the Head's face disconcerted him. Kildare turned away towards the window, with a gesture of disgust.

"You may go on, Merry," said the Head.

"You do not believe me, sir?"

"Go on!"

"Very well, sir. This letter was given to the fag I've

mentioned, to be taken to Pudsey Smith. He wouldn't take it—he refused, and the senior—"

"It was a senior, then, who gave him this letter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Continue."

"The senior threatened him, and licked him—and I interfered. I've always stood by that kid—he's had troubles enough since he came to St. Jim's, and I was the cause of his coming here—and I was bound to protect him. I chipped in, sir, and when I found what the matter was, I took the letter from him. The senior wanted to get it back then, but I wouldn't part with it. I said I'd keep it by me, and if he ever tried to lead the fag into his rotten games again, I'd show him up, sir. I never meant the letter to come to light; and it was understood that I shouldn't give him away, if he let the fag alone. If he worried him again, I was going to hand the letter to Kildare. It's not my business, of course, what Sixth Form fellows do, and it's not for a junior to interfere if they care to disgrace themselves; but I wasn't going to have a kid dragged into it."

"What fag are you alluding to, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"From what he's said, sir, he can only mean Frayne," said Kildare.

"Was it Frayne, of the Third Form, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

"In taking possession of this letter, then, you were acting as the protector of Frayne, against a Sixth-Former who was trying to lead him into bad connections?"

"I don't know whether the rotter wanted to do exactly that, sir. He wanted a messenger—a go-between, between him and Pudsey Smith—and he thought young Frayne could do it, because Frayne was brought up in a slum, and has been through a lot of things that other fags here don't know anything about. He was wrong about Frayne; there isn't a more decent kid in the school."

The Head looked hard at Tom Merry.

"And what is the name of the senior concerned, Merry?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"You heard my question, Merry."

"I don't think I ought to give his name, sir. It was understood that I wasn't to produce this letter if he let young Frayne alone."

"Will Frayne bear out your statement?"

"Of course he will, sir."

"Fetch Frayne here, Kildare."

"Yes, sir."

Kildare quitted the study. Dr. Holmes sat silent and grave while he was gone. Tom Merry stole a timid glance at his face. The Head did not believe him, that was clear. But the headmaster of St. Jim's was a just man, and he would not leave a stone unturned to get at the truth. If there was a chance for the accused, he should have it.

Kildare returned in a few minutes, followed by the waif of the Third, who was looking very startled and scared.

"Come in, Frayne!" said the Head kindly.

"Yes, sir," stammered Joe.

"Joe—" began Tom Merry.

"Say nothing, Merry," said the Head, with a frown. "I do not wish you to prepare Frayne for the questions I am going to put to him."

"I was only going to tell him not to mention names, sir," said Tom Merry flushing.

"Frayne," said the Head, "were you given a letter on Monday, by a member of the Sixth Form, to take to a man named Smith in Wayland?"

Joe Frayne cast a scared look at Tom Merry.

"Answer, Joe," said the captain of the Shell. "Tell the Head everything he wants to know."

"Yes, sir!" stammered Joe.

"Was this the letter?"

Dr. Holmes showed the slit, unaddressed envelope. Frayne looked at it.

"It was like that, sir," he stammered. "Jest a plain envelope, with a note inside it, sir. I didn't see the note. The bloke wanted me to take it to Mr. Smith, at the Peal o' Bells, sir, and I wouldn't."

"And what happened then?" asked the Head, evidently surprised at this ready corroboration of Tom Merry's statements.

"Master Tom interfered, sir, and took the letter. He said that he would keep it, and if the bloke didn't let me alone, he'd show it up agin him. I ope that wasn't wrong, sir. Master Tom only wanted to protect me from the bloke, sir. It wasn't right of 'im to try to get me to go to the Peal o' Bells, sir. I should 'ave been punished if anybody 'ad seed me goin' there."

"Quite true, Frayne," said the Head quietly. "Any boy in this school known to visit such a place would certainly be most severely punished. Now, Frayne, think carefully before you answer me again—is this story true, or is it a concoction between you and Tom Merry?"

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A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE NEXT WEDNESDAY: "THE WRONG TEAM!"

"Eh, sir? I don't understand!"

"Did you know that Merry was to be brought before me this morning?"

"All the school knows it, sir."

"Did he arrange with you that, if he were found to have written a certain letter in his possession, you should come here and abel this story?"

"Cert'nly not, sir," said Joe, in wonder. "Master Tom has goin' to keep that letter dark, if the bloke let me alone."

"Do you know whether Tom Merry was in communication with Pudsey Smith?"

"I know he wasn't, sir. He ain't that sort," said Joe.

"What is the name of the senior who gave you the letter, with instructions to carry it to Pudsey Smith?"

Joe cast a look of distress at Tom Merry.

"Master Tom!" he muttered. "I—I orter tell 'im."

Tom Merry was silent.

"I command you to tell me, Frayne," said the Head sternly. "Listen to me. Unless it can be proved that this letter was given you by someone else, and handed to Tom Merry, Tom Merry will be adjudged guilty of having written it himself—and he will be expelled from the school."

"Oh, crikey!" said Joe, in dismay.

"If any senior at this school was so wicked, so utterly unscrupulous, as to attempt to induce you to take a letter to such a place as Mr. Smith's public-house, he does not deserve to be protected by you, Frayne. It is your duty to tell me the truth, and it is the only way to save Merry from punishment."

Frayne cast an appealing look at Tom Merry.

"I must tell 'im, Master Tom," he muttered.

"Don't look at Tom Merry, Frayne," said the Head sharply.

"Now, what can you tell me—is this story a total invention, or was the letter really given you by a senior?"

"Yes, sir, it was."

"Who was the senior?"

"Bingham, sir, the prefect!" stammered Joe. "I was bound to tell 'im, Master Tom. Arter all, it's Bingham's own fault—he's caused all the trouble."

Kildare uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Bingham!"

"Yes, Master Kildare."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the Head. "Bingham—a prefect! Impossible!"

"It's true, sir."

"Do you say that it is true, Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, "as Frayne's given you the name, I must stand by him. It was Bingham, of the Sixth."

"Call Bingham here, Kildare!"

"Yes, sir."

And Kildare left the study for the second time. Joe Frayne stole a miserable glance at Tom Merry.

"I ope I ain't done wrong, Master Tom," he muttered.

"It was all Bingham's own fault—he oughtn't to 'ave give me the letter. We ain't called on to protect 'im—it was his own look-out."

Tom Merry nodded without speaking. The study door reopened, and the captain of St. Jim's came in with the accused prefect.

CHAPTER 9. Condemned.

BINGHAM was perfectly cool and self-possessed as he entered the Head's study. He glanced at Tom Merry and Joe Frayne, but it was a casual glance, as if he did not connect their presence in the study with himself in any way.

"Kildare says you want to see me, sir," he said respectfully.

"Yes, Bingham," said the Head, with a sigh. "I am trying to straighten out a most extraordinary tangle, and I want your assistance. Frayne has brought a most extraordinary accusation against you, and Merry corroborates it."

"Indeed, sir!" Bingham glanced at Frayne and the captain of the Shell. "Before you go into the matter, sir, I think I ought to tell you that these two boys are very thick, and I have suspected them of breaking bounds, and paying visits to a place kept by a man named Pudsey Smith. On Monday I questioned Frayne on the subject, but he denied it; and my suspicions were still stronger with regard to Tom Merry."

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

"Liar!" he exclaimed promptly.

"Silence, Merry!" exclaimed the Head, in a voice of thunder.

"He is lying, sir."

"Silence! Bingham, Frayne says that on Monday you gave him a note to take to Pudsey Smith at the Peal of Bells, at Wayland, and that Tom Merry took possession of it. Is there any truth in this?"

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"None, sir."

"My heye!" gasped Joe Frayne. "Oh, crumbs!"

"Silence, Frayne. You did not give Frayne a note, Bingham?"

"No, sir."

"Have you any acquaintance with Pudsey Smith?"

"None, sir."

"Great Scott!" murmured Tom Merry.

Bingham smiled slightly.

"If I gave Frayne such a note, sir, and Tom Merry took it, I suppose it is still in existence. Let them produce it."

"This is the note, Bingham," said the Head.

The prefect glanced at it.

"That is certainly not my writing, sir. It is a disguised hand."

"Yes, that is evident, Bingham. You know nothing about that note?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Very well. I am almost ashamed to have asked you; it is only too clear that it is an impudent invention of this junior."

"Bingham has not told the truth, sir," said Tom Merry hopefully. "That is the note he gave to Frayne, and I took it, and told him that if he tried to get Frayne into trouble again, I'd give it to Kildare. I didn't know that the note was in a disguised hand, and that it wasn't signed. I never opened it."

Bingham shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose I need hardly defend myself from such a ridiculous accusation, sir," he said. "This is evidently a note that Tom Merry has written to send to Pudsey Smith, and as it has been found upon him, he has invented this preposterous story to account for it. If any proof is necessary, Kildare will tell you that I suggested to him that Tom Merry should be searched for evidence."

"That is so, sir," said Kildare.

"I should hardly have done so, if incriminating letters belonging to myself had been in Tom Merry's possession," the prefect remarked.

"You awful villain!" burst out Tom Merry. "You knew the letter was in a disguised hand, and that it wasn't signed. You knew that if it was found on me, it would be supposed to be written by me."

Bingham laughed.

"Come, Merry!" he said. "You will not be able to make the Head believe this nonsense. Why do you not confess, and throw yourself upon Dr. Holmes's mercy?"

"You hound!"

"Silence!" said Dr. Holmes. "Bingham, you are completely exonerated. Tom Merry has been guilty of wicked falsehood, and he has led this foolish lad, younger than himself, into the same wickedness. That is only too clear. Frayne came here with his story all ready, and I suppose they had arranged it beforehand, in case that letter should come to light before Merry had succeeded in sending it to Smith. Frayne, you may go. I regard you as being under the influence of this wicked lad, and I shall take into consideration your unfortunate antecedents, and pardon you. Leave the study."

Joe hesitated.

"Master Tom—" he began.

"Go!"

Kildare took Frayne by the arm and led him to the door, and pushed him outside the study.

"Master Kildare," said Joe, in a voice of agony, "Master Tom is innocent! I swear—"

The door closed upon him.

In the study Tom Merry stood silent, and as pale as death.

It seemed to the unfortunate junior that he was tangled in a web, through the meshes of which he could not break.

In his simplicity he had entered into this contest with the rascally prefect, and he had fancied that he held the upper hand, but the prefect's plot had completely turned the tables upon him.

He was helpless now, at the mercy of his enemy; not a word he said would be believed, and his well-known influence over Joe Frayne only gave colour to the suspicion that Joe's evidence was concocted, and designed to clear him, regardless of truth.

"Tom Merry," said the Head, in slow and measured tones, "I am greatly disappointed in you. It is only too clear that you have been deceiving me all along. You have practically led a double life, and I am glad that you are discovered before you have had an opportunity of corrupting others as well as that foolish boy Frayne. Now that the case is clearly proved against you, I trust you will have the decency to confess."

Tom Merry shivered.

"I have nothing to confess, sir."

"You deny it still?"

"I must, sir. Bingham is lying—he lies like a villain. I should never have dreamed that anybody could tell such fearful lies as he has," said Tom Merry brokenly. "I know I can't make you believe me, sir. But I've told the truth."
"You certainly cannot make me believe you, Merry," said the Head coldly. "I am not likely to believe outrageous falsehood. Kildare, take Tom Merry to the punishment-room, please, and lock him in and bring me the key."

"Dr. Holmes! You will not—"
"I shall communicate with your guardian, Miss Fawcett, immediately," said the Head coldly. "You can hardly expect to remain at this school after what has happened. For the sake of Miss Fawcett, an old and venerable lady whom I greatly esteem, I shall not expel you publicly. I shall break the dreadful news to her as gently as possible, and ask her to remove you. In order not to give her too painful a shock, I shall not send you home directly. I shall ask her to come here and prepare her mind for it, before I tell her the baseness you have been guilty of, which makes it necessary for you to leave the school. I shall be more considerate to Miss Fawcett, Merry, than you have shown yourself; you must know what a grief this will be to her."

"It's enough to break her heart," he muttered.
"I am glad you have the grace to be sorry for the harm you have done, at all events," said the Head.
"I have done nothing. That fellow has lied!"
"Silence! Take him away, Kildare!"
"Come, Merry!" said Kildare grimly.
Tom Merry followed him blindly from the Head's study.

CHAPTER 10. In the Punishment-Room!

ALL St. Jim's knew of Tom Merry's disgrace before he had been in the punishment-room for ten minutes. Joe Frayne had related what had happened in the Head's study; and a crowd of fellows had seen Tom Merry following the captain of St. Jim's to the punishment-room.

The key had been turned upon him, and Kildare had taken it to the Head's study.

Tom Merry was locked in—away from his chums—to await the arrival of his guardian, who was to take him away from St. Jim's.

The news almost stunned his chums.

A melancholy group gathered in the passage outside the locked cell to discuss the matter; and to them Joe Frayne told his version of the incident of the letter.

Tom Merry's chums naturally believed that version; but it was only too clear that they would not be able to upset Bingham's account of it.

Their faith in Tom Merry was the result of their friendship for him; and that was not evidence of his truth.

"We've got to do something," said Manners. "Toby told me he's posted a letter to Miss Fawcett from the Head. She will be here to-morrow to take Tommy away."

"Bai Jove, it's wotten!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Somethin' will have to be done before to-morrow."

"Bingham will have to be shown up, somehow," said Monty Lowther. "But how?"

"We've got to see Tommy, and talk it over with him," said Jack Blake.

"He's locked in," said Lowther hopelessly. "Let's bang on the door," said Digby. "We can tell Tommy through the keyhole that we're backing him up, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The punishment-room was at the end of the Fourth-Form passage at the extremity of a deep recess. It was in one of the oldest portions of the School House, an obscure room in a secluded corner, with stone walls, and a little window looking out upon a narrow space between high walls. It had once been used as a study; but it was secluded and badly lighted, and had been deserted for that reason; and it was sometimes called by the fellows Nobody's Study.

The recess which led to it from the passage was dim and dusky, and closed at the end by the heavy oak door of the lonely room. The juniors crowded into the recess, and two or three of them knocked cautiously at the big oak door. They did not want the knocking to reach the ears of the prefects, as anybody confined in the punishment-room was supposed not to be spoken to.

