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COMPLETE STORIES FOR ALL, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

TRIED AND TRUE!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

As Tom Merry came out of the School House, four juniors lined up before him, in a solemn row, and bowed almost to the ground, raising their caps at the same time with the utmost respect. "Hail!" they said, with one voice. "You silly chumps!" snorted Tom Merry. "What are you hailing me for?" *(See Chapter 1.)*

CHAPTER 1.
Heir to Millions.

TOM MERRY paused—in astonishment.

Morning lessons were over at St Jim's, and Tom Merry had gone up to his study to fetch his bat, to put in a little practice at the wickets before dinner. He came out of the School House with the bat under his arm, and his cap on the back of his curly head, and a sunny smile on his face.

Then he paused on the steps of the School House, astonished.

Four juniors were waiting near the bottom of the steps—evidently waiting for Tom Merry. They were Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form. As Tom Merry appeared, the four juniors lined up before him, in a solemn row, and bowed almost to the ground, raising their caps at the same time with the utmost respect. Or, to speak more correctly, Blake and Herries and Digby raised their caps, and D'Arcy raised a shining silk topper

And as they performed that respectful salutation, they pronounced, with one voice, the word:

"Hail!"

Tom Merry stared at them. The School House juniors had made much of him since his recent absence from St. Jim's. But it was surprising to see Blake & Co. saluting him as if he were an emperor, or a grand-duke, at least. So Tom Merry's reply to that handsome salute was terse and pointed:

"Silly asses! What are you playing the giddy ox for now?"

The chums of the Fourth looked at him more in sorrow than in anger.

"Hail!" repeated Blake deliberately.

"Hail!" said Digby.

"Hail!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah—hail, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and again his silk topper gleamed in the sun as he swept it off.

"You silly chumps!" exclaimed Tom Merry, beginning to get exasperated. "What's the matter with you? What are you hailing me for?"

Blake made a sign to his chums, and the row of juniors again bowed to the ground. But this time the ceremony was interrupted. Tom Merry charged down the steps, right into the bowing row, and upset them completely.

Next Wednesday:

"D'ARCY THE VENTRILOQUIST!" AND "PLAYING THE GAME!"

"Yarooh!" roared Blake, as he sat down in the quadrangle.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Gweat Scott! My toppah!"

Crunch!

There was a wail of anguish from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as Herries sat on his topper, which he had involuntarily dropped as Tom Merry charged him over.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Hail to you! Ha, ha, ha!"

And he walked away towards the cricket-ground, leaving the chums of the Fourth to pick themselves up and sort themselves out. That it was a "rag" of some sort Tom Merry guessed, but he fancied that he had had the best of the rag, as it had turned out. But before he had taken a dozen steps towards the cricket-ground, Manners and Lowther of the Shell stopped in his path, exchanging a grin.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What the deuce——"

Manners and Lowther had dragged off their cricket-caps simultaneously, bowed low before the captain of the Shell, and ejaculated together:

"Hail!"

"You silly duffers——" began Tom, in perplexity. "What's the little game?"

"Hail!"

Then Manners and Lowther jumped aside in a great hurry as Tom Merry charged. They had seen the fate that had overtaken Blake & Co., and they just avoided it in time.

Tom Merry, more perplexed than ever, pursued his way to the cricket-ground, leaving the two Shell fellows chuckling behind him. There was evidently something "on," though Tom had not the faintest idea what it was.

But it was not over yet. There were a good many juniors on the cricket-ground, and at sight of Tom Merry, half a dozen of them rushed towards him. Kangaroo of the Shell, and Clifton Dane, and Glyn, and Reilly, and two or three more, took off their caps and bowed low, grinning, and pronounced together the word of greeting with which he was becoming familiar.

"Hail!"

And then Figgins & Co. of the New House came tearing up to join in the bowing crowd, and they yelled out in chorus:

"Hail!"

"Ave Cæsar!" added Kerr, who was nothing if not classical.

"Ave Tom Merry!" grinned Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite an army of juniors surrounded the captain of the Shell, all bowing and all hailing. They were all grinning, too. Tom Merry's eyes wandered round the circle from one grinning face to another, in utter astonishment.

"I suppose this is a rag?" he said, at last. "But I'm blessed if I can see where the joke comes in!"

"Rag!" said Monty Lowther, hurrying up with Manners, with Blake & Co. at their heels. "Joke! Rag! Far from it! Hail!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hail!"

"Look here, you silly chumps!" roared Tom Merry. "If you're asking for a set of prize thick ears——"

"Wathah not, deah boy. We're payin' our wespects," explained Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Hail!"

"What's the little game, you fatheads?"

"There isn't any little game," said Brooke of the Fourth, laughing. "Hail!"

"If you say 'Hail' again I'll punch your silly head," said the exasperated captain of the Shell. "I think you've all gone off your silly dots. What do you mean by bleating 'Hail! Hail!' like a set of giddy parrots?"

"We are payin' our wespects to wealth, deah boy."

"Wealth!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you've come to the wrong shop. My wealth at present amounts to ninepence ha'penny," said Tom. "I haven't had a remittance, if that's what you mean."

"Hail to the heir to millions!" chortled Blake.

"Hail! Hail!"

"Haven't you heard the news?" Monty Lowther demanded.

"What news?"

Lowther took a folded paper from his pocket, and began to read aloud from a marked paragraph. All the juniors stood round Tom Merry, cap in hand, while Lowther was reading, with an air of exaggerated respect and deference.

"Mr. Brandreth, the well-known South African millionaire, has arrived in London. This is Mr. Brandreth's first visit to the Old Country for more than twenty years. We are glad to be able to state that Mr. Brandreth's health, which has caused his friends some anxiety of late, is now quite restored."

"There you are!" said Monty Lowther. "Mr. Brandreth—millionaire. And don't we all know that he was your pater's best chum, and that he has made his will in your favour, leaving you heaps of diamond-mines, and gold-mines, and whole crowds of Kaffirs and things? Hail!"

"Hail!" repeated all the juniors, in chorus.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh. He understood now. His father's old friend, whom he knew only by name, had certainly made a will in his favour; a fact which had been brought to the knowledge of the St. Jim's fellows by a curious chance. And now the South African millionaire had arrived in the Old Country.

"Isn't that good news?" demanded Blake. "Of course, the old johnnie has come home to see his dear Tommy! He will come here, of course—hung with diamonds and gold-nuggets. I specially want you to introduce me to him, Tommy."

"And me!" said Kangaroo.

"And us!" chuckled Figgins. "I shouldn't wonder if my pater was one of his old chums, too. I'll ask him, anyway."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll all back you up in giving him a stunning good time, Tommy," said Manners, heartily. "We don't have millionaires here every day."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry laughed again.

"You're on the wrong track," he remarked. "Of course, I know you're only rotting—but you're on the wrong track all the same. I shall never have any of Mr. Brandreth's millions."

"Why not?"

"Because I won't!" said Tom, with a glint in his eyes, and the smile fading from his face. "You fellows know about his will, owing to what's happened here lately. I'm to inherit his giddy wealth, on condition that I don't do anything disgraceful—that's the opinion he has of his old chum's son! It's not good enough. It may interest you to know that I've had a letter from him——"

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther.

"He said he was coming down to see me——"

"Oh, good!"

"And I've replied——"

"Urging him to come, and promising him the time of his life, of course," said Monty Lowther.

"Nothing of the sort," said Tom Merry grimly. "I've replied, telling him that I don't want to see him."

"What!"

It was a general gasp from the juniors.

They stared at Tom Merry blankly. Kangaroo tapped his forehead in a significant way.

"You—you've told him that?" ejaculated Lowther.

"Yes."

"And he's a giddy millionaire!" roared Blake.

"I don't care."

"But—but you were his heir."

"I don't want to be his heir, not on the condition he put in his will," said Tom Merry quietly. "I dare say he meant well in his way, but I take it as an insult. And I don't want to have anything to do with him, and I've told him so."

"Well, my only hat!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, clapping Tom Merry on the shoulder, with great enthusiasm. "Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, I wegard that as wippin'. I quite appwove of placin' one's personal dig before such wotten considewations as money. You are quite wight, deah boy. I appwove entiahly."

"Oh, good!" said Tom, laughing. "If you appwove, Gussy, there's nothing more to be said on the subject. So let us get to the cricket, if you fellows have done playing the giddy ox. We haven't much time before dinner."

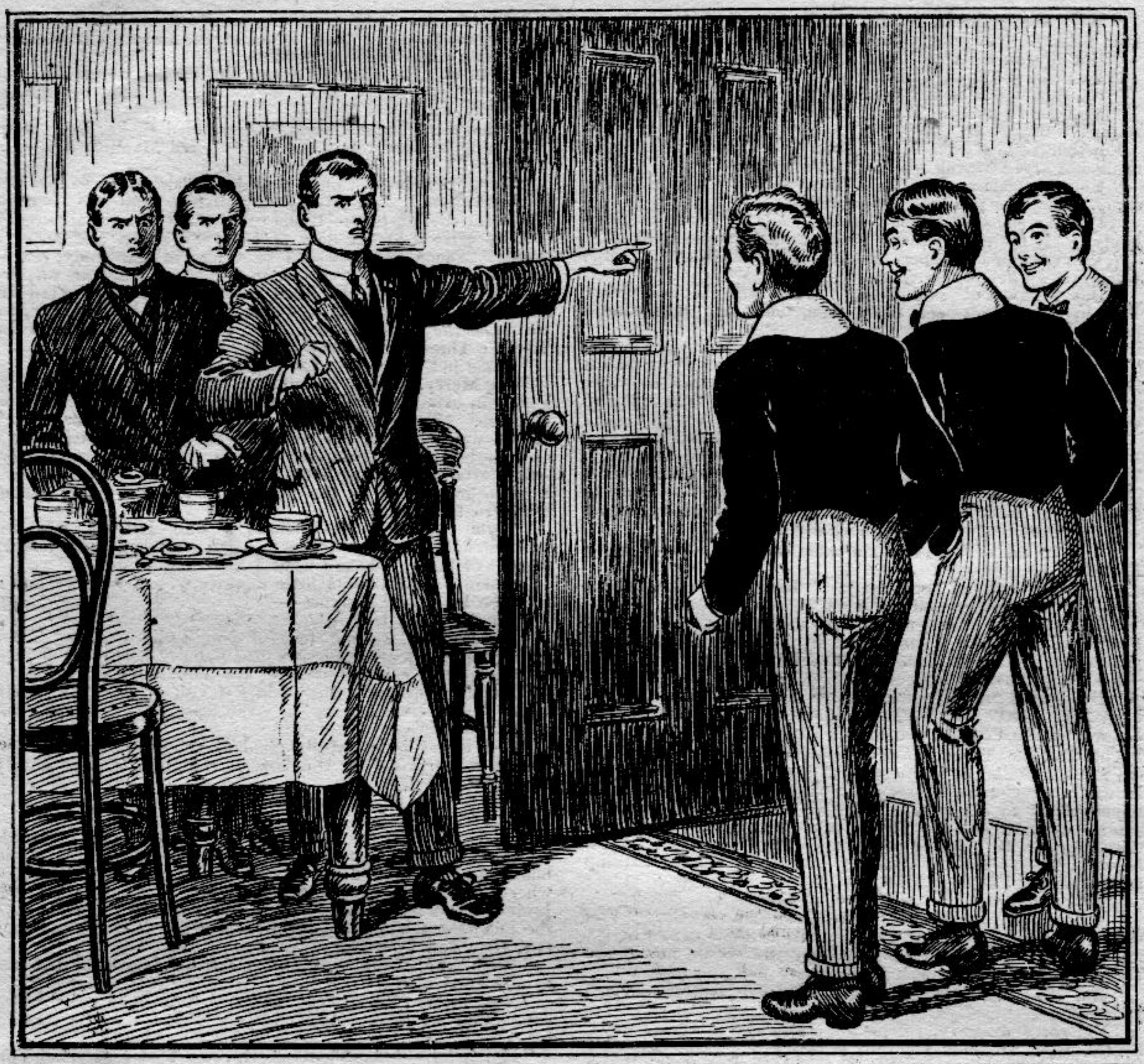
"Tommy," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "you must allow me to tell you that you are a champion ass!"

"Thanks!"

"A regular blithering, frabjous duffer!" said Manners.

"Good! Now let's get to the cricket," said Tom Merry imperturbably.

And they got to the cricket.



"Thanks awfully for the feed, Lefevre!" said Monty Lowther, as the Terrible Three rose to go. Cutts, Gilmore, and Lefevre glared at them wrathfully. "Clear out!" roared Lefevre. "I'll wring your cheeky necks if you are not out of this study in two shakes!" *(See Chapter 3.)*

CHAPTER 2.

A Friend in Need!

MONTY LOWTHER heaved a deep, deep sigh. Manners echoed it. They were looking into the cupboard in the study in the Shell passage. It was tea-time, or, rather, considerably past tea-time. The Terrible Three had stayed on the cricket-pitch ever since afternoon lessons till dusk, and, needless to say, they had healthy appetites when they came in. It was too late for tea in Hall, not that the chums of the Shell thought of having tea there. They always had tea in their study, and a merry and cosy meal it generally was—when they were in funds. When funds were low commons were short, unless a timely invitation came along from another study. Indeed, in hard times, the juniors had sometimes been glad of an invitation to tea from a master. There was often a large amount of uncertainty about the commissariat in junior studies.

The cupboard in Tom Merry's study was very bare just now. The jam-jar showed just sufficient traces of jam to indicate that it had been used once to contain that sticky and agreeable comestible. There was half a loaf, which the proverb declares to be better than no bread. But as it had been there for a week or two, and was not at all improved by age—rather the reverse—it was not much better. No wonder Lowther and Manners sighed deeply. Their sighs, however, were so exaggerated that Tom Merry looked at them suspiciously.

"What are you chaps grousing about?" he inquired.

Lowther sighed again, a deep, deep sigh that seemed to come from his lowest waistcoat button.

"I was thinking what an awful infliction it is to have a lunatic in the family," he said sadly.

"Rougher on your family than on you, I should think," Tom Merry remarked.

"Ass! I was referring to this study as the family, and you as the lunatic," growled Lowther. "We're too late for tea in Hall. All the other chaps have finished, and there's nothing but an empty jam-jar and a stale crust. And you've got a millionaire anxious and ready to tip you quids, and you turn up your nose at him."

"Might have had the old johnnie here to-day!" groaned Manners. "I only wish a tame millionaire would drop on me out of South Africa. I'd fold him to my bosom and weep."

"I'd greet him like a long-lost son," said Lowther. "I'd stroke him down, and butter him up, and make him stand a tremendous feed."

Tom Merry laughed.

"No, you wouldn't," he said. "You'd do just the same as I've done. Blow him and his blessed millions! I'm fed-up with them! I've had a high old time lately because he put me in his will, and left another chap out. Do ring off that subject! Are you stony?"

"I've got a postage-stamp," said Lowther.

"Well, one of the chaps will give you a penny for it," said Tom briskly. "A penny saved is a penny earned!"

"But it's on a letter," said Lowther.

"You can get it off with hot water."

"No good. It's on a letter from my uncle."

"You ass!" roared Tom. "Do you mean it's a used stamp?"

Lowther nodded cheerfully. Even in a time of scarcity he could not avoid having his little joke.

"You thundering ass!" said Tom Merry. "Then you're stony. How are you fixed, Manners?"

"I'm like the seed in the parable," said Manners disconsolately. "It fell upon stony places, you know. So have I."

"You've got ninepence, Tom," said Lowther. "Now, what can we get for ninepence?"

"But I haven't," said Tom. "That was this afternoon. I've had a ginger-beer since then, and lent Skimpole a tanner."

"Oh, you frabjous ass!" said Lowther, in deep disgust. "To expend the last available funds in riotous living like a giddy prodigal. I don't mind the ginger-beer, but to waste a tanner on Skimpole. Oh, how could you? Then you've only got a humble brown?"

"That's all, and it's a French 'un!" said Tom Merry.

The chums of the Shell looked at one another tragically. They were famished, and they felt all the more famished as every prospect of a feed receded from their view. And the funds of the study were reduced to one French penny, which was not legal tender at the school shop.

"And to think that there's a tame millionaire——" began Lowther.

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry. "Ring off, you ass! Let's go along the passage and see what we can borrow."

"Hallo!" said Manners, as the study door opened, and Frayne of the Third Form looked in. "What do you want, you shaver? Can you lend us a fiver?"

Frayne grinned.

"I've got a message for Master Tom," he said. "I've been here before for you, you know, and you weren't in. Lefevre of the Fifth is waiting tea for you."

The Terrible Three jumped. Lefevre was the captain of the Fifth, a senior, and quite a great man in the School House. It was a very unusual thing for the Fifth-Form captain to have juniors to tea at all. To wait tea for them, that was utterly unheard of. No wonder the Shell fellows concluded that the fag was "pulling their leg." Monty Lowther slipped between Frayne and the doorway, picking up a cricket-stump as he did so. The fag backed away.

"Here, hold on!" he exclaimed, in alarm.

"Where will you have it?" asked Lowther sweetly. "You shouldn't come and beard hungry lions in their den, Frayne, my son. When you want to be funny you should make sure that the animals have been fed. Where will you have it?"

"But it's true," said Frayne. "Lefevre sent me to tell you——"

"I'm sorry to see you departing from the lines laid down by the late lamented George Washington," said Lowther solemnly. "This isn't a time for your little jokes. We're stumped. Now you're going to be stumped—cricket-stumped! Where will you have it?"

"Honour bright!" ejaculated Frayne, dodging round the table.

"Hold on, Monty!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "It's all right. It's astonishing, but true. Honour bright, kid?"

"Yes," said Frayne, "and I jolly well won't bring any more messages here if that's the way you show your gratitude. Rats!"

"But—but then it's a giddy dream!" gasped Lowther, pitching the stump into the corner. "What is Lefevre asking us to tea for?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Frayne. "Can't be because he likes your company, unless he's got an extraordinary taste." And Frayne departed from the study whistling.

The Terrible Three exchanged looks of amazement. An invitation to tea at that moment came like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years. It was welcome, very welcome. But they could not understand it.

"Lefevre has heard that we're stony, and is playing up like a man and a brother," said Tom Merry, at last. "It's jolly decent of him."

"Yes, if that's it," agreed Lowther dubiously.

"Well, whatever his reason is, it's an invitation to tea, and I'm hungry enough to eat Lefevre himself," said Manners. "Let's go!"

"Yes, rather; let's!" said Tom.

Whatever might be the reason for Lefevre's unexpected invitation there was no doubt whatever that the Terrible Three ought to accept it. They did not waste any time on thinking that out. In fact, they were anxious to get on the scene before the captain of the Fifth changed his mind.

They left the study and hurried off in the direction of the Fifth-Form passage. Jack Blake of the Fourth met them on the stairs, and called to them.

"Hold on, you chaps! About the cricket to-morrow, you know——"

"Sorry, can't stop!"

"What's the blessed hurry?" demanded Blake, in surprise.

"Going to have tea in the Fifth!" said Manners loftily.

"Rats!"

"Fact, my boy. Can't stop to speak to mere Fourth-Formers now," said Monty Lowther. And the Terrible Three hurried on before Blake could think of a suitable reply.

They arrived at the door of Lefevre's study, and knocked gently. There was a sound of voices in the study. The captain of the Fifth was evidently not alone. The surprise and mystification of the Shell fellows intensified. Had the Fifth-Form captain, who was generally too lofty and dignified to notice the existence of juniors, asked a party to meet the Terrible Three? It seemed like it.

"Come in!" called out Lefevre's voice.

Tom Merry opened the door. There were three of the Fifth in the study—Lefevre himself, Gerald Cutts, and Gilmore. With Cutts of the Fifth the Terrible Three were on the worst of terms; but, of course, they did not give any sign of hostility on meeting him in another fellow's study. And Cutts was looking most agreeable now. He bestowed a smile and a nod on the juniors, as Lefevre greeted them with great heartiness.

"Walk right in, you fellows!" said Lefevre, and the juniors could not help remarking that he called them fellows instead of kids. "That's what I say—walk right in!"

"Ahem!" said Tom, a little doubtfully. "We—we had a message by young Frayne——"

"That's right; trot in!"

"We've been waiting tea for you," said Cutts. "But never mind—it's all right so long as you're here!"

"Certainly," said Gilmore. "We don't mind a bit."

"Not the least little bit," said Lefevre, in the same hearty way. "That's what I say—not the least bit! Squat down, you chaps!"

"I—I say, this is awfully good of you!" stammered Tom Merry, so surprised by this cordial reception that he hardly knew what to say.

"Not at all," said Lefevre. "When Cutts suggested asking you to tea, I thought it was a jolly good idea!"

The Terrible Three could not help exchanging a glance. So it was Cutts who had suggested it—Gerald Cutts, the black sheep of the Fifth. Cutts had an axe to grind somewhere; there was no doubt about that. What it was the juniors could not guess. What was more to the point was the fact that a handsome spread was ready on the table, and that they had first-class appetites.

"Well," said Manners, "I must say that I agree that it was a jolly good idea!"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "As it happens, we're stony, and we were just wondering where tea was coming from."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Lefevre. "That's good! You stony! Ha, ha, ha! That's what I say—that's jolly good! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry had not intended his remark as a joke; but as Lefevre seemed to take it as one, and as Tom was an accommodating fellow, he was quite content to let it pass as one, so he politely laughed too.

The Terrible Three sat down, and Cutts lifted up a dish of hot, buttered toast from the fender. Gilmore made the tea. And the chums of the Shell, very much astonished, but more hungry than astonished, attacked the excellent spread Lefevre of the Fifth had provided, content to make hay while the sun shone, so to speak, and to leave the clearing-up of the mystery till afterwards.

CHAPTER 3.

Under False Pretences.

"TRY the kidneys, Merry, old chap!"

"Thanks, I will!"

"Pass Merry the toast, Cutts!"

"Here you are, Merry!"

"Another cup of tea, Merry?" asked Gilmore.

"Thanks!"

The Terrible Three were "doing" themselves very well. The three Fifth-Formers looked after Tom Merry with amazing solicitude. Manners and Lowther, it had to be observed, were not the recipients of so much kind attention as their leader; they were left chiefly to look after themselves. But they were quite equal to the task; they looked after themselves without fail.

