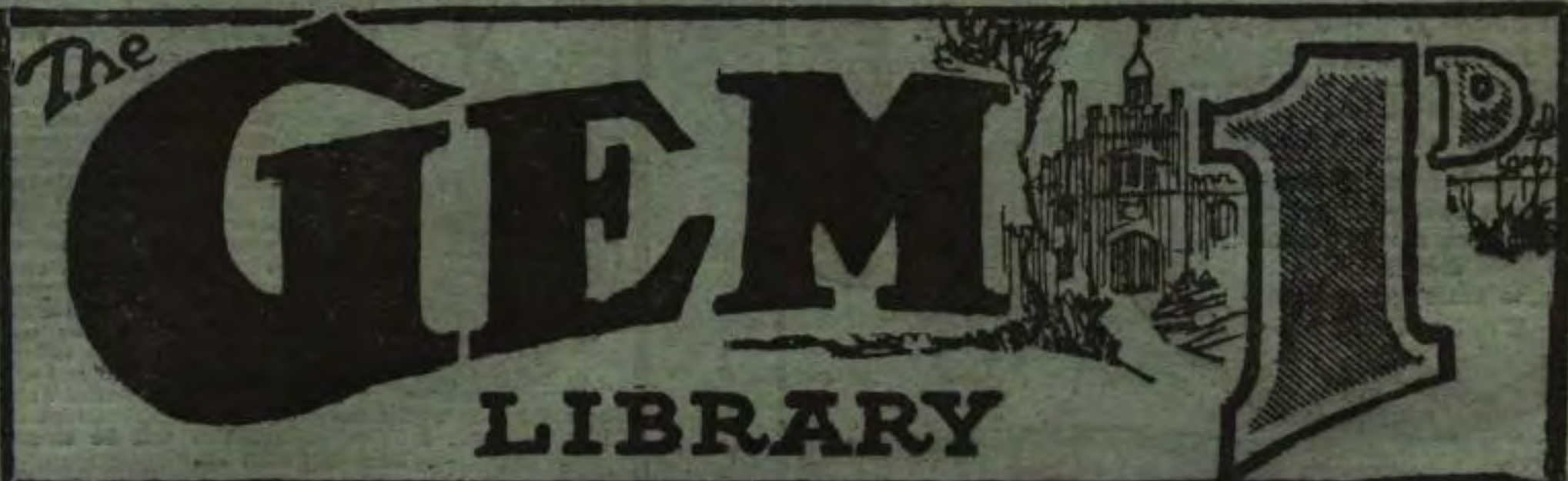


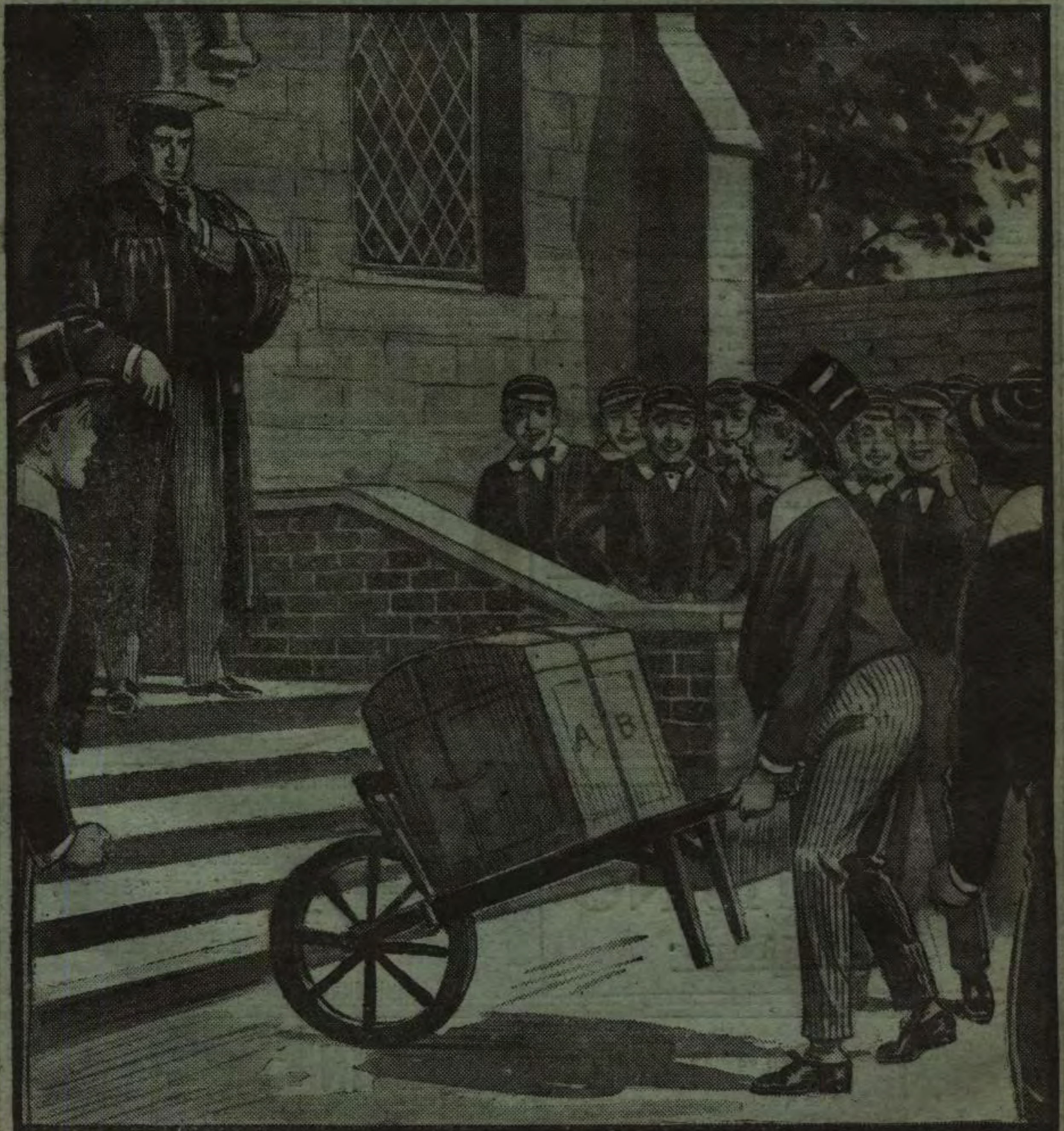
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By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



"Goodness gracious!" gasped Algernon, as he saw the female attire in the place where he had left his own.
"S-s-sus-some female person has left her clothes here! Oh dear! This is simply dreadful!" (See Chapter 11.)

CHAPTER 1.

News for Tom Merry!

"**S**TAND and deliver!"

Blagg, the postman, jumped. He had halted outside the gates of St. Jim's to mop his manly brow, for the summer afternoon was very warm, and the long white road from Rylcombe was hot and dusty. And as he stopped he received that startling summons, and three figures rushed upon him from the shady old gateway.

"Halt!"

"Stand—"

"And deliver!"

It was only the Terrible Three of the Shell, however, and Blagg grinned as he blinked at them. He was used to humorous greetings from these cheerful youths. Tom Merry

and Manners and Lowther surrounded him, and Monty Lowther levelled a fountain-pen at his head.

"Money or your life!" he said solemnly. "If there isn't a remittance for one of us in that bag, Blaggy, you die the death! Shell out!"

"Arternoon, young gentlemen," said Blagg cheerfully, "which you quite startled me. I think I've got a letter 'ere for Master Merry."

"Hurray!"

"Hand it over!" said Monty Lowther. "If there's cash in it, Blaggy, your grey hairs shall be spared! We are stony broke and desperate!"

Blagg grinned and fumbled in his bag. The chums of the Shell watched him anxiously. They were certainly stony broke, if not exactly desperate. Funds were low—in fact, had reached vanishing point. The afternoon's post was all

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that stood between the Terrible Three and famine; hence their anxious waylaying of the village postman at the school gates. Manners and Lowther were not expecting letters, but Tom Merry had a lingering hope of a letter from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old governess. And Miss Priscilla's letters were generally accompanied by remittances. Miss Priscilla seemed to know by intuition that money burns holes in schoolboy pockets; and that riches take unto themselves wings and fly away more swiftly at school than anywhere else.

"Ere you are, Master Merry!"

Blagg handed over the letter and went his way. The Terrible Three looked eagerly at the prize. The postmark was Huckleberry Heath; and the handwriting was that of Miss Priscilla Fawcett. The three juniors gave a cheer.

"Saved!" exclaimed Monty Lowther dramatically.

"Open it—quick!" said Manners.

Tom Merry jerked the envelope open. There was a letter inside, and he unfolded it quickly. Then a blank expression came over his face. Monty Lowther and Manners were watching him anxiously.

"How much?" they inquired simultaneously.

"Nix!"

"What?"