There was a movement inside the room.

"Hallo!" called out the voice of Tom Merry from within.

"Hallo, Tommy!"

Tom Merry came to the inside of the door.

"We're all here, Tom, old man," said Monty Lowther, through the keyhole. "We just want to tell you that we

don't believe a word against you, and we're going to star by you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thanks, you fellows," said Tom Merry, in a choking voice. "I'm afraid it's all up with me here. The Head down on me, and Bingham has made him believe that I wrote a letter to Pudsey Smith, and it was found on me. I suppose Frayne's told you about it?"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"We're going to prove it, somehow," said Manners. "We'll make that cad Bingham own up, if we have a scalp him."

"I don't know what can be done," said Tom Merry through the keyhole. "It's a plot of Bingham's. I suppose he was afraid I should show the letter, and he's fixed this up to discredit me beforehand. It has been arranged with Pudsey Smith; he told Kildare himself that I was the fellow with him last night."

"The villain!"

"I'm coming in to see you after lessons, Tommy," said Monty Lowther. "We've got to have a jaw over this, and decide what's to be done. The Head has written to Miss Fawcett, and she will most likely be here to-morrow. We've got to get something done before then."

"I wish we could, Monty. But while I'm shut up here—"

"While you're shut up there we're going to work for you, said Lowther. "We can't talk to you now. Somebody will be along in a minute to stop us. I'm coming to see you after lessons."

"But you can't get in here."

"There's the window."

"But—"

"I'll bring a knotted rope with me," said Lowther, in a low voice at the keyhole. "You can let down a cord from the window, and pull it up and tie the end, so that I can climb up. If you haven't any string, you can strip up your necktie, and make a cord of that good enough to pull up a rope with."

"Good!"

"I'll bring you some grub, too. You won't get much here on punishment diet," said Monty Lowther.

"Thanks, old man!"

"Cave!" called out Blake, from the passage where he was keeping watch.

Bingham, the prefect, came striding towards the group of juniors. He turned out of the Fourth Form passage into the dusky recess before the door of the punishment-room. He smiled sneeringly as he looked at the juniors.

"So you are all here!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

"I suppose you know that no one is allowed to communicate with a fellow in the punishment-room," said Bingham.

"Oh, rats!"

"Yaas, wats, and many of them."

Bingham scowled.

"You will take fifty lines each, every fellow here!" he exclaimed angrily, "and if you are found here again you'll be caned."

"Go and eat coke."

"Rats!"

"Cad!"

"Rotter!"

Bingham clenched his hands. He had authority, as a prefect, to punish the juniors for talking to him in such uncomplimentary terms; but their respect for his position as a prefect was gone. They looked upon him only as a cowardly plotter, and the enemy of their imprisoned chum. It would not have been safe for Bingham, prefect as he was, to attempt to punish the exasperated Co.

"I shall report this to Mr. Railton," he said.

"Report and be hanged," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I wergard you with uttah contempt, Bingham. You are a wascal."

"Will you go?" shouted Bingham.

"Yes, we'll go," said Lowther. "But you know our opinion of you. You're a cad and a rotter, and we'll show you 'up yet."

The juniors moved away down the passage.

There was a shadow upon many faces that afternoon. Monty Lowther and Manners felt the disgrace of their chum keenly, and most of the Shell fellows were depressed. Tom Merry's personal friends believed in him; but other fellows, of course, went by the evidence, and the evidence certainly was overwhelmingly against the hero of the Shell.

Crooke and Gore, indeed, declared their firm belief that Tom Merry was found out at last, and that he deserved what had happened to him; and Levison and Mellish, of the

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urth, took the same line. But they did not venture to express those opinions in the presence of the Co. In the Fourth room, Blake and his comrades were Tom Merry's champions; and they were loyally backed up by Figgins & Co., of the abw House.

Figgins & Co. were the rivals of the School House fellows; that, as Figgins remarked, on an occasion like this, House was were off, and it was time to rally round. Redfern and ven and Lawrence, of the New House, took the same view. his hour of need, it was clear that Tom Merry had friends the rival House of St. Jim's, as well as in his own House. at whether his friends would be able to help him to any tent beyond sympathising with his misfortunes was very subtle.

Monty Lowther secured a rope, and coiled it up and concealed it under his jacket. Bingham was keeping an eye on the punishment-room, and two or three of the Co. lingered the passage as if to wait for an opportunity of speaking to om Merry through the keyhole. This little device kept the effect hovering near the spot, and left a clear field for Monty Lowther outside the House.

He strolled out into the quadrangle, and sauntered round lat the old chapel, and as soon as he was sure that he was st observed, he slipped into the narrow entry between two high walls upon which the window of the punishment-room looked.

There he tossed up a pebble to the window. He heard the window open above, and Tom Merry looked out at him.

"Good old Monty!" murmured Tom Merry. A string composed of threads of a torn-up necktie came fluttering down from the window-sill.

Monty Lowther caught the end of it, and attached it to the end of the rope, which he uncoiled from under his jacket.

The string was drawn up, and the rope followed it, and after a few minutes Tom Merry waved his hand from the window as a signal that he had secured the end of the rope.

Monty Lowther hung upon it for a few moments to test his, and then climbed it, hand over hand.

In a couple of minutes he reached the window-sill, and Tom Merry helped him in. Monty Lowther crept silently in at the window, and drew in the rope after him, and closed the window.

CHAPTER 11. A Council of War.

"HERE we are again!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Good old Monty," said Tom Merry.

The room was very dusky; the window, looking up the shadowed entry, gave little light. The walls of the room were of huge square stones, and the floor of ancient W oaken planks. The atmosphere was chilly. The only furniture was composed of a table and a chair. Nobody's Study was not a cheerful abode; and as Monty Lowther glanced round the dusky room, he remembered the legend of St. Jim's, that the room was haunted. But there were more serious matters than ghosts to be thought of now.

"Better whisper," said Monty Lowther, in a low voice. "Bingham is keeping an eye on the passage; he doesn't mean us to get at you if it can be stopped."

Tom Merry's eyes burned at the mention of the name.

"The rotten cad!" he muttered. "I suppose he won't be easy in mind till I'm fairly out of the school."

"Not likely! He's playing a risky game; and he knows that you've got chums to stick to you, and that we won't leave a giddy stone unturned to get the truth out."

"It's jolly decent of you chaps," said Tom Merry, with a break in his voice. "Some chaps would go back on a fellow in my position."

"Rot!" said Lowther. "Don't we know you're true blue?" He fumbled in his pockets, and produced several neatly-tied packages. "Put these out of sight; they'll be a change from the grub you'll get here. Ham sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, cake, and tarts, and two bottles of pop."

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Tom Merry smiled faintly. He was thinking of anything but a feed then.

The packages were deposited in the obscurest corner of the study. Monty Lowther sat on the corner of the table.

"Now let's decide what's to be done," he said. "We mayn't have much time. In the first place, what do you mean by keeping these giddy secrets? If you'd told us about that rotten letter at the time, on Monday, this wouldn't have happened."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I wish I had," he said.

"Well, let it be a warning to you, my infant, not to keep secrets from your uncle," said Monty Lowther magisterially. "How did it happen?"

"Bingham was trying to get Frayne to take a letter to Pudsey Smith. I suppose he'd fixed it to meet Smith at his place, and he found Kildare was on the watch," said Tom Merry. "There have been suspicions about St. Jim's fellows going there for the prize fight, and all the prefects had been warned by the Head to look into it. Of course, Bingham was told, along with the others, and so the Head himself put the cad on his guard. Bingham fancied that Joe would be willing to do anything shady, you know, from the poor kid having been in the slums before he came here; but he was mistaken; and I chipped in, and took the letter. Bingham was awfully wild; but I defied him, and kept the letter. I told him that if he tried anything of the kind with Frayne again, I'd show the letter to Kildare, and that I'd keep it as a guarantee of his good behaviour. If he did the decent thing, neither Frayne nor I would say a word about it. I thought that was a good arrangement; I couldn't have the cad sending Joe to such a place, and such a man."

Monty Lowther nodded.

"I thought that would be an end of the matter," said Tom Merry ruefully. "But I suppose Bingham fancied himself under my thumb, so long as I had his letter; and was afraid that I should let it all out sooner or later. He was very ratty, too. So he thought out this rotten scheme, to nip it in the bud, and put the letter on me."

"What was in the letter?"

"I never knew till it was opened in the Head's study to-day. I naturally supposed that Bingham had written it in his own hand, and that it was signed. It turned out to be in a disguised hand, and without a signature—so it might as well have been written by me as by Bingham. In it he told Pudsey Smith that he couldn't come because 'K'—that's Kildare—was on the alert, but that he wouldn't miss the scrap."

"The scrap?" repeated Lowther.

"Yes; there's going to be a fight at Pudsey Smith's place, so I understand. You know he has fights there; he pretends they're glove contests, but they're really prize-fights, and fellows go there to see them and bet on them."

Lowther's eyes gleamed.

"Do you know when the fight is to be?" he asked.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"So Bingham said in the letter that he wouldn't miss it? You're sure of that?"

"Quite sure!"

"Good!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry looked at him inquiringly.

"Don't you see?" murmured Lowther. "If there's a glove-fight coming off at Pudsey Smith's place, and Bingham is very keen on it, he won't miss it. And we may have a chance of catching him on the hop if we can find out when the fight is to be."

"My hat!"

"It's a chance," said Lowther. "We shall have to keep it dark, of course; but if we keep an eye on Bingham, we may bowl him out over that."

"Oh, good!"

"Pudsey Smith must be in the game to fix this on you," Monty Lowther remarked, after a pause.

"That's certain. You see, it's clear enough that some St. Jim's chap is mixed up with him, and if it's proved to be me, that leaves Bingham clear, and he thinks he will be able to go there without risk."

"He's a deep beggar!"

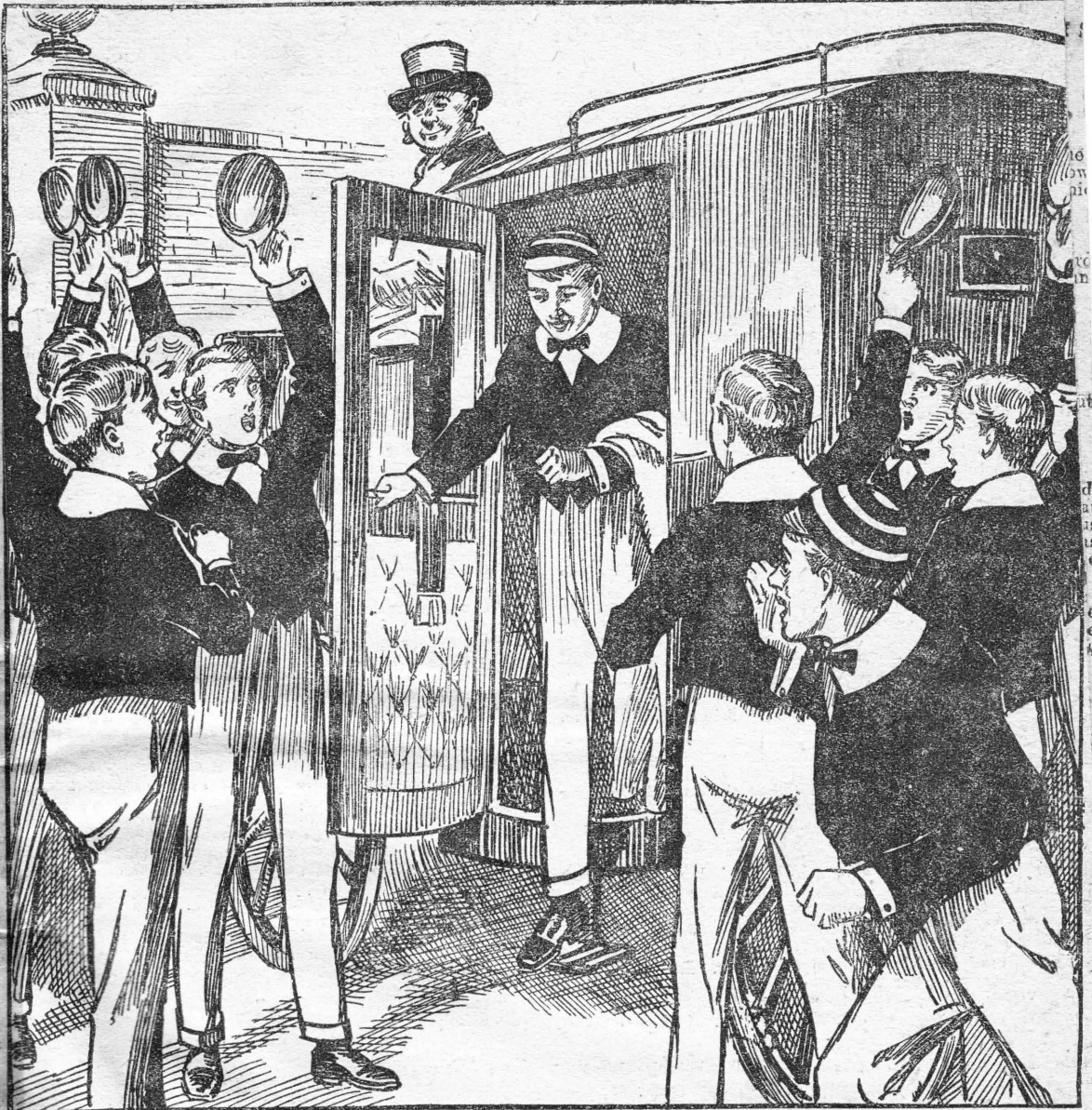
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When the station cab drove up, with Tom Merry in it, there was a roar of cheering from the crowd of juniors at the gates. They rushed to open the door and to lift him out. Tom Merry's face was very bright and happy. "Here he is again," roared Manners, "as large as life and twice as natural! Hurray!" (See Chapter 16.)

"If I'd known how deep he was, I shouldn't have kept that letter on me," said Tom Merry ruefully. "That was the worst thing against me. Of course, Bingham denied knowing anything about it. It was Bingham suggested to Kildare searching me for evidence; and that was how the letter came to light. Who could have suspected him of being such a deep rotter? He pays me out, and makes himself quite safe, at the same time. And when I'm sacked from the school, the whole thing will blow over, and he will be able to go to Pudsey Smith's place to see the fight without danger. That's how he's worked it out."