The first keen edge worn off their appetites, their surprise and curiosity increased. They had more time now to indulge in speculations as to what that unwonted hospitality might

possibly mean. Lefevre might be off his chump—that seemed the most reasonable explanation—but Cutts certainly wasn't off his chump.

Cutts of the Fifth was too cool and calculating to do anything without an adequate motive. What was Cutts's little game, then, in inducing Lefevre of the Fifth to entertain the three juniors—between whom and Cutts there was always an undying feud? What was his reason for assuming his blandest manners? And Cutts could be very agreeable when he liked.

He certainly liked now; and, deeply as the Shell fellows distrusted him, they could not help being won over to a certain extent by his spontaneous heartiness. But they would have given a good deal to know what it all meant.

Cutts sometimes had juniors to tea in his study—juniors who were blessed with plenty of money—and played nap with them afterwards, thus kindly relieving them of their superfluous cash. But that could not be the little game now. Lefevre would never have countenanced anything of the kind in his study.

The captain of the Fifth was a little bit of a swanker, and a good bit of a duffer, but he was not a blackguard of the Cutts variety. It was possible that Cutts was merely using Lefevre as a means of getting on terms of good-fellowship with the Terrible Three; but the mystery remained, what was he doing it for—especially at a time when, as Tom had frankly announced, they were all stony?

"I must say, you chaps are doing us jolly well!" Tom Merry remarked presently. "I hope you'll drop into our study one of these evenings, Lefevre!"

"Certainly," said Lefevre. "I'll be glad to. My idea is that the Fifth has really been too standoffish towards the Shell. Don't you think so?"

"I—I haven't thought about it," said Tom, in surprise.

"Of course, as the Shell's the next Form down, it's hardly the thing to treat you Shell chaps as fags," Lefevre went on, with great condescension. "Don't you think so, Cutts?"

"My idea exactly," said Cutts.

"I've always thought so," Gilmore remarked. "Besides, Tom Merry being such a first-class bat—ahem——"

"Exactly," said Lefevre. "What would you say to playing for the Fifth sometimes, Merry?"

Tom nearly dropped his teacup. Any junior would have been glad, of course, to be asked to play in a senior team, but the utter unexpectedness of such an honour was simply flabbergasting.

Was all this trouble being taken simply to secure the services of the best junior bat for the Fifth-Form cricket team? It was not likely. A mere request would have been quite sufficient, without this handsome feed, and all the "buttering-up" with which it was accompanied. That offer of batting for the Fifth was simply part of the buttering-up process. But why? Tom Merry began to wonder whether he was dreaming.

"I—I'd bat for you with pleasure, Lefevre," stammered Tom. "Of course, not when my own team wanted me. I couldn't give them the go-by. But what would the rest of the Fifth say to your playing a junior?"

Lefevre sniffed.

"Blow the rest of the Fifth!" he said. "That's what I say—blow 'em!"

"Lefevre's captain of the Form," said Cutts, in his silky voice. "Besides, I should back him up all along the line in securing the best bat in the Lower School!"

"Oh, I don't know about that!" said Tom honestly. "Figgins of the Fourth is as good as I am—and Blake, too!"

"You're the chap we want," said Lefevre. "Besides, it's up to all of us to look after you a bit—after what you've been through!"

"Oh!" said Tom.

"Like a blessed novel, wasn't it?" said Lefevre. "You were kidnapped because a giddy millionaire had put you down in his will. That was it, wasn't it?"

"That was it," said Tom.

"And that other chap—what was his name—Snoring or something——"

"Goring!" said Tom, laughing.

"Yes, that's it. He was a rotter, a regular bad egg," said Lefevre, shaking his head solemnly. "Chokey is the right place for him."

"Tell us about it, Merry," said Cutts.

"There isn't much to tell," said Tom. "I thought all the fellows knew the story by this time. Old Brandreth made a will, leaving his money to Goring, his dead partner's son. Goring disgraced himself, and was sacked from college, and the old man cut him off."

"And then made a will in your favour?" said Cutts carelessly.

Tom Merry frowned a little. It was a sore point with him.

"Well, yes. I never knew anything about it. I had never even heard of Mr. Brandreth, except hearing his name mentioned as an old friend of my pater's when he was alive. I don't like the man, from what I've heard—he seems to be a suspicious and distrustful beast!"

"He made some condition in his will?"

"Yes," said Tom, his eyes flashing. "He was afraid he might be taken in by another chap as rotten as Goring; so he made it a condition that if I should act like a rotter, and get into disgrace, I wasn't to inherit his money; it would go to Goring, after all. That led that rascal to get up a scheme for disgracing me—which has ended in his going to prison. Mr. Brandreth's lawyer was his confederate in it; that was how he knew about the will. It all came out after he was arrested."

"Well, some kids do have all the luck," said Lefevre. "I hear that Brandreth is in England now?"

"Yes; he's been in London some days, I think."

"Of course you've heard from him?"

"Yes," said Tom.

Monty Lowther gave a sudden giggle. The Fifth-Formers looked at him—and so did Tom Merry and Manners—in surprise. Lowther tried to control his merriment, but he could not. His giggle expanded into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What's the little joke?" demanded Lefevre.

Lowther gasped.

"Excuse me, you chaps," he stuttered. "I—I'm sorry! Something struck me as funny. I'm awfully sorry, really! Go on, Lefevre; you were saying——"

But Tom Merry and Manners had guessed now the cause of Lowther's sudden mirth, and they were grinning. Tom Merry remembered the ridiculous scene of the morning, when all the juniors had hailed him as the heir of millions. The juniors had been "rotting," of course; but it came into Tom Merry's mind now that he knew the reason at last of this marvellous good-fellowship on the part of the Fifth-Form chaps.

It was not Tom Merry of the Shell they were making much of—it was Tom Merry, the heir of the South African millionaire. He was asked to tea in Lefevre's study. Cutts and Gilmore were outdoing one another in buttering him up. He was to bat for the Fifth-Form team, because they knew that he was to inherit the wealth of the South African diamond magnate.

Lefevre was simply keen to be on good terms with a fellow who would be rolling in money; but Cutts and Gilmore, undoubtedly, were after the money itself. Once on chummy terms with Tom Merry, they would calculate on making a very good thing out of the heir and favourite of the millionaire.

Considering the terms he really stood upon with Mr. Brandreth, Tom Merry felt inclined to echo Lowther's roar of laughter, but he restrained his mirth, and made a fresh attack on the jam-tarts instead. He did not intend to disguise the real facts from his kind hosts, and he had a suspicion that the Fifth-Form hospitality would fade away like a beautiful dream.

"Yes; I was saying——" said Lefevre, evidently somewhat disconcerted by Lowther's untimely merriment. "Lemme see. I suppose the giddy millionaire will be coming down here, Merry?"

"I don't think so."

"Oh, he's sure to!" said Lefevre. "And if we can fix it up for a half-holiday, my boy, you shall be playing in the Fifth-Form team when he comes. That's bound to please him. Of course, as your pater's old pal, it's up to you to please him."

"I don't see that," said Tom grimly. "I think the terms of his will are an insult to me, and I don't want his money."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Lefevre. "That's a good one. That's what I say—a jolly good one! You don't want his millions. Ha, ha, ha!"

But Gerald Cutts was looking very curiously at Tom Merry. He was a good deal keener than Lefevre.

"But I'm not joking," said Tom. "I don't want his money. And, besides, after the publicity of what's happened, I dare say he would alter his will, anyway. I'm jolly sure he'll alter it after reading my letter, anyway."

"Your letter?" said Cutts. "Why, what have you said to him?"

"Only that I think his will was an insult, and that he ought to have a better opinion of me, if he was really a friend of my pater," said Tom. "And I put in that I didn't want his money, and that he could leave it to Goring, or to anybody he liked, and that I didn't want to see him. I'd have made it plainer if he hadn't been my pater's friend a long time ago."

"My hat!" gasped Cutts. "That was plain enough.

Why, after that, you haven't the slightest chance of ever getting a penny from him."

"I know that."

"And—and he won't come to see you."

"I don't suppose he will, after my letter," chuckled Tom Merry. "I don't want to be bothered by a suspicious and distrustful old johnnie, who'd be bound to think all the time that I wanted his beastly money if I was barely civil to him. I'd rather not have anything to do with him."

"You young idiot!"

"Thanks!" said Tom cheerfully. "It's awfully kind of you to be interested in my prospects, Cutts."

"Then—then you're not his heir at all!" stuttered Lefevre.

"Not in the least."

"You—you spoofing young jackass——"

"I haven't spoofed anybody. "I didn't know you were asking me here as Mr. Brandreth's heir," grinned Tom. "You should have told Frayne to mention that along with the rest of the message."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners and Lowther.

Lefevre's face expressed a deep disgust and annoyance. Cutts was scowling. Gilmore, who seemed to have a glimpse of the humorous side of the matter, grinned faintly.

The Terrible Three rose to their feet. They had made an excellent tea.

"Thanks awfully for the feed!" said Monty Lowther sweetly. "I hope you'll return our visit, Lefevre. Jolly glad to see you in our study, you know."

"Jolly long time before you see me coming to tea with fags!" snorted Lefevre. "That's what I say. Get out!"

"When shall I begin batting for the Fifth, Lefevre?" asked Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"Clear off!" roared Lefevre, turning crimson. "Do you think I'm going to put a beastly, inky fag in the Fifth-Form team? If you do, you're jolly well mistaken!"

"But you said——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind what I've said. What I say now is, that I'll wring your cheeky necks if you don't clear out of my study!" roared Lefevre, jumping up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three cleared out promptly. They yelled with laughter as they retreated down the Fifth-Form passage. In Lefevre's study, the three seniors looked at one another in utter disgust.

A handsome spread, and a long and careful process of buttering-up had been wasted—a sheer waste! And all the reward the millionaire-hunters received was the loud laughter of the Shell fellows as they retired from the scene of that excellent and timely repast.

CHAPTER 4.
A Pal in Trouble.

"LETTER for you, Tommy!" said Monty Lowther, when the Shell came out after lessons the next morning.

Tom Merry brightened up. Letters were always welcome, especially at a time when the funds were low. If the letter was from Miss Fawcett, his old governess, there was probably a postal-order in it—as well as a great deal of valuable advice about taking care of his health. If it was from his uncle in America, it was pretty certain to contain a remittance. And the Terrible Three were in terrible need of a remittance.

As Lowther remarked, they couldn't go on living on Tom Merry's expectations for ever, especially since Tom had been duffer enough to knock his own expectations on the head. The chums of the Shell were in a dreadful state of stoniness, though they were not without hope of another invitation to tea from some millionaire-hunter like Lefevre.

"Chuck it over!" said Tom Merry.

Lowther tossed him the letter. Tom Merry made a grimace. It was not in Miss Fawcett's hand—neither did it have the American postmark. It was not a remittance.

"Oh, rats!" said Tom.

"No good?" asked Manners and Lowther dolefully.

"No; it's only from Mr. Brandreth; that's his fist."

"Only!" snorted Lowther. "Only from a millionaire—and we're stony! Only!"

"Oh, blow! Besides, he isn't really a millionaire," said Tom Merry. "The newspapers call everybody a millionaire. I think he's very rich—that's all."

"And at the present moment our resources amount to one French penny!" said Manners.

"Rats!" said Tom cheerfully; and he put the letter, unopened, in his pocket.

"Open it, fathead!" said Lowther.

"But we're going down to the cricket now. I can read it afterwards."

"You can read it now," said Lowther, catching Tom by the arm. "How do you know he hasn't sent you a bank-note for a thousand pounds or so?"

"Ass!"

"Well, open it."

Tom Merry gave in, and opened the letter

"If there's a remittance in it, I'm going to send it back," he said.

"What for?"

"Because I won't take anything from him, I tell you," said Tom.

"Prize ass!"

"Thanks; but I mean it."

There was no remittance, however, in the letter. And the letter itself was short, if not sweet.

"I am in receipt of your letter. I am coming down to the school to-day to see you.—GEORGE BRANDRETH."

That was all.

"Well, that's a chap who doesn't believe in wasting ink," said Monty Lowther admiringly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry looked cross.

"What the dickens is he coming for?" he exclaimed. "I told him quite plainly in my letter that I didn't want to see him."

"Like your cheek!" commented Manners. "You ought to have thought of the study."

"Rats!"

"It's a half-holiday to-day, luckily," Lowther remarked. "We'll devote it to looking after your kind friend, Tommy."

"We won't!" growled Tom. "We've got a match on with the New House, and I'm jolly well not going to stand out of a House match for him. If he's determined to come, he can watch us play cricket if he likes."

"Now, look here, Tom," said Lowther seriously, for once. "Let me give you some fatherly advice. I think you're quite right, of course, not to suck up to the man for his money. That would be rotten, I know. Also, it's only natural you should get your back up about what's come out concerning his queer will. But you can carry independence too far. No, don't jaw; listen to me. You're not rolling in money. Your pater left you pretty well provided for, but your guardian lost the money. The poor old lady was swindled out of it, and you were left on the rocks. If it hadn't been for your uncle in America, where would you be now?"

"Still on the rocks, Monty!"

"Exactly. Your uncle stood by you like a giddy Trojan; but what are you going to do later on? You're dependent on your uncle now. He's a jolly good sort, and he will see that you're looked after, I know. But uncles and things are mighty uncertain things in this world. I've got an uncle myself, who looks after me, and I know!" said Lowther. "Now, this old chap Brandreth was your father's pal, and he seems to be longing for a chance to leave you a pot of money. As a man of the world," said Lowther solemnly, "I advise you to go easy with him."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, thanks for your advice," he said. "When I grow up I'm going to earn my living. I've got lots of ideas about that already. I don't know that I should care to be a slacker, hanging about doing nothing, anyway. In any case, I'm not going to bother my head about this old johnnie from Africa. I don't want his money, and I won't put up with his beastly suspicions and distrust. If he was my father's pal, he ought to know that my father's son couldn't possibly be a rotter like that fellow Goring. If he can't take that for granted. he can't have anything to do with me. I've made up my mind about that. Now don't jaw about it any more, but let's get down to the nets for half an hour before dinner."

"Well, I've given you some jolly good advice," said Lowther. "If you won't take it, that's your bizney. We'll drop the subject now, if you like. And if you want to speak to young Brooke about the cricket, now's your chance; he's clearing off."

Brooke of the Fourth nodded to the Shell fellows as he passed out of the School House. Brooke was a day-boy, and on half-holidays he generally went home immediately after morning lessons. Tom Merry darted after him, and overtook him in the quad.

"Hallo, you're looking rather off colour," Tom Merry remarked, scanning the junior's face, which was unusually pale and clouded. "Anything wrong, kid?"

Brooke coloured a little. Brooke's circumstances at St. Jim's were a little peculiar. His people had been very well-to-do at one time, but his father had been a "rolling stone," and had not only gathered no moss, but had shed most of his patrimony. John Brooke, who had once been a man of some position in the locality, had fallen from his high estate, and all that remained of his once extensive property was a

rambling old house on Wayland Moor, where the Brookes lived now. The family income had been reduced to vanishing point, and Dick Brooke had to earn his living, and by sheer grit and determination he did so, finding the money to pay his own fees as a day-boy at St. Jim's. His circumstances were no secret, and some of the fellows, like Levison and Mellish and Crooke, related with great gusto in the common-room that they had seen "old Brooke" reeling out of the Green Man squiffy, as they called it.

The father was a hopeless wastral, but his recklessness and folly had never been able to alienate the respect and affection of his son. Tom Merry & Co. were on very friendly terms with Brooke of the Fourth—indeed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had made it a point to be extremely chummy with him, carrying his chumminess to the point of sometimes going home with Brooke on half-holidays to help him with his work. His help consisted in sitting on Brooke's work-bench and talking to him while he worked, varied with singing duets with Brooke's sister. But Arthur Augustus was quite in earnest about it, and sometimes after disappearing for a half-holiday, he would explain to his chums when he came back to Study No. 6 that he was wathah tired, as he had been helpin' Bwooke.

Tom Merry did not wait for a reply to his question, as he saw the colour flush into Brooke's face. He guessed that the junior's father had been in trouble again, and that it was weighing on Brooke's mind. So he went on hurriedly:

"About the cricket, you know. You're not going to give the cricket the go-by this season, old chap. Will you play this afternoon?"

"The team's made up, isn't it?" said Brooke uneasily.

"That's all right. Herries is standing out," said Tom Merry. "You can have his place, if you like. Come, old son, you'd better play. You stick indoors too much, you know, and what you want is a good game."

"I know I do," said Brooke, with a faint smile; "but——"

"You haven't any tooting to do this afternoon?" asked Tom. Brooke did some work as a coach to a backward youth.

The Fourth-Former shook his head.

"No, not that," he said, "but I've some work on. If you'll excuse me, I'd rather get home. I—I don't feel quite up to it, anyway. I——" He paused. "I won't bother you with my worries, Merry; but I'd rather get home."

Tom Merry looked at him. He could see that there was some real trouble on the day-boy's mind, apart from his work.

"I'll trot part of the way with you, then," he said. "You chaps get down to the nets!" he called out to Manners and Lowther.

"Aren't you coming?" asked Lowther.

"No; I'm going with Brooke."

"Oh, all right."

Manners and Lowther strolled away to the cricket-ground, and Tom Merry walked with Brooke out of the gates of St. Jim's. Tom Merry was the fellow who was most in Dick Brooke's confidence. The fact that Tom was no longer a rich fellow made it easier for Brooke to talk freely to him. With Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was rolling in money, he was naturally more reticent.

"I can see you've got it bad," said Tom, as they went down the lane. "Don't tell me anything if you don't want to, of course, but if it would ease your mind to jaw it over with a pal, why, pile in. You know I don't blabber."

Brooke nodded.

"I know," he said. "You're awfully good, Merry. I—I am in trouble, there's no blessed doubt about that. Of course, nobody can help me, but—but it is rather a relief to talk to a chap who understands."

"Perhaps I can give you some good advice," said Tom cheerily. "I've just been getting a lot myself from Lowther."

"It's my pater," said Brooke, in a low voice. "The poor old chap has done it this time. I don't think you'll be able to advise me out of the fix we're in now; still, you can tell me what you think. You understand, of course, I'm not finding fault with the pater in any way. He has a right to do as he likes with his own property, and it isn't a chap's bizney to set up in judgment on his father, whatever he does. I know that. It's simply a question of what's to be done. You know that the house we live in is all that's left of what my pater used to own. The bookmakers have had most of the rest. Well, that's going now."

Tom Merry started.

"So bad as that, old chap?"

"He signed a bill for another man," said Brooke hopelessly. "It was that kind of thing that always ruined him. He would always do anything he was asked to do. The old, old place isn't worth much. It's half in ruins, as you know. If it's sold up, it will just about pay what he's liable for now—a thousand pounds. It's worth a good bit more than that, but it won't fetch any more at a forced sale. And —and it's all the home we have now."

"A thousand pounds!" said Tom.

"Yes, the other man has done him in, and he's got to meet the bill. There was a time when he could have met ten times as much quite easily, but that's a long time ago. Now it's the finish. We have nothing but the house, and the mater's hundred a year, and now the house will go, unless a thousand quids drop out of the sky before next week."

"A thousand quid! Poor old chap," said Tom. "I suppose you haven't the remotest chance of raising it?"

Brooke smiled faintly.

"I've got twenty quid or so in the Post Office bank," he said. "That's about the full extent of what I can raise towards it."

"And—you can't get time on it?"

"That's the worst of it," said Brooke miserably. "In time the place will be worth a lot more money, now Wayland is growing, and they're building there. But the bill's got into the hands of a moneylender chap in Wayland, and he knows, of course, that the place is going up in value, and he won't give us an hour beyond the legal time. He wants to get his claws on the place, of course. Next week he's going to close down on us, and we shall have to move into lodgings in Wayland, I suppose. It comes rather hard. The poor old pater is awfully cut up about it—for our sakes, you know. He didn't think it would come to that, of course. The poor old chap is rather too simple for this world. He looks so rotten about it that it makes me wretched to see him. We shall keep our heads above water, but it's a wrench to part with the old place where we've always lived, and to go into lodgings in some back street in the town. It can't be helped, of course. No good crying over spilt milk."

"Who's got the bill?" asked Tom.

"Sampson, the land agent in Wayland."

"A jolly hard customer, so they say," said Tom Merry

"Hard as nails," said Brooke ruefully.

Tom Merry was silent, his thoughts busy. A thousand pounds! Of course, Brooke had not the slightest chance of getting that sum, or a tenth part of it, from any source whatever. Tom Merry thought of old Mr. Brandreth and his useless, superfluous money. Here was a use to which that money might be put—if Tom Merry had had it. Brooke would never have accepted money from him, of course; but the matter might have been arranged somehow. And Mr. Brandreth was coming down to the school that afternoon—coming down to see Tom Merry, whom he wished to make his heir. Money, after all, was not to be despised.

"Suppose the quids were raised from somewhere, Brooke?" Tom Merry said, after a long pause. "Then——"

"Oh, we could settle it in time," said Brooke. "The land we have left isn't worth much now, but when the building goes on a bit longer it will sell at a good figure. In a few years' time we could part with some of it for more than that, and still keep the house and its surroundings."

"Then what you want is a loan on the place, a mortgage, or something like that, to be paid off in, say, five years," suggested Tom.

Brooke laughed.

"Yes, that's what we want, but that's what we sha'n't get," he said. "We can't get a loan on the place, when it's got to be sold next week."

"But if some relation, say, lent you the cash, then it could be fixed, and his money would be quite safe."

"Yes, but we haven't any relation with a thousand quid to lend for five years," said Brooke. "It would be a safe investment, but only a friend would take it on; and friends like that are jolly scarce. If Sampson would hold the bill over for a few years he could have four or five per cent. on the money, safe as houses. But he'd want fifty per cent. at least. You know these sharks. It's no go! Of course, this is in confidence. I haven't said anything about it to D'Arcy. He would think nothing of asking his pater to fix it up for me," said Brooke, with a faint smile. "And I'm not a beggar. I shouldn't have told you, only——"

"Only you know I'm as poor as a giddy Lazarus," said Tom, laughing. "Quite so. I'm afraid I can't offer to lend you a thousand quid; all I can raise just now is a French penny. I say, I'm awfully sorry it has come to this. I hope some way out of it will turn up."