"It isn't a remittance, after all," said Tom Merry dismally.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Oh, that villain Blagg, to raise our hopes like this!" groaned Monty Lowther. "Let's go after him and slaughter him!"

"Better go and look at Study No. 6," said Tom Merry. "We may be able to make a raid there. Gussy's generally in funds!"

"Read the letter," was Manners' valuable suggestion. "There may be something about a remittance coming later."

"More likely advice about health, and inquiries about taking medicine!" snorted Monty Lowther. "I must say that I don't think so much of your guardian as I did, Tommy. She has disappointed me. This carelessness is really inexcusable!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. He was reading the letter.

"What's the news—remittance following?"

"No!"

"Then you needn't bother to read the letter," said Monty Lowther. "Let's go and look for Blake. I'm expiring for a ginger-pop."

"Hold on," said Tom. "There's some news in the letter. We sha'n't be able to go up the river this afternoon."

"Why not?" demanded Manners and Lowther at once warmly.

"At least, I sha'n't be able to go," said Tom, "and I think you fellows ought to stick to me, in a fearful emergency like this."

"Something the matter?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry gave a deep groan.

"Yes."

"Miss Fawcett's not ill?" exclaimed the two Shell fellows together.

"No."

"But it's bad news?"

"Yes," said Tom, with another deep groan.

"Your guardian coming to see you?" hazarded Lowther.

"Worse than that!"

"Tell us what it is, fathead!" exclaimed Manners. "Don't pile on the agony. Get it out, and get it over."

"I'll read it to you," said Tom Merry, with an expression of deep anguish upon his face. "Here it is. No need to read all the letter. It's rather long. Begin here!"

"I hope you are taking regular doses of the Magical Mixture," read out Lowther, "and that you are careful not to get your dear little feet wet—"

Tom Merry turned crimson.

"Not that part!" he exclaimed hastily. "Never mind that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, this is where it begins," said Tom, turning the page over, and Lowther and Manners read together:

"By the way, you will be delighted by some news I have for you. A dear lad named Algernon Blenkinsop is coming from Huckleberry Heath to St. Jim's. You will remember meeting his father, the Rev. Rabbits Blenkinsop, who is such a dear man, and so interested in the conversion of the natives of the Gooralooral Islands. Algernon is his youngest son, the other thirteen being all older than dear Algernon, and he is such a nice quiet boy, and so simple. I am sure you will like him, and will do your best to be a friend to him at the school. I think it is possible that the other boys—some of them are so rough—may make fun of dear Algernon, because he is very simple and nice, and stutters a little. But I know that my darling Tommy will be kind and good to him and protect him. I hope you will take Algernon to your heart, dear Tommy; and ask the headmaster to put him in your study. You will find him very good and kind, and his conversation very interesting and instructive. He knows a very great deal about missionary work in the Gooralooral Islands, and he sings hymns beautifully. I know, dear Tommy, that Algernon will become your dearest friend. Now about taking care of your chest—"

"That's all!" said Tom Merry hastily. "Now, what do you think of that?"

"Don't ask me what I think of it?" said Monty Lowther in a deep voice. "If a chap who stutters and sings hymns, and talks about missionary work in the Tooralooral Islands, is put into our study, he will be found dead there shortly afterwards. I know that."

"There's a postscript," said Tom Merry dismally. "Listen. Algernon arrives at Rylcombe Station by the half-past three train, and as it is a half-holiday, I am sure you will go to meet him, my dear Tommy. Take him into your care, and cherish him, for my sake, and the sake of his dear father, Mr. Rabbits Blenkinsop, who is such a good man."

"I'm not going to the station to meet him!" bawled Monty Lowther, with quite unnecessary vigour.

"Well, I must," said Tom Merry. "I can't refuse Miss Fawcett. She's such a good sort. I only hope the kid won't come into the Shell. My only hat, I wonder what sort of a specimen he is? And to have him planted on us—"

"Really, Tommy, it's too bad! You'd better wire Miss Fawcett, and tell her to ask Mr. Rabbits to send him to the Tooralooral Islands instead of St. Jim's. It would be a more suitable place for him!" said Manners severely.

"Hallo, there's another postscript overleaf," said Lowther. "Is there?" exclaimed Tom. "I missed that! My hat, this is good!"

"Hurray!"

The Terrible Three brightened up as they read the final postscript. For it ran:

"P.S.—I have given dear Algernon a sovereign to hand to you when he arrives at St. Jim's, as I thought you might like to make some little celebration to welcome him."