"There's many a slip, you know," said Monty Lowther. "It isn't ended yet. If Miss Fawcett takes you away to-morrow, Tommy, you mustn't go home. You can stay in Rylcombe till we've got this matter settled, and then we'll have you back in triumph."

Tom Merry smiled.

"I hope so, Monty."

"Oh, we'll do it," said Monty Lowther confidently. "I must say you've been rather an ass, Tommy; but you couldn't foresee that Bingham would be so cunning. As Frayne wouldn't take his letter, he went to see Pudsey Smith

apparently on Tuesday. I suppose he has some rotten business with him that couldn't be neglected—some giddy betting, or something of that sort. But he ran a big risk. Kildare very nearly caught him with Pudsey Smith on Tuesday night. It was jolly unlucky your having gone home with Brooke last evening."

"That's why he gave me the pass out, so that I should be out on the same evening," said Tom Merry. "He knew, of course, that Kildare was going to keep an eye on the Wayland Road near Pudsey Smith's place. I was surprised when he offered me the pass for the evening, but, like an ass, I thought he was trying to be decent after having acted like a cad the day before. He wanted me to be out last evening, and I fell into the trap. When I went home with Brooke, he went to meet Pudsey Smith; and, knowing that Kildare was on the alert, he was watchful; and he was muffled up so that he couldn't be recognised if anybody came upon him. When Kildare surprised them together, he bolted before old Kildare could collar him, and Pudsey Smith called out, 'Hook it, Tommy!' They'd arranged that, so as to give Kildare the impression that it was I."

Lowther nodded.

CHAPTER 12.

A Painful Interview.

DR. HOLMES rose from his chair, and sat down again, and rose again, and coughed. The sound of wheels in the drive outside announced the arrival of Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess and guardian, and the Head expected her to be shown into his study every moment. The interview was likely to be a painful one, and it was no wonder that the Head shrank from it.

But it had to be faced. Dr. Holmes coughed again uncomfortably as Toby announced Miss Fawcett. The kind old lady came into the study, and accepted the chair the Head offered her, with a gentle smile.

"I was very much surprised to receive your letter, dear Dr. Holmes," said Miss Priscilla. "But I was very glad to come and see my dearest Tommy. How is he?"

Dr. Holmes coughed again.

"Ahem! He is quite well in health, Miss Fawcett." "I am so glad! Dear Tommy is so delicate, you know, and he will never understand that he must take care of his health," said Miss Fawcett anxiously. "You are quite sure that he is well?"

"Quite sure, madam."

"He has not caught a cold?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"The weather this summer has been so dreadful," said Miss Fawcett, with a shake of the head. "I have been very anxious about him. I hope he has not been getting his feet wet in that dreadful rain?"

"Ahem!"

"Does he eat well?"

"I—I think so!"

"He is not looking pale?"

"N-n-no!"

"I am so relieved," said Miss Priscilla. "Your letter quite alarmed me. I was afraid that my dearest boy had caught a cold."

Dr. Holmes suppressed a smile. He would not have been likely to write an urgent letter to Miss Fawcett if Tom Merry had caught a cold. But to the dear old lady the figure of Tom Merry filled up the horizon. It had never occurred to Miss Fawcett that Tom Merry was growing up; to her he was still the infant she had brought home from India at a tender age, and she was continually alarmed for the health of the sturdiest fellow in the Lower Forms at St. Jim's.

How to break the unpleasant news to Miss Fawcett that Tom Merry was in disgrace, and had to leave St. Jim's, was a puzzle. Dr. Holmes coughed, and coughed again, and the complete unsuspectingness of Miss Fawcett made his task all the harder.

"Then my darling boy is quite well?" said Miss Fawcett.

"Quite, madam."

"I suppose he was anxious to see me?" said Miss Fawcett musingly. "It was just like the dear boy. Where is he, Dr. Holmes?"

"Ahem!"

"I should like to see him."

"Ye-es; I—I wish you to see him!" said Dr. Holmes hesitatingly. "The—the fact is, Miss Fawcett, I—I think it will be better for you to remove Tom Merry!"

"From the school?" asked Miss Priscilla.

"Yes."

"Ah! You think the air does not agree with him?" said Miss Priscilla. "I have been anxious upon that point several times!"

"N-n-not exactly!"

"I have consulted the school doctor, sir, and he assured me that the situation was most healthy," said Miss Fawcett. "But if you think that dear Tommy's health is likely to suffer here—"

"It—it is not that!"

"Then I do not understand," said Miss Fawcett, perplexed. "Why do you wish me to remove him if his health is satisfactory?"

"The fact is, madam, he—ahem!—he— It will be better for him to leave the school. There has been some—some trouble."

"Oh dear!"

"Tom Merry has been very reckless, madam!"

"The poor, foolish lad! I know he was always reckless," said Miss Fawcett weakly. "I see that you have been breaking this gently to me, Dr. Holmes."

"Yes, that is so, madam."

"My darling Tommy is ill, after all."

"Oh, no—no!"

"Then it is an accident?"

"N-no!"

"He has been playing those dreadful dangerous games," said Miss Priscilla fearfully. "I have said to him many times that he should not trouble so much about taking

"It's all clear to us," he said; "but we can't make it clear to the Head, that's the trouble. We should have to get a jolly strong proof before he'd believe that one of his boys was such an awful rascal."

That's so. The handkerchief, too. Kildare thinks I dropped it in running; but Bingham must have taken it from him, with the intention of dropping it if Kildare came on him. He had everything cut and dried. Indeed, I think it's very likely that the meeting wasn't by chance, as Kildare thought. I think very likely Bingham knew he was on the road, and fixed up the whole scene for his benefit."

Quite likely. Then he bolted full pelt back to St. Jim's, and Kildare was still looking for you on the Wayland Road, and got home first, and came into the common-room with a grin about having been studying, and forgetting the time. I noticed at the time that his boots were muddy, as if he'd been out in the rain—so did Kangaroo."

"Why, if you told Kildare that—"

"If I told Kildare that, my son, Bingham would say that you took a turn in the quad, to get some fresh air, or some other like that, and so made his boots muddy."

"Ye-es; I suppose he would. There doesn't seem to be any way of catching such an awfully slippery beast."

"Well, we've gained this much: We know it was Bingham; we can't prove it, but we know he was with Lindsey Smith last night; and we know that he's going to be the prize-fighter when it comes off," said Monty Lowther.

That's what we've got to work upon. If we can prove that Bingham goes to the Peal of Bells for the prize-fight, that will settle it, I should think."

"He won't go if he thinks you are shadowing him, Monty."

"We shall have to be awfully careful, of course," agreed Monty Lowther. "I won't tell the other chaps about it—only Manners. My hat! Suppose Manners could get a snap of him, with his camera, among those cads at the Peal of Bells!"

"My hat! That would settle it!"

The chums of the Shell went on talking in low tones, discussing every aspect of the matter; but suddenly Monty Lowther raised his hand.

"Listen!"

There were footsteps outside. They stopped at the door of the punishment-room.

Monty Lowther slipped off the table.

"Caught!" he murmured.

There was no time to escape by the window. There was no place of concealment in the room. The door opened, and Monty Lowther braced himself to face the music. Toby, the School House page, entered with a tray.

"Hallo, Toby!"

Toby stared blankly at Monty Lowther. In his surprise he almost dropped the tray.

"M-m-master Lowther!" he gasped.

"Mum's the word, Toby!" murmured Lowther. "Don't give me away—there's a good chap!"

"I—I've brought Master Tom his tea," said Toby dazedly, setting the tray upon the table. "Ow did you get 'ere, Master Lowther? The Head gave me the key to unlock the door; and I'll swear it was locked when I put the key in!"

"Oh, I came in through the keyhole!" said Lowther cheerfully. "It's no good telling anybody you saw me here, because they won't believe I could do it."

Toby grinned, and nodded towards the rope on the floor. Tom Merry kicked it under the table.

"You'd better get hout, Master Lowther!" he said. "I ain't saying nothing, of course. I know Master Tom is innocent."

"Good for you, Toby! Good-bye, Tom, and keep your pecker up!"

Monty Lowther stepped out of the punishment-room. Manners and Kangaroo and Jack Blake were in the passage, looking very anxious. Lowther joined them quietly, and at the same moment Bingham came striding along the passage from the direction of the stairs.

"Clear off, you juniors!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Can't we go in and say a word or two to Tommy?" asked Lowther, with much meekness.

"No, you can't!" growled Bingham. "Clear off!"

The juniors cleared off. Bingham evidently had no suspicion that Lowther had just emerged from the punishment-room. He waited grimly in the passage till Toby came out and locked the door again.

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goals and things when he is playing cricket, but he always smiles when I speak about it."

The Head smiled, too; he could not help it.

"My dear Miss Fawcett—"

"I—I hope he has not broken a limb, Dr. Holmes?"

Tell me, please! I—I can bear it now; I am prepared!"

"Oh, no! Nothing of the sort! He is quite well in health!"

"Then what ever has happened?"

"He has done wrong!"

"Impossible!"

"My dear madam—"

"Dr. Holmes!"

"The proof is complete—"

"Nonsense!"

"Madam!"

"Nonsense!" said Miss Fawcett.

"My dear Miss Fawcett—" said the Head feebly.

"I am surprised at you, Dr. Holmes! Of course, I know that you are making a mistake; but, still, it is very surprising that you should make such a ridiculous accusation against my dearest boy! I am very much surprised."

"Madam!" said the Head, with some acerbity.

"I decline to hear a word of it! I can only hope, Dr. Holmes, that you will come to take a more sensible view of the matter. Surely you have known Tom long enough to know that such a supposition is the height of absurdity!"

"Madam!"

"What does Tom say himself about the accusation?"

"He denies it."

"There!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett triumphantly. "I told you so! He denies it, of course, and surely that settles the matter!"

"Unfortunately, madam, it does not settle the matter. He has allowed himself to become mixed up with a rascally set of persons, among them a retired prize-fighter!"

"Nonsense!"

"It is proved that he was with this man—"

"Perhaps he was trying to reclaim him, and teach him the error of his ways?" suggested Miss Fawcett.

"He denies having been with him."

"Ah, that alters the case! He was not with him, then?"

"It is clearly proved."

"Nonsense!"

"The man himself has admitted it."

"He has spoken untruthfully."

"Kildare found them together—"

"Kildare is a truthful boy," said Miss Fawcett. "He was mistaken."

"A letter was found upon Tom Merry, which he had been about to send to this man Smith."

"Impossible!"

"I have the letter here," said the Head, laying it upon the table before Miss Fawcett's eyes. The old lady adjusted her glasses carefully, and scanned the letter.

"This is not Tom's handwriting," she said.

"The hand is disguised."

"Nonsense!"

"Really, madam, you make this interview very painful to me," said the Head mildly. "Surely you must know that I should not have decided to send Tom Merry away from the school without making every possible investigation, and establishing his guilt beyond the possibility of doubt."

"It is a plot."

"Madam!"

"I exonerate you, Dr. Holmes!" said Miss Fawcett, waving her glasses at the startled Head. "You have evidently been deceived."

"Miss Fawcett!"

"But I am very much surprised, sir, that your credulity should be imposed upon in this way. The headmaster of a public school should be more careful."

"Madam, this is unbearable!" exclaimed the Head. "I have no more to say. I will send for Tom Merry, and leave you together. You will oblige me by taking him away from the school at once."

Miss Fawcett rose, her old limbs trembling with anger and emotion.

"I shall certainly do that!" she exclaimed. "I shall not allow him to remain here, among wicked enemies, and with a foolish headmaster—"

"Madam!" shouted the Head.

"A foolish headmaster to believe silly accusations against him," said Miss Fawcett inexorably. "I am surprised at you! A man of your age should really have more discrimination. You shock me, Dr. Holmes!"

Dr. Holmes seemed about to choke.

"I will send him to you!" he stammered, and quitted the study.

Miss Priscilla sank into her seat again. She was crying now. A few minutes passed, and the study door reopened to admit Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 13.

Exit Tom Merry!

19

TOM MERRY came into the study with a pale face hesitating manner. But if he had had the slight doubt of his old governess, her greeting dispelled it once. Miss Priscilla tottered towards him, and drew him her arms.

"My darling Tommy!" she sobbed.

"The Head has told you?" asked Tom Merry, as he kissed the old lady upon her withered cheek.

"Yes, dearest. There is some silly accusation against you."

"It's not true, dear."

"I know it is not, Tommy. As if my darling could act in a disgraceful manner," said Miss Priscilla, regarding him fondly through her tears.

Tom Merry choked. The simple trust and faith of Miss Priscilla went straight to his heart.

"I'm glad you believe in me," he said.

"Of course I believe in you, Tommy. As if I could believe anything against you. I have changed my opinion of Dr. Holmes very much. I suppose it is the approach of second childhood!" said Miss Fawcett thoughtfully.

Tom Merry smiled faintly.

"You mustn't blame the Head, dear," he said. "They worked it up so that it looks plausible enough, and I Holmes has been taken in."

"Yes; I told him that was how it was," said Miss Priscilla with a nod.

"But I've got to leave St. Jim's," said Tom Merry.

"My darling boy!"

"It's rotten!" said Tom, with a sigh. "I don't want to leave all the fellows. But if the truth comes out afterwards—"

"It must come out," said Miss Fawcett. "It is impossible to believe that such a ridiculous slander can last long. My poor boy! I am sure that Dr. Holmes will apologise to you for this, when the truth is made known."

"But I've got to go now," said Tom Merry miserably.

"My box is packed. I can't even say good-bye to the fellows. They're in the Form-rooms."

"Come!" said Miss Fawcett, with dignity. "Let us go my dear child. I hope the time will come when Dr. Holmes will be sorry for these base suspicions. Come!"

And, leaning heavily upon Tom Merry's arm, the old lady left the study.

Dr. Holmes was not to be seen. Apparently he did not wish to face Miss Priscilla Fawcett again. Taggles, the porter, had already placed Tom Merry's box upon the station cab. As Miss Fawcett and Tom Merry came down to the door, there was a rush of footsteps, and Monty Lowther and Manners ran up.

"We've got leave from Mr. Linton to see you off, Tommy!" said Monty Lowther. "How do you do, Miss Fawcett? I'm sorry this has happened, but it will come out all right. Nobody here believes it about Tom."

Monty Lowther was exaggerating a little, in the excitement of the moment.

Miss Fawcett shook hands with the chums of the Shell.