"I hope so," said Brooke. But he did not speak hopefully. "Anyway, it's a relief to jaw it over with a pal. Thanks for coming with me."

They parted at the stile, and Brooke went on towards the house on the moor. Tom Merry looked after him for a few minutes before he turned back to St. Jim's. Brooke did not look back once. Tom noticed how the junior's head drooped a little; and the usual spring was gone out of his stride. Brooke had faced many troubles in his young life,

and had overcome them by sheer pluck, but it seemed that he was knocked over at last.

Tom's face was very thoughtful as he walked back to the school. There was only one way in which Brooke's home might be saved—if a thousand pounds were forthcoming. And it would be a safe investment, with nothing in it to offend Brooke's pride. And that afternoon the South African millionaire was coming down to St. Jim's to see Tom Merry!

CHAPTER 5.

The Man from South Africa.

"PENNY for 'em!" said Monty Lowther.

"Eh?"

"Only I shall have to owe you the penny," said Lowther reflectively.

Tom Merry laughed. The chums of the Shell were sunning themselves on the steps of the School House after dinner, and for some time Tom Merry had been plunged in deep thought. Manners and Lowther had watched him with subdued grins for several minutes, and Lowther had finally interrupted the reverie with a munificent offer of a penny for the thoughts.

"Well, I've been thinking," said Tom.

"Yes, I noticed that," agreed Lowther. "You've been scowling at the elms for six or seven minutes on end. What have the elms done?"

"I was thinking, ass. Mr. Brandreth is coming down here this afternoon."

"He is—he are!" said Lowther. "Are you thinking that millionaires are worth cultivating after all? I quite agree with you. If you like I'll captain the House team this afternoon, while you do the agreeable to the giddy millionaire. Butter him up and stroke him down, and let him make a ripping will, leaving you a heap of diamond mines—and ask him for half-a-quid on account."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Tom, colouring. "The fact is, I've been thinking——"

"Must have felt a bit strange at first," said Lowther sympathetically. "But if you keep on you'll get used to it in time. The brain wants exercise, like the other parts of the body. If you do it for five minutes a day at first——"

"Look here——"

"And ten minutes a day for the second week——" went on Lowther.

"Do cheese it!" said Tom. "The fact is, I—I've been thinking about old Brandreth, and—and—— Perhaps I was a little previous with jumping on him."

"I could have told you that, if you'd asked me," said Lowther, looking a little surprised, all the same. "Millionaires don't grow on every bush; and even if they're a little bit queer, that's excusable in a millionaire. Even if they hurt your noble dignity, they can afford to pay for the damage to a good tune. I should never, never discourage any millionaire who wanted to make me his heir. I should say, 'Let 'em all come!'"

"I haven't changed my opinion about that," said Tom, his colour deepening. "Only—only Mr. Brandreth could do something for me, if he liked—that—that——"

"Quite so! A fiver, at least!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom. "Perhaps I was a bit too previous, but—— Let's get down to the cricket. I'm not going to suck up to anybody, for my own sake, or anybody else's. Brandreth can watch us play if he comes, that's all."

And Tom Merry, with his brow wrinkled in a frown, went into the house to change into his flannels. Manners and Lowther exchanged a glance of surprise. They did not understand their chum in the least. That Tom was regretting having taken an independent line, on account of Mr Brandreth's money, seemed impossible. But certainly he did not seem so satisfied now that he had acted rightly. He was thinking of Dick Brooke, as a matter of fact; but of that his chums knew nothing.

However, there was the House match to think of now. Tom Merry was captain of the junior School House team, and he had no intention of standing out. If Mr. Brandreth found him occupied when he came, that was his own look-out. Tom had not asked him to come.

Figgins & Co. came on the field, looking very fit and very confident. Figgin's team had won the last junior House match, with wickets to spare, at the time when Tom Merry had been absent. They intended to win this match, too, though it would not be so easy with the captain of the Shell in his old place.

"Standing out, Tommy?" Kangaroo asked, as Tom came on the field with Manners and Lowther. Tom did not look as if he were standing out, as he was in his flannels, and had his bat under his arm. But as Noble was vice-captain he felt that he ought to give him a chance.

"No," said Tom.

"But I hear that your tame millionaire is coming."

"That's so."

"You're not going to meet him at the station?"

"No."

"Nor greet him with a loving embrace when he arrives here?" asked Blake.

"No, ass!"

"I say, deah boy, there's such a thing as bein' too standoffish, you know," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, with a sage shake of the head. "Aftah all, the chap was your patah's pal. I should be quite willin' to skippah the team in your place——"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Hallo, Figgy! Ready?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather," said Figgins cheerily. "You're playing, then?"

"Of course I'm playing!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in an exasperated tone.

"But I heard that your millionaire was coming——"

"Blow the millionaire!"

"I say, he'll feel a bit neglected, you know," said Kerr.

"Let him!"

"He'll expect to be made much of," remarked Fatty Wynn. "You ought to stand him a feed, at least, after his journey."

"Such a thing as politeness, especially towards millionaires," grinned Redfern.

"Bosh! Are you going to toss up, Figgy, or is this a conversazione, and not a cricket match?" Tom Merry demanded crossly.

Figgins grinned, and the coin was tossed. Tom Merry had the best of it, and he elected to bat. Figgins & Co. went into the field. Fatty Wynn took the ball for the first over; and Kangaroo and Monty Lowther went to the wickets.

Tom Merry looked on with wrinkled brow. He felt that perhaps he was carrying the independent line a little too far in his conduct towards the millionaire. But what he knew about Mr. Brandreth did not dispose him to waste civility upon him. A suspicious, distrustful man, possessed with the belief that everyone was after his money; that was all Tom knew about the man, and it did not dispose him to like Mr. Brandreth. And the facts that had come to light about the man's queer will had exasperated Tom deeply. Let him come; and let him see how little Tom cared for his money. That was the idea of the captain of the Shell. When courtesy was likely to be construed into currying favour, he had no courtesy to waste.

Fatty Wynn was in great form. In the first over he took Lowther's wicket for no runs; and when Digby took Lowther's place, his sticks went down with the last ball of the over. The New House team grinned joyously. Two wickets for nil was a good beginning. Digby came back to the pavilion looking rather blue. And Tom Merry picked up his bat. He was next man in.

"Hallo!" said Manners, as Tom was drawing on his gloves. "Here comes somebody! Bet you that's your millionaire, Tommy!"

Tom Merry glanced away in the direction of the distant gates. A man was crossing towards the School House—a stranger at St. Jim's. He was a slightly-built man, with a thick, dark beard, tinged with grey, and grey eyebrows, under which gleamed a pair of keen, sharp eyes. His complexion was almost as brown as a berry. He paused and looked towards the cricket-ground, as Tom glanced towards him, holding the brim of his broad, soft hat to shade his eyes from the sun.

Tom Merry frowned irritably. It was undoubtedly Mr. Brandreth. And Tom was just going in to bat; the field were waiting. Tom hesitated a moment.

"Better go and meet him," whispered Manners. "I'll go in first."

Tom's jaw set squarely.

"I'm going in!" he said. "You can go and speak to him if you like. Tell him I'm batting."

"But, I say——"

Tom Merry did not pause to listen. He went into the field, crossed over to the wicket Digby had vacated. Manners shook his head and left the pavilion, hurrying towards the stranger in the quadrangle. Tom Merry gave him no further thought. He had to receive the bowling from Redfern, and he needed to give it all his attention, if he was to save his wicket.

Tom Merry knocked up six runs for the over, and by that time he had quite forgotten the new arrival. The field crossed over, and Kangaroo received the bowling from Fatty Wynn. The Cornstalk cut away the first ball to the boundary, and as the batsmen did not need to run, there was a pause while the ball was sent in. In that pause, Tom Merry glanced

Tom Merry faced Mr. Brandeth with white face and flashing eyes. "You think I've been humbugging you, sir! Keep your money! I wish you good afternoon." And he strode out of the study, so enraged that he could not trust himself to speak further. *(See Chapter 7.)*

towards the pavilion, and saw Manners return there, accompanied by the bearded stranger.

The latter, with his broad, soft hat pulled over his brows to shade his eyes, looked on at the cricket. Manners pointed out Tom Merry to him, but just then the bowling recommenced, and Kangaroo knocked the ball away, and Tom had to run. It was a single, and brought Tom to the pavilion end, and there he knew that the stranger's eyes were fixed intently upon him. He coloured a little, and raised his cap to the stranger as he caught his glance, and then gave all his attention to the bowling. Fatty Wynn was delivering it, and he had to keep his eyes open.

It worried Tom's nerves a little to feel himself under the critical inspection of the man from South Africa. The man's face was hard and lined, he had noted that, and his eyes keen and piercing. His face showed the signs of age, but a hard and grim age—there was no sign of softness in the features or in the expression. But there was an ironical look about the hard, sunburnt face that puzzled and somewhat annoyed Tom as he saw it. More than once, in spite of himself, his eyes turned towards the man from South Africa, till he resolutely pulled himself together, and glanced at him no more. He had nearly been caught napping once by the New House bowler, and he did not mean to give Fatty Wynn another chance.

From that moment he played steadily, as if the stranger had not been there. It was a splendid innings, and elicited loud cheers from the School House juniors round the cricket-ground. Tom Merry had been fourth in on the list, and he was not out at the finish of the innings. The batsmen came and went, the wickets going down pretty fast to the New House bowling, especially when Fatty Wynn had the ball; but Tom Merry's wicket was impregnable. He had knocked up fifty runs off his own bat when the last wicket fell, and he was left not out, the total School House score being one over the hundred.

"Bwavo, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, most magnanimously, for he had scored only a duck's egg himself, having been caught out by Redfern just as he was preparing to do great things for his side. "Bwavo, deah boy! A wippin' innings!"

And Tom Merry's chums clapped him on the back as he came off the field, with his bat under his arm and his face very ruddy.

"Here's Mr. Brandreth, Tom," murmured Lowther. "He's been watching you for close on an hour, and I fancy he's a bit impatient."

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"It's not my fault," he said.

"Well, speak to him civilly, anyway!"

Tom Merry, feeling decidedly awkward, and with the colour deepening his ruddy cheeks, walked towards the gentleman from South Africa, who was seated outside the pavilion, waiting for him.

CHAPTER 6.
Cricket First.

MR. BRANDRETH rose to his feet as Tom Merry came up.

The expression hardly changed on his grim, bronzed face, which, from its hardness, might really have been moulded in bronze itself.

Only the ironical look that had already irritated Tom Merry seemed to intensify a little.

The hard, keen eyes scanned the handsome, flushed face of the junior. Tom Merry slid his bat into his left hand, and raised his cap.

"Mr. Brandreth?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I am Tom Merry."

"I knew you at once," said Mr. Brandreth quietly.

"Yes?" said Tom, in surprise. "But you have never seen me before, sir.'

"No; I was in Africa before you were born," said the diamond magnate, with a nod. "I knew you by your likeness to your father."

"I don't remember my father," said Tom, his face clouding a little. "I was sent home from India when I was a little nipper, and dad was killed by the Afghans. But, of course, you know about that."

"I know about it, Tom. I was your father's best friend during his life, and we were schoolboys together. I remember him best when he was your age—he was a keen cricketer at school. Looking at you just now, I felt as if I had gone back thirty years." For one moment the hard face relaxed, but it was only for a moment, then it was all bronze again. "You do not seem very glad to see your father's old friend."

"I explained in my letter——"

"I understand perfectly. But I suppose you have no time to talk to me now—you are wanted in the match."

"Figgins & Co. will be batting in ten minutes, and I have to go into the field, of course," said Tom. "I'm captain of the junior team in my House."

"Yes; your friend—Manners, I think, his name is—has explained to me, and it seems you are playing a very important match this afternoon, and could not possibly be spared from the team."

Tom realised that Manners had been making the best of matters for him. But that curious ironical look on Mr. Brandreth's face irritated him more than ever. It seemed as if the man were mocking him, somehow.

"Well, I could have been spared, but the team would have missed me; that's how it is," said Tom. "I don't say they wouldn't win without me; but the fellows wanted me to play."

"Even on the afternoon when your father's friend was coming?"

"Yes," said Tom bluntly. "I thought I had made it clear in my letter to you, sir. I don't want to be uncivil, and I know my duty towards any friend of my father's. But. I think my pater would have approved of what I wrote to you. After what has happened—after what came out lately, I mean, through the scoundrel Goring kidnapping me—I think it's better to be quite plain. You put me into your will in a way that was simply an insult to me, and your solicitor betrayed it to the man Goring, and through him everybody knows about it. The whole school knows that you left me your money on condition that I didn't turn out to be a rascal—a pretty condition for the son of the man you say was your best friend. And so I wrote to you that I regarded it as an insult, and so I do!"

"I have my reasons."

"I know you had; but you had no right to make mention of me, in your will or anywhere else, in such a manner."

"No right!" said the millionaire, frowning.

Tom Merry's eyes met his fearlessly.

"No right!" he repeated. "At least, you ought to have asked me whether I wanted to be made your heir on such humiliating conditions."

"And if I had, what would your reply have been?"

"No!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"Really?"

"Yes, really. If you cannot take my word——" Tom Merry broke out angrily.

"Keep your temper, my boy. In my day youngsters were taught not to quarrel with their elders."

Tom bit his lip.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "But—but excuse me now, sir, will you; I'm wanted!"

"You may do as you choose."

"Thank you!"

Tom Merry walked away to join the cricketers, who had fallen back politely to avoid hearing what passed between him and the South African magnate.

"Ready?" asked Tom.

"Well, if you want to talk a bit to your friend——" began Figgins.

"I don't!" said Tom shortly.

"Right-ho! Then we bat!"

Tom Merry led his men into the field. Mr. Brandreth did not move from his seat on the bench before the pavilion. During the New House innings he watched the game with a calm and expressionless face of bronze.

The New House innings lasted an hour, and sixty runs were knocked up. That was well behind the School House score. Then the School House batted again, Tom Merry going in first this time. It was a little upon his conscience that he was neglecting his visitor, unwelcome as that visitor was, and he put himself first on the list, with the intention of looking after Mr. Brandreth when his wicket went down. But again he made a record innings. Wickets went down one after another, but Tom Merry's remained intact, while his comrades came and went.

Mr. Brandreth rose after about three-quarters of an hour, and walked away to the School House. Manners and Lowther, who were out, had spoken to him, and tried to engage him in conversation; but the South African's replies had been of the shortest and driest, and they had been effectually discouraged. They exchanged glances as he walked away from the cricket-ground.

"His monkey's up, and no mistake!" Lowther murmured.

Manners nodded.

"Blessed if I blame Tommy, though," he said. "He looks a hard old nut, and there's a sort of sneer on his chivvy I don't like."

"Well, he can't think that Tommy wants his blessed money, after this," said Lowther, with a grin. "That's clear, at least, I think."

"I should say so."

"Yaas, wathah!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chimed in. "All the same, I weally think Tom Mewwy is a little in ewwah. The old chap has come a long way to see him, you know. I shall point that out to Tom Mewwy when he finishes battin'—if he evah does. It looks as if he's goin' to be not out again, bai Jove!"

"There goes the giddy wicket!" said Lowther. "You're not a prophet, Gussy!"

Tom Merry's wicket had fallen to Fatty Wynn at last. He came off the field, and Reilly took his place—last man in. Tom Merry glanced round, and then joined his chums.

"He's gone," said Lowther.

"Yes; I see he has. I dare say he wants to see the Head," Tom Merry remarked. "Most likely he'll have tea in the Head's house.

"Won't you ask him to tea in the studay, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass reproachfully on the captain of the Shell.

"My dear chap, I can't ask him to the kind of tea we could raise for a French penny!" said Tom, laughing.

"Oh, wats! I will gladly lend you a half-quid, if that's all, Tom Mewwy. I weally think you ought to be civil. Wemembah he is an old man, and he has been ill."

"Well, yes," said Tom, uneasily. "He looks jolly tough, though. Still, there's such a thing as respect for age. I—I suppose it's up to me to be a bit attentive But—but I know he'll misunderstand it. He looks like that."

"A chap should do what is wight, deah boy, and wisk bein' misundahstood."

"Quite right, as you always are, Gussy!" said Lowther cheerily.

"Yaas, I weally think you can wely on my opinion," said D'Arcy innocently. "In a case of doubt you can't do bettah than take the advice of a fellow of tact and judgment, you know."

"There goes the last wicket!" said Tom. "Eighty for the second innings. Figgy will have all his work cut out to beat that—if there's light enough to finish."

The field came off, and Figgins joined the Terrible Three.

"If you'd like to play a substitute in the field, Tommy, you're welcome," he remarked. "Dash it all, old chap, Mr. Brandreth will be going to catch his train soon, and you can't let him go without speaking to him."

Tom Merry was silent.

"I know it's none of my business," said Figgins, a little uncomfortably. "But I'm quite willing for you to put a substitute in the field, if you want to stay out of the last act. Suit yourself, of course."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Take Figgy's offer, you duffer!" urged Monty Lowther.

"Oh, all right!" said Tom resignedly. "Call young Hammond, and let him field for me. I dare say you're right—anyway, I see that you mean to have your way. I'll buzz off and be dutiful."

"And don't lose your temper, deah boy. I saw you lookin' quite watty when you were speakin' to him."

"I felt ratty!" growled Tom.

"Yaas; but it's up to a chap to wespect age, you know. And you had bettah let me lend you that half-sovereign, old fellow."

"Right!"

Tom Merry slipped the loan into his pocket, and left the cricket-ground. Hammond of the Fourth went into the field in his place. Figgins & Co. started their second innings, and Tom turned his back on the field with great regret; but there was no help for it.

Leaving the cricketers busy, the captain of the Shell entered the School House.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Loses His Temper.

KILDARE of the Sixth met Tom Merry as he came in. He gave the Shell fellow a somewhat quizzical look.

"Looking for your visitor?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom, colouring awkwardly. "Have you seen him?"

"He's had tea in the Head's house, with Mrs. Holmes and the doctor," said Kildare, smiling. "If the Head hadn't happened to see him, I fancy he wouldn't have got any tea. Is this what you kids call hospitality?"

"Well, I—I was booked for the match, you know, and—and I didn't know he was coming till just before dinner," said Tom. "I didn't ask him to come."

"Isn't he the Mr. Brandreth whose will there was so much talk about, through that fellow Goring kidnapping you?"

"Yes; he's the man."

"Well, I must say you've got a peculiar way of looking after a man who was a friend of your father's," said Kildare drily. "He's in your study now, waiting for you. I pointed it out to him. He's only just come from tea with the Head, so he hasn't been waiting long. No fault of yours, I suppose?"

"Well, I'm playing a substitute now."

"You might have done that before," said Kildare. "No business of mine, I suppose, but even the fags are supposed to have some manners at St. Jim's, you know."

Tom's flush deepened as he left the captain of St. Jim's, and hurried up to his study. Kildare evidently regarded him as having failed in civility to his visitor, and he could not explain to him. His feeling of irritation against Mr. Brandreth was becoming keener and keener. What did the man want to persist in coming to see him for, against his will?

Mr. Brandreth was seated in the armchair in the junior's study, looking out of the open window, from which a portion of the cricket-ground could be seen. He turned his head from the window as Tom came in.

"You have finished playing?" he asked.

"I've put in a substitute to field," said Tom.

"That was very considerate of you." Mr. Brandreth looked at his watch. "I leave St. Jim's in half an hour to catch my train back to London."

"I—I—well, I'm sorry," said Tom, feeling guilty—"I—I'm very sorry if you think I've been wanting in—in courtesy, sir!"

"I do not think you have, I know you have," said Mr. Brandreth grimly. "And I fancy I can penetrate your motives, young man."

"I don't think my motives need much penetrating, sir. I don't want to be disrespectful, but I told you in my letter how I felt towards you," said Tom bluntly. "I thought it better not to meet you, as I can't forget that you suspected and distrusted me, and insulted me into the bargain. That's all."

"Why should I not suspect and distrust someone whom I had never even seen—especially after I had been basely deceived by someone I did trust?" said Mr. Brandreth coldly.

"If you were my father's friend, you might have had a better opinion of his son, that's all, sir."

"I was the friend of Gerald Goring's father, and I had a good opinion of the son, which was quite undeserved, as it turned out," said the millionaire. "Goring is in prison now, where he deserves to be. Listen to me, my boy. I have lived a hard life, and I have learned to know the world only too well I have learned to distrust appearances, to take no man at his own valuation, and to look for the real motives behind the outward professions. It is not all pleasure to be extremely wealthy. It makes it impossible for a man to place faith in his own kind."

"Then I'd rather be poor," said Tom. "Certainly I'd never suspect and distrust people on principle, simply because I had money."

Mr. Brandreth smiled slightly.

"When you are my age you may think differently," he said. "When I lay sick almost to death in South Africa, there was not one who cared—who cared for anything but what I might leave. Even my old partner's son, he was only scheming to benefit under my will by a crime. I have experienced every kind of cunning attempt to get into my favour, because I have a large fortune to leave, and cannot live long—from bowing and scraping civility to the pretence of rugged independence—which was still easier for me to see through and despise."

Tom Merry started.

He thought he understood now the ironical expression of the millionaire's face. His conduct towards the South African magnate had been set down under that head—a pretence of rugged independence, as a means of influencing the millionaire in his favour. The blood rushed into his face.

"But such a device may be carried too far," the millionaire added drily. "It might wear out my patience entirely."

Tom Merry checked the hot words that rose to his lips. Of what use was it to speak to this man, who would never understand?

"You—you believe that is my motive, sir?" he said at last, quietly.

"I believe nothing," he said. "I do not know you. I have never seen you before. I came here to make your acquaintance, and I may say that you have made a very disagreeable impression upon me."

"I'm sorry for that, but perhaps it's all the better," said Tom. "Every word you have spoken to me is a fresh insult. All I ask from you is that you leave my name out of your will."

"Sincerely?"

"Certainly!"

"If I believed that, I should make you my sole heir," said the millionaire calmly. "But it is a little difficult to believe."

"Well," said Tom, half laughing, "I can only give you my word. If you don't believe me, there's nothing more to be said."