"I don't know about celebrating Algernon, but a quid's a quid," said Monty Lowther. "We're stony—we're hungry—and we are athirst. Gentlemen, Algy stutters, and he sings hymns, and talks about the Tootalooral Islands; but Algy's got a quid, and I suggest that it's our bounden duty to go and meet Algy at the station."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

Tom Merry grinned, and looked at his watch. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"My hat, it's a quarter to four already! The train's been in a long time."

"Oh, that's all right! We shall find him rooted to the platform, with the hayseed growing out of his hair," said Lowther. "Come on. Let's go for Algy."

"Let's!" said Manners.

And the Terrible Three, greatly comforted by that postscript, and willing to make the best of Algy, under the circumstances, walked away down the lane towards Rylcombe to meet the youth from Huckleberry Heath.

CHAPTER 2.

Fallen Among Friends.

"PLEASE, can you tell me the way to St. Jim's?" Gordon Gay of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School looked round as he was addressed in a somewhat timid voice.

Gordon Gay and his chums, Wootton major and minor, of the Grammar School, were chatting together outside the village station. They had been strolling round Rylcombe that afternoon, in the amiable hope of falling in with some St. Jim's fellows, and ragging them, by way of passing a half-holiday with a little harmless and necessary amusement.

No St. Jim's juniors had been spotted, however, and the three Grammarians were thinking of wending their way homewards when a strange youth came out of the station, and

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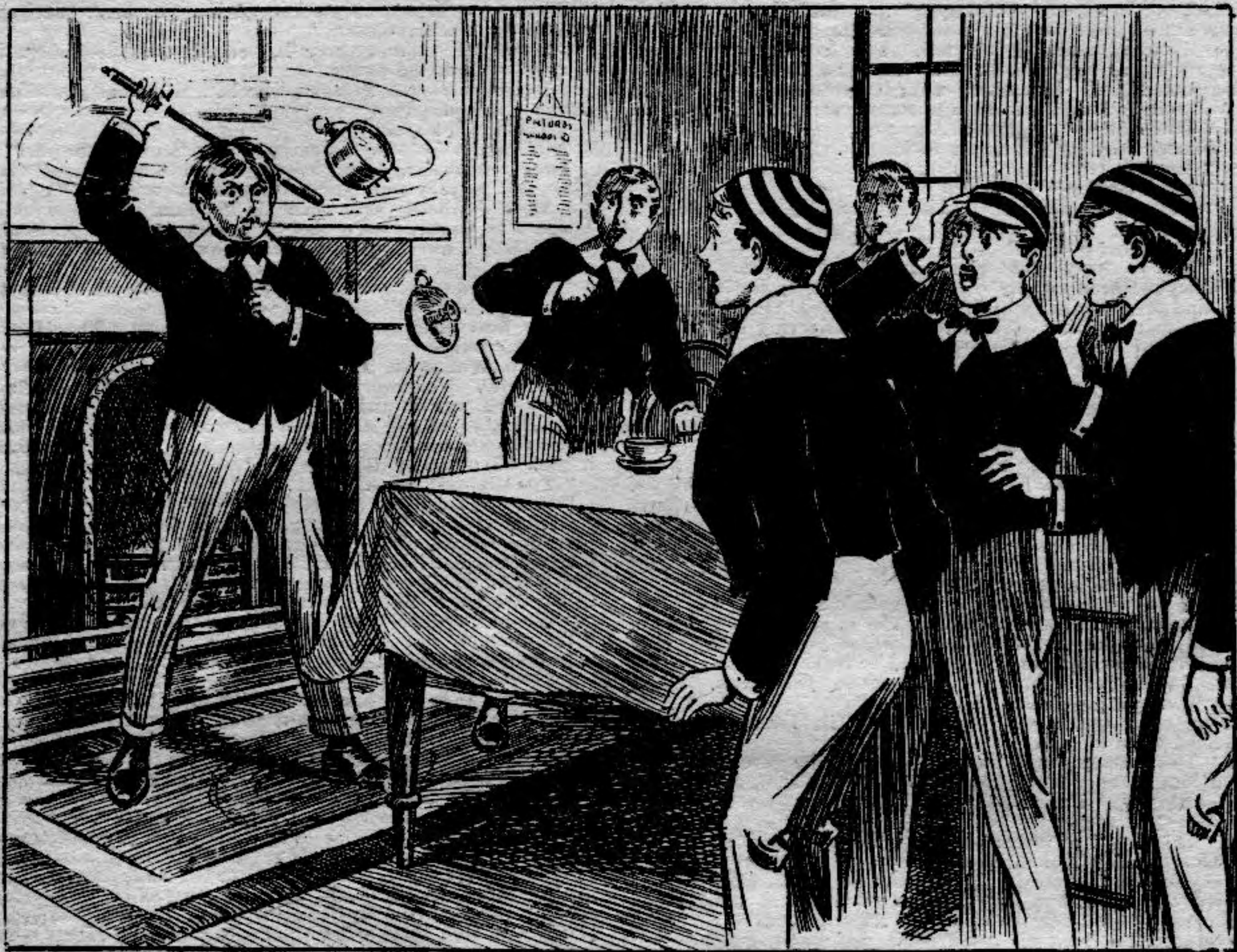
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Algernon Blenkinsop leaped to his feet as the Terrible Three rushed in, and seized the poker from the grate. "Keep off!" he yelled, brandishing the poker round his head. And there was a crash as he swept the clock off the mantelpiece. "I will not be murdered and robbed!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co. (See Chapter 5.)