"It is ridiculous," she said. "I hardly know what Tommy is accused of, but I know that he is innocent."

"Of course he is, ma'am," said Manners. "All his friends know that, and we're going to prove it, somehow."

"I hope you will, kid," said Tom Merry, with a sigh.

"No doubt about it," said Monty Lowther cheerily. "Look here! I don't think you ought to go home. Why not stay in Rylcombe till we've cleared it up, and you can come back?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"That may be a long time, Monty, if at all. Miss Fawcett can't stay in Rylcombe. But—but if anything turns up you can let me know at Huckleberry Heath, and you bet I shall come back by the first train."

"Right-ho! It's rotten that you're going."

"Beastly!" said Manners.

The chums of the Shell followed Miss Fawcett into the cab, and the driver put his horse into motion. The station hack disappeared out of the gates of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry cast a long look back at the old school.

Would he ever see it again?

Was this a last farewell to the school where he had spent so many happy hours, and where he left so many loyal chums?

At the thought of it, a lump rose in his throat.

"Cheer up!" said Monty Lowther, miserably enough. "It's bound to come out all right. You're leaving a good many friends to work for you while you're gone, Tommy."

"I know, old chap. But—but—" Tom Merry's voice broke.

In moody silence they drove to the station.

Manners and Lowther saw their departing chum into the

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n. Miss Fawcett was crying softly behind her veil. Tommy was keeping calm, but only by great efforts. He took hands with his chums from the window of the carriage. "Buck up, Tommy!" said Lowther.

"Cheer up, old man!"
"Good-bye, Miss Fawcett!"
He train rolled out of the station.
Manners and Lowther watched it with lugubrious faces, as it disappeared down the line. Then they looked glumly at another.

"My hat!" said Lowther. "If this isn't utterly rotten"

"I—I feel like blubbing," stammered Manners.
"No good doing that," said Lowther, who was very near himself. "I feel more like hammering that awful cad again!"

"The rotter!"
"But we'll show him up, somehow."
The chums of the Shell left the station.

They were silent and gloomy as they walked back to St. Jim's. The parting, and the uncertainty of the future, weighed heavily upon their spirits.

"We've got to be careful," Lowther muttered, as they crossed the school gates. "Bingham's got to be bowled out somehow. But mum's the word. He mustn't suspect that we're going to watch him."
Manners nodded.

"If he knows we're on the watch he will be careful, and you know he's as slippery as an eel," said Lowther. "We've got to catch him napping, same as he caught poor old Tommy. Not a syllable. And let him suppose that the matter's ended, and we've made up our minds to it."
"I understand."

They tramped glumly into the quadrangle.
Morning school was finished, and the fellows had come out of the Form-rooms. A crowd surrounded the chums of the Shell as they came up to the School House.

"He's gone—ch?" asked Gore.
"Yes," said Manners shortly.

"The Terrible Three are reduced to the Terrible Two now," grinned Crooke. "Well, I don't complain, for one."
"I'll give you something to complain of, then," said Monty Lowther savagely, and he hit out with all his force, and Crooke rolled in the quad.

"Hear, hear!" said Jack Blake. "If you want any more, Crooke, you can ask me for it."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "And if you repeat Crooke's caddish remarks, Goah, I shall give you a feahful washin'."

Gore did not repeat them. He shrugged his shoulders, and walked away. Tom Merry's friends were in a very touchy humour just then, and it was not safe for anybody to say anything against Tom Merry, "sacked" from the school as he was.

During the afternoon, Levison and Mellish of the Fourth showed signs of damage, the result of incautious remarks upon the subject, and in the New House Figgins & Co. had several fights upon the subject Arthur Augustus D'Arcy proposed raiding Bingham's study and ragging the prefect, but the other fellows frowned upon that hardy suggestion. As Monty Lowther said, if anything was to be done, it would have to be done with caution, if the unscrupulous prefect was to be caught napping. And the best way to lull him into a sense of false security was to let the matter drop.

CHAPTER 14.

Loyal Chums.

TOM MERRY was gone from St. Jim's. The prefect's plot had succeeded, and Tom Merry was gone; his place knew him no more. His chums missed him at every turn—in the Form-room, in the study, in the football-field, Tom Merry was missed.

Monty Lowther and Manners looked very gloomy after his departure, but of their secret hope that he would return they said nothing.

They waited.

It had been agreed among the chums that Bingham's movements should be observed; but, as if the prefect guessed something of the sort, he was very much on his guard.

That day, and the next day, he did not stir outside the walls of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry was gone, but life at St. Jim's went on in the old way. But his old comrades had not forgotten him.

On Saturday, as soon as morning school was over, Monty Lowther and Manners left St. Jim's and walked away towards Ryloombe.

When they reached the stile in the lane they turned into the footpath through the wood, and crossed the wood to the Wayland Road

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THE GREYFRIARS INSURANCE COMPANY

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They came in sight of the Peal of Bells, and caught sight of Mr. Pudsey Smith seated upon a bench outside the building, his usual place in the afternoon. He was smoking, and had a mug of ale beside him. The two Shell fellows gritted their teeth at the sight of the old pugilist.

"There he is!" muttered Lowther.

"Keep out of his sight," said Manners. "This way!"

The Shell fellows stopped on the edge of the wood, which bordered the road opposite the little public-house. The hedge aleyhouse stood at some distance from the town of Wayland.

A paling and a ditch separated the road from the wood, and behind the palings the Shell fellows were able to keep a watch upon the inn, and upon the road which ran past its doors.

They settled down to watch.

Lowther had judged very shrewdly that Bingham was only biding his time, and waiting for a safe opportunity of visiting his old haunts, and on the half-holiday, when all St. Jim's would be on the playing-fields, the rascally prefect would find his opportunity. If he came to the Peal of Bells that day, the two watchers could not fail to see him.

They sat in the grass and watched.

An hour passed—and then another.

Monty Lowther yawned.

"Blessed if I should like to be a giddy detective!" he remarked. "It must get on a chap's nerves in the long run, I should think!"

Manners nodded.

"Yes, rather. But this is for Tommy's sake; stick it out."

"Oh, yes; I'm not thinking of chucking it!"

Monty Lowther glanced along the road again, through an opening in the wood palings. Mr. Pudsey Smith had gone into his house, and presently he appeared in the doorway, in talk with a short, bull-necked youth who had several teeth missing.

"That's the Bermondsey Chicken!" said Monty Lowther. "I've seen his portrait in the paper."

Manners whistled softly.

"That means that the prizefighters are down here," he said.

"Yes."

"Then the date of the fight can't be far off!"

"My hat, no! They wouldn't come down here for long," said Lowther excitedly. "I'll bet it's coming off to-day—to-night, anyway. They couldn't be having it to-morrow; even Pudsey Smith would stop short of that, I should think."

"If it's to-night, Bingham will be along here some time," said Manners.

The Bermondsey Chicken and the landlord of the Peal of Bells disappeared into the building again.

A light rain began to fall, and the Shell fellows kept under the trees by the palings, shivering in the cold breeze.

Monty Lowther had taken the precaution of bringing a packet of sandwiches with him, and when tea-time came round the two amateur detectives were glad of the sandwiches.

"No luck so far!" said Monty Lowther.

"Never say die!" said Manners stoutly.

Dusk was falling upon the woods and the white road.

Lights began to twinkle from the windows of the Peal of Bells.

Several times footsteps on the road made the juniors look out with renewed hope; but they did not sight the prefect of St. Jim's.

The road was not a much-frequented one, but a good many people passed, and the eyes of the juniors watched them cautiously from behind the palings.

But the one they sought did not come.

But as the dusk deepened, Monty Lowther's keen eyes noted a peculiar circumstance. A good many pedestrians came along to the inn and entered quietly, and stayed there. They were not ordinary wayfarers in quest of liquid refreshment. For the most part, they were men of sporting appearance, and there were at least two or three of them whom the watchers could not mistake for anything but bookmakers.

"There's getting to be quite a crowd collected in there," Lowther remarked thoughtfully. "and you see the kind of men they are, Manners, old man."

Manners nodded.

"It's pretty certain the fight's coming off this evening."

"I should say so."

"And Bingham will be there. Most likely he won't come till after dark," said Lowther, in a low voice. "Where do you think the fight will take place—in the house, or somewhere at the back?"

"In the big shed at the back, I should say," said Manners thoughtfully. "Pudsey Smith is keeping it dark, you know. He's only pretending it's a glove-fight; it's nothing of the sort; they're going to slog with bare knuckles. Everybody knows it."

"Except the police," grinned Lowther.

"Exactly."

"If Bingham comes after dark we sha'n't spot him," said Lowther.

"Then we'll scout round the building, as soon as it's dark enough not to be seen."

"Good!"

The darkness thickened on the road before them. They could make out nothing of the opposite building now save the lighted windows.

There was a soft whistle in the wood, and Lowther started. He whistled low in reply.

Footsteps followed, and Jack Blake came out of the trees, and joined the chums of the Shell by the palings.

"Well, I've found you," he remarked breathlessly.

"Any news?" asked Lowther.

"Yes. Bingham's left the school."

Lowther's eyes gleamed.

"Sure?" he asked.

"I watched him go. He went out on his bike, and I heard him mention to Lefevre of the Fifth that he was going to see a fellow at Abbotsford. He borrowed Lefevre's bike-lamp. Abbotsford's the opposite direction from this."

"Which means—"

"That's he's coming here," said Manners.

"Just so," said Blake, with a nod. "He'll put up his bike somewhere, and walk back to the Peal of Bells, I reckon. I don't see why he should choose a rainy evening for a long bike ride to Abbotsford. It's an excuse for getting away from the school."

"I believe the fight is coming off to-night here," said Lowther. "I've seen the chap they call the Bermondsey Chicken, and a crowd of sporty-looking characters have been going in on and off for hours past."

"Then Bingham will be there."

"We're sure of it."

Blake peered out into the dark road through the opening in the palings. Only the winking lights of the Peal of Bells caught his eye.

"Bingham can't miss it," he said. "It stands to reason he won't, and I'm pretty certain he's got bets on it."

"Quite certain," said Manners.

"Only we sha'n't see him from here," said Blake doubtfully.

"He may sneak in at the back way, too, in the dark," Manners remarked.

"I'm going to scout round the place," said Lowther. "There's nothing else to be done. It's the only way to find out."

"Phew! It's risky!"

"No good sticking here," said Lowther. "The giddy fight may be taking place, and Bingham watching it, while we're wasting time."

"That's so. Perhaps I'd better do the scouting, though," said Jack Blake thoughtfully.

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther promptly.

"Well, I've had a good deal of practice as a Boy Scout—"

"So have I, haven't I?" demanded Lowther warmly.

"Yes; but I—"

"Oh, rot!" said Lowther. "I'm going. Look here, you fellows had better stay here, and wait for me to whistle. You know my whistle. If you hear me whistle, you'll know that I've seen Bingham go in, and you're to buzz off to St. Jim's and bring Kildare here as a witness. He'll come if you tell him how the matter stands. I won't give the signal unless I'm sure of Bingham being there."

"Mind you don't make a mistake," said Blake dubiously.

"Oh, rats!"

"Then if you whistle, we're to take it that Bingham is there watching the fight, and one of us is to cut off to St. Jim's?"

"That's the programme."

"All serene, then. Mind you don't get spotted."

"Trust me!"

Monty Lowther moved away in the darkness. Night had fallen now, and the woods were enwrapped in deep gloom. The lonely road was deep in shadow, save where the glimmering lights of the inn penetrated the night.

Blake and Manners watched and waited anxiously.

The minutes passed, seeming like hours to the anxious, troubled juniors.

An hour slowly crawled by.

"My hat," murmured Blake restlessly. "I wonder where Lowther is! I wonder if they've spotted him. I wonder—"

Manners clutched his arm.

"Hark!" he breathed.

Clear and soft, from the darkness of the road, came Monty Lowther's whistle. Blake drew a sharp breath.

"He's seen him!"

Manners cautiously answered the whistle. Then there was deep silence.

"I'm off!" muttered Blake.

And he disappeared into the wood in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 15.

Kildare is Called In!

KILDARE was at work in his study when there came hurried knock at the door, and it was thrown hurriedly open, and a panting and rainy junior came in. The captain of St. Jim's stared at him.

"Blake!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

Blake gasped for breath.

He closed the study door behind him, and turned toward the St. Jim's captain, panting. Kildare rose to his feet, and gazed at the junior almost in alarm.

"What on earth's happened?" he exclaimed.

"I want you."

"What!"

"You must come!" panted Blake.

"Are you mad, Blake?"

"No," said Blake breathlessly. "We've bowled him out that's all."

"Bowled who out?"

"Bingham."

Kildare frowned.

"Look here, Blake, let that matter rest," he exclaimed.

"I know you kids have some idea that Bingham fixed that charge upon Tom Merry; but the idea is utterly ridiculous and unjust. Nothing of the sort is the case. Bingham was sorry for him, and he had nothing whatever to do with the matter."

"He's bowled out now."

"I will not listen to anything against him, Blake. Let the matter drop, for goodness' sake. As for Tom Merry, the sooner you forget there ever was such a fellow at St. Jim's, the better," said Kildare harshly.

"Do you know where Bingham is?" said Blake.

"Yes; he's gone on a ride to Abbotsford."

"Suppose he were at the Peal of Bells, with Pudsey Smith and his gang, at this very moment," said Blake.

The St. Jim's captain started.

"Impossible," he said.

"But if he were?"

"I refuse to suppose anything of the sort," said Kildare testily. "What nonsense are you talking?"

"Wouldn't you take that as a proof that he was lying about Tom Merry—that the letter found on Tom Merry was really Bingham's, just as Tom Merry said—and that Bingham was the fellow you saw with Pudsey Smith on Tuesday evening?"

"Really, Blake, this is all rot!"

"Bingham was out that night," said Blake. "He came in late to see the Fourth to bed. He said he had been studying in his room, and hadn't noticed the time pass; but his boots were muddy, and his bags were wet with rain."

"He might have been in the quad."

"He might, but he hadn't. He was the fellow you saw on the Wayland road with Pudsey Smith, and the whole thing is a plot between them," said Blake, "and I'm going to prove it to you."

"How are you going to prove it?" said Kildare impatiently, yet somewhat impressed, in spite of himself.

"By taking you to the Peal of Bells, and showing you Bingham among that gang."

Kildare started.