"You are one of the extraordinary persons, then, who have no use for money," the millionaire said ironically.

Tom Merry paused.

Back into his mind came the remembrance of Dick Brooke, and the bitter need that he had of money to save him and his family from the results of his father's folly.

The millionaire was watching his face closely.

"Well?" he said.

"I could do a lot of good with money if I had it," said Tom. "If you had—had been different I should have asked you a favour. I can't ask it now. If you'd been what I should have expected of my father's best friend, it would have been possible."

"What would you have asked?"

Tom hesitated.

"You can tell me that, at least," said Mr. Brandreth. "What is it you want?"

"I want nothing. But—but to help a chap—a friend of mine—out of a fix," said Tom, flushing again. "It's a lot to me, I mean—nothing to you. I'd give a great deal to be able to help old Brooke. I don't mean it would be necessary to give any money—he wouldn't take it—but a thousand pounds would have to lie idle for some years—at a low interest——" He broke off. A bitter sneer had gathered upon the hard, bronze face.

"A thousand pounds!" said Mr. Brandreth.

Tom stood dumb. He could have bitten out his tongue for his folly in speaking. For the moment, in his friendly concern for Brooke, he had forgotten. But the expression on Mr. Brandreth's face recalled him to himself.

"A thousand pounds—for a friend, of course," said the millionaire ironically. "Tom, you are not moderate. So that is the outcome of it all—you do not want the possibly distant advantage of being mentioned in my will, but——"

Tom clenched his hands hard.

"I was a fool to speak," he said; "an utter fool! I might have known you'd misunderstand."

"I don't think I've misunderstood."

"Very well," said Tom, his face white now with anger. "You think I've been humbugging you, sir, and that I've come to what I really wanted—money. Well, you can think so if you choose—I sha'n't try to explain. Keep your money. It wasn't for myself I was going to ask you. But, of course, you won't believe that."

"Tell me all the circumstances——"

"I shall tell you nothing. I wish you good-afternoon," said Tom.

And he strode out of the study, so enraged that he could not trust himself to say anything further.

"Tom!"

He heard Mr. Brandreth's voice, much softer in tone now, but he did not turn back. He strode on savagely, and whether the millionaire spoke again or not, he did not know.

Ten minutes later Mr. Brandreth was seen crossing towards the gates, and he went alone. Some of the fellows looked at him, but his face told them nothing—it was inscrutable.

CHAPTER 8.
Startling News.

TOM MERRY did not return to the cricket-ground. He was feeling angry and disturbed, and he did not want to be asked questions. The match was still going on; and Tom Merry walked to and fro, frowning, under the elms, till Mr. Brandreth was gone, and then went to his study. By that time his brow was clearing, and at last his face broke into a smile. He laughed.

"What an ass I was to lose my temper!" he murmured. "I suppose the old johnnie's built that way, and he can't help it. He must have had crowds of cads after his rotten money, and he's put me down as one of them. Blessed if I know what the pater ever saw in him to chum up with him! He must have been a lot different when he was a kid, I should think. Blow! I won't think about it any more."

And, his anger having evaporated, he set about preparing tea in the study, ready for Manners and Lowther when they came in after the match. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's loan came in very useful, though not for the purpose of entertaining Mr. Brandreth.

The fire was burning brightly in the study, the table was laid, and there was a fragrant odour of fresh toast, when Manners and Lowther came in at last at dusk. The kettle was singing on the fire; and the two Shell fellows, hungry enough after the match, looked round the study with keen appreciation.

"Well, this is all right," said Lowther. "Old johnnie gone?"

"Yes; long ago."

"What size tip?"

"None."

"My hat—and he's a millionaire!"

"We didn't part on good terms," said Tom. "Don't talk about it—I'm fed up on that subject, right up to the chin."

"Oh, Tommy!" sighed Lowther. "You'll never be a success in the world, my son. When you're a little older you'll understand the value of a millionaire."

"Rats!"

"You haven't been rowing with him, surely?" said Manners.

"Not exactly; but—but—well, it's all over, anyway. He won't come here to see me again," said Tom. "I don't suppose I shall ever hear from him again—and I'm sure I don't want to. It's ended."

"Tommy, you are an ass!"

"And a frabjous one," said Lowther.

"Admitted, if you like," said Tom. "Now let's have tea, and for goodness' sake let's hear no more of him and his beastly money. How did the match go?"

"Beat them, of course," said Lowther. "They didn't get within twenty runs of our total. Just finished when the light went."

"Oh, good!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked into the study.

"Hallo! Your fwiend gone, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes. But thanks for your loan, all the same, Gussy," said Tom, laughing. "It's come in jolly useful."

"You are vewy welcome, deah boy. I twust you have tweated Mr. Bwandweth with pwopah wespect," said D'Arcy anxiously.

"Rats!"

"I was goin' to give you some advice——"

"Keep it for another time, old time—I'll mention when I want it," said Tom. "Come in and have tea, and tell us about your new waistcoat."

Arthur Augustus shook his head

"I'm goin' to have tea in No. 6," he said. "I just looked in to see if there was anythin' I could do to help in entertainin' your fwiend. I am sowwy he is gone."

And Arthur Augustus departed, with a serious shake of the head. He was evidently suffering from an inward fear that Tom Merry had failed in upholding the reputation of the School House for hospitality.

Tom Merry was more than tired of the subject of Mr. Brandreth and his money, but he was not suffered to hear the end of it very soon. Quite a number of fellows wanted to know how the interview with the South African millionaire had "gone," and Tom's answers grew shorter and shorter to every inquirer. Late in the evening Levison of the Fourth tackled him on the subject, and found him extremely crusty by that time.

"When's your millionaire coming again, Merry?" Levison wanted to know.

"Not at all," growled Tom.

"Oh, come—we all know about his will in your favour," said Levison. "Why, it's been in the papers. You don't mean to say he's altered it."

"I think very likely he has, but I don't know anything about it, and don't want to know anything about it, and don't want to jaw on the subject," said Tom Merry categorically.

Levison laughed.

"You didn't seem to be paying him much attention while he was here," he pursued.

"I didn't pay him any."

"Why not?"

"That's my business."

But Levison was not to be rebuffed. He was determined to get to the bottom of the mystery, if it could be done by asking questions.

"Oh, don't get ratty!" he urged. "I wish I had a chance of cultivating a giddy millionaire, that's all. I wouldn't let him slide."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," agreed Tom, with a sniff.

"Well, you wouldn't, for that matter," said Levison reflectively. "Nobody would. If you haven't buttered him up, there must be a reason, and I jolly well know the reason. These blessed South African millionaires are here to-day and gone to-morrow—rolling in money one day, and stony broke the next. I suppose you've found out that he really hasn't got very much money after all. Is that it?"

Lowther burst into a cackle. It was really the only reasonable reason Levison was likely to discover for Tom Merry's line of conduct.

"You can take it as that if you like," said Tom Merry wearily. "Go and eat coke!"

"I suppose that's it," said Levison, satisfied with his solution of the problem. "But how did you find out that he wasn't rich after all?"

"Fathead!"

"But you must have found out somehow," said Levison. "You are a lot deeper than fellows have supposed, Tom Merry. It was jolly keen of you to find out that the old johnnie wasn't worth buttering up; though how you did it——"

"Will you shut up?" asked Tom Merry, and he looked so exasperated that Levison walked away, but he confided his solution of the mystery to everybody who would listen to him, and found many believers.

But everything comes to an end, and the next day the subject of Mr. Brandreth and his millions was dropped, much to Tom Merry's relief. He hoped sincerely that he had heard the end of it. But the subject was destined to be revived before the week was out. On Saturday afternoon the St. Jim's junior team were visiting Rylcombe Grammar School to play Gordon Gay & Co., and Tom Merry and his chums were waiting for the brake which was to convey them over, when Cutts of the Fifth stopped to speak to them. There was an unpleasant sneer on Cutts's hard face.

The cad of the Fifth had not forgotten the happening in Lefevre's study. Cutts had a paper in his hands, in which he had probably been consulting the racing columns. But he had seen some other news as well.

"So you knew all along, did you?" he said.

"Eh!" said Tom Merry, in surprise. "Is that a conundrum, Cutts?"

"I say you knew all along," said Cutts. "About old Brandreth, I mean."

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at," said Tom Merry, with a yawn. "I thought I'd heard the end of that subject."

"I was puzzled at first," said Cutts. "Now I understand. You must have known all along."

And he walked away, with a sneering grin.

The Terrible Three looked at one another. What Cutts's remarks might possibly mean they could not guess.

"Off his rocker, I should think," said Manners at last.

"Can there be anything about Mr. Brandreth in the paper?" said Tom, wrinkling his brows in thought. "Those newspaper johnnies are always printing items about millionaires. I don't see that it concerns me, anyway. Perhaps he's gone back to Africa."

"Here's Levison—and he looks as if he has news," said Monty Lowther. "Well, what is it this time, Levison? Which keyhole have you been honouring with your special attention?"

Levison laughed disagreeably.

"I was right, you see," he remarked.

"Hallo! Are you setting up as a conundrum merchant, too?" asked Manners. "Will you explain what you are driving at?"

"I've seen it in Cutts's paper."

"What have you seen?"

"Hasn't Tom Merry told you?"

"I don't know what's in the silly paper," growled Tom Merry. "Is it anything about Mr. Brandreth?"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Levison. "Don't tell me you didn't know it all along."

"Blessed if he isn't repeating Cutts like a giddy parrot," said Lowther. "Take hold of his ears, Manners, and I'll take his feet, and we'll bump some sense into him, and make him explain."

"Hold on!" said Levison, backing away. "I'll tell you, if Tom Merry hasn't. It's no good his telling me he didn't know, because I know he did. I told him so the day old Brandreth was here. It's in the paper. He's ruined!"

Tom Merry started violently.

"Ruined! Mr. Brandreth!" he exclaimed

"Yes; and it's come out that his affairs have been shaky for a long time. He had a heap of money invested in a mine that petered out," said Levison. "He'll be able to pay twenty shillings in the pound, but he'll be left a beggar. After swanking as a millionaire, he's got nothing—nothing at all. He must have known it a long time ago himself. Things like that don't come suddenly. And now we shall all know why you didn't suck up to him, Tom Merry. You knew he was a spoofer. You must have known jolly well that he hadn't a quid to his name. That's why you were so jolly independent towards him. But what beats me is, how did you know? How did you find out how he was fixed?" And Levison looked intensely curious.

Tom Merry hardly heard him.

Ruined! The millionaire! The great wealth which had warped the man's nature, which had made it impossible for him to trust or like his fellow-men, which had led him to read duplicity everywhere, to doubt the frankest honesty—that wealth which he had bought so dearly was gone, vanished like a dream, and the man was left a beggar in his old age! The blow must have been as terrible as it was sudden, if it was true! And it must be true. Tom Merry's brain was in a whirl.

"The poor old chap!" he said. "This is rotten—rotten! But there may be something left. He could hardly lose all that money, and have nothing."

"Of course you didn't know it was coming," giggled Levison.

"Of course I didn't," said Tom savagely. "I hadn't the faintest idea of it, you miserable cad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Levison yelled with laughter. "That's too rich! You really expect anybody to believe you didn't know it. Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry clenched his fists.

"I tell you I did not know, Levison. That's enough."

"Ha, ha, ha! Do draw it mild! Yaroooh!" roared Levison, as Tom, out of all patience, hit out savagely. The cad of the Fourth sat violently at the foot of the steps.

Tom Merry pushed back his cuffs.

"Now, you rotter, get up and put up your hands! I don't allow anybody to doubt my word."

Levison scrambled up. But he did not put up his hands. He backed away.

"You'll find that the whole school doubts your giddy word, if you tell them a thundering lie like that!" he exclaimed, and then he darted away as the Shell fellow made an angry movement towards him.

Tom Merry turned back with a flushed face towards his chums. It was borne in upon his mind that only too many of the fellows would take Levison's view of the matter. His disregard of the millionaire, his contempt for the man's money had been regarded as curious enough, only a few days before the news became public that the millionaire was no millionaire at all, but a pauper.

"I suppose you chaps believe me?" said Tom awkwardly.

"Of course we do," said Lowther. "Don't be an ass. But—but it does look queer. Only two or three days after he was here this comes out. Levison was right in saying that these things don't happen suddenly. Mr. Brandreth must have known when he was here that it was coming. He must have been a pauper then, if he's one now. But, of course, you didn't know."

"We know you didn't know, Tom," said Manners. "We know you well enough to be sure that if you'd known the poor old chap was really on the rocks you'd have been kinder to him."

"I jolly well would," said Tom Merry feelingly. "He didn't drop a single word to hint about his real position. Of course, I don't know anything about his position. I simply took it for granted that he was wealthy. So did everybody. If he'd told me that, it would have made a difference, of course. I—I feel that I acted rottenly, now. It was his beastly money, and I was a bit too sensitive about that rot he put in his will. I dare say he meant well all the time. I wish I'd been a bit more decent to him."

"He's not likely to come here again, or you could tell him that," said Manners thoughtfully. "Well, it can't be helped. It would have been a bit more straightforward of him to have told you. I can't help thinking that. Well, what do you want, Mellish?"

There was an eager expression on Mellish's face as he came up. He was evidently devoured with curiosity.

"You've heard the news, I see," he remarked. "I say, Tom Merry, do you mind telling us how you knew that Brandreth was going on the rocks?"

"I didn't know!"

"But the way you treated him. That shows that you knew, doesn't it?" said Mellish, with a stare.

"Extraordinary as it may seem to you, Mellish, it doesn't. If I'd known he was a ruined man I should have done my best to be decent to him."

"Well, you can tell that to the Marines," said Mellish, with a sniff. "Why, of course you knew. Here, keep your paws off!" And Mellish retreated hastily.

"Here's the brake," said Lowther. And the chums of the Shell walked down to the gates. Gore tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as he was about to mount into the brake.

"I say, Merry, how did you know about old Brandreth's position before the reporters got hold of it?" he asked. "The paper says it came as a sudden surprise to everybody on Friday. You knew on Wednesday. How——"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Well, you might tell a fellow how you knew——"

"I didn't know!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Gore, in disgust.

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose. He climbed into the brake without another word. The brake was about to start when Thompson of the Shell, a New House fellow, came running up, evidently for information. The story of Mr. Brandreth's ruin was all over the school now, and the fellows were greatly excited about it.

"I say, Tom Merry," panted Thompson, "how did you know——"

"Oh, shut up!" roared Tom Merry.

"But, I say, you knew—you know how—— Well, a fellow might answer a civil question," said Thompson, in an injured tone, as Tom Merry turned his back on him, and the brake started.

CHAPTER 9.

Called Away.

TOM MERRY hardly spoke a word as the brake rolled away down the lane towards Rylcombe. His face was clouded. He was feeling disturbed and troubled.

The news had come as a great shock to him. Even if he had not known Mr. Brandreth, he would have felt sorry to hear of a man who had been wealthy being reduced to poverty in his old age, at so advanced a time of life that it was impossible for him to think of making his way upward again. But he did know him, and the man had been his father's chum, his schoolfellow and lifelong friend, and Tom had been anything but kind to him on the only occasion he had met him. It weighed upon the junior's conscience now. He felt that he ought to have remembered that it was his father's friend he was dealing with, and ought to have had more patience with his foibles, even with his exasperating distrust and suspicion. He felt that he had been wanting in the respect due to age, if nothing else. And the man had really been in that wretched position all the time, a pauper, whose poverty had not yet been revealed, instead of the millionaire he had been considered. Would Brandreth himself believe that Tom had had an inkling of the truth from some source or other, and that thence came his independence? It was only too probable that he would think so.

At all events, it was certain that a great many of the St. Jim's fellows would think so. They would think that Tom Merry had treated him with disdain because he knew that he had nothing to expect from him.

Tom's cheeks burned at the thought.

Had he known, had he only suspected, how differently he would have acted on that Wednesday afternoon!

But he had not known, he had not suspected, and it was too late to think of it now. Sympathy and kindness from the son of his old chum might have comforted the unhappy man, to some extent, in his ruin. But it was too late now. If only the man had told him the truth, but he had not dropped a single hint.

The hard, bronze face, with its ironical, sceptical expression rose before Tom Merry's mind. He wondered how the hard old man was looking now, now that he was known as a ruined man, probably besieged by creditors, overwhelmed by the wreck of his fortune. He would now know the true from

the false friends, if he had never known before. There was no doubt about that. Such a test as this would not fail to distinguish them. Tom Merry felt miserably that he wished the opportunity would come over again, that he would have a chance of showing some sort of friendship to his father's old friend.

The brake arrived at the Grammar School, and Gordon Gay greeted the St. Jim's team. Tom Merry was not feeling in much of a humour for the game. Somehow or other the thought of George Brandreth persisted in obtruding itself upon his mind. He could not help thinking of the lonely old man, face to face with his ruin, probably abandoned in his misfortune by those whom his wealth had attracted to him.

It had been impossible for Tom to avoid feeling "rusty" with the South African magnate. That provision in his will, to which so much publicity had been given—that if Tom Merry should disgrace himself, or be guilty of rascally conduct, the Brandreth fortune should go, after all, to Gerald Goring—that provision Tom could not help regarding simply as an insult.

He had not asked to be the old man's heir; he had hardly known of his existence. And that ridiculous provision had led to Gerald Goring's plot—to his unscrupulous attempt, which had very nearly succeeded, to get Tom Merry disgraced and expelled from St. Jim's. And the exposure of that plot had made the whole affair widely public, and everybody knew of that provision in the old man's will, and Tom's humiliation had been very keen.

He had felt that he could not forgive or forget it. But now that the old man was overwhelmed with misfortune he both forgave and forgot it—which was very like Tom Merry.

But he had to drive the matter from his mind now, and devote himself to the Grammar School match. Gordon Gay & Co. were in great form, and the St. Jim's team had to do their best. Tom Merry's eleven was in great form too—a fine team, selected from the best junior players in both Houses. But Tom was not at his best now. His kind heart was heavy with the news he had so lately received.

St. Jim's batted first, and Tom sent in Figgins and Kangaroo to open the innings. The two bats made a good stand against the Grammarian bowling. A good number of St. Jim's fellows were arriving, on bikes or on foot, to see the match, and they mingled with the crowd of Grammarians round the field. There were loud cheers for Kangaroo's hard hitting, which gave Gordon Gay and his men plenty of leather-hunting.

Tom Merry stood outside the pavilion with the rest of the side, waiting their turns to bat. It was a quarter of an hour before Figgins was caught out, and then Redfern went in in his place.

Redfern was facing the bowling from Wootton major, of the Grammar School, and making hay of it, when a cyclist jumped down in the gateway, and wheeled his bike in. It was Brooke, the day-boy at St. Jim's. He left his machine—or, rather, Tom Merry's machine, which he had borrowed—near the gates, and came quickly towards the cricket-ground.

"Hallo, Brooke!" said Tom, giving him a smile of welcome. "I'm glad to see you here. So you've found time to come and see the match?"

Dick Brooke shook his head. He was feeling in his pocket.

"No, I haven't come to see the match," he replied. "I stayed on at St. Jim's for my extra lesson with Mr. Lathom, and just as I was coming out a telegram came for you; so I thought I'd buzz over with it before I went home, as it might be important. I borrowed your bike—you don't mind?"

Tom laughed.

"I'm much obliged," he said.

"I'll get back home from here," said Brooke. "One of you fellows won't mind riding the machine back?"

"That's all right," said Tom, taking the telegram Brooke handed to him. "Leave it there, old chap. Can't you stay to see the match?"

"Well, I'll watch for a bit, anyway," said Brooke. "How jolly well Reddy is batting!"

"Yes, isn't he?" said Figgins enthusiastically. "Regular corker, old Reddy! I say, Merry, don't say there's any bad news in that blessed telegram! You're jolly well not going to miss your innings, you know!"

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "That would be too wotten! Howevah, I should twy to make up for it in my innings!"

"You might try!" snorted Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Hallo!" said Monty, turning quickly towards Tom. "Anything wrong?"

Tom Merry's face was very grave.

He handed Lowther the telegram without a word. Lowther, looking rather worried, read it.

He guessed that something was wrong, and that Tom would be called away—just when he was wanted most specially to bat against the Grammarians.

The telegram was from George Brandreth. Lowther glanced at his name at the end first. He had guessed it, somehow. And the telegram ran:

"Doubtless you have heard the news that I am a ruined man. I wish to see you before leaving England. Shall reach Rylcombe Station at three. BRANDRETH."

"At three!" said Monty Lowther, looking at his watch. "And it's twenty to three now. Came jolly near missing you, anyway. We might have been playing away, too far off for this wire to be brought to you!"

"I'm glad I've got it," said Tom.

"But, I—I say, you can't go," said Manners uneasily. "It means missing this match, Tom, and you know how much you're wanted!"

Tom Merry looked troubled.

"I know, Manners, old man; but I must go. If he wants to see me, I can't disappoint him, under the circumstances."

"Well, I suppose you can't," admitted Manners. "If he doesn't stay long, you may get back in time to bat. You could be the last man in!"

"Put me down as last man, anyway, and I'll try," said Tom. "If I don't get back, play young Hammond in my place. He's a good bat."

"It may mean getting licked, all the same!" groaned Lowther.

"Can't be helped, old chap. You wouldn't have me disappoint him, would you, after what's happened to him?"

"Well, no."

"Bad news?" asked Brooke, turning round from watching the game.

"Yes, in a way," said Tom. "I've got to cut the match. But I'm jolly glad you brought the telegram over, Brooke; I wouldn't have missed it for anything! Glad the bike's here, too. Can't be helped, you chaps. Hammond will do very well, if I don't get back in time to bat. I'll change, and clear off on the bike!"

And Tom Merry ran into the pavilion.

He reappeared in five or

Wynn gripped the ball hard, took a little run, and turned himself into a kind of catherine-wheel, and sent the ball down like a four-point-seven shell. Clatter! "How's that?" yelled St. Jim's. "Out!" said the umpire.
(*See Chapter* 10.)

six minutes, and hurried away to the gates. He wheeled the bicycle out, and disappeared.