approached them, after blinking round for some minutes as if in search of someone.

Gay and Wootton major and Wootton minor looked at him with interest.

He was a somewhat striking-looking youth.

He was about their own age, but taller, being decidedly lanky in form. His face was round and chubby, glowing with rosy health, and his eyes were big and blue and saucer-like in appearance. His face expressed the most unlimited simplicity, and yet there was a lurking smirk of satisfaction about it, which showed that the verdant youth was pretty well satisfied with himself. He wore a large silk hat, under which little tufts of tallow-coloured hair could be seen. He raised the silk topper most politely as he addressed Gordon Gay. It was evident that his manners had not been neglected by those who had trained him up in the way he should go.

Gordon Gay & Co. exchanged a joyous grin. They had been looking for some of their old rivals at St. Jim's, and looking in vain. And here was a youth of the most verdant appearance inquiring his way to that school, evidently, therefore, a new boy for St. Jim's. A youth, whose whole appearance, from top to toe, showed plainly that he was born for the special purpose of having his leg pulled. Gordon Gay & Co. could have fallen upon him and hugged him. The afternoon would not be wasted after all.

"St. Jim's!" repeated Gay, to gain time.

The strange youth nodded.

"Yes, please. I'm a new b-boy for St. Jim's, you know."

"My dear kid, you've come to the right shop," said Gordon Gay blandly. "What's your name?"

"Algernon Blenkinsop."

Gay appeared overcome for a moment.

"My hat! That's a stunning name! Are there any more at home like you?"

"Yes, indeed. My thirteen brothers are very like me," said Algernon, apparently surprised by the question.

"Thirteen!" gasped Gordon Gay. "Oh, my hat! What a giddy family! And you're going to St. Jim's?"

"Yes. I was to be met here, but no one seems to have come," said Algernon, in a slightly injured tone. "Unless, indeed, you are Tom Merry?"

Gay winked at his chums.

"Exactly!" he agreed. "Allow me to introduce myself. Tom Merry, at your service. Manners and Lowther."

And Wootton major and minor took off their caps, and bowed solemnly. Algernon brightened up at once.

"I am so glad to meet you," he exclaimed. "Miss Fawcett told me she had written to Thomas Merry to meet me at the station, and that he might bring his friends with him. I have something for you, Thomas—a sovereign Miss Fawcett gave me to hand to you."

"Ahem! Never mind that now," said Gay hastily. "Keep it for the present."

"Yes, Thomas. You don't mind my calling you Thomas?"

"Not at all. Don't mench. Now," said Gay seriously. "I suppose you don't know much about public schools and their manners and customs?"

"I fear not. You see, I have always lived at Huckleberry Heath. That is a very rural and retired place."

"Truly rural, to judge by appearances," murmured Wootton major.

"Well, of course, we're going to look after you," said Gay reassuringly. "Now, the first thing is to make a good entrance at the school. A lot depends on that. In fact, your whole career at St. Jim's may depend upon the impression you make when you enter for the first time."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Blenkinsop.

"But I do. Now, Blinkingsop, my dear boy——"

"Blenkinsop!" said Algernon mildly.

"Yes, I meant Blenkinsop. Now, look here—— Hallo! Here come those bounders!" exclaimed Gordon Gay.

At the end of the street the Terrible Three appeared in

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NEXT
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sight. They were walking quickly towards the station. Gordon Gay did not lose a second. He grasped Blenkinsop by the arm, and dragged him away, rushing him at top speed round the nearest corner. The new boy, utterly astounded and breathless, went unresistingly. The two Woottons followed fast. In a twinkling they had disappeared.