"But he's not there!" he exclaimed.

"He is there!"

"Do you mean to say that you have seen him?" asked Kildare.

"Lowther and Manners and I have been watching for him," Blake explained. "Lowther was scouting close to the house, while we stayed behind the palings. Lowther gave us the signal that he had seen Bingham go in."

"It's impossible!"

"Lowther saw him!"

"Good heavens," muttered Kildare, "if this should be true—"

"It is true!" said Blake.

"I can't believe it."

"Well, come and see. Seeing is believing. We're going to see this through," said Blake. "If you won't come, I'll go to Mr. Railton."

"Oh, I will come," said Kildare, picking up his cap.

"I'm bound to look into the matter, as head prefect of the School House. But I sha'n't believe this about Bingham unless I see it with my own eyes. Lowther may have been deceived."

"You will see!"

"Yes, I shall see!"

Kildare quitted the study with Blake. They left the School

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A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE WRONG TEAM!"

House together. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy caught Blake's arm on the steps.

"Have you discovered anythin', deah boy?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Yes; but mum's the word."

"But what—"

"Can't stop. Mind, not a word."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Blake and Kildare disappeared into the darkness of the quadrangle.

The captain of St. Jim's strode along so rapidly that Blake had to break into a trot to keep pace with him.

Kildare's brows were contracted, and there was a glint in his eyes. It boded ill to the treacherous prefect if Kildare found him with Pudsey Smith. In spite of himself, Kildare was impressed by the earnestness of the junior, and a suspicion was born in his mind that he had been deceived; that he had been made the tool of an unscrupulous rascal, who had ruined an innocent lad to cover up his own misdeeds.

They tramped through the shadows of the wood. The rain had ceased, but the ground was wet, and the night very dark. Where the footpath ended in the Wayland Road, a shadowy figure loomed by the gate, and Manners started towards them. He had left the place where watch had been kept, to wait for them at the end of the footpath.

"Is that you, Blake?" he breathed.

"What-ho!"

"And Kildare?"

"Yes," said Kildare shortly.

"Good egg! We've got him now."

"Got whom?"

"That cad—Bingham!"

"Where is Lowther?" asked Kildare.

"He's gone back to watch them.. He came over to speak to me about ten minutes ago," said Manners, in a whisper. "The fight's begun, and it's going on in the shed at the back of the public-house. Lowther says it's an awful slogging match, and he saw Bingham making bets with a bookmaker there."

Kildare clicked his teeth.

"Can you guide us to the place?" he asked.

"Yes; but don't make a row. They'll put out the lights in a second if there's any alarm, and Bingham will bolt."

"Lead on, then."

"This way."

Manners led the way across the dark road, with Kildare and Blake at his heels. They moved round to the rear of the inn garden, and climbed over a fence. Manners whispered that an ostler was keeping watch at the garden gate, and could not be passed without giving the alarm.

A sound of murmuring voices greeted their ears as they dropped on the inside of the fence.

Then there was a shout.

"Bravo, Clobber!"

"Go it Chicken!"

The fight was evidently in progress.

Kildare set his lips.

At the back of the inn was a large shed, and although the door was closed, and the shutters fastened over the windows, gleams of light came out from several chinks in the wood.

There were sounds of many feet and many voices inside the shed; and as the St. Jim's fellows drew near it, they heard a heavy thud.

"One of 'em down!" whispered Manners.

A voice came from the shadows.

"This way!" It was Lowther's voice.

Lowther's voice was recognised; but he himself was invisible, until they were very close to him. A shadow moved, and a glimmer of light came from a chink in the shed. Lowther's hand groped for Kildare's.

"This way!" he murmured. "Put your eye there and look!"

Kildare obeyed.

CHAPTER 16. The Truth at Last!

WITHIN the shed there was a blaze of light.

A crowd of men were standing about, or sitting on benches, encircling a roped ring.

In the ring, two men stripped to the waist were facing one another, sparring. They were not wearing gloves, and their faces and bodies showed the signs of fearful punishment.

The audience were looking on at the brutal scene with evident enjoyment. Mr. Pudsey Smith was prominent, acting as timekeeper. Among the brutal faces clearly shown in light, Kildare looked round for the face he had come there to see—Bingham's. At first he could not see it.

Were the juniors mistaken after all? The prize-fight was

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in progress; but that was no business of Kildare's, unless St. Jim's fellows were present.

"Can you see him?" muttered Monty Lowther.

"No."

"Look in the far corner—chap with his face muffled up."

Kildare started, as he applied his eye again to the chink. He could see the prefect now.

Bingham, probably not wishing to be generally noticed in that disreputable assembly, was standing in a corner of the shed, in talk with a fat, ruddy-faced man, whom Kildare recognised as a bookmaker well known in Wayland.

The St. Jim's prefect had his coat on, with the collar turned up, and his cap was drawn down low over his forehead.

At a glance, he would not have been known; but now that Kildare's attention was specially directed to him, he recognised Bingham easily enough.

He gritted his teeth.

There was no doubt about it now.

Bingham of the Sixth, the prefect of St. Jim's, was there—watching the prize-fight, and evidently discussing bets with the bookmaker. Mr. Banks had a book in his hand, and was making an entry in it, as Kildare looked.

"Satisfied now?" asked Lowther, in a whisper.

"Yes," said Kildare.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to take Bingham away."

"Phew!"

"There may be a row, if you interrupt the fight," said Manners. "They're not a very pretty crowd, Kildare."

"You juniors keep away; I'm going in."

"We'll stick to you, you bet."

Kildare moved round to the door of the shed, no longer taking the trouble to be quiet in his movements. He reached the door, and struck upon it heavily.

Crash!

There was a loud exclamation within the shed.

"Who's there?"

"I am."

"Who—who's that?"

"My name is Kildare, of St. Jim's. Mr. Pudsey Smith. You know me," said Kildare, through the door. "Open this door at once!"

"Hang yer!" muttered the publican, between his teeth. "Wot do you want 'ere?"

"I want Bingham. And I am not going to leave without him. If you don't open the door, I'll smash it in."

There was a muttering of voices in the shed. Kildare, impatient, threw his weight against the door, and it creaked ominously. In two minutes the door was half off its hinges, and the boys looked in.

There was a sudden yell from the other side of the shed. A little door at the side—planned for such emergencies, in all probability—had opened, and a glare of light for a moment illuminated the wet, dark bushes. The door closed again immediately; and there was the sound of a fall and a struggle.

"Got him!"

"This way, Kildare!"

Kildare dashed round the building.

On the wet ground three forms were sprawling and rolling in a desperate struggle.

One of them, the undermost, was Bingham of the Sixth, and Manners and Lowther were clinging to him, and pinning him down, in spite of his frantic struggles.

"Here he is!" roared Blake.

And he sprang to aid the Shell fellows.

"You'd better give in, Bingham," said Kildare quietly.

"I saw you there, and recognised you. You're found out."

Bingham's struggles ceased.

"Kildare!" he muttered.

"Yes."

"For heaven's sake, don't give me away to the Head, Kildare!" said Bingham hoarsely. "I—I happened to hear the fight was going on, and looked in—I—"

"Don't tell lies, Bingham," said Kildare coldly. "You've told enough lies, I should think. You left St. Jim's on your bike, pretending you were going to Abbotsford. Where is your bike now?"

"I—I left it at Wayland Station."

"And happened to walk here—a mile from the station," said Kildare sarcastically. "You had better think out something better than that to tell the Head, Bingham."

The prefect groaned.

"Kildare, you won't tell the Head! It's ruin for me!"

"What was it for Tom Merry, when you lied about him?" demanded Monty Lowther wrathfully. "If Kildare didn't tell the Head, we jolly well should—and we're three witnesses."

"The game's up, Bingham," said Kildare quietly.

"Come!"

The prefect rose to his feet with a groan. He attempted no further resistance; it could not help him now.

With a drooping head he walked away in company with the captain of St. Jim's. Lowther and Manners and Blake followed gleefully.

They were triumphant. They had no compassion to waste upon the prefect. He had lied away Tom Merry's honour; and retribution had overtaken him at last; and the chums of the School House could feel nothing but satisfaction.

"Won't Tommy be pleased!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"What ho!"

"Hallo, there's some of the fellows at the gates!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Digby, and Herries, and Kangaroo were in the school gates. Blake slapped the swell of St. Jim's violently on the back.

"It's all right!" he shouted.

"Ow!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Cheer, you ass—cheer! Hurray!"

"Bai Jove!"

"He's found out!" yelled Lowther. "Caught in the giddy act! Found out and done in! Hurray! Three cheers for us!"

"Hurray!"

"Yaas, wathah! Huwway, deah boys."

A triumphant procession of juniors escorted Kildare and his wretched companion to the School House. Blake dashed on ahead to spread the news. It ran through the house like wildfire. Half the School House seemed to be gathered in the hall to greet Bingham of the Sixth as he came in with Kildare.

"My only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally of the Third, digging Joe Frayne enthusiastically in the ribs. "What do you think now? Hurray!"

Frayne's face was glowing.

"This will be all right for Master Tom!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah, Fwayne, deah boy! It cleahs Tom Mewwy!"

"Bravo!" roared Wally.

Kildare and Bingham moved on directly to the Head's study. Bingham was deadly pale, and he moved like one in a dream. Dr. Holmes gazed at the two seniors in blank astonishment as they came in. He rose quickly to his feet.

"What is the matter, Kildare?" he exclaimed.

Kildare pointed to Bingham.

"Ask him, sir," he said.

"Bingham! What—"

Bingham groaned. The cool nerve he had shown in winding the chain of guilt about Tom Merry had quite deserted him now. He was pale as death, and trembling in every limb. He knew that he was ruined, and the knowledge had deprived him of what little courage he may have possessed.

"I—I—" he stammered. "Oh, sir! I—I'm sorry—I—"

"He has lied about Tom Merry, sir," said Kildare; "that's quite plain now. I have found him at Pudsey Smith's place, watching a prize-fight, and making bets with a bookmaker."

"Good heavens!"

"He is hand in glove with that gang. That is why Pudsey Smith made out that his companion of Tuesday night was Tom Merry; to shield this rotter," said Kildare, with flashing eyes. "It was a plot between them."

The Head's brow was like thunder as he fixed his eyes upon the shrinking wretch before him.

"Is that the case, Bingham?" he exclaimed.

"I—I—"

"You lied, then, when you said that you did not know Pudsey Smith, and had no connection with him?" demanded the Head.

"I—I—"

"If that fact is established, the rest follows," said the Head. "It appears, then, that Tom Merry's and Frayne's statements were the truth, and that the letter was really yours, Bingham?"

The prefect could not speak. His lips moved, but no words came. Of what use were words to him now; the truth was known, and falsehood could not save him. With the discovery of his connection with Pudsey Smith, the rest, as the Head said, followed. His plot was revealed now, and lying could not help him.

As the Head gazed at the miserable plotter, a contemptuous pity came into his face.

"You do not seem to have the courage of your vices, Bingham," he said. "You know, of course, that I shall expel you from this school."

"I—I suppose so, sir," groaned Bingham. "I—I don't know how I shall face my pater. If—if you'd let me off this time, sir—"

The Head interrupted him.

"After you have done your best to ruin a boy who is proved to be innocent!" he thundered.

"I—I was driven to it," groaned Bingham. "Tom Merry had the letter—I couldn't be sure he wouldn't produce it—and he wouldn't give it back to me when I asked him. I—I had

to get in first word, and make out that the letter was his. If he had given it back to me, I—I shouldn't have done anything against him."

"Your excuses are as bad as your crime, Bingham," said the Head, harshly. "You have caused a serious wrong to be done—you have made me act unjustly. Go! You will leave this school this very night; I will not have St. Jim's polluted by your presence a moment longer than is necessary."

"I—I—"

"Go!"

Bingham cast a wild look at the Head, and then turning, tottered from the room.

A yell greeted him from the crowd in the passage outside.

"Yah!"

"Cad!"

"Spoofers!"

"Are you sacked?"

"Hurrah! He's sacked!"

Not a friendly look—not a friendly word! The prefect, with his eyes fixed upon the floor, hurried away, crushed and despairing.

The Head turned to Kildare.

"How did you come to know of this, Kildare?" he asked.

"Tom Merry's chums found it out, sir, and caused me to go to Pudsey Smith's place," said Kildare. "Here they are!" He signed to Lowther and Manners and Blake to come in, and they entered the study, looking rather sheepish.

"You have done well, my dear lads," said the Head. "I am only sorry that my faith in Tom Merry was not so strong as yours."

"I—I say, sir—" said Blake, hesitatingly.

"Yes, Blake?"

"May I—I send him a telegram, sir?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And say he can come back to St. Jim's?" asked Blake.

"Undoubtedly."

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake, forgetting in his joy that he stood in the august presence of the Head.

But the Head only smiled.

Nearly all the "Co." joined in sending telegrams to Tom Merry. Quite a considerable sum was expended upon them. And the next day there came a reply from the missing junior, announcing that he was returning to St. Jim's early on Monday morning. Monty Lowther waved the telegram in the air and cheered, when he received it.

And the next morning, when Tom Merry's chums requested leave from classes, in order to meet Tom Merry on his return, the masters of the Fourth and the Shell granted it at once; doubtless having had a hint to that effect from the Head.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy suggested the erection of a triumphal arch to greet the returning hero; and Fatty Wynn of the New House suggested making preparations for a gorgeous feed. It was Fatty Wynn's suggestion that was carried out.

When the station cab drove up, with Tom Merry in it, there was a roar of cheering from the crowd of juniors at the gates.

They rushed to open the door, and to lift him out.

Tom Merry's face was very bright and happy.

"Here he is again!" roared Manners. "As large as life, and twice as natural! Hurray!"

"Hip, hip, hurray!"

"Bravo!"

"Shoulder high!" yelled Figgins.

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry, laughing. "Cheese it! I'm jolly glad to get back—glad to see your old chivvies again! But—"

"Bring him in!"

"Hurray!"

Tom Merry was swung up on the shoulders of Lowther and Manners, and carried bodily into the quad. Round him the rest of the juniors surged, waving their caps and cheering enthusiastically.

Right across the quadrangle they bore him, to the door of the School House, where the Head stood to meet him. Tom Merry was landed at the feet of Dr. Holmes.

The Head of St. Jim's held out his hand.

"I am glad to see you again, Merry! I am sorry injustice was done! The wretched boy who plotted against you has been expelled from St. Jim's. You must forget this!"