The St. Jim's cricketers looked glum enough. The Grammarian match was one of the hardest they had to play, and they wanted their skipper. But, as Tom had said, it could not be helped. He could not act to-day as he had acted on Wednesday, after what had happened to the millionaire. Then he had been dealing with a man whom he believed to be rolling in money; now he was dealing with a man overwhelmed with misfortune, and plunged into poverty, and that made all the difference to Tom Merry.

The captain of the Shell scorched away on his bike, giving no further thought to the cricket-match. He was only anxious now to get to the station before Mr. Brandreth's train arrived. He did not want George Brandreth to arrive first and find that he was not there. He scorched along the lane, and rode hard up the village street; but as he came in sight of the station he heard the train there, and knew that Mr. Brandreth must have arrived.

He jumped off the machine, threw it against the station wall, and ran in breathlessly.

Mr. Brandreth was standing in the station vestibule; he had just come off the platform. He was looking about him, evidently to ascertain whether anyone was waiting for him.

"I'm here, sir!" Tom Merry panted.

Mr. Brandreth turned quickly towards him. A curious expression came over his bronzed face as he saw the breathless junior.

"You had my telegram?"

"Yes."

"And you have come—a little late, eh?"

"We were playing away," said Tom. "A chap brought your telegram over to the Grammar School only twenty minutes ago, and I had to change."

"You were playing?"

"I hadn't gone in to bat, as it happened."

Mr. Brandreth looked very grave.

"Is it an important match, my boy?"

"Well, it's rather important to us, sir—one of our toughest fixtures. But that doesn't matter now."

"You have given it up to come here?"

"Yes."

"That is somewhat of a change—after last Wednesday," Mr. Brandreth remarked.

Tom flushed.

"It's different now," he said.

"In what way different?"

"I—I mean, I—I've heard the news," said Tom. "It's in the papers, and some of the fellows have seen it. Your telegram would have told me, anyway. Of course, I came, under the circumstances."

"I don't see why 'of course,'" said Mr. Brandreth. "Since the news of my failure has been made public, I have not found people anxious to go out of their way to oblige me."

"Well, anyway, that's how I look at it," said Tom. "Never mind the cricket-match—I can give that a miss all

sight. I'm only jolly glad that I had your wire. It might not have come on to me at the Grammar School, only Brooke's such a jolly decent chap he brought it over. Then you'd have thought that I wouldn't come, I suppose?"

"I should have gone on to St. Jim's to ascertain if you had not been here," said Mr. Brandreth.

"Good! Then you'd have found that we were playing away. Still, I'm glad Brooke brought it over—and I got here in time," said Tom. "You say you are leaving England, sir?"

"Yes. I——" Mr. Brandreth paused, and glanced round. The place was deserted, save for themselves; but the South African lowered his voice. "I—I have something to say to you about that. I am in trouble."

"Yes, I know what's happened, sir, and I'm awfully sorry!"

"You do not know all, my boy. Come, let us get somewhere where we can talk—if you are sure you would not wish to return to your game."

"Never mind that," said Tom. "Come to the bunshop, sir, and have some tea after your journey. It's just down the street. They have jolly good cake there, too!"

Mr. Brandreth smiled.

"Thank you—I won't come to the bun-shop," he said. "Let us walk out of the village, Tom."

"Very well, sir. I'll put my bike into Murphy's as I go by—it can stay there."

Mr. Brandreth nodded, and they left the station, Tom walking beside the South African and wheeling his machine. The bicycle was pushed into Mrs. Murphy's shop, to be called for, and then the two walked out of the village. Mr. Brandreth seemed to be plunged into deep thought; and Tom Merry was thinking too. He could not help wondering what the old man had to say to him. They stopped at the stile in the lane, and Mr. Brandreth leaned on it, and slowly and methodically lighted a cigar. Tom Merry stood waiting. There was a silence for some minutes.

Mr. Brandreth broke it suddenly.

"You have heard that I am a ruined man, Tom?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom. "I can't say how sorry I am. And—and I want to apologise for the way I acted last Wednesday, sir, when you came down to the school. I suppose I was rather a cad, but I was ratty about—about the way you looked at things. But I see now I was wrong, and I'm sorry."

Mr. Brandreth looked at him keenly.

"And—and I hope you don't think I knew anything about your affairs, sir," Tom Merry went on awkwardly. "I hadn't the faintest idea things were turning out like this."

"I know that, Tom."

"You believe that I didn't know, sir?"

"I know you could not have known."

Tom drew a deep breath of relief.

"I'm glad of that, sir, at least. A lot of the fellows think I knew. They were surprised that I didn't make a great fuss about you, you being a millionaire, sir—as we all thought then—and they were surprised at my being rusty with you, and now this has come out they've jumped to the conclusion that I knew all along—I mean, some of them think so, not my own pals, of course; they know me better."

"I am sorry. It places you in a bad light, then, with some of your schoolfellows?"

"Oh, they can go and eat coke!" said Tom carelessly. "My own pals know me better, and that's all I care about."

"I did not think of that," said Mr. Brandreth musingly.

Tom smiled.

"Well, you couldn't help it, sir. I suppose you wouldn't have lost your money if you could have helped it."

Mr. Brandreth did not reply to that remark. There was another long silence. It was Tom Merry who broke it this time.

"You had something to say to me, Mr. Brandreth—something important?"

"Yes, Tom." The millionaire started from a deep reverie. "Tom, you know I was your father's old friend, and you know that my intentions towards you were kind, though my method of expressing them seems to have irritated you. I am not surprised at that. I should have known Captain Merry's son better, though I had never seen him. But what if I have come here to ask something of you, Tom?"

"Of me, sir?" said Tom, in surprise.

"Yes—to ask you to help me."

"My hat!"

"What would your answer be, Tom?"

"That I'd do anything I could, of course, sir," said Tom, in wonder. "I hope you haven't any doubt about that."

"Yet last Wednesday, only a few days ago, you seemed to dislike me?"

"It's different now, sir," said Tom uneasily. "Now you can't imagine that I want anything from you—now your money's gone."

"Quite so. But, supposing I asked a great deal of you, would you remember that I am your father's old friend, and help me?"

"Certainly. What can I do, sir?"

"Suppose I tell you"—Mr. Brandreth's voice was very low—"that I have not only lost my fortune, but that I am in danger of losing my liberty."

"Your liberty!" stammered Tom, utterly taken aback.

"That my creditors are looking for me, and that unless I escape them, and get out of England quietly, I shall be arrested."

"Great Scott!"

"Because I cannot meet my liabilities," said Mr. Brandreth.

"Oh, sir!"

"And that I want you to help me—to find me some place where I can remain unknown for a couple of days, until all is ready for me to escape——"

There was a long silence again.

CHAPTER 10.

Fatty Wynn Saves the Game.

MR. BRANDRETH'S eyes were fixed upon the junior's face with a penetrating look. Tom's face expressed the thoughts that were in his mind—amazement, alarm, compassion. He had never suspected that it could come to this. Then the one-time millionaire was not only a beggar but a fugitive. Tom Merry's heart melted with pity at the thought.

"Well, what do you say, Tom?" asked Mr. Brandreth at last.

"You don't mean to say—the police?" asked Tom, in a hushed voice. "You—you haven't done anything——"

The dark, bronzed face broke into a smile.

"No; it is not that, Tom. You need not be afraid that you have to deal with a thief or a swindler. It is simply a case of debt—the failure of a company which had every prospect of success—a misfortune that might happen to anyone. But I am responsible, as it happens, and my creditors will show me no mercy. If I can lie low for a couple of days I can leave the country secretly. And once more in South Africa I can make terms—I shall be sure there. Will you help me?"

"Yes, I will," said Tom. "Excuse me for having asked that, sir. I know you're all right, and it's only bad luck."

"You will help me?"

"Yes, rather!" Tom's face was excited now, and his eyes were gleaming. "You were my dad's pal, sir, and it's up to me to do anything I can. I jolly well wish I had plenty of money—that would make it easier. Are you hard up, sir?"

"Have you not heard that I am a beggar?"

"My hat! I—I didn't think you were quite stony, sir," said Tom, in commiseration. "It must be an awful change. Of course, a kid in the Shell doesn't have very much money, as a rule," Tom added, rather ruefully. "All the same, on an occasion like this, I'll try every blessed wheeze to raise some tin. I'll borrow all I can from the fellows—and I've got a lot of things I can sell too. You can depend on me, sir, to raise every penny I can. I'm jolly glad to do it for my pater's pal, too. But the first thing is, somewhere for you to stay, where you won't be spotted. Isn't that it?"

"That's it," said Mr. Brandreth, with a smile. His iron face had grown strangely softer as he watched the eager junior.

Tom Merry wrinkled his boyish brows in thought.

"You can't rough it, of course," he said. "No good your thinking of sticking in the hut in the wood. That's a safe place, but you couldn't stand that. You will have to take a room in some cottage about here. I must think of some lonely place—one of the cottages on Wayland Moor, perhaps. My hat! There's Brooke's place."

"Who is Brooke?"

"He's a day-boy at St. Jim's," Tom Merry explained. "A ripping good sort! He's the chap who brought your telegram over to me. They used to be rich, but his pater had—had bad luck, and they've only got an old house left—a rambling, half-ruined old place on the moor. Why, a giddy regiment could hide there. Brooke would do it for me if I asked him. He could put you in one of the rooms in the ruined wing without a soul being the wiser, and get your meals to you there. Brooke really runs the show there, you know. He works for his living—he's a splendid chap. And—and it will be safe enough till next week. Poor old Brooke!"

"Why, till next week?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Well, next week I'm afraid it will be all up with Brooke's place—he's had bad luck. He told me in confidence, so I can't tell you about it. Only Brooke's the chap I wanted to help when I spoke to you about that thousand quid, sir. Brooke will put you up for a couple of days, if I ask him, sir."

"But his people——"

"There's his parents and his sister," said Tom thoughtfully, "They're ripping people! But, under the circs, it wouldn't do to speak to them. Brooke can simply let you into the unused part of the house. It s a rambling old place, with forty or fifty rooms half in ruins that are never used. You'd be a bit lonely, but it would be quite safe."

"And Brooke would do this—for you?"

"I think so, sir. He's a good sort, and we're great pals. I'll ask him. He's at the Gramar School now, watching the match, and he'll come this way home. And he won't be long, either, as he's got to get back to work. Do you like the idea, sir?"

"I place myself in your hands, Tom."

"Then I'll speak to Brooke about it."

Tom Merry looked down the lane towards the turning that led to the Grammar School.

It was only a few minutes before Dick Brooke came in sight, striding quickly along the lane.

"I'll go and meet him, and explain to him, sir," said Tom.

"Very good."

Tom hurried away up the lane, the millionaire looking after him, with a very strange expression on his face

"Hallo!" said Brooke cheerily, as Tom Merry joined him in the lane. "Seen your friend?"

"Yes," said Tom; "and I want to ask a big favour of you, Brooke." He hurriedly explained the situation, Brooke listening in wonder. "You see, the poor old chap's right down on his luck, and he's got to lie low for a couple of days before he can clear off. Of course, he's done nothing wrong—you understand that. It's just bad luck."

"I understand," said Brooke.

"If you could shove him into some corner of the old house for a couple of days," said Tom anxiously. "Do you think you could do it?"

Brooke nodded.

"I'd do more than that for you, Tom—you've been a good pal to me It will be quite easy. Nobody ever goes into the ruined wing, and he can be put up there quite easily. I'll shove a few things in. Of course he will have to rough it."

"Oh, yes, that's understood. Come and tell him so," said Tom.

"Righto!"

They joined Mr. Brandreth in the lane. Five minutes later, Brooke and the South African magnate were gone, and Tom Merry was hastening back towards the Grammar School. He was not wanted for the present; and there was no reason why he should not finish the cricket match—if there was yet time. Brooke would do all that could be done for Mr. Brandreth.

Tom Merry ran all the way to the Grammar School, and arrived breathless on the cricket ground. Jack Blake and Hammond were at the wickets; the St. Jim's innings was not finished yet, but it was just on the finish.

"Last man's in," said Monty Lowther dolefully. "Hammond's been at the wicket only five minutes, Tommy."

"Yaas, wathah—and you're too late, old chap," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"Well, it can't be helped. How's the score?"

"Eighty—and there goes Hammond's wicket."

St. Jim's were all down for eighty. It was a single-innings match. The hopes of winning on the part of the St. Jim's fellows sank down to zero.

"Never mind," said Figgins, "we'll beat 'em in the bowling. Fatty old man, you're to give us the hat trick, do you hear? If you do, we'll feed you up to the chin with jam-tarts when we get back to St. Jim's."

Fatty Wynn grinned.

"What-ho!" he said emphatically.

St. Jim's went on to field, and the Grammarian innings opened with twelve runs for Gordon Gay in the first over. The second over brought the score up to twenty. The Saints looked decidedly blue, and the Grammarians were grinning cheerfully. They wanted only eighty-one to win; and they fully expected to get them with half a dozen wickets to spare.

But they had reckoned without Fatty Wynn. The fat Fourth-Former received beseeching looks from the field as he went on to bowl the third over. Fatty Wynn was a wonderful bowler when he was at his best, and he soon showed that he was at his best now. Gordon Gay received the ball, and met with a surprise. There was a crash of a falling wicket.

"How's that?" roared Figgings, in huge delight.

"Bai Jove! Out!"

"Well bowled, Fatty!"

The most dangerous bat on the Grammarian side was out. Wootton major took his place, and the next ball knocked his middle stump away. Then came in Frank Monk—to receive only one ball, which finished him. The St. Jim's crowd roared then.

"Bravo, Fatty! The hat trick! Hurray!"

"Bwavo, deah boy!" yelled Arthur Augustus, clapping his noble hands. "Bai Jove, I couldn't have done bettah than that myself! Huwway!"

Lane came in next, and faced the bowling a little nervously. His nervousness was well-founded, for Jack Blake caught him out off the next ball. The Saints yelled. Four wickets in succession! They could have hugged Fatty Wynn!

After that, the Grammarians dealt most carefully with Fatty Wynn, happy only if they could save their "sticks" without scoring off his bowling. The runs piled up slowly, and at seventy the Grammar School were eight down.

"We shall do it, aftah all, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "Bai Jove, pewwaps I had bettah go on to bowl now! I have wathah a feelin' that I should perform the hat twick, you know, if there were enough wickets left."

But Arthur Augustus was quite alone in his opinion that he had better go on to bowl. The bowling was left to Fatty Wynn and Redfern in turns. Last man came in when the score was seventy-eight; and the Grammarians wanted three runs to win, with one more wicket to fall. And last man promptly captured one.

"One more to tie, two more to win," said Gordon Gay. "We shall do it!"

But Fatty Wynn was bowling again, and he did not mean to let them do it. The fat Fourth-Former of St. Jim's gripped the ball hard, and took a little run, and turned himself into a kind of amateur catherine-wheel, and the round, red ball came down like a four-point-seven shell, and——

Clatter!

"How's that?" yelled all St. Jim's.

"Out!"

"Hurray!"

And the Saints rushed on the field in a crowd, and hugged Fatty Wynn. Figgins and Kerr took the fat junior's arms and marched him off in triumph.

"Ripping!" said Figgins ecstatically "You can always depend on the New House to pull a game out of the fire."

"I say, Figgy——"

"It was ripping, Fatty!"

"Yes, but——"

"Gorgeous, old son," said Figgins, slapping him violently on the back. "Simply topping!"

"Yes, I know; but——"

"There are no buts in the case," said Figgins. "It was top-hole!"

"But—but I mean, don't forget——"

"I don't forget that you've bowled like a giddy cherub, Fatty!" chortled Figgins. "We sha'n't forget that, Fatty!"

"I don't mean that!" roared Fatty. "I mean, don't forget——"

"Don't forget what, then?"

"Don't forget about the jam-tarts!"

"The what?"

"The jam-tarts!" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "Didn't I do the hat trick?"

Figgins burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! I'd forgotten, but it's all right! My dear old porpoise, you shall have all the jam-tarts you can devour, if we have to carry you home afterwards. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally think Fatty has earned them."

And when the eleven returned to St. Jim's, Fatty Wynn did not allow his enthusiastic friends to forget. He made a bee-line for the tuckshop, and for the next quarter of an hour he was very, very happy, and considerably sticky.

CHAPTER 11.
Raising the Wind.

TOM MERRY had a problem to solve.

It was an old, old problem—raising the wind.

But it was not a question, as it sometimes was, of raising funds for tea in the study, or for a picnic, or a half-holiday's excursion.

He did not require a half-sovereign, or a quid, or even a five-pound note. He wanted all he could raise. He had promised to do his best for Mr. Brandreth, and he intended to keep his word.

Manners and Lowther observed the thoughtful frown on his face as the cricketers came home from the Grammar School. The Terrible Three did not join the revellers in the tuckshop. Tom Merry went directly to his study, and Manners and Lowther accompanied him. They saw that something was "up," and they wanted to know what it was.

"Has Mr. Brandreth gone back to London?" Lowther asked, as they entered the study.

"No!"

"How did you get away from him, then?"

"I'm going to tell you chaps about it," said Tom. "You're bound to know, because I want you to back me up. But it's not to go any further."

"Hallo, a giddy secret?" said Monty Lowther. "Wait till I've put the kettle on. Then it will get boiling while you unbosom yourself."

"This is serious, Monty."

"So am I," said Monty Lowther imperturbably. "I suppose we want tea, even if Mr. Brandreth has been telling you deadly secrets. What has he confided to you—that he made his fortune with illicit diamond buying—I.D.B., they call it in South African novels, I think. If that's it——"

"Stop being funny, and listen," said Tom, closing the door of the study carefully. "It's serious. The old chap has not only lost his money, but he's in debt, and his creditors are looking for him."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Manners, and Lowther gave a whistle.

"That's how the matter stands," said Tom. "He's stony—right up a tree."

"You don't mean to say that he's liable to be—to be arrested!" gasped Lowther.

"It's not so bad as that yet. There's no warrant out for him," said Tom. "But he thinks there may be, and, anyway, he wants to keep his whereabouts dark till he can clear out of England. When he gets home to Cape Colony again he'll be able to make terms with them."

"I don't quite see that."

"Well, I don't, either; but that's what he said, and I suppose he knows. I didn't ask for details. It was enough for me to know that my pater's old chum was in trouble, and I could help him," said Tom. "I asked Brooke to put him up in the ruined wing in their old house, and Brooke's taken him home."

"Good old Brooke!"

"And now I've got to raise some money," said Tom. "You see, he's right on the rocks, and he hasn't enough to take him back to Cape Colony."

"Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen!" sighed Monty Lowther, and he ran on in a Shakespearian strain:

"But yesterday the word of Cæsar might
Have stood against the world. Now lies he here,
And none so poor to do him reverence!"

"Will you cheese it?" roared Tom Merry. "I tell you this is a serious matter, you ass!"

"Well, Shakespeare's serious enough, too," protested Monty Lowther. "But I'll be mum. The question before the meeting, then, is to raise the wind. Luckily, I had a postal-order from my uncle this morning, and if it isn't necessary to pay Gussy his half-quid, I'll contribute ten bob exactly."

"And you can put me down for all I've got," said Manners, "and that's half-a-crown. I shall have to do without my new films till next week."

"Blow your new films!" said Tom Merry "The trouble is, that there isn't much time for raising money. No time to write home. The only thing I can think of is to hold a sale of goods."

"Oh!" said Lowther.

"I've got some photographs we could put in a sale," said Manners thoughtfully. "They're jolly good ones. I don't suppose anybody would give any money for them, though."

"That's rather a drawback in a sale, isn't it?" said Lowther solemnly. "There's my last term's topper, though."

Tom Merry was not listening to Lowther's funny remarks. He had taken a pencil and a sheet of paper, and was making a list, wrinkling his brows over it. Lowther looked over his shoulder, and whistled as he read out.

"Bike, writing-desk, football, cricket-bat, set of foils—— Great Scott! You're not going to break up the happy home in that way, Tommy?"

"I am," said Tom.

"How are you going to play cricket without a bat?" asked Lowther. "Have you invented a new system of doing it with a stump or a pen-holder?"

"I can borrow a bat, I suppose. I gave a guinea for that bat, and it's a good one, and ought to fetch something. My bike has seen service, but it's in good condition, and the tyres are nearly new," said Tom thoughtfully. "And the foils——"

"I say, I use those foils, you know."

"You can go and eat coke. I ought to be able to raise a good bit on that list," said Tom. "I shall think of other things to put down, too. My watch is worth something. If any fellow wants a watch it's worth a couple of quid to him."

Manners and Lowther stared at their chum. Considering the way Tom Merry had acted on Mr. Brandreth's first visit the change was startling. But Tom Merry was in earnest. He was making a complete list of all the things he could do without, and a good many things that it would be difficult to do without. Not the slightest thought of himself seemed to trouble his mind. Tom Merry was not the kind of fellow to do things by halves.

"I say," Lowther remarked, becoming serious at last, "this is a bit rotten for you, Tom. You won't be able to get those things back. Your allowance won't cover anything of the sort."

"My allowance is going to be mortgaged," said Tom cheerily. "I'm going to ask Mr. Railton to make me an advance on it. He'll do that, I know, when I tell him I want the money for a special purpose. I shall have to do without an allowance for the rest of the term."

"My hat!"

"Well, I get tips, you know. I sha'n't be stony all the time," said Tom. "It's no good doing things by halves. This man was my pater's chum at school, and I'm going to stand by him the best I know now."

"We're going to help, then," said Lowther. "Hang it all, we always share and share alike. If you're going to sell your things you can sell mine, too."

"And mine," said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That wouldn't be fair on you chaps," he said. "Mr. Brandreth is nothing to you. It's up to me, but it's not up to you."

"Rats!"

"We're standing by you, Tom," said Manners decidedly. "Put my camera on the list."

"Not the presentation one?"

"Yes; the old one isn't worth much."

"Can't, Manners, old man; it's too thick. You got that blessed camera for risking your giddy life."

"It's going in the list, if your bike goes," said Manners firmly. "Levison's had his eye on it for a long time. He takes photographs. If I can raise the money later he'll let me have it back at double the price. You know Levison. So it won't be gone for good. Put the camera in, I tell you."

"And my bat," said Lowther. "If you can borrow a bat I can borrow one, too, or I'll borrow the same one for that matter. And my writing-case, and my fountain-pen."