"Wha-a-at—" stuttered Algernon.

Gordon Gay put his finger to his lips.

"Shush!"

"B-b-b-but—"

"Did you see those three kids?" asked Gay, in a mysterious voice.

"Ye-e-e-es; but—"

"You've only got away in time," whispered Gay.

"They're three awfully desperate characters, and belong to a kind of reformatory in this neighbourhood. It's a shocking thing that they're allowed out loose, considering that they've committed crimes of the deepest dye."

"You d-d-don't say so!" gasped Algernon.

"See if they're gone, Wootton—I mean, Lowther."

Wootton major peered round the corner. The Terrible Three, who had not caught sight of the Grammarians, so quickly had they vanished, walked into the station.

"They're gone in," said Wootton.

"We must lie low for a bit," said Gay, in an awed whisper.

"Goodness knows what might happen if you met those chaps, Algernon. It would be an awful thing for your seventeen brothers if they suddenly heard that you had been murdered for your watch and chain."

"G-g-goodness gracious!"

"If you come across them again, bolt at once!" said Gay.

"I warn you, as an old hand. The moment you see them simply bolt for it. Never mind where you are. It's quite possible some of them may pretend to be friendly to you, for the purpose of taking you by surprise, you know. Don't let them get near you. Simply bolt!"

Algernon swallowed that whole. His round blue eyes looked more like saucers than ever.

"Th-th-thank you so much, Thomas!" he gasped.

"Not at all. It's my duty to give you these warnings," said Gay. "I'm thinking of your twenty-three brothers too—"

"Thirteen!" murmured Algernon.

Gordon Gay looked cautiously round the corner. The Terrible Three were in the station some minutes, and they came out again, and looked about them with a puzzled air. They were evidently in search of Algernon. But Algernon was lying low with his new friends, and was not to be seen.

"I suppose he's started for St. Jim's," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Then we ought to have passed him on the road," said Manners.

"May have taken the wrong road. I know he's an ass."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, that's it," he said. "He can't have gone by the road, or we should have passed him. He must have taken the footpath through the wood. We'll go back that way and keep an eye open for him."

"I want a ginger-pop," said Monty Lowther pathetically, "and the young idiot may have wandered off anywhere. There are a dozen ways of going in the wood, and he would be bound to take one of them."

"Well, we'll look for him."

In the quiet village street the voices of the Terrible Three were quite audible to Gordon Gay, at the corner, a dozen yards away. He grinned cheerfully, keeping back out of view. Tom Merry & Co. walked away, and disappeared down the street.

"Are they g-g-gone?" stammered Blenkinsop, as the Australian junior came back to him.

Gordon Gay nodded.

"Yes; but I fancy they're looking for you, Algy."

"You d-don't say so!"

"Yes, they've heard of you, and they're after you!"

"G-g-good gracious!"

"Keep your eye open for them. They may follow you to St. Jim's. They've got cheek enough for anything, and they're desperate characters. If you see them, bolt! Remember that. It may save your life."

"Oh dear!"

"And now you'd better get to the school as quick as possible, where you'll be safe," said Gay. "Come on! I suppose you left your box in the station."

"Yes."

"As you're new to public schools I'd better give you a tip about that. The Head is frightfully down on slackers. If you went there in a cab with your box, I don't say he would scalp you, but he might."

"You don't say so."

"He likes to see a fellow exerting himself," explained Gay.

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"If you want to make a good impression you must take your box to the school yourself."

"B-b-but I couldn't carry it," stammered Blenkinsop, in dismay. "It is too heavy."

"That's all right. You can wheel it. I'll show you where to get a wheelbarrow."

"You are k-k-kind."

"Of course. It's my intention to be kind. Come on!"

They returned to the station. The Terrible Three were gone, and as they were going through the wood, looking out for Algernon there, there was little likelihood that they would fall in with the new boy again till after he reached St. Jim's. Under Gay's direction, Algernon's box was brought out of the station, and dumped down on the pavement.

"You are s-s-sure the Head would like me to wheel it in on a wheel-b-b-barrow?" asked Algernon.

"My dear chap, you don't know the ropes. The Head's a rather peculiar chap."

"He m-m-must be, Thomas."

"Exactly. You can hire a wheelbarrow here," said Gay, leading the way to the ironmonger's opposite the station. "You'll have to pay a bob for the hire; but I'll pay that, under the circumstances. And another bob for a chap to fetch it back when you've done with it."