"It's all right, sir," said Tom Merry, with tears of happiness in his eyes, as he shook hands with the Head. "I'm jolly glad to be back again!"

All St. Jim's was glad, too!

That evening there was a most gorgeous celebration in Tom Merry's study; and the hero of the hour was the junior who had so nearly been ruined by the Prefect's Plot.

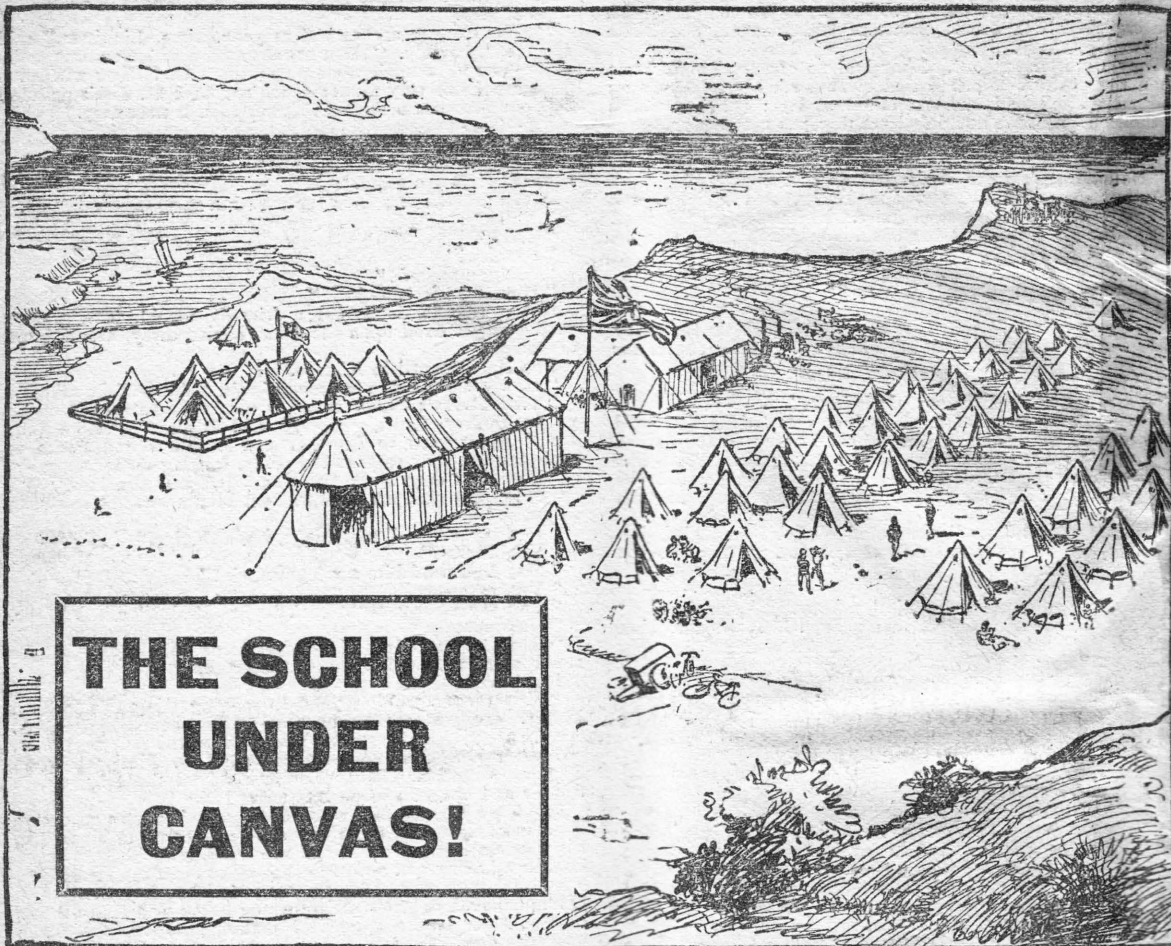
THE END.

(A magnificent tale of Tom Merry & Co.'s football team is contained in next Wednesday's "THE GEM" LIBRARY, entitled "THE WRONG TEAM," by Martin Clifford. Also another grand instalment of our thrilling school serial, "The School Under Canvas." Order your copy in advance. Price One Penny.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 242.

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE MOST EXCITING SCHOOL SERIAL EVER WRITTEN!



THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!

A Rousing, New and Original School Story of Gordon Gay, Frank Monk and Co.
By **PROSPER HOWARD.**

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

"The School will assemble in Big Hall at half-past six o'clock. An important announcement will be made.

"(Signed), E. MONK, Headmaster."

The appearance of the above brief notice on the school board is the first hint that the Rylcombe Grammar School receives of the great change in its circumstances that is pending—nothing less than the removal of the whole school into temporary quarters under canvas by the sea, on the Essex coast. Just at this time the ranks of the Fourth Form are reinforced by Gustave Blanc—immediately christened Mont Blong—a new boy from across the Channel. Mont Blong, who attaches himself to Gordon Gay & Co., is a slim and elegant youth with a peculiar flow of English, but he quickly shows his worth by holding his own with Carker, the bully of the Fourth. Amidst great excitement the Grammarians travel down to their new abode. During the first few days Gordon Gay discovers that there is more in Mont Blong than at first meets the eye, and that the French junior can speak English

fluently. Gordon Gay and Frank Monk & Co. one day see Herr Hentzel in secret conversation with two German military officers in a cave on the seashore. They are surprised to hear from Mont Blong that the three are spies, and that the French junior himself is a Secret Service agent.

One day Mont Blong disappears, and shortly afterwards Herr Hentzel is arrested by the police as a spy. Gordon Gay & Co. subsequently discover the French junior, bound in a cellar, where he has been imprisoned by Herr Hentzel. The same evening the juniors observe a German launch lying off the headland, evidently waiting till dusk to land at the cave. Mont Blong and the Cornstalk Co., therefore, hide themselves in the cave, and as night falls the French junior begins to make signals to the launch with an electric lamp, just as Herr Hentzel had been observed to do before. Standing on the ledge outside the cave, Mont Blong flashes the lamp, using the German's secret code, which is well-known to him. (Now go on with the story.)

Caught.

Gordon Gay & Co. listened. Complete darkness had now fallen, and the sea and the shore were wrapped in gloom.

Mont Blong had come in from the ledge. Light signals had flashed back from the launch, and then again darkness reigned.

The French junior chuckled softly.

"It is all right," he murmured.

"Ah, I can hear oars," said Gordon Gay.

"Yes, razzar."

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"They're coming."

"Look out for squalls!" murmured Wootton major. "If we'd known this was coming, we could have brought a cricket stump each."

"I've got a chunk of rock," said Harry Wootton. "If the chap gets it on his crust, it will make him say 'Hoch!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hark!" murmured Mont Blong.

Clearly through the silence of the darkness came the regular plash of oars.

The boat was approaching the cave.

"THE GREYFRIARS INSURANCE COMPANY" is the Title of the New and Exciting Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co appearing in this week's "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on Sale. Price One Penny

The tide was not yet at the full, but the water was high enough for an active man to scramble from the boat into the cave. The Grammarians nerved themselves for the encounter. Who the German officer was they did not know, but they knew that Herr Hentzel's employer was some man in authority, probably some prominent military personage, whose capture and exposure would cause a sensation.

The honour of laying him by the heels, and putting an end to his rascally proceedings on the British coast, appealed to the imagination of the juniors. The German officer would be a greater prize than Herr Hentzel himself.

"I suppose he's taken you for old Hentzel?" Gordon Gay murmured.

Mont Blong chuckled again.

"Oui, oui, my shum! I talk to him as Herr Hentzel talk; vous savez, and he tink zat I have escape from ze English police."

"My hat!"

"It isn't so easy to escape from the police, and that waster will find it out when we get him into chokey," murmured Wootton major.

"Yes, rather."

"Hush!" said Mont Blong. "Zey must not hear. Hark!"

There was a sound of bumping and scraping without. The tide had carried the German boat close to the rock under the opening of the cave, and the seamen were fending it off with the oars.

A sharp, commanding voice called out in German.

Mont Blong did not move.

"Aren't you going to answer?" whispered Gordon Gay. "You can pitch them their own lingo."

"But not ze voice of ze spy," said Mont Blong shrewdly.

"I say nozing."

"But—"

"Taisez-vous!" murmured Mont Blong, touching his chum's lips with his hand. "Silence, my shum."

The sharp voice called again.

Silence reigned in the cave. The Grammarian juniors held their breath.

There was a sound of scraping on the rock, and the bump of oars as they fended against the cliff.

"He's coming!" breathed Wootton.

The juniors' eyes were fixed upon the opening of the cave, where the dark sky glimmered a little lighter than the deep gloom that surrounded them in the cavern.

A head rose to view, and the shoulders followed, and the stranger climbed upon the ledge of rock. He rose to full view there, dimly outlined against the dusk of the sky, and the juniors heard the grinding of his boots upon the rock.

They knew the military figure again. It was the German officer who had accompanied Herr Hentzel into the depths of the cavern.

The man stood peering into the darkness of the cave, as if in doubt.

He had come ashore from the launch in answer to the signal, and he was surprised not to find the signaller there.

The juniors did not move.

The German officer stepped into the cave at last, and struck a match.

The light glimmered out over the boulders and the walls of shaggy rock.

It glimmered, too, upon the white, strained faces of the juniors, and the German uttered a sharp cry of surprise.

The match went out!

At the same moment Gordon Gay leaped upon the German, and his sudden spring sent the man staggering backwards. He fell heavily to the ground, with the Cornstalk sprawling across him.

"Back up!" panted Gordon Gay.

Mont Blong was only a second behind him.

Bang!

There was a flash in the darkness—the report of a pistol—and a crash in the cave as the random bullet chipped on the rock.

Wootton major and minor piled on the German the next moment. Mont Blong had a grip on the man's wrist, and was forcing his hand to the ground, to prevent him from using the pistol again.

"Ach!"

"Hold him down!" gasped Wootton major.

"Mind the pistol!"

"I have ze hand viz ze pistol," said Mont Blong breathlessly. "Ah, now I have ze pistol!"

He wrenched the weapon from the hand of the German, and sprang up.

Two heads rose into view from the boat under the ledge—the heads of the seaman who were waiting in the boat.

Bang! Bang!

Mont Blong pulled the trigger twice, and the bullets flew over the heads. He took good care not to hit them.

"Sharge!" shouted Mont Blong. "Ve have zem!"

The heads disappeared as if by magic.

Mont Blong ran out on the ledge.

Bang!

He fired into the sea, but it was enough. The two boatmen bent to their oars in frantic haste, and pulled away. They knew that their commander had fallen into a trap, and that was enough for them.

Bang!

Mont Blong sent another bullet into the sea, and it splashed up the water close to the boat, and accelerated the flight of the rowers.

Then he turned back into the cave.

The German officer was still struggling in the grasp of the three juniors, but they were too many for him, and they kept him pinned down upon the rock.

"Lend a hand, Mont Blong, old man!" gasped Gordon Gay. "The beast is as strong as a horse."

"Oui, oui, my shum!"

The French junior lent his aid.

With four fellows piling upon him, the German officer had no chance. His struggles died away, and Gordon Gay jerked a rope from his pocket, dragged the man's hands together, and tied the wrists tightly.

Then he stood up, and gasped for breath.

"Got him!"

"Hurray!"

The cavern rang with the cheers of the Grammarians.

Jack Wootton lighted the bicycle lantern, and Mont Blong turned on the light of his electric lantern.

The light gleamed upon the red and furious face of the prisoner.

He was wrenching at the bonds on his wrists, but he could not break them. He scrambled to his feet, with his hands still bound, and stood gasping and glaring at the four Grammarians.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed hoarsely, in English.

Gordon Gay grinned.

"It means that you're a prisoner," he replied.

"But what—what—?"

"Herr Hentzel is a prisoner, too," said Gordon Gay. "You are going to join him in chokey, to stand your trial for spying."

"It was I who make ze signals," said Mont Blong, chuckling. "It is zat you are caught in ze trap, mon ami."

The German ground his teeth.

"Come on," said Wootton major. "Let's get him away. There may be a crowd of the rotters here soon, as soon as that boat gets back to the launch."

"Hold!" exclaimed the German hoarsely. "Listen! I—I will pay you a thousand marks for my freedom."

"You've given me some marks, already," said Gordon Gay, rubbing his nose. "I don't want any more for one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Five thousand marks—"

"Five thousand rats!" said Wootton major scornfully. "You're a rotten spy, and you're going to prison. Bring the brute along."

"Listen! I am an officer. I am high in the service. I will pay you anything for my freedom—any price you name!"

"You are priceless!" grinned Gordon Gay.

"Will you let me go?"

"No fear!"

The German set his teeth, and made a desperate spring towards the opening of the cave. It was evidently his intention to fling himself into the sea, bound as he was, and it would have been certain death. But the juniors grasped him, and dragged him back. He struggled and kicked, but they bore him to the ground.

"Blessed wild-cat," said Gordon Gay, panting. "We shall have to tie his legs, too! Anybody got a cord?"

"I've got a belt," said Wootton major, "and we can use Mont Blong's necktie. It's about two yards long."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My shum—"

"All hands to the mill," said Gordon Gay. "Any old thing will do! We mustn't let him jib."

With various articles the officer's ankles were shackled, so that he could walk, but could no longer kick at his captors. Then the juniors dragged him to his feet.

"March!" said Gordon Gay.

"Ach! I will not move one step!"

"Anybody got a pin?"

"Here you are!"

"Yah! Ow! Yoop!" roared the German, as Gordon Gay inserted half an inch of the pin into one of his fat limbs.

"Will you march now?" asked the Cornstalk cheerfully.

"Nein! Nein! Ow! Yow! Yah! Ja, ja, ja!"

And the prisoner marched.

Captured from the Enemy.

Mont Blong led the way, carrying a light, and the three Cornstalks followed him, with their grasp upon the prisoner. The German officer, white with rage, stumbled and shambled along in the midst of his captors.

The juniors penetrated deeper and deeper into the cave hollowed out of the headland, in the direction in which Herr Hentzel had disappeared upon that never-to-be forgotten night. The cave narrowed so that they could go only abreast, and then, at a considerable distance from the sea, it widened out again into a large space.

Gordon Gay uttered an exclamation.

In that hidden recess of the hollow headland there were many signs of recent occupation.