"Oh, I say, Monty——"

"Shove 'em down!"

Tom Merry hesitated, looking at his chums. But Manners and Lowther were in deadly earnest.

The Terrible Three always shared alike, and held funds in common. When one was in funds all three were in funds. When one was stony, all were stony. And when one was in a fix, all three were in a fix. If Tom Merry was to be sold up, Manners and Lowther were to be sold up, too, and there wasn't the slightest hesitation on their part.

"It's awfully decent of you chaps," said Tom, at last. "It comes jolly hard on you, though, especially about your camera, Manners."

"Bosh!" said Manners.

"It will save him a lot in films if he doesn't have a camera," said Lowther. "There's a silver lining to every cloud, you know. And if I part with my fountain-pen it will save the ink I used to spill filling it. Shove 'em all in. Why, we shall be able to raise twenty quid, I shouldn't wonder."

Tom Merry finished his list. It was a long one by the time he had jotted down all the articles that could be raised for the sale.

"When's the sale coming off?" asked Lowther.

"Immediately after tea," said Tom. "We'll get the things into the common-room while the fellows are having tea, and start as soon as they're finished."

"What about our tea?"

"Oh, you can have a snack! No time to waste feeding. I'll write out a couple of sale notices—one for each House. We want the New House fellows at the sale. Take that kettle off. It's boiling. No time for tea. Just a snack! Now, buck up!"

And the Terrible Three bucked up, making preparations for the sale, and while the other fellows were in their studies at tea, Tom Merry posted up the notices, and then the goods were transported to the common-room.

CHAPTER 12.
Sale Now On!

"BAI Jove! Look there, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form was the first to spot the notice on the board in Tom Merry's hand. He turned his eyeglass upon it in great astonishment, and as word passed round a crowd of juniors gathered to read.

The notice surprised them. Fellows came from far and near to read it. In the New House a similar crowd had gathered round a similar notice.

"NOTICE!

"A sale will be held in the junior common-room, School House, commencing at seven o'clock precisely. No reserve. Must clear! Gentlemen in need of bicycles, bats, rackets, fountain-pens, desks, footers, foils, etc., are invited to roll up in their hundreds, and take advantage of this grand opportunity.

"Terms strictly cash, right on the nail!

"Signed: T. MERRY, H. MANNERS, M. LOWTHER."

"Selling up the happy home, it seems," remarked Jack Blake. "Why, it's close on seven now. May as well trot in."

"Yaas, wathah."

Nearly all the Lower School trotted in. Figgins & Co. came over with a crowd of New House fellows. There was a buzz of surprise from the fellows as they crowded into the junior common-room.

The preparations for the sale had been made there.

In one corner of the common-room were stacked the articles for sale, and a queer heterogeneous stack it was. A table had been placed in front of the stack, and Monty Lowther stood at a desk placed on the table, with a ruler in his hand. Lowther was evidently the official salesman. Tom Merry and Manners were seated at the table to assist. The Terrible Three were waiting for the crowd to arrive.

When the crowd arrived a shower of excited inquiries poured upon the chums of the Shell. Everybody wanted to know what was the little game, and everybody wanted to know at the same time.

"Sure, and is it a joke intirely?" demanded Reilly.

"What's the game, deah boys?"

"What are you selling the giddy home up for?"

"Cash!" said Monty Lowther. "Strictly cash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen," Monty Lowther rapped on the desk with the ebony ruler—"gentlemen, the sale is now commencing!"

"But what's the little game?" roared Kangaroo.

"It isn't a little game, it's an auction. Owing to a dearth of the needful we are selling up the happy home until more prosperous times. No reserve. Everything is going for what it will fetch—in cash! Gentlemen who want to buy on credit are requested to clear off at once and not worry."

"Bai Jove!"

"Gentlemen who are in funds, and who are eager for big bargains, are invited to roll up. Hallo! Glad to see you here, Cutts. Seniors are as welcome as juniors, or as the flowers in May."

Cutts of the Fifth had looked in with Gilmore and Lefevre. Several other seniors had come in, and there was an army of juniors of the Shell, the Fourth, and the Third. The Terrible Three surveyed the increasing crowd with satisfaction, and for once they were glad to see Cutts of the Fifth. Cutts had plenty of money, and he had a keen eye to a bargain. Cutts was very likely to make purchases, if he could get anything for half its value.

Rap—rap—rap! came Lowther's ruler on the table.

"Gentlemen, the first item on the list is a handsome jigger. Tom Merry's governess gave fifteen quid for it. What offers for a handsome jigger costing fifteen quids——"

"Soveweigns, Lowthah!"

"Quids!"

"Soveweigns!"

"D'Arcy offers fifteen sovereigns," said the auctioneer coolly. "Going at fifteen sovereigns to Arthur Adolphus D'Arcy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I didn't—I wasn't—I nevah! I was merely——"

"How much do you offer, then?"

"I didn't offah anythin'. I——"

"Then shut up, and don't interrupt the sale!" said Lowther severely. "What offers for a handsome jigger?"

"A quid!" said Gore of the Shell.

"The tyres alone are worth more than a quid. A quid I am offered," said Lowther. "What advances on a quid for a handsome jigger?'

"Thirty bob," said Levison.

"Thirty boblets I am offered for a handsome jigger, costing fifteen quid. Gentlemen, what offers? What advance on thirty miserable, disgusting boblets for a handsome——"

"Two quid!"

"Two-five!"

"Two-ten!"

"Three quid!"

"Three quidlets I am offered for a handsome jigger, which has had the distinction of being ridden by the captain of the Shell! Three quids! Going!" Lowther rapped the table. "Going! Gone—for three quids! Gore, the bike is yours! Kindly hand over three quids to Tom Merry, and take your property!"

Gore grinned, and extracted the three sovereigns. He was in funds that day, and never had he had an opportunity of better investing his funds. Tom Merry slipped the three sovereigns into a little bag on the table before him, and Gore wheeled the bike away. The auctioneer passed on to the next item.

"Gentlemen, a handsomely-bound volume of King Georgie, the boy who always told the truth! I recommend Levison to purchase this volume, which will be useful to him. Gentlemen, what offers for King Georgie, a handsomely-bound volume, with gilt edges, and no end of illustrations in colour? Slightly soiled by having been used as a foot-rest, but otherwise in perfect condition. What offers?"

"A ha'penny," said Mellish.

"Gentlemen, I am offered one halfpenny for King Georgie. Going—going—gone! King Georgie goes to Mellish for one halfpenny! Pay up, Mellish!"

"Here, I say, I don't want the blessed thing!" said Mellish. "I was only joking!"

"Jokes are not allowed at auctions. Pay up! Take him by the neck, somebody, and squeeze a ha'penny out of him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish paid up the halfpenny, and indemnified himself by kicking King Georgie across the common-room. The sale went on. Monty Lowther knocked down his own bike for one pound fifteen, and Manners's bike followed for two pounds. There was plenty of enthusiasm in the bidding, but a shortage of cash, which prevented the bids from rising high. The property was going at ruinous prices.

Rap—rap—rap!

"A handsome presentation camera! What offers? Presented to Henry Manners, Esq., on the occasion of his saving the life of a kidlet or something of the sort in a burning house. First-class camera—check action, gilt edges, and ball bearings complete," said the enterprising auctioneer. "What offers for a presentation camera, with heroic associations thrown in without extra charge?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! It's weally too bad to part with that camewah, Mannahs," said Arthur Augustus. "It was pwesented to you for savin' the life of a little gal—or boy—I forget which——"

"Whether boy or girl not guaranteed," pursued the salesman cheerfully. "Presented to Henry Manners for saving the life of a kidlet—first-class camera, with ball bearings, Dunlop tyres, cane handle, gold nib, and piano accompaniment complete!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's weally too wotten——"

"Nothing rotten about this camera, presented to Henry Manners for emulating the boy who stood on the burning deck, whence all but he had bunked——"

"Cheese it!" growled Manners.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy held a hurried whispered consultation with his chums. For what reason the Terrible Three wanted to raise money they did not know, but they knew that the reason must be serious to make Manners part with his presentation camera.

D'Arcy hurriedly suggested buying it with a common fund, to be re-presented to Manners afterwards, and his comrades jumped at the idea.

"Ten bob!" Levison was saying.

"Fifteen bob!"

"One pound, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, acting as spokesman for the hastily-formed syndicate of juniors who were to purchase the camera with that laudable intention of giving it back to Manners.

"Twenty-five bob!" said Levison.

"Thirtay shillin's!"

Levison scowled. He was at the end of his resources. He would have been very glad to bag that camera at a tenth part its value, but it was not to be. But Cutts of the Fifth chimed in now:

"Two pounds!"

"Two guineas!" said D'Arcy.

"Two-ten!" said Cutts.

"Thwee pounds!"

"Three pounds ten!"

"Four pounds!"

There was a buzz of keen interest now. Cutts of the Fifth was looking annoyed. He meant to have that camera. He had heard D'Arcy's excited whispering to his chums, and had the amiable intention of defeating his little project if he could. And he knew that the camera was worth ten pounds at least.

"Four quids I am offered!" said Lowther, rapping the table. "Any advance on four quids!"

"Five!" said Cutts.

"Six!" said D'Arcy

"Hooray! Go it!" said the auctioneer. "Six I am offered!"

"Guineas!" said Cutts.

"Six guineas I am offered for a presentation camera, with heroic associations complete. Going at six guineas!"

"Seven!"

"Going at seven guineas! Going—going! Did you say eight, Cutts?" inquired the auctioneer politely.

"No, I didn't!" growled Cutts savagely.

"Gone at seven guineas to Arthur Adolphus Aubrey Plantagenet D'Arcy, who will kindly step up to the table and hand out the filthy lucre!"

"Just a minute, deah boy! I haven't waised it all yet, but I'll settle befoah the sale is ovah!"

"Right! Gentlemen, a gold fountain-pen! What offers?" offers?"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to his chums. "We've got to waise seven guineas, deah boys. Scout wound and waise the tin. Luckay I had a fivah this mornin' fwom my patah, wasn't it? We want two pound two as well!"

Two pounds two shillings were collected, and added to the fiver, and presented to Tom Merry at the table. Arthur Augustus took the camera. The Terrible Three were orightening up now. Quite a little sum was being raised, after all. But the next articles went at low figures; money seemed to be running short among the bidders. Shillings came in, but half-sovereigns were very scarce, and pounds seemed non-existent.

"A handsome guinea bat, going for two bob! Gentlemen, you will not let a handsome guinea-pig—I mean, a guinea bat—go for two bob! Gentlemen, I appeal to you as sportsmen! Going—going—gone for two bob!"

And Levison secured Tom Merry's bat, with the certainty of re-selling it later for five or six times as much.

"A splendid match footer, in good condition, going for one-and-six—two shillings! Any advance on two shillings! Gone at two shillings to Master Reilly!"

And so on with the rest. Monty Lowther was certainly an energetic salesman, and if the juniors had been overflowing with money the bidding would probably have been brisker.

The last item was a set of photographs taken by Manners. The bidders did not seem in a hurry to start.

"Gentlemen, a superb set of photographs, giving views of St. Jim's from all points of the compass, with photographs of the Head and other interesting individuals; portrait of the Head as seen from the south——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you say ten shillings, Kangaroo?"

"No fear!"

"What offers, gentlemen? Don't let me finish this sale with articles left on my hands, gentlemen! Superb set of photographs, with views of the Head from every point of the compass!"

"Tuppence!"

"Tuppence-ha'penny!"

"Going at tuppence-ha'penny, a superb set of photographs! Going to Mr. Glyn for twopence-halfpenny—gone!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Glyn, handing out two pennies and a halfpenny. "Manners, old man, I make you a present of a superb set of photographs, giving views of St. Jim's from all aspects!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners grinned, and slipped the photographs into his pocket. They were all, as Lowther remarked, that were saved from the wreck. The rest of the property of the Terrible Three had disappeared, and they proceeded to disappear themselves, to count up in the study the result of the sale.

CHAPTER 13.

A Surprising Revelation.

"TWENTY quids!" said Tom Merry.

"Good egg!" said Manners and Lowther heartily. "It's a giddy fortune!"

Tom Merry nodded with satisfaction.

"Of course, the things were worth an awful lot more than that," he said. "But I'm jolly glad we've been able to raise twenty quidlets. I've had five pounds from Mr. Railton in advance on my allowance. I knew he'd turn up a trump. That makes a total of twenty-five pounds to hand over to Mr. Brandreth."

"A tidy little sum, though it won't seem much to him after what he's been used to," Monty Lowther remarked. "If it sees him through his difficulties, though, it will be all right. That's the main thing."

"When are you going to see him, Tom?"

"Well, we've arranged that I'm not to go over to-morrow, in case of attracting attention to the fact that he's at Brooke's place," Tom explained. "I don't know whether that's rather overdoing the caution, but that's what we've fixed. I'm to see him on Monday before he departs for good."

And Tom Merry locked the money up in safety.

The study wore a denuded aspect. A good many things the juniors were accustomed to were missing. Some of them had been purchased by their friends, and the fellows looked in that evening to explain that they could have them back at the same price if they wanted to later. But a good many of the articles had gone to bargain-hunters, like Levison, or to fellows with whom the Terrible Three were not on particularly chummy terms—and those articles, of course, were gone for good.

"Blessed if I can understand my camera fetching such an awful lot," Manners remarked, as they sat down to a frugal supper of roast chestnuts. "What on earth did Gussy want with it? He doesn't even know how to use a camera. Seven guineas was an awful lot of money, even for Gussy."

The explanation of that extravagant purchase was to come on the morrow. Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus and his friends were keeping their own counsel, and chuckling over the surprise they had in store for Manners.

The next day was Sunday, a very quiet day at St. Jim's, and that day, at least, Tom Merry did not miss his cricket-bat. After morning chapel, when the Terrible Three came into the School House, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy approached them with a mysterious expression upon his aristocratic face.

"Goin' up to your studay, Mannahs, deah boy?" he asked.

"Eh?" said Manners, surprised by the question.

"There's a little surpwise waitin' there," said D'Arcy. "By the way, what were you fellows sellin' off all your pwoperty last night for?"

"Cash!"

"Wats! I mean, what was the weason? Are you feahfully hard up?"

"We wanted to raise the wind," said Tom Merry.

"But what——" began Manners.

"Comin', Blake?" called out Arthur Augustus; and he hurried away before Manners could question him further.

"Blessed if I know what he's driving at," said Manners, puzzled. "But we may as well go up to the study and see."

A parcel on the table greeted the eyes of the Terrible Three as they entered their study. It was addressed to Manners, in Blake's handwriting. Manners, considerably perplexed, opened it.

The presentation camera was inside.

"My camera!" Manners exclaimed, in astonishment.

"There's a note with it," said Tom Merry.

The note was in D'Arcy's elegant hand. It ran:

"With kind regards from the Fourth Form!"

The Terrible Three stared at one another. Lowther whistled, and Tom Merry smiled. Manners looked perplexed.

"So that was what that champion duffer was bidding against Cutts for," said Tom Merry. "He's a good little ass!"

"But I can't take it," said Manners. "It's impossible. It's awfully good of Gussy; but I can't take it, all the same."

And Manners hurried away in search of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He did not succeed in finding him until the juniors were going in to dinner, and then he collared the swell of St. Jim's in the passage.

"Gussy, old man, I'm awfully obliged——" he began.

"That's all wight, deah boy."

Manners shook his head.

"I can't! The sale was business, you know. I can't let you give me the camera."

"It's a pwesentation, with the kind wegard of the Fourth Form," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy explained. "It's up to you to accept it, deah boy."

"Well, I'll take it, on condition that when I'm in funds you let me return the money you gave for it," said Manners. "I can't take it, really, on any other condition—though I'm awfully grateful."

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"All serene!" said Blake. "We'll let it go at that. But we couldn't possibly let you lose the camera, Manners, old man, when you got it for saving the life of a kidlet."

"Thanks awfully!" said Manners. "I sha'n't forget this."

And Manners' face was certainly much brighter after he knew that his camera was safe. That camera was the apple of his eye, and it had been a wrench to part with it.

On Monday morning Tom Merry looked out for Brooke when he arrived at the school. He wanted news of Mr Brandreth.

"All serene at home?" Tom asked, as he met the day-boy in the Form-room passage.

Brooke nodded.

"Right as rain! Mr. Brandreth is fixed up quite comfy in the deserted wing. I've told my people—they're quite agreeable."

"I've raised twenty-five quid. We've had a sale," said Tom.

"My hat! You must have had a pretty good clearance to get a sum of money like that," said Brooke, in astonishment.

"Sold up all the happy home, root and branch!" said Tom, laughing. "Did Mr. Brandreth give you any message for me?"

"Yes. He's going to see you to-day—after lessons."

"Good! You can take a note for me this morning when you go home to dinner, with the money in it."

"Right-ho!"

When the day-boy left St. Jim's after morning lessons, he carried the note and the cash.

He found Tom Merry on the cricket-ground when he came back for afternoon classes. Tom Merry joined him at once.

"I told him just the facts," said Brooke; "and it was a jolly decent thing for you to do, my son, whether you admit it or not. He's coming over here about six."

"Coming here?" said Tom, in surprise. "But—but it would be safer——"

"So I told him, but he said he'd come. If he wasn't a friend of yours, I should think it was all spoof about his having to keep dark," said Brooke

"Oh, no; it's right as rain!" said Tom confidently. "Why should he tell me it was so if it wasn't so?"

The Terrible Three were at tea in the study when the millionaire came. There was a knock at the study door, and Tom Merry jumped up to open it.

Mr. Brandreth walked in.

Monty Lowther politely placed a chair for the visitor, and then slipped out of the study with Manners. They guessed that Mr. Brandreth wanted to be alone with their chum.

"Is it all right now, sir?" Tom asked anxiously. "We did the best we could, and my chums helped me like Trojans.'

Mr. Brandreth smiled.

"It is all right," he said. "Tom, I want to ask you to forgive me."

"Forgive you, sir?" said Tom, with a smile. "I don't quite catch on. If you mean about that rotten—ahem!—about that condition in your will, that's all over and forgotten. I'm sorry I cut up rusty about it!"

"Not only that, Tom. I have deceived you!"

"Deceived me, sir?"

"Yes."

"I—I don't understand!"

"I did it to test you, and I have been satisfied with the test. You have been tried, and have been true," said Mr. Brandreth, in a voice full of emotion. "You are what I have wished to find you—the true son of my old comrade. Forgive me for putting you to such a test, but I was harassed by doubts and suspicions. I have seen the seamy side of life too closely, my boy, to be able to retain much faith in my fellow-men. I shall make my will again, Tom, and you will be heir without condition. And, meanwhile, you must let me act towards you as your father's old friend."

Tom Merry looked at him blankly.

"But I don't understand!" he gasped. "You—you are ruined; you are a fugitive——"

"I am nothing of the kind. I am a millionaire, Tom."

"But—then that report in the papers——"

"I spread that report myself—for my own reasons. For the same reasons I told you what I did on Saturday."

"It was not true?"

"Not a word of it."

"You are not ruined?"

"No."

"You are not in hiding?'

"No."

Tom Merry's face set hard. The millionaire held out his hand, but the captain of the Shell did not take it. There was a long silence in the study.

CHAPTER 14.
At Last!

"TOM!"

Mr. Brandreth broke the silence at last. His voice was strangely changed from the hard, incisive tones Tom had known before. It was soft, and almost pleading.

"Tom, can you forgive that little deception?"

Tom Merry drew back.

"No, I can't," he said. "It was rotten! Do you know what you've made a lot of the fellows think of me? That I was standoffish towards you because I knew in advance that you were ruined!"

"They will know the truth now."

"I—I suppose so. But—but what did you do this for? What did you make a fool of me like this for?"

"It was to test you. I couldn't trust you, Tom. It has been my curse that I could trust no one!"

"I see. You expected that when I supposed you were poor I should turn my back on you—that I shouldn't think you worth the trouble of helping?"

"I did not expect it, but I feared it, Tom. That report of my ruin has shown me how little faith I could place in many whom I have called my friends. If Captain Merry's son had turned out to be base and mercenary too, I think it would have broken my heart. Thank Heaven, you stood the test, and saved me from losing all faith and hope in my fellow-creatures!"

Tom Merry looked at him quickly. The millionaire's voice had faltered; the iron face was working, and there was a glimmer of tears in the hard eyes. Tom Merry felt his anger melting away.

"And—and you did all this to prove to your satisfaction whether I was a mercenary rascal or not?" Tom said slowly.

"I did. I hoped it would prove you honourable and true—as it has done. You did not turn your back on me," said Mr. Brandreth softly. "Believing me to be a ruined man, you forgot your causes of dislike against me—you helped me. And I know what you did on Saturday—I have heard it all from Brooke. You did all that, believing that I was in need, without a thought for yourself. Tom, I believe in you and trust you now. Cannot you forgive an old man?"

Tom Merry was not proof against that appeal. He grasped the outstretched hand of the millionaire.

"Friends now?" said Mr. Brandreth, with a smile.

"If you like," said Tom. "But there's one thing—I don't want your money, sir. That's got to be understood."

The millionaire smiled.

"You won't refuse to let your father's friend be a friend to you, Tom? In the first place, I know about Brooke's trouble. The old man told me. It was Brooke whom you wished to help?"

"Yes," said Tom eagerly.

"I know the facts now, and I have already taken up that bill. I saw to that to-day. Brooke's home is safe!"

"Oh, that's ripping!" Tom Merry exclaimed, his eyes dancing. "That's splendid of you, sir! Old Brooke will be jolly glad of that! And I'm jolly glad, too! It was a ripping thing to do!"

"And you must let me replace all that you parted with on Saturday, Tom. I insist upon it. You cannot refuse me!"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Tom, my boy, I am an old man, and I have no children. You are all that is left in the world for me to care for. Don't disappoint me. Let me be your friend, as I was your father's friend!"

"I can't say 'No' to that," said Tom. "We'll let bygones be bygones, then, if you choose, sir!"

"That's all I ask, Tom!"

. . . . . .

When Manners and Lowther came back to the study, they found Tom Merry and Mr. Brandreth chatting in the most amicable way in the world. The millionaire stayed some time at St. Jim's that day, and there was a feast in Tom Merry's study to celebrate his visit, to which the chums of Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. came, as well as Kangaroo and Reilly, and as many more fellows as could cram themselves into the study.