"You are very kik-kik-kind!"

"Don't mench!"

Gordon Gay quickly arranged for the loan of the wheelbarrow, and Algernon wheeled it out. The three Grammarians lifted the box upon it. The porter and the cabman and several village urchins looked on with great interest at that proceeding. But the Grammarians did not mind.

"We'll give you a hand with it down the street," said Gay.

"We can't go into St. Jim's with you. We've got a rather important engagement—ahem!—elsewhere."

"Very well, Thomas."

Algernon took the handles of the wheelbarrow, and the Grammarians helped him push it away. A cackle of laughter followed them down the street. Algernon, who was evidently unaccustomed to exercise, was soon perspiring and panting. The barrow was wheeled out of the village at last, and they went down the lane towards St. Jim's. Gordon Gay was as grave as a judge; but Wootton major and minor were almost choking. The new boy was certainly as green as the greenest variety of grass; but they could scarcely believe that he would be green enough to present himself at St. Jim's, wheeling in his box on a wheelbarrow. But not a trace of a suspicion entered the mind of the verdant youth from Huckleberry Heath. In that rural and retired spot japes and japers were unknown; and Algernon was coming into a new world of which he did not know the manners and customs.

The old tower of St. Jim's appeared in sight at last. Then the Grammarians halted.

"Sorry, but we must go now," said Gordon Gay regretfully. "We'd like to come in with you; we really would."

"Ha, ha! Rather!" roared Harry Wootton.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Gay severely. "Shurrup! Go straight on, Algy, and when you come to the big stone gateway, turn in. That's St. Jim's."

"Thank you, Thomas!"

"See you later," said Gay. "Come on, you chaps!"

The three Grammarians beat a retreat. It was high time, for they were very close to the enemy's country, so to speak. Algernon Blenkinsop paused for a moment to mop his perspiring brow, and then took up the handles of the wheelbarrow again, and pressed on. A few minutes later he was wheeling his box on the barrow in at the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

The Arrival of Algernon.

"B AI Jove! Whatevah does that mean?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, stopped in his elegant saunter, in the quadrangle of St. Jim's, in blank amazement.

He groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye, and surveyed the astonishing sight before him. A youth, with a silk hat pushed back from his red and perspiring brow, and his Etons very dusty, was wheeling a barrow in at the school gates, and upon the barrow reposed a large, corded box.

"Gweat Scott!"

"Hallo!" roared Jack Blake, coming out of the School House. "What on earth's that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush of fellows at once to view the new-comer. Taggles, the porter, came out of his lodge, and almost fell down at the sight of the new junior.

"Wot's that?" he exclaimed.

Algernon Blenkinsop paused, and let the barrow rest for a moment, turning his saucer-like eyes upon the porter.

"Good-afternoon!" he squeaked.

"Oh, my heye!"

"This is St. Jim's, my g-g-good man, is it not?"

"Yes," gasped Taggles. "But wot—"

"Thank you so much! I am the new boy. Will you tell me which is the School House, my good man?"

Taggles, too overcome for words, pointed out the School House; and Blenkinsop took up the handles again, and wheeled the barrow up the drive.

A shriek of laughter greeted him.

Algernon seemed surprised by the laughter. He looked round at the yelling juniors with wide-open eyes as he wheeled the barrow onward.

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who is it? What is it?"

"This takes the giddy biscuit! Ha, ha, ha!"

Half St. Jim's had gathered round the new-comer by the time he reached the steps of the School House.

The roars of laughter had brought Mr. Railton, the House-master, out of his study, and he came out of the doorway of the School House, to see what was the cause of the uproar.

He started at the sight of Blenkinsop.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What does this mean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon paused, and let the barrow drop, and breathed hard. He could not wheel the barrow up the steps, or probably he would have done so.

"Boy!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Who are you?"

Algernon blinked at him.

"If you pip-pip-pip—" he stuttered.

"What?"

"Pip-pip!" chuckled Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Answer me, boy! Who are you?"

"If you pip-pip-pip—"

"If I what?" gasped the astonished House-master.

"If you pip-pip-please, I'm the new boy."

"Oh, you are Blenkinsop!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir, if you pip-pip-please."

"And what do you mean, Blenkinsop, by coming here in this fashion, wheeling your box here on a wheelbarrow?" thundered the House-master.

Algernon opened his eyes wide.

"I—I thought it would pip-pip-please the Head, sir."