There were half a dozen camp stools, and a couple of boxes locked and padlocked, and several bottles and glasses, and other articles which showed that the inner cave had been used continually as a meeting-place.

Mont Blong's eyes gleamed as he looked at the boxes.

He set his light down, and was upon his knees before one of them in a moment, fumbling with the locks.

The box was open in a couple of minutes.

The contents were papers of all kinds—letters, mostly in German, and maps and plans, and strange measurements of creeks and inlets with depths of water at various tides.

"My hat!" said Gordon Gay, looking over the shoulder of the French junior. "There's enough evidence there to convict a whole army."

Mont Blong grinned with satisfaction.

"Yes, razzler," he said. "Ve take zese boxes viz us; zey are not too heavy to carry away. It is not safe to leave zem here; as zere vill be some of zose rascals zat come to look for zat spy."

Gordon Gay swung up one of the boxes.

"You take the other, Harry," he said.

Wootton major picked up the second box.

"Hark!" exclaimed Jack Wootton, holding up his hand.

There was a sound from the darkness behind them. It was a vague, faint sound; but the juniors knew what it meant. Germans had rowed from the launch to seek for the captured officer, and they were already in the cave.

"Better buzz off!" grinned Gordon Gay.

"Yes, razzler! Come on, my shums."

With the captured boxes, and the stumbling prisoner cursing in their midst, the juniors hurried on through the cave.

They had a good start, and little fear of being overtaken; but they did not waste a moment.

The cave narrowed again to a mere passage in the rock, still descending; till at last Mont Blong extinguished his light. There was a glimmer of the stars in a dark sky before the eyes of the juniors.

The cave ended on the landward side of the cliff, and the juniors found themselves at a narrow opening, screened with thick bushes. Outside was a steep descent to the ground. It was a lonely spot, unfrequented at night; and the bushes at the mouth of the cave concealed it completely from the view of a passer-by.

The Grammarians scrambled down the steep slope, dragging their prisoner with them. In the distance gleamed the lights of the village of Netherby; and further down the shore were the lights of the school camp, in plain view.

"We're well out of that!" gasped Gordon Gay. "Now, where are we going to take this rotter, Mont Blong? You're leader this time."

"He might get away if you took him to the police-station," said Wootton major. "Let's have him in the camp."

Mont Blong nodded.

"Zat is right," he said. "I vill go to ze village and send ze telegram for ze police, and until zey come, he can be kept in ze camp."

"Good egg!"

"Mind zat you keep him safe while zat I am gone," said Mont Blong anxiously.

"You bet!"

"I come back quick!"

"That's all right! Buzz off!"

Mont Blong ran towards the village, and Gordon Gay & Co. propelled their unwilling prisoner towards the school under canvas.

Delamere, the captain of the school, met them as they entered the camp.

"Where have you young rascals been?" he demanded. "The Head has been alarmed about you again. Why, what—who—"

He broke off in astonishment at the sight of the German officer.

"Prisoner of war!" explained Gordon Gay airily.

"Picked him up on the beach," said Jack Wootton.

"Great Scott! Who is it?"

"A confederate of Herr Hentzel's—the man who employed THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 242.

him, and used to take his letters away in a steam-launch," said Gordon Gay—"a bigger prize than old Hentzel himself. We've got to keep him safe till the police come."

"My hat!" exclaimed Delamere. "You youngsters take the cake, and no mistake! You'd better come and explain to the Head. Where's young Blanc?"

"Gone to telegraph for the police."

"Bring him along to the Head's tent," said Delamere.

The prisoner was marched into the Head's tent. Mont heard the story the juniors had to tell, in utter amazement.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "You have done very well, my lads; though I should certainly not have given you permission to undertake so perilous a task. You must not do anything of the kind again."

"Certainly not, sir!" agreed Gordon Gay meekly. "It was a safe enough promise to make; the circumstances were certainly not likely to arise again."

"The man shall be kept safe until the police come for him," said the Head.

"May we stay with him and watch him, sir?" suggested Gordon Gay. "He tried to shoot us when we bagged him. He's a dangerous customer."

"Certainly!" said the Head. "And you had better keep his hands tied."

"What—ho—I—I mean, yes, sir!"

And the German officer was kept under strict watch and ward that evening. All the Grammarians came to have a look at him, sitting upon a camp-stool, with Gordon Gay & Co. sitting round him, watching him like hawks.

"You bounders!" exclaimed Frank Monk. "You ought to have let us into this!"

Gordon Gay laughed.

"We've managed it all right, Monkey, old man," he said. "We'll take you along next time we go looking for German spies, though."

"Takes a Cornstalk to deal with a matter of this kind, you know," said Wootton major loftily.

"Rats!" said Frank Monk. "If we'd been there, I dare say we should have caught half a dozen of 'em!"

"Oh, quite!" said Carboy.

"Here comes Mont Blong!" sang out Lane.

The French junior came up breathless.

"It is all right," he announced. "In an hour zey take him away. Ve keep ze rottair safe till zen."

"What—ho!" said Gordon Gay. "We will!"

And they did.

It was late before Gordon Gay turned in; but before he went to bed, he had the satisfaction of seeing the German spy taken away in charge of the police. And the Cornstalk Co. slept the sleep of satisfaction that night.

Monkey's Idea.

"Friends, Romans, and countrymen—"

"Hallo!" said Carboy, sitting up in the sand, and staring at Frank Monk. "What's the matter with you?"

"Lend me your auricular appendages," said Frank. "In other words, listen to me."

"That's what we generally are doing," growled Lane. "Can't you be quiet on a warm afternoon?"

"I've been thinking—"

"Rats!"

"Order!" said Frank Monk severely. "I tell you I've been thinking. It appears to me, that this Co. has been put very much in the shade."

"I wish we were," said Carboy, blinking at the sunny sky. "Seems to me that there's no shade here. I wish I had an umbrella."

"Oh, don't be funny, Carboy, old man!" implored Frank. "The weather's too warm for that, anyway. This Co. has been put in the shade. Those blessed Cornstalks have been raking in all the kudos, and we have had to hide our diminished heads. Gordon Gay & Co. are the giddy heroes of the hour, since they showed up Herr Hentzel and had him arrested as a foreign spy."

"Jolly good thing, too," said Lane. "We haven't had any German lessons since."

"Well, that's a great advantage, of course. But the Head has already arranged with a new German master to come down."

"Troubles never cease!" groaned Carboy.

"And the beast'll be here to-morrow," went on Frank Monk.

"Might turn out to be another spy, and get arrested," said Lane hopefully. "There's just a chance, you know."

"That's my idea," said Frank. "I've been thinking it out. To-day's a half-holiday; and my idea is that the new German master should arrive to-day, and turn out to be a foreign spy."

Lane and Carboy sat bolt upright and stared at

Lane tapped his forehead significantly, and Carboy nodded sadly.

"Quite off!" said Lane.

"Oh, quite!" said Carboy. "I say, Lane, your pater's doctor; what does he do with a patient when he gets into that state?"

"Strait-waistcoat," said Lane. "But as we haven't any strait-waistcoats here, I suggest that we bump him. It's just as good."

"Good; come on!"

"Hands off, you asses!" said Frank, as his two chums rose to their feet. "It's a wheeze, you duffers—a wheeze on the Cornstalks."

"Oh!" said Lane suspiciously. "Then, you're not off your rocker?"

"No, fathead! Look here; we three are the leading lights of the Fourth Form Amateur Dramatic Society—n'est-ce-pas, as Mont Blong says."

"We are!" said Lane. "We is! Reject spurious imitations."

"Those blessed Cornstalks think they are, of course," said Monk; "but we know we are, that's the difference. Now, the easiest kind of character to make up is a German gentleman of uncertain age—all you want is plenty of padding, a blonde complexion, and a liberal allowance of whiskers."

"My hat!"

"As the best actor going, I assign myself the title role—"

"Oh, rats!"

"And that's the wheeze. I arrive this afternoon as Herr

The arrest of the German spies, and the cessation of German lessons, were events equally gratifying to the Grammarians. The Cornstalk Co. were the heroes of the Fourth, and it was undoubted that the Old Co. had been put very much in the shade. Frank Monk & Co. were not at all jealous. They rejoiced in the success of the Cornstalks. But they had a natural desire to keep their end up, and not allow all the "kudos" to fall to the lot of their rivals in the Fourth.

Frank Monk went into his tent, and reappeared with a well-filled bag in his hand. Tadpole, of the Fourth, met him as he came out, and blinked at the bag.

"Going picnicking?" he asked.

"No," said Frank; "just a little walk."

"Pork!" said Tadpole, who was affected with deafness. "Pork—this weather!"

"Walk!" roared Frank Monk. "A walk along the shore!"

"Who's a bore?"

"Oh, my hat! You are, Taddy! Run away and play!"

"Eh?"

"Go and eat coke!" yelled Frank Monk.

"Oh, it's a joke, is it?" said Tadpole. "I don't see the joke myself. If you're going on a picnic, I'll come with you."

"It isn't a picnic, Taddy. There's nothing to eat in this bag!"

"Carry your bag? All right. Is it heavy?"

"Oh, run away!"

Look out for the Opening Chapters of our

GRAND, NEW SERIAL STORY

STARTING SHORTLY.

Special Announcement next Wednesday.

Hokey pokey, or Herr Huckaback—some convincing German name like that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And act in a suspicious way," pursued Frank Monk serenely. "We get Mont Blong and the Cornstalks on the track."

Lane and Carboy yelled.

"And they track me down, and arrest me, and confiscate my papers," said Frank. "I think that will be funny, and it will save them from the fearful danger of getting swelled heads."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Head is away this afternoon—he's gone to visit the headmaster at Netherby Abbey," went on Frank. "With my respected pater out of the way, it will be all plain sailing. The Cornstalks, and especially Mont Blong, are very much on the alert now, and it will be the easiest thing in the world to get them on the track of Herr Huckaback."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, how's that for a wheeze?"

"Ripping!"

"Hurray!"

Frank Monk uncoiled himself from the sand.

"Then come along, and back up your uncle," he said. "We've got all the props we need among our theatrical stuff, and it won't take long to make-up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Old Co. sauntered into the school camp.

The first thing they saw as they came among the tents was a crowd of juniors surrounding Gordon Gay & Co., who were relating, for about the fiftieth time, their adventures in the capture of the German spies.

There was no doubt that Gordon Gay & Co. were the heroes of the hour.

Frank Monk joined his chums, and started off. Tadpole followed them, and Frank paused outside the camp, and waved his hand at him.

"Go back!" he bawled.

"Eh?"

"We are going alone!"

"Loan," said Tadpole. "How much?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I can lend you two bob, if you like!" said Tadpole generously. "We'll stop in the village, and lay it out in ginger-beer."

"We don't want any ginger-beer."

"Don't want to linger here," said Tadpole. "Well, I don't, either. Look here, as you're taking me on a picnic I'll carry the bag for you!"

"I'll carry it myself!"

"Hand it over, then!"

"Ass! Let it alone!" roared Monk. "You make me tired!"

"Not a bit!" said Tadpole. "I'm not tired! I was thinking of going out sketching, anyway."

And he made a grasp at the bag. Frank Monk jerked it away, but Tadpole was determined to be obliging. He grabbed at the bag, and caught one of the handles.

"Hand it over!" he said. "I'll carry it, and pleased!"

"Let it go!"

"Did you speak?"

"Will you let go that bag, you silly ass?" shouted Monk, wrenching it away from Tadpole. "Oh, my only Uncle Jim!"

The bag came wide open as he wrenched it away from Tadpole, and the contents shot out upon the sand. A flaxen wig, and a pair of light yellow whiskers and a check pair of trousers rolled into the view of the astonished Tadpole.

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Monk, Lane, and Carboy made a spring for them, to gather them up. Tadpole blinked at them in amazement.

"Dear me!" he said. "There's nothing to eat in that bag, Monkey!"

"You silly ass!"

"You've been taking me in!" said Tadpole wrathfully.

"I'll take you out some day," said Monk; "I'll take you out and drown you! Go and eat coke! Go and eat chips! Run away!"

"I'm jolly well not coming with you, if it's not a picnic!" said Tadpole. "And I won't make you that loan, either!"

"Oh, you fathead!"

"I'll go sketching instead, after all!" said Tadpole, with a sniff. "You're not going to jape me with your spoof picnics, I can tell you!"

Frank Monk stuffed the disguise into the bag again, and the three chums started off. Tadpole snorted, and walked back to the camp.

"The silly ass!" growled Monk. "He's seen the things now. Still, if the chump is going out sketching, he won't see Herr Huckaback when he arrives, and he's too fatheaded to guess what we've got these things for! Come on!"

And the Old Co. hurried on their way.

.Not Made in Germany.

Gordon Gay yawned.

"What price a boat this afternoon?" he asked.

"Shilling an hour!" said Wootton major.

"Ass! Shall we have a boat out, or stroll along the beach?"

"Any old thing," said Jack Wootton. "There are no more giddy German spies to look for! We might as well have a row out on the bay."

"Zat is a good idea," said Mont Blong.

"Hallo!" said Tadpole, meeting the Cornstalk chums as they were leaving the camp. "You fellows going out?"

"No; we're staying in!" said Gordon Gay gravely.

"That's why we're walking towards the sea!"

Tadpole looked puzzled. The shortest time allowance for Tadpole to see a joke in was five minutes.

"Is it a picnic?" he asked.

"No; it's a row! It wouldn't suit you, Taddy. You'd better go sketching!"

"Catching what?"

"Crabs, if Gay rows!" grinned Jack Wootton.

"Why, you ass—"

"What are you going catching?" asked Tadpole.

"Nothing!" roared Gay. "We're going for a row. Blessed if that chap doesn't get deafer every day! I say, Taddy, I think Monk would like your company this afternoon. Go and see Monkey!"

"Who's a monkey?"

"Go and see Frank Monk!" yelled Gay. "Very likely he wants you!"

"No, he doesn't!" said Tadpole, with a shake of the head. "The bouncer has been trying to jape me! He asked me for a loan, because he was going on a picnic, and the bag came open, and I saw there wasn't any grub in it, only some theatrical stuff. They're going to do some rotten rehearsal or something, and they tried to spoof me that it was a picnic!"

"Hallo! What's that?" said Gordon Gay. "Monkey & Co. trying to collar our laurels as the champion dramatists of the Fourth Form? Where are they gone?"