The millionaire seemed as happy and light-hearted as any junior there, and after he had departed the general verdict was that he was a jolly good fellow.

Tom Merry proved, after all, the favourite and the heir of a millionaire; and Levison of the Fourth asked him, with a great desire for knowledge, how he could possibly have known all the time that the report of the millionaire's ruin was unfounded. A question to which Tom Merry replied only with a laugh.

Levison knew the facts, but did not believe them, priding himself on being too worldly-wise for that; but Tom Merry's chums knew that he had been Tried and True!

THE END.

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.

Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

"DROWNED" AT SEA.

He had come down in life, and it was his first experience aboard-ship as deck-hand.

"Hi, you!" cried the mate. "Sing out to them below to heave round the salt-water pump."

The green hand seized what he thought was one of the latest improvements of modern science, and jammed the nozzle into his mouth.

"I say, below there——"

He got no further, for a 20-h.p. jet of water gurgled upwards, and the next moment he was reposing on his back, wondering if it were possible to live after such a shock.

Slowly he went and approached the mate.

"You're too funny for me on this boat!" he cried. "It's a pity a fellow can't speak through your blithering speaking-tubes without being spanked by half-a-ton of salt water!"

"Speaking-tubes!" roared the mate. "Why, you unutterable idiot, that was the hose-pipe you were trying to bellow down!"—Sent in by Marcus Tozer, New Zealand.

RIDDLES.

Question: What is the best way to make a coat last?

Answer: By making the trousers and vest first.

Question: What three letters are required most by statesmen?

Answer: A Y Z (a wise head).

Question: Why is the letter "M" like pain?

Answer: It makes one mone (moan).

Question: Why is a black man out for a holiday like a bandy-legged man?

Answer: The negro's out (knee grows out).

Question: If I was in the sun, and you were out of it, what would the sun become?

Answer: Sin.

Question: How may a man discern a cow in a flock of sheep?

Answer: By his eyesight.

—Sent in by Stanley Hards, Plumstead.

CASTING A REFLECTION.

Bootblack: "Shine, sir?"

Ugly Gentleman: "No, thanks."

Bootblack: "Shine yer boots so yer can see yer face in 'em?"

Ugly Gentleman: "No, thanks."

Bootblack: "Coward!"—Sent in by W. C. Webb, Stafford.

HER CHOICE.

A little girl was invited to tea at a house in which a child about her own age was present. Tea being over, the two little girls happened to be left alone. On the table was placed a large dish of plums, an extraordinarily large one being visible. The two youngsters approached the table.

"Is oo greedy?" asked the little guest, after a longing look at the fruit.

"No," answered the other, "I'se not greedy."

"Well," said the little one, "oo chocse first."—Sent in by Mrs. E. S. Thacker, Leicester.

NOTEWORTHY.

Mr. Pattle arrived at the door of his house a good deal after midnight. Eventually he got tired of trying to find the keyhole with his latchkey, and he sat down contentedly and deliberately on the doorstep. Immediately there floated into the cold night air strains of music that set his heart awhirl. Rapturously he listened, and when the local policeman came along, he invited him to listen, too.

"It's wonderful how they have improved these talking-machines!" he said. "Just hark at that! It must be Melba's latest 'Reverie in F' that I saw advertised in the 'Daily Mail.' It's beautiful—beautiful!"

But the policeman, though perhaps less susceptible to the charms of music, had a keener perception of fact.

"I'm sorry to have to disturb you," he said, "but one of my duties is to prevent cruelty to animals. It ain't no talking-machine you're listening to. You're sitting on the cat!"—Sent in by M. Kincaid, Glasgow.

CRUELLY HINTED.

Artist: "Do you think it is possible for a man who is clever with his brush to make a living these days?"

Cruel Cynic: "Yes, if he is a bootblack."—Sent in by George Cook, Fulham.

CURIOUS.

A pin has a head, but has no hair;
A clock has a face, but no mouth there.
Needles have eyes, but they cannot see;
A fly has a trunk, without lock or key.
A timepiece may lose, but cannot win;
A cornfield dimples without a chin.
A hill has no leg, but has a foot;
A wineglass a stem, but not a root.
A watch has hands, but no thumb or finger;
A boot has a tongue, but is no singer.
Rivers run though they have no feet;
A saw has teeth, but it does not eat.
Ash-trees have keys, but never a lock;
And baby crows, without being a cock.

—Sent in by Robt. P. Charleston, Scotland.

ROOM FOR A LITTLE ONE.

Willie's father had promised to take him to a museum as a holiday treat. They wandered round the big building all the morning, and then eventually came to a standstill in front of a huge glass case that contained a big, fierce-looking lion. At the sight of the animal Willie's voice shrilled through the air.

"Take me away, daddy!" he sobbed. "I want to go home!"

"Don't be afraid, Willie," expostulated his fond parent, as he endeavoured to suppress Willie's sobs. "That lion is stuffed!"

"Very likely!" Willie's voice sounded shakily through his sobs. "But I dare say he could find room for a little boy like me!"—Sent in by Robert Miller, Ayr, N.B.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

OUR GREAT NEW SERIAL.

PLAYING THE GAME!

A Splendid Tale of School, Sport, and Adventure.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

INTRODUCTION.

Geoffrey Foster, one of the most popular members of Grovehouse School, is elected to fill a vacant place in the school cricket team. His victory earns him the enmity of Bangley Jeffcock, who tried means fair and foul to secure the coveted position for his chum Weames. Together they plot to ruin Foster. The latter's father, who controls a company with Jeffcock senior, is made responsible for the failure of the company, and a warrant is issued for his arrest. The charge preferred is that Major Foster made use of the company's money for his own purposes. After saying good-bye to his son, Major Foster flees the country. A trumped-up charge of robbery is brought against Geoffrey, and he is expelled from the school. After seeing his mother at his uncle's house, Geoffrey sets out for fame and fortune.

One night Geoffrey is instrumental in stopping a big, burly, ruffian from ill-treating a lad. A fight takes place, and Foster succeeds in knocking the other down, who, while on the ground, has his arm run over by a motor-car. He learns the assailant's name is Alf Brookes, a well-known boxer, and the crowd who witness the fight are loud in their praises of Geoffrey's prowess. A police-officer, however, sees fit to take Foster in charge, but he is dismissed the next morning, after Joe Gunning, Brookes's trainer, had given evidence in his favour. When leaving the court, he comes across Jellotson, an old Grovehouse chum, who takes the trainer and Foster to lunch. Jellotson announces his firm opinion that the theft for which Geoffrey was expelled from school was committed by Weames and Jeffcock.

"I am burning to get even with Jeffcock," he says. "One day I shall, and then let them look out!"

(Now go on with the story.)

Geoffrey's Proposal.

Geoffrey, after discussing the point in its various phases until he, too, became convinced that no one but Jeffcock and Weames could have been the culprits, told Jellotson his story, from the time of his leaving Grovehouse until their meeting at the police-court. Jellotson listened to the story of the Belvidere Cricket Club, the meeting with Hewitt, Jeffcock, and Weames, the friendship of young Grice, the scene at Grice's office, when Jeffcock had so unwarrantably interfered, the strange behaviour of Patrick Mulready, and Geoffrey's encounter with Alf Brookes, in unqualified amazement.

"By gad," he cried, "it beats fiction hollow! Whoever heard of such a thing! And Jeffcock behaved like that? Well, I am not surprised. He's cad enough for anything. We're both going to be at Sandhurst together, more's the pity. But Hewitt will be there, too, so that I sha'n't be left to Jeffcock's tender mercies. I dare say he'll get in with a putrid set. They might try to 'rag' me if I were there alone; but as Hewitt will share quarters with me, I reckon even Jeffcock will be afraid to tackle we two. It wouldn't be well for him if he did."

Jellotson despatched a glass of the excellent wine.

"And now, Foster," he said, "look here. Here's a fine thing you've done! You've been and played right into Jeffcock's hands."

"What do you mean?" asked Geoffrey, amazed.

"Why," said Jellotson, "just this! You knocked out Brookes, didn't you? Well, as Hewitt told you, I'm a member of the National Sporting Club. I've caught the boxing fever. It came on me that day when I seconded you in the gravel-pit in the fight against Jeffcock. It's been in my blood ever since. I shall never forget that fight as long as I live. My word, how you did paste the beggar! I shall never forget the joy I felt when I heard the thumps you gave him, and saw your blows getting home. But to come to the point. I had backed Alf Brookes, as my 'unknown,' to fight the Tea Taster for a hundred pounds a-side at the National Sporting Club, on Monday, the 10th of November, and the man who has backed the Tea Taster against me is Jeffcock. Now do you understand?"

Geoffrey stared at Jellotson, speechless in his amazement.

"Yes," cried Jellotson, banging his fist on the table once more; "it was only because it was Jeffcock who was backing the Tea Taster that I offered to find a man of his weight—11st. 4lb. or under—to beat him. The Tea Taster is a good man. I shouldn't think of offering to put a man against him if it weren't Jeffcock that had issued the challenge. I would like to rob him of his hundred pounds. It would break his heart, the mean hound! I fell in with Gunning at the club, and he offered to find me a man. He did. He found me the ruffian Brookes. I disliked the brute; but I thought any whip was good enough for me to beat a dog with, and Brookes as whip to the dog Jeffcock was a good idea. Now you've been and spoilt it."

"I'm sorry, Jellotson," said Geoffrey. "I wish I had known. Mine should have only been passive interference then. But it's too late now. And so Jeffcock will take a hundred pounds off you—eh?"

"Yes," sighed Jellotson gloomily.

"I don't see why he should, sir!" cried Joe Gunning, interrupting.

"Why, what have you to propose?" asked the aristocrat, eyeing the professional from top to toe.

"Mr. Foster 'ere licked Brookes, didn't he?" said Gunning. "Well, then, being a better man than Brookes, for he is a better man, being steady and younger and sober

to boot, why shouldn't he face the Tea Taster instead of Brookes, if he has a mind? He's a friend of your'n, sir. Friends do a lot for each other sometimes, as I know. Let him give himself into my hands, and I promise you by the 10th of November, when the fight is to take place, to set him down in the ring at the National Sporting Club as good a man at his weight as they've seen this ten year and more."

Jellotson regarded Gunning with amusement and disdain.

"You're a good chap, Gunning," he said. "But you talk out of your hat."

"No, I don't see that he does," said Geoffrey, interrupting and flushing at the thought of being able to render his old friend a service. "I've put you in a hole, Jellotson, why shouldn't I help you out of it?"

Jellotson looked at Geoffrey in astonishment.

"You're joking, Foster," he said. "You, a gentleman, to fight in the ring as a professional against a pugilist like the Tea Taster? The thing's absurd!"

"I wouldn't offer to do it," said Geoffrey, "if it were not Jeffcock who was backing the Tea Taster, as you call him. By the way, what is the real name of this mysterious personage, and who is he?"

"Oh, he's from America," said Jellotson, lighting up a fragrant cigar which he took from a superb jewelled cigar-case set with diamonds and rubies. "He's a hurricane fighter of middle-weight, and a half-blooded negro. He's supposed to be capable of standing any amount of punishment, is much fancied, and Jeffcock, with that execrable taste he has always shown, travels him about everywhere. He seems proud of the connection. That was why I was anxious to bring him down a peg or two."

"Well, it's not a pleasant thought to have to stand up to such a brute and take punishment from him," said Geoffrey. "And yet I can't think of Jeffcock taking a hundred pounds off you without wanting to do something to try and prevent it. I put Brookes out of the match for you. I'm on the rocks, Jellotson. You were always a good friend to me. Let me take Brookes's place."

Jellotson leant across the table and regarded Geoffrey fixedly.

"Do you really mean it, Foster?" he cried. "No jokes?"

"I do!"

"You've got the pluck, I know," said the aristocrat hesitatingly. "You showed that at Grovehouse again and again. Gunning, do you think that Foster, here, would stand a chance?"

"What's your weight, sir?"

"About eleven stone and a half, perfectly fit," said Geoffrey. "And I'm as hard as nails now."

"We'd soon have you down to 11st. 4lbs. fighting weight," mused Gunning, looking at Geoffrey with ill-concealed admiration. "Yes, Mr. Jellotson, if your friend Mr. Foster will place himself entirely in my hands, and not be too proud to accept a few wrinkles from me, I don't see why he shouldn't beat the Tea Taster, notwithstanding the Yankee's big reputation. The black ain't as hard as some people think him. I saw him spar against Churchman, and the Britisher gave him as good as he got. It struck me then that he hadn't got much heart. Besides, a well-bred 'un like Mr. Foster here is worth a dozen Brookeses. You gentlemen never know when you're beat. Better close with Mr. Foster's offer, sir."

"I don't know," said Jellotson, getting up and pacing up and down the dining-saloon—"I don't know. I wouldn't expose a friend of mine to public ridicule for anything in the world. With Brookes it was different. A ruffian, and a professional fighting-man, he couldn't stand any disgrace with equanimity. You, Foster, are different. Many of your old friends would be there. It would soon get noised about, and I should hide my head with shame if you were beat. I can't accept such a sacrifice—I can't!"

"Think of Jeffcock," said Geoffrey, his eyes flashing at the thought of his enemy's discomfiture could he but be at the Tea Taster. "I'd give anything for the chance of getting a bit of my own back off him. I'm only human, Jellotson. Better let me try."

"Do you really wish it?" asked the aristocrat, tossing away his cigar in his agitation.

"Seriously I do," answered Geoffrey.

"Then," cried Jellotson, giving Geoffrey his hand, "it shall be as you wish, Foster. Give yourself entirely into Gunning's hands, and let him get you as fit as he possibly can by the 10th of November. It does not give you any too much time, you know, and the Tea Taster, whose name in private life is Ezra Watts, has been hard at it with his training for a month or more."

"I'm hard and fit now," responded Geoffrey, with a smile. "You forget I've been playing cricket all the summer. I shall turn up in the ring as fit as training can make me, you can rest assured of that."

And Geoffrey gripped hands upon the bargain.

The National Sporting Club—Some Big Betting—Jellotson's "Unknown"—The Fight—Geoffrey Shows Fine Science, and Wins the Big Match.

On the night of the 10th of November the National Sporting Club was packed to excess. All the seats had been sold weeks before, as soon as it was definitely known that the "Unknown," backed by Jellotson against the Tea Taster, would of a certainty face Watts in the ring. There were three other competitions on the Monday. One being between James Tanner, heavy-weight champion of the Navy, and William Armstrong, the Army champion heavy-weight, for a purse; another a ten-rounds contest between "Shaker" Smith, of Bermondsey, coming feather-weight champion, and "Tod" Cummings, of Putney; whilst the final of the Novices' Competition, the preliminary rounds of which had been fought on the previous Thursday afternoon, was also down on the programme.

Early on Monday morning the Tea Taster and the "Unknown" had been weighed, and both were within the prescribed weight, Ezra Watts scaling 11st. 4lbs., and Mr. Jellotson's "Unknown" tipping the beam at 11st. exactly. This gave the black a 4lb. advantage, and he was established an easy favourite at odds of 4 to 1 on.

Jeffcock, with his hat jauntily set on one side of his head, and with his betting-book in hand, ready to lay the odds to any man, was present when the Tea Taster was weighed, but Mr. Jellotson's "Unknown" went to scale in the presence of the stewards and Joe Gunning alone.

All that could be said about him by the stewards was that he was a remarkably fine-looking man, who, if looks went for anything, would give the Tea Taster all his work cut out to beat him. But habitues of the National Sporting Club had seen so many of those remarkably fine-looking young men make an appearance in the ring, only to flatter and deceive, that the odds on the Tea Taster were not in the least shaken by the stewards' report.

At 8.30 the fun began. The bout between the Army and Navy champions proved a stubborn and fearful battle, though science was not to the fore, and it was only midway through the last round that the Navy man was hit down and failed to rise within the stipulated ten seconds.

Then followed the final of the Novices' Competition, wherein the spectators were treated to another exhibition which sent them crazy with delight, a decision again being not arrived at until the final round, and then only on points.

"Shaker" Smith, too, was set going by his opponent Cummings, of Putney, and won on a foul, Cummings at last losing his temper and hitting below the belt.

The preliminary bouts had all been decided, and the tit-bit of the evening was reached. The ring was carefully prepared for the contest, and then, amidst a wild outburst of cheering, the Tea Taster, his brown and glossy skin shining like satin in the glare of the electric lights, stepped through the ropes and made his bow to the sporting public.

Well might they give vent to cries of admiration. He was a fine-looking athlete, upon whose body every muscle stood out in perfect relief. Ezra Watts wore a smile that would not come off, and his big white teeth gleamed as he nodded to his acquaintances, who shouted his name, and who had gathered in all parts of the building.

Up in the gallery hundreds of sportsmen stood up in their seats, leaning forward in the effort to get a better view of the much-vaunted American hurricane fighter. He reminded many present of Craig, the Coffee Cooler; but he was, if anything, a finer-built man.

"It's all over," said a sportsman in the front row on the floor of the hall, who was sitting near to Bangley Jeffcock. "Jeffcock wins in a canter!"

"Will you back your opinion, sir?"

It was Jellotson who spoke, and, standing erect, the aristocrat, book and pencil in hand, prepared to write down a bet.

"With pleasure," said the sportsman.

"Will you lay the odds?"

"Yes. 4 to 1."

"Without having seen my man?"

"I don't want to see him. Will 'ponies' do?"

"Make it 'monkeys,'" said Jellotson easily, writing. "My man is going to win."

"All right. 'Monkeys,' then," said the sportsman, sitting down; and a murmur of astonishment went round at the foolhardiness of Jellotson.

"Oh, leave him alone!" said a well-known bookmaker. "He is green at the game. When he's lost a thousand or two over this fight he'll be a sadder and a wiser man. We all have to buy our experience."

Meanwhile, a man had wormed his way to Jellotson's side. He whispered in the aristocrat's ear.

"My name's Simon Blake," he said. "You know me, sir. I'm the bookmaker of Elsworth, with whom some of the Grovehouse boys used to have dealings."

"I know," said Jellotson, with a frown. "The man through whom poor Foster was expelled."

"Pardon me, Mr. Jellotson," said the bookmaker indignantly, "you know better than that. It was Mr. Foster himself asked me to say he'd been with me that night. And you know why. I'd have cut my tongue out rather than have told the lie if I hadn't been asked to."

"Well," said Jellotson, softened, "what is it you want, Blake?"

"I met Gunning, your trainer, just now, and he was telling me that it is Mr. Foster who is going to face the Tea Taster here to-night. Is it true?"

"It is true," said Jellotson; and with a whoop Simon Blake stood up.

"Gentlemen," he said, "now's your chance. I'm taking the odds. Who'll lay 4 to 1 on the Tea Taster? There's Mr. Jeffcock over there anxious to make a bet. We've done business together many a time. Shall I book 4,000 to 1,000 for you, sir?"

Jeffcock crimsoned. What did it all mean? Here was a bookmaker, and a knowing one, too, anxious to take the odds now. Too many people in the building fancied the "Unknown" to please him.

"I'll tell you when I've seen my man's opponent," he said.

He had not long to wait, for a murmur of excitement heralded the approach of Trainer Gunning, the seconds, and the other principal in the match. Gunning entered the ring. The second and bottle-holder stood outside the ropes, and a tall, lithe, active, and splendidly-built youngster got between the ropes, and stood, his white skin shining in the light of the powerful electric lamps, affording a remarkable contrast to the brown-bodied Tea Taster whom he had to meet.

A pause of absolute silence followed his appearance, during which the experts scanned him from top to toe. They were well repaid for their trouble. Seldom, if ever, had a middleweight been seen within that classic arena who could compare in bodily excellence with Jellotson's "Unknown." Unknown he was indeed. Instead of a well-known bruiser such as Alf Brookes, whom they had expected to see, their eyes rested upon the vigorous and youthful frame of a lad who looked a gentleman, and the silence was followed by a big round of applause. As for Jeffcock, he gazed in open-mouthed indignation at Foster. So, then, this was Jellotson's trump card.

His momentary feeling of vexation over, a thrill of joy ran through Jeffcock's veins. Why, he had fought Foster at Grovehouse not so very long ago, and how could a Grovehouse schoolboy stand a chance with a hard-hitting, hurricane fighter like the Tea Taster, one versed in all the science of ring-craft and cunning?

Jeffcock rose to his feet.

"Blake," he cried, "I'll lay you 4 to 1 in thousands, and the same to anyone else in the room who would like to take me." And his eyes challenged Jellotson.

"I'll take that bet," said the aristocrat languidly, "as many times over as you may care to make it."

This gave the punters confidence, and a roar of odds followed. They decreased from 4 to 1 to 3 to 1, and then 2 to 1, by which time everything was ready for the battle.

Geoffrey had been seated in his corner, where Joe Gunning had carefully tied on his gloves for him, his face drawn, palpably pale and nervous. He eyed his opponent very carefully, and there was nothing in the appearance of the Tea Taster to indicate his being anything but the determined fighter the report declared him to be.

Ezra Watt's demeanour formed a strong contrast to that of the white-skinned English lad. He was calm, cool, and confident. His smile never for a moment relaxed. He looked round the crowded auditorium with absolute indifference, as who should say, "All right, gentlemen, you may look at me. I'm not afraid. I'm going to win your money for you. You can back me if you like."

At last, the final touches being given, and referee, and timekeeper, and spokesmen being in readiness, a brief speech was made from the ring, and, at the word, principals advanced to the centre, shook hands, and faced each other, swinging round in orthodox fashion to opposite sides of the roped arena.

"Time!" called the timekeeper, and up went their hands.

They began cautiously. The Tea Taster's freedom of action was quickly noted. He was a lissom, nimble-jointed boxer, and slipped his feet and feinted with his hands like a champion. The "Unknown," as Foster was called by many, though some had shouted "Foster!" was slow by comparison, more solid in his stand, but none the less determined to look upon. It seemed, however, to the frequenters of the National that he would be easy to hit, and the odds on the Tea Taster rose again.