"When was I born?" repeated Tadpole, puzzled. "What does that matter?"

"Where are they gone?" yelled Gay.

"Oh, they're gone towards Netherby!"

"The bouncers!" said Jack Wootton. "I know they've got an idea of doing Julius Cæsar, and beating us at our own game. It would be a good idea to go to the giddy rehearsal, and give 'em a surprise!"

Gordon Gay chuckled.

"Good egg! What did they have in the bag, Taddy?"

"Eh?"

"Did they have ancient Roman clobber in the bag?"

"Eh Oh, no—a wig and whiskers and things, and check trousers!" said Tadpole.

"Check trousers!" said Gordon Gay, in surprise. "They can't be going to rehearse 'Julius Cæsar' in check trousers."

"Are you sure they were check trousers, Taddy?"

"Yes; and yellow whiskers and things," said Tadpole.

"Check trousers and yellow whiskers! Blessed if I can make it out. Perhaps they're getting up a modern comedy, or something," said Wootton major. "Look here, we won't go for that row! We'll look for Monkey!"

"Yes, rather; they're not going to steal a march on us in the amateur dramatic line!" said Gordon Gay emphatically. "That's our bizney, and we don't want any strange dogs in the kennel! When did they go out, Taddy?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 242.

"THE GREYFRIARS INSURANCE COMPANY" is the Title of the New and Exciting Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"Eh?"

"What time did you see them?" shrieked Gay.

"Oh, about an hour ago!"

Gordon Gay grunted.

"Why couldn't you come and tell us at once, you fathead! No good looking for them now! Br-r-r-r-r!"

The Cornstalks strolled back into the school camp. They were very curious to know the meaning of the strange proceedings of their rivals in the Fourth. Tadpole blinked after them, but he understood that there was not going to be a picnic, and he took his sketching materials, and wandered down to the headland.

Carker of the Fourth met the Cornstalks as they came in.

"Not much good getting rid of old Hentzel," was his first remark.

"How's that?" asked Gordon Gay.

"Out!" replied Carker. "There's a new beast coming. He'll be here soon, Lane says."

"I heard there was a new beast coming to-morrow," said Wootton major. "You don't mean to say he's turned up to-day?"

"Yes, he has; Lane says so."

"Fact!" said Lane, looking out of his tent. "Herr Huckaback will be here this afternoon. We've seen him in Netherby."

"Oh, quite!" said Carboy.

"Huckaback!" said Gordon Gay. "What a gorgeous name. What's he like?"

"Mostly whiskers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Lane.

The juniors looked towards the path from the village. A stout gentleman, whose glasses glimmered in the sunshine, was making his way towards the camp.

Gordon Gay & Co. stared at him curiously.

The German gentleman was very stout, and his face was very red, and half-hidden by a mass of beard and whiskers of a flaxen hue. A large pair of spectacles adorned his face, and he was clad in a check suit of a decidedly loud design.

"My only hat!" said Gordon Gay, "this beats Hentzel! Where did he dig up those checks,"

"And those whiskers!"

"And that face!"

Mont Blong burst into a sudden chuckle.

"Hallo, what's the matter with you?" asked Gordon Gay.

"What do you mean by going off like a Chinese cracker?"

"He, he, he, he!"

"Thump him on the back," said Wootton major.

Mont Blong backed away.

"Zat ve go and meet ze Sherman master!" he exclaimed.

"Come viz me, my shums. I zink zat perhaps he is a friend of Herr Hentzel, n'est-ce-pas? and ve keep ze eye on him."

"Oh, all right!"

Gordon Gay & Co. walked away, and Lane and Carboy exchanged a wink.

"Caught!" murmured Lane.

"Oh, quite!" grinned Carboy.

The Cornstalk Co. left the camp, and strolled towards the fat stranger, who was puffing as he came trundling towards the school under canvas. He looked very warm, which was perhaps due to his stoutness, and his exertions in the warm sunshine.

"Not much like a giddy conspirator," grinned Jack Wootton.

Mont Blong chuckled again.

"Vous avez tort," he replied. "You are wrong, my shum. He is ze conspirator."

The Cornstalks stared at the French junior inquiringly.

"What do you mean?" demanded Gordon Gay. "Do you know him?"

"Oui, oui!"

"Is he a spy?"

"Non, non."

"Look here, what are you driving at, Mont Blong?" demanded Gay. "I can see that you've got something in your noddle."

"Oui, oui, my shum."

"Well, out with it."

"Regardez," said Mont Blong, grinning. "Look at zat Sherman gentleman. You see ze yellow viskers."

"Vell?"

"And ze check trousers?"

"Well?"

"Vat do you zink?"

"Blessed if I know what you mean," said Jack Wootton. "I suppose there's no law against a German master having yellow whiskers and check trousers, is there?"

"But you know vat Tadpole say—"

"Oh!"

"Zey go out viz check trousers and yellow viskers in ze bag—"

"My hat!"

"And only Carboy and Lane are in ze camp now. Frank Monk have disappear!" grinned Mont Blong.

"My only respected Aunt Sempronia!" said Gordon Gay, with a whistle. "Do you mean to say—"

"Oui, oui, my shum! So I zink."

"Great Scott!" murmured Wootton major. "It's a jape."

"A giddy jape, as large as life," said Gordon Gay, surveying the approaching German master with a critical eye. "A jape on us! US!"

"The cheek!" said Jack Wootton, indignantly. "Let's collar him as soon as he gets to the camp, and have his whiskers off, and show him up!"

"Yes, razzler."

"Hold on!" said Gordon Gay, a gleam of fun coming into his eyes. "Hold on, my infants! This is where we lay low and say nuffin, like Brer Fox. Those bounders are trying to jape us; we'll let them rip! Let them take us in!"

"Eh?"

"Mind, not a word! We'll be taken in, and let them go ahead! That duffer is going to make us take him for a German spy, I expect, and pull our leg! Let him do it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hush! Shush! Not a giddy syllable! Come on, and let's meet him; and mind you're respectful to your new German master!" said Gordon Gay, severely.

The Cornstalks shrieked. Gordon Gay glared at his chums, and reduced them to gravity, and they walked solemnly forward to greet the new German master. They came up to him, and halted, and raised their caps with a respectful obeisance.

"Herr Huckaback?" asked Gordon Gay meekly.

The stranger blinked at him through his big glasses.

"Ja wohl!" he replied.

"Our new German master?" asked Gay.

"Ja ja, mein poy."

"Glad to see you, sir," said Gordon Gay.

"So glad to see you, sir," said Wootton major and minor together.

"Moi, je suis heureux," said Gustave Blanc.

"I tink tat I am glad to get here," said Herr Huckaback.

"Te vetter is warm, ain't it? Is mein frent, Herr Hentzel, in te school, mein poy?"

The juniors exchanged glances.

"Are you a friend of Herr Hentzel's, then, sir?" asked Gordon Gay.

"Ja wohl."

"I'm sorry he's gone, then, sir," said Gay.

"Ach! Is he gone?"

"Yes; you're taking his place, you know; but perhaps you expected to see him before he went," said Gay. "It's unfortunate."

"Ja, ja; because I have te letters for him," said Herr Huckaback. "I have in te pocket te letters from Shernany."

"My hat!"

"Vat tat tat you say, mein poy?"

"Oh, nothing, sir," said Gordon Gay. "The Head's away, unfortunately, too. He doesn't seem to have expected you this afternoon. I suppose you know our Head, sir; Dr. Monk, a real brick, sir, though he's got a son here in the Fourth, who's an awful waster."

"A regular rotter," said Wootton major.

"Rank outsider," said Jack Wootton.

"What—I mean vat—tat is to say—"

"Please come into camp, sir," said Gay, apparently not noticing the German gentleman's sudden change of accent. "We should be pleased to do the honours while the Head's away."

"You are ferry goot, mein poy."

"Not at all, sir. You've got those letters for Herr Hentzel about you?"

"Tey are in mein pocket."

"Good—I—I mean, yes, sir," said Gordon Gay. "Pray allow me to carry your umbrella."

And the Cornstalk Co. escorted Herr Huckaback into the school camp, and led him to their tent; and Lane and Carboy, watching them from a distance, almost went into convulsions.

"They're after him already!" murmured Lane.

"Oh, quite!"

"And they'll have the papers off him soon!"

"And when they open them—"

"They'll read our message!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Lane and Carboy withdrew behind a tent to yell.

(Another long instalment of this serial story next week. Please order a copy of "THE GEM" in advance. Price 1d.)

*At midnight to-night,
I shall without fail,
steal the famous
Vane necklace—
Tartaran*

THIS message is received by the owner of the famous Vane necklace, who takes every precaution to frustrate the master rogue TARTARAN. The house is guarded from top to bottom by police, and the jewels are placed on the neck of Lenore Vane, who is locked in a room and watched by two detectives. Yet, in spite of all this, the infamous TARTARAN carries out his threat to the minute! For this astounding story see this week's

PENNY WONDER
Out on Tuesday

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE WRONG TEAM!"

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns will be from those readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons. One taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, 23, Bouverie Street, London, E.C., England."

Owing to want of space this week's list of names and addresses has been unavoidably held over.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 242.

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"THE WRONG TEAM!"

By Martin Clifford. Next Wednesday's splendid, complete tale of the juniors of St. Jim's tells of an astonishing letter received by Tom Merry, the captain of the St. Jim's Junior Football Club, containing a challenge from a football team of international renown. Tom Merry accepts the challenge in all seriousness, and takes over a St. Jim's team, and gives the amazed Internationals the match of their lives in which

"THE WRONG TEAM!"

actually manages to score a glorious victory by a narrow margin. No one should miss this splendid tale of school and football.

Look out for **"THE PENNY POPULAR."**

As I announced on this page last week, a new companion paper to "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries, entitled

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"

is now in course of preparation, and the first number will be issued in a couple of weeks' time. I am convinced that

"THE PENNY POP."

will fill a long-felt want in catering—as no other weekly story-paper has ever catered—for the reader who demands a budget of really good stories to read during the week-ends. With this object in view, "The Penny Popular" will be

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY.

As my readers will have noticed already, the publishing day of "The Gem" Library has already been advanced, and this paper will in future come out on every Wednesday—its companion, "The Magnet," being issued on Mondays—so that the appearance of "The Penny Popular" each Friday will be doubly welcome. The first announcement of this wonderful new companion paper has been received with the greatest enthusiasm on all sides, and I confidently look to my reader friends to back me up in making this new venture a huge success. The tale of

TOM MERRY

which will appear in the first issue of "The Penny Popular," is some of Martin Clifford's best work, and will make many new friends for the popular schoolboy character, besides appealing very strongly to all his old chums. I ask you, therefore, my readers, to look out—and ask your friends to look out—for

"THE PENNY POPULAR."**Replies in Brief.**

R. Berr (Manchester).—I am sorry I cannot accede to your request.

V. Perrin (Sydney, Australia).—Thank you for your very interesting letter. You may hear more of the two characters you mention later on. Send in your request again, and I will insert it in the new Exchange.

A. H. Bateson (Rochdale).—Thank you for your letter. In reply to your query, I do not think it would be of any use for you to write to an agency in London unless you intend to live there. Why not make application at a local theatrical agency?

F. Briggs (Whitefield).—The number of "The Gem" Library containing the article entitled "The Care of Acetylene Lamps" is 225. I am sorry I cannot insert your request for it, as the "Back Numbers Column" is closed. You may probably be able to get it through your newsagent.

Miss G. Canacott (London, W.C.).—Thanks for your letter. I am sorry that your request is not eligible for the New Correspondence Exchange.

How to Start a Marine Aquarium.

There are doubtless many of my readers who annually spend two or three weeks at the seaside, and would be glad to preserve alive—for a short time, at all events—some of the many curious sea creatures which inhabit the shore, and can be readily collected at low tide. With a little trouble and attention, a temporary sea aquarium may easily be set up at home, and the habits and customs of the many and curious varieties of sea life with which it can be stocked form a most interesting and also instructive study.

"Shore-hunting" after specimens intended for the aquarium is a most fascinating seaside hobby in itself. It is not much use going shore-hunting along the sands, even when the tide is low, as only a few stranded starfish or cockles will be found. The best spots for hunting are where the beach is pebbly, and where patches of weed-covered rock abound. In such places as these plenty of subjects—such as hermit crabs, sea urchins, shrimps, anemones—are to be found. Such things as jelly-fish and starfish are to be discovered stranded on the beach; but the collector must search under pieces of seaweed, in tiny cracks in the rocks, and under overhanging pieces for small crabs, etc. In the small pools left in the rocks a variety of creatures may be obtained. Armed with a good big jar and a strong net, the collector can enjoy himself for hours fishing in these tiny pools.

Go carefully over every small piece of shore, and thoroughly examine it. Many marine objects are so similar in appearance to their surroundings that they may easily be overlooked. Others are only to be found by the most diligent searching, getting covered as they do by the mud or small stones.

In order to preserve specimens for a short while, there is no need for the collector to purchase or make an aquarium; any large receptacle with a nice wide open top will serve the purpose. There must be no overcrowding, however—much better to have two or three aquariums.

In the bottom of the aquarium, place two or three pieces of growing seaweed, such as can be obtained in the rock-pool, and strew some clean sand and pebbles. The seaweed will help to keep the water pure.

The collection may then be placed in the aquarium, and with a book in his hand, containing the descriptions of the various animals and plants peculiar to the seashore, the collector can spend his evenings or rainy days in classifying his captives, and watching the marine life.

He will see his little captives feeding—some of them on the seaweed, others on the minute particles which float about in the water, and still others preying on each other.

A good plan in order to freshen the water up is to obtain a glass syringe; fill this with the water in the aquarium, and then squirt the contents of the syringe back again into the tank, thus carrying plenty of air-bubbles beneath the surface of the water.

After a few days have elapsed the collector will probably notice that his aquarium requires refilling, owing to some of the water having evaporated. Fresh water must be added in this case, for the salt does not evaporate with the water, and were more salt added the aquarium would soon be too salt, and the captives would all die off.

As soon as one of the captives dies it should be at once removed, so that the water is not contaminated.

The aquarium should not be placed where the rays of the sun catch it, or the water will become too hot, and the captives perish. Too much light is also not advisable, as most of the sea creatures live in semi-darkness. The best plan is for the collector to carefully notice the surroundings of the spot where he made his collection, and follow this out as far as possible in his aquarium.

THE EDITOR.