The coloured pugilist was of the same opinion. He fancied he saw a half-dozen openings in the first half minute, and then went in. He landed a lightning blow without much steam behind it, however, and, encouraged by this partial success, went in again. Once more his glove touched Geoffrey's body, but with a lurch out shot the white and well-rounded arm of the old Grovehouse boy, the weight of his body following, and with a thud that echoed through the building the Tea Taster was knocked clean off his feet.

Joe Gunning was delighted. He had taught the lad that blow, and knowing how Geoffrey could hit—for Joe had

experienced some of it in his training spars with his pupil—the trainer looked upon the battle as good as over.

"Give him no rest, my boy," he said. And Geoffrey advanced, standing over his fallen rival, waiting for him to rise.

The black did, getting to his feet cleverly. But the blow had shaken him up. His confident smile had vanished. Something like dismay wreathed his lips instead. He set himself on guard wildly, and it was now Geoffrey who went in to win. In a moment the heaviness that had characterised him in the opening of the round vanished. He showed himself as quick and as full of resource as his rival, and, fighting him round the ring, he got him against the ropes, where he struck his man four times about the body, receiving only a light tap on the forehead and several half-arm jabs in the ribs in exchange from the Tea Taster. Then Ezra went down to avoid trouble.

"Get on your feet, Watts," warned the judge, "unless you want to be disqualified!"

"Evens Foster! Evens the 'Unknown'! I'll lay 2 to 1!" came from Simon Blake.

"Silence!" roared an official.

Ezra Watts came up a little groggy, and saved himself by clinching.

Geoffrey, who might with luck have won the battle in that first round, returned to his corner with no more damage done him than a bruised lip.

"Time!"

The men were at each other again, and, frenzied with despair and chagrin, the black, refreshed by the rest and the attention of his seconds, went in. He was received, however, with a crashing blow on the face, which stopped him. His head wagged. He half dropped his arms.

"Keep your arms up, Watts, or leave the ring!" cried the referee sternly.

The black obeyed.

"Ten to one on Foster!" roared Blake, but there were no takers.

The place was in an uproar. And so the big event of the evening was to peter out into a fiasco? Why, the much-vaunted Tea Taster could not hit hard enough to knock the stuffing out of a feather-bed! He was already beaten. He made a feeble attempt to go in again, but, standing up to his man, Geoffrey got in two terrific blows, one on the solar plexus, which resounded right through the National Sporting Club, and recalled to Jellotson an incident in the memorable fight in the gravel pit at Grovehouse, and another on the jaw. And with his head toppling over on his chest, the Tea Taster fell to the boards, reclining there all of a heap, whilst the referee counted out the seconds.

As the tenth was called a roar of cheering went up.

Geoffrey Foster had won the fight without being hit, one might say, and in a round and a half vanished a reputation which, it is to be suspected, had been all too easily won on the other side of the Atlantic.

Geoffrey Foster was a hero!

He had shaped like a champion; and some who had known the Tea Taster as a regular terror, pronounced the boy to be the finest man at his weight that had been seen in the ring since the days of Tom Sayers.

So are reputations won and lost.

Jeffcock, arising amidst the hubbub, ground his teeth together in fierce and impotent rage.

"Curse the luck!" he cried. "Foster has almost ruined me It was a trick of Jellotson's. Be hanged to them all! I'll have my revenge—I'll have my revenge! I swear I will. If I have to wait half a lifetime. He won't cross my path for ever!"

Jellotson, standing by, heard the last words.

"I shall expect prompt payment, Jeffcock!" he cried, grinning with delight. "That's another one to our side. I reckon Foster wiped off a lot of the arrears to-night."

And, turning coolly away, he joined the throng that was pressing round the hero of the evening.

Geoffrey Foster had the ball at his feet. If he cared to adopt the life of a professional pugilist—a sporting life, shall we say?—his fortune was as good as made.

(This splendid story has now reached the most interesting stage, so all my readers who are anxious not to miss the rest of "Playing The Game!" should make a point of ordering next week's copy of the "Gem" in advance. Price One Penny.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 327.

"THE GEM" LIBRARY FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of 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, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

R. Wetton, c.o. Transvaal Leader, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 19-20.

R. Golding, 34, Delorentz Street, Gardens, Cape Town, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Scotland or Ireland, interested in postcards, age 14-16.

N. C. Kingsley, 34, Tuela Street, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the British Isles, age 17-19.

C. B. Johnson, Bornie, Stebonheath Street, Sydenham, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the British Isles, age 12-15.

Eustace Powrie, West Bank, Oudtshoorn, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 15.

Glen D. Cowane, Banker of Perdue, Saskatchewan, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in Scotland or Ireland, age 20-22.

Miss Dolly Glasser, President Street, Kroonstad, Orange Free State, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers from all parts, age 13-15.

W. E. Mann, Georgina Street, York, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in Yorkshire or Manchester.

James Smith, P.O., Box 175, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with an English girl.

H. F. Hardy, 184, Moreland Road, East Brunswick, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England.

H. Oosterbroek, 71, Van Beck Street, New Doornfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in Scotland or Ireland, age 12-14.

H. Carolin, P.O., Box 4615, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with V. Trickie, late of Johannesburg.

A. L. Friedle, care of West End Watch Co., Bombay, India, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 15-20.

L. W. Cockshell, Piper Street, South Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in Australia interested in cigarette cards.

A. R. Wylie, 49, Victoria Street, Petone, Wellington, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps.

R. Poole, care of Post Office, Boulder, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 16.

Clifford Pollard, 98, Walpole Street, Kew, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 16-17.

Harry Lund, 26, Smith Street, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers in any of the Colonies, age 20.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

HOW TO GET ON IN CANADA!

BY A SUCCESSFUL EMIGRANT.

OFF TO CANADA

THIS WEEK:

Work and Wages of Cowboys in the West.

The Demand for Unskilled Labour.

A HOMESTEAD IN ALBERTA

AROUND the work of the cowboys has been woven a glamour that has fired thousands of British lads with a desire for a life in the saddle in the "wild and woolly West." In the hands of hundreds of authors and artists the cowboys' work has been evolved into a continuous round of battles with Red Indians, hunts after buffaloes, mad rides before prairie-fires and stampeding cattle, and running gun-fights through the streets of lawless little towns. The moving pictures also foster the idea. And to see on the screen a cowboy in the orthodox slouch-hat, with shirt thrown open at the throat, his legs encased in sheepskin "chaps," and a big six-shooter at his side, carelessly striding a bucking broncho, is enough to turn any adventurous youth green with envy.

But, alas! in these prosaic times, buffaloes are almost extinct, and the Red Indians smoke the pipe of peace in their wigwams on Government reservations, whilst Western towns are not so lawless as they were. So, my chums, the cowboys' life is not so adventurous as it was. At times, indeed, it can easily become deadly monotonous.

Of course, there is some excitement even now. A big "round up" of cattle, for instance, can provide thrills, as can also the roping and branding of the animals. The life entails many hardships. To ride the prairies for several days after cattle does not seem much of a task. Nevertheless, great discomforts have to be endured.

If you sigh for the life in the saddle, however, the best thing for you to do to secure your desire is to journey to one of the cattle-raising districts in Alberta or British Columbia. There you should visit the big ranches, and attempt to hire out to do "chores"—that is, general odd jobs. I am taking it for granted that you have had no experience. Indeed, it would be extraordinary if you had obtained experience in Britain that would at once fit you for work as a cowboy in the West. The knowledge of how to ride and manage a horse would be very useful, but skill in other directions, as with the lariat, is also necessary. For doing "chores" on a ranch you might receive ten dollars (£2) a month, with free board and lodging. And you would be lucky to get that to begin with on some ranches.

The life of the cowboy has a great fascination for certain young emigrants, and some manage to take it up, but there are hundreds of men born and bred to the work who are chiefly employed. Indians and half-breeds who are born, as it were, to the saddle, are favoured by many ranchers.

Experienced cowboys receive from about thirty-five to forty-five dollars (£7 to £9) a month and board. The men nearly always use their own horses for the work. A "cayuse," as this kind of horse is called, can be usually purchased from one hundred dollars (£20).

I mentioned that phases of the cowboys' work could prove monotonous, and here let me give a case to show you what I meant. A rancher wants several of his cattle brought in, and despatches a cowboy across the ranges to find them. The man takes some provisions with him, and sets out on his errand. He comes up with herd after herd of cattle, and seeks among them for any bearing his employer's brand. For days he may sustain disappointment after disappointment. The weather during the daytime is dry and dusty, at night it turns intensely cold; and the cowboy has to sleep on the ground in the open. It is possible that he may even suffer from thirst during his search, for he may have to cross a range where only alkali lakes exist, the water of which is harmful to man. So he goes on his lonely trail until he locates and "rounds up" the cattle he was sent after. And bringing the cattle into the ranch provides a worrying time. Ceaseless vigilance and superb horsemanship are requisite for the performance of this task.

In bygone days cowboys found use for their revolvers against cattle-thieves, or "rustlers," as they are called in the West. Now, however, comparatively little cattle-stealing is done. I know one unprincipled old rancher, though, who, before he sends his cowboys on a big "round up," gives them a bottle of whisky, with the expressed wish that they may "see double." A clear hint to bring in a few extra cattle, even though they do not bear his brand.

Expert cowboys delight in breaking in bucking horses, and when a young Britisher starts work on a Western ranch they usually find one for him to try his hand with, too. Cowboys are notoriously free and easy with their money, and the majority of them do not worry at all about putting "a bit by for a rainy day."

To be a "cow-puncher," or "broncho-buster," sounds very nice and adventurous, but I seriously recommend my chums who are going West to take up something a little more commonplace. Unless you actually intend to become a rancher, in which case a knowledge of handling cattle may prove very useful, I think such an experience is better dispensed with. The work is precarious, and association with the class of men you will most likely have as companions is apt to get you into careless habits, which certainly will not help you to get on in the world.

Many young and unskilled Britishers land in Western Canada with very little money, and their shortness in this direction makes them willing and anxious to do any work that will enable them to start a banking-account. Their main object, in fact, is to make all they can during the summer so as to be provided for in the winter that is to follow, in case of unemployment. Naturally, in seeking a job, they look along the line of least resistance, with the result that they become labourers, either in the building trade or in one of the many other industries.

Now, to turn from the cow-puncher's saddle to the pick and shovel seems a long drop backwards, but here let me say that work with the latter is by no means to be despised in Canada. During the summer season labourers are in demand, and, what is more to the point, they get well paid. Builders' labourers on such work as excavation are paid from two to three dollars (8s. 4d. to 12s. 6d.) a day in the Western provinces. With board and lodgings costing five or six dollars (£1 or £1 4s.) a week, a fair sum can be saved during a summer's work.

Nine or ten hours may constitute a working day, but in some places the eight-hour day holds good for this class of work. Sometimes, in British Columbian towns especially, higher remuneration can be obtained when there is a scarcity of labour. A sudden "boom" will occasionally create a demand for workers, as it did in a place I was in four years ago. Wherever excavation or building operations were going on in this city, notices were to be seen appealing for hands. I myself did a spell with the pick and shovel during that period, and was paid at the rate of three dollars and seventy-five cents (15s. 6d.) a day for my services.

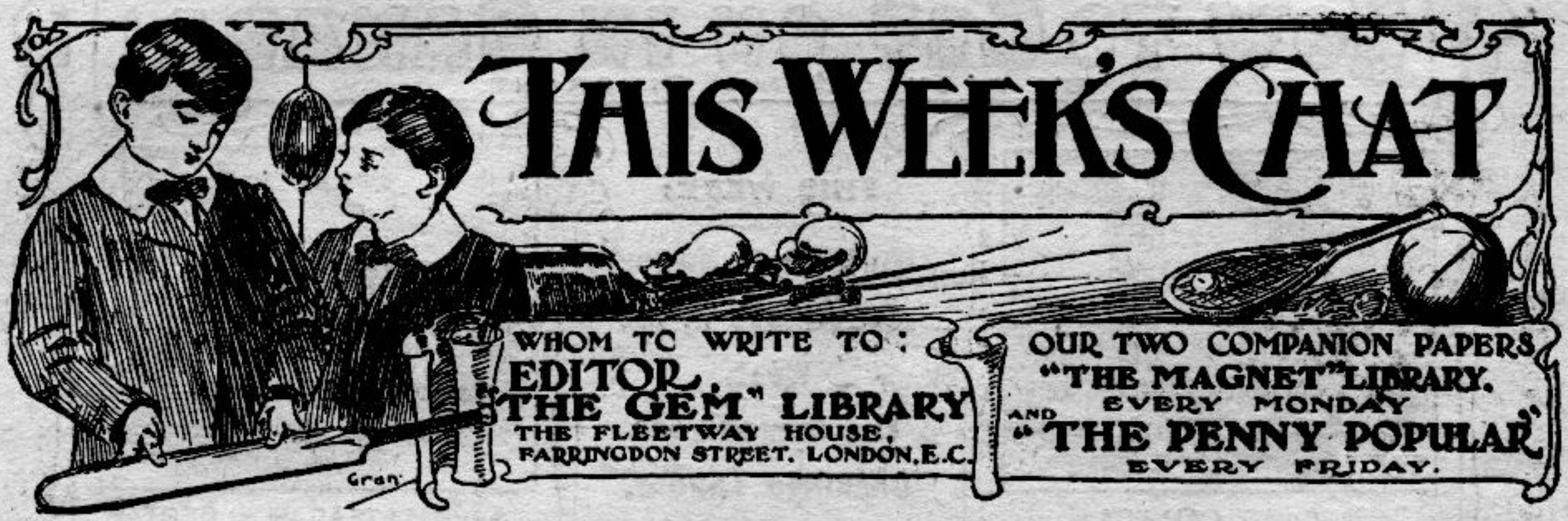
In seeking a job as a builders' labourer you should apply personally to the foreman on the spot, or at any contractor's office. The fact that you have never done such work before should not deter you, providing you have average strength and health.

In next week's article I will tell you more about the opportunities, work, and wages to be obtained in the Dominion.

(Another of these Interesting Articles next week.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 327.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE.



For Next Wednesday,

"D'ARCY THE VENTRILOQUIST!"
By Martin Clifford.

In our next grand, long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gets a fresh idea into his noble head; and, as is usual with him, he sticks to his idea through thick and thin.

Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars School—himself a ventriloquist of renown—kindly offers to instruct D'Arcy, for a consideration. But Arthur Augustus gets very little benefit from Billy Bunter's lessons, expensive as they prove to be.

In the face of discouragements and failures that would have daunted the most professed of the art of "voice-throwing," Arthur Augustus continues his attempts to ventriloquise.

In the end, however, circumstances prove too much for him; he is overwhelmed by the surprising result of an advertisement he inserts in the local paper, and decides that he will not go down to fame as

"D'ARCY THE VENTRILOQUIST!"

THIS WEEK'S GOOD THING.

I feel I must once more draw the attention of my "Gemite" chums to the magnificent fare, in the way of complete stories, which is offered in our Grand Companion Paper "The Penny Popular" this week.

"AN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIR!"

is the title of the first of these stories, and it deals with the adventures of Sexton Blake, the world-famous detective, and his assistant Tinker. In this grand story these two clear up between them a most baffling case, the consequences of which are of the highest International importance.

"THE SPORTING SAINTS!"
By Martin Clifford,

is the second complete story. There is no need for me to explain who the "Saints" are to my "Gem" readers, or to enlarge upon the merits of Martin Clifford. My chums will meet old friends in this delightful story.

The third complete tale deals with the amusing and adventurous doings of the three famous comrades, Jack, Sam, and Pete, and is entitled:

"FALSELY ACCUSED!"
By S. Clarke Hook

—a story well worth reading. The issue of "The Penny Popular," containing all this splendid reading in the form of complete stories, is now on sale at the usual price of one penny.

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

William Paxton, 24, Flora Street, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wishes to form a "Gem" club in his district, and would be glad to hear of any fellow-readers over 17 years of age who are willing to join such a club.

Fred Cassling, 93, Bute Street, Treherbert, Rhondda, South Wales, is forming an Amateur Concert Party in the Rhondda Valley, and hopes to hear from all fellow-readers of the "Gem" Library, and its companion papers, who are living in that district, and would care to join him.

F. G. Gladman, 59, Egerton Road, Stamford Hill, London, N., wishes to establish a "Gem" Correspondence League, and would be glad to hear from all readers interested.

There are vacancies for a few more members in the Grimsby and District "Gem" and "Magnet" League. G. Coulbeck, of 21, Clyde Street, Grimsby, would be glad to hear from readers of these papers wishing to join this League, of which he is the founder.

Miss Katie Hould, a Colonial girl-reader, writes that she has had thirty letters in answer to her request for a correspondent, which was published in the "Gem" Library Free Correspondence Exchange; and she wishes the Editor to convey her thanks to all the readers who so kindly wrote to her.

KEEPING FIT.

By C. D. Musgrave, M.D.

Exercise—The Right and the Wrong Way to Take It.

Two men were riding home together in a tramcar, on their way from business, and were discussing their health, as so many people do nowadays. They both looked tired and depressed, and on comparing notes found that they were each suffering from the same complaint—"nervous exhaustion due to overwork." At least, that was what they called it. They were tired when they went to bed, and just as tired when they got up in the morning, and had no energy for their day's work. Why the latter should have proved too much for them was a mystery, for it lasted only from nine to six, with an hour for lunch, and their business was not an arduous one for men in the prime of life.

The Value of Exercise.

As a matter of fact, they were not suffering from overwork at all, but from poisoning, the result of a sedentary occupation and want of exercise. It must be understood that the nourishment which is carried to different parts of the body is burnt up, and it is this combustion which produces the body-energy. At the same time, a residue of waste matter is formed, just as ashes are left behind in a fire. We all know that if the ashes are not raked out the fire burns badly, and precisely the same way if this waste-matter is not got rid of it interferes with the various functions of the body, causing headache, languor, dyspepsia, rheumatism, and various other complaints.

This waste matter is discharged from the system in several ways, chief of which are the lungs, kidneys, and skin. In order that it may reach these organs it is necessary that the blood should be circulating freely, which means that the heart should be beating well, the breathing free and deep, the skin acting, and the muscles working, so as to squeeze this poisonous material out of them.

The two men we referred to above used to ride to their work, sit in their offices most of the day, ride back home, and spend the rest of the evening in an easy-chair, reading or dozing. And that was why they were poisoned and never felt well.

Many people are beginning to recognise the value of exercise, but few know the correct way of carrying it out. To simplify matters I shall deal with outdoor exercise first, and indoor afterwards.

(Next Week: A Special Article on "Keeping Fit.")

The Editor

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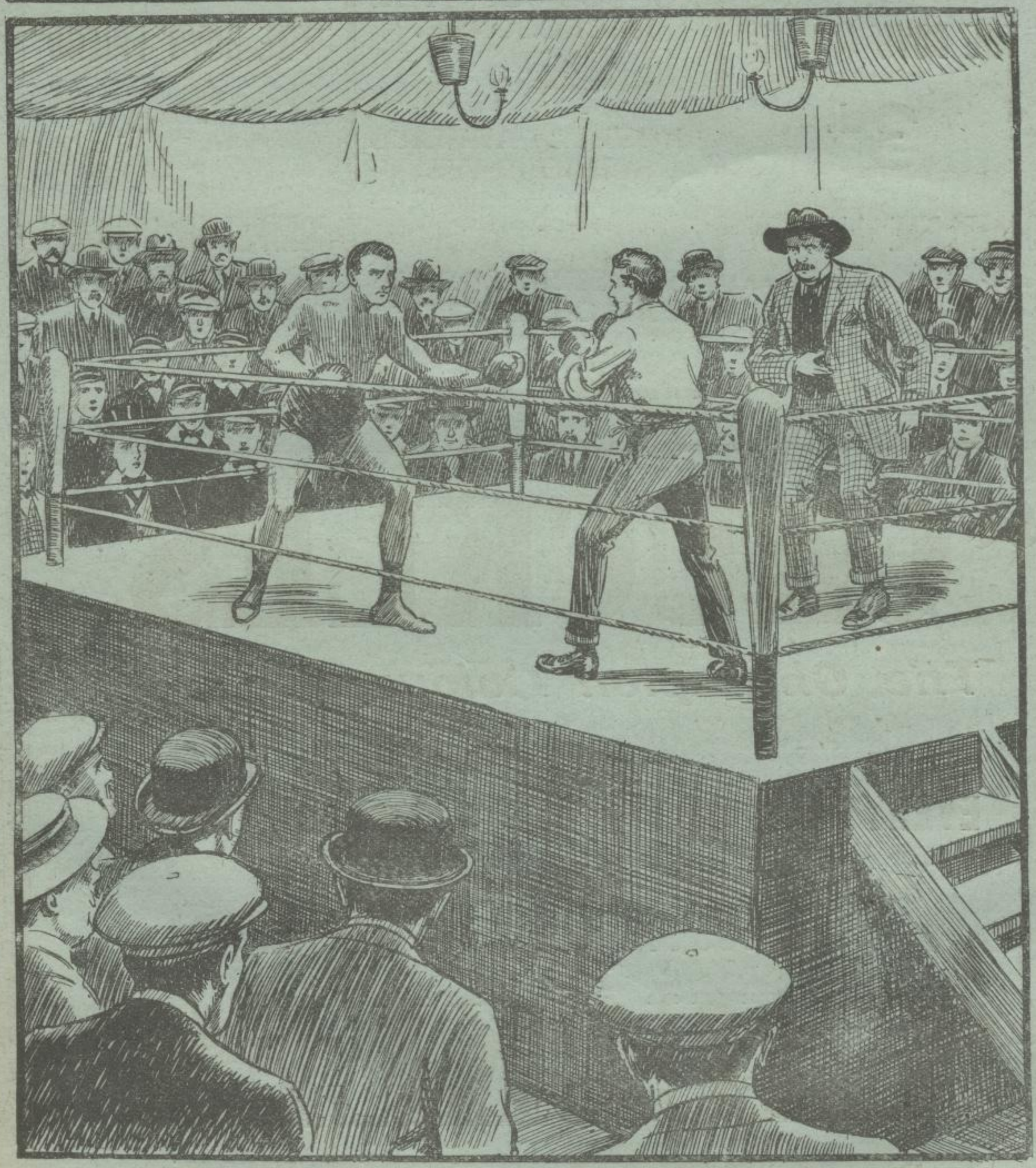

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