"You thought it would please the Head! Are you insane, boy, or is this impertinence?"

"Nunno, sir! Thomas told me so," said Algernon, in dismay.

"Thomas! Who is Thomas?"

"Thomas Merry, sir."

"Oh! Merry of the Shell! Do you mean to tell me, Blenkinsop, that Merry advised you to bring your box here in this ridiculous manner, and that you were stupid enough to take his advice?" Mr. Railton exclaimed witheringly.

"Oh dear! Yes, sir."

"Then I shall speak to Merry about it. Gore, please call the porter to take this box in, and to take that barrow away!"

"Yes, sir," chuckled Gore of the Shell.

"You may come in, Blenkinsop. I am your House-master. Follow me!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

And the dusty and perspiring youth from Huckleberry Heath followed Mr. Railton to his study.

The crowd in the quadrangle roared. The extraordinary arrival of the new junior was something novel in their experience. That any boy could be so incredibly "green" was amazing. But Algernon had evidently acted in good faith, in the innocence of his heart.

"Oh, that boulder Merry!" ejaculated Kangaroo of the Shell. "What an idea, to send that frabjous ass here with his box on a barrow."

"But what a howling idiot!" said Levison of the Fourth.

"What a burbling cuckoo!" chuckled Mellish. "He must be as green as grass, or a good bit greener. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! It was wathah wotten twick to play on a new kid," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I shall wemonstwate with Tom Mewwy about this."

"The silly ass!" said Herries. "He ought to be sent to a home for idiots, I should think. I wonder what Form he's going into?"

"He's going into the School House, anyway," grinned

Figgins of the New House. "That's a bit of luck. They might have shoved him into our House."

"Proper place for him," said Digby. "Oh, my hat! I wonder what study he will have? If they put that awful ass into No. 6—"

"Bai Jove!"

Most of the juniors waited for Blenkinsop to come out of the House-master's study. They were curious to see something more of the verdant youth. He came out at last, and found a crowd looking for him. He blinked round at them with his saucer-like eyes.

"If you pip-pip-please," he said, "is Levison here?"

"Hallo! What's wanted?" said Levison.

"Are you Levison of the Fourth Form, please?"

"Yes."

"Then I am very pleased to m-m-mum-mum-mum—"

"He's very pleased to mum-mum-mum!" said Levison, in wonder. "What on earth is he talking about? Anybody know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm very glad to mum-mum-mum—"

"Mum's the word!" chuckled Lumley-Lumley.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm very glad to mu-mum-mum-make your acquaintance," jerked out Blenkinsop, at last.

"Oh!" said Levison. "Well, the pleasure's all on your side."

"Mr. Railton says I'm to shush-shush-shush—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, shush, then—it's time you did!"

"To shush-shush-share your study."

"Oh!" ejaculated Levison. "Is that it? Look here, we've three in that study already, and we don't want a tame lunatic added."

"Rather not," said Mellish.

"I guess he can come in," said Lumley-Lumley. "You're welcome, kid. I'm in that study, too, and you'll be an improvement on Levison and Mellish, anyway."

"Th-th-thank you. You are very k-k-kind."

"So you're in the Fourth?" said Blake.

"Yes, pi-pip-please."

"My hat! They might have put him into No. 6," murmured Blake.

"What an escape!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Levison, will you shush-shush-shush—"

"What!"

"Will you shush-sh-show me the way to the study, please?"

A peculiar gleam came into Levison's eyes. Levison had a peculiar

turn of humour, and it occurred to him at once that this decidedly green youth would afford him any amount of entertainment. So he assumed a cheerful grin, and took Algernon Blenkinsop's arm.

"Certainly," he said. "Come with me. I'll look after you."

"Thank you!"

And Levison led the new junior away. The crowd dispersed, still chuckling over the advent of the cheerful Algernon. They were still discussing Algernon, with many chuckles, when the Terrible Three returned to St. Jim's some time later.

CHAPTER 4.

Making Himself at Home.

ALGERNON BLENKINSOP walked away contentedly with Levison of the Fourth. Levison was bland and friendly, and it would have required a sharper youth than Algernon to see through the cad of the Fourth.

"I suppose you feel a bit tired after your journey—what?" asked Levison.

"Yes, a little," confessed Blenkinsop. "It is quite a long distance from Huckleberry Heath to this school. Also, it was very fatiguing wheeling the box here on the barrow. I am also somewhat dusty. I should like a wash very much."

"You can get that in your study," said Levison calmly. "The studies here are very well got up, you know—sort of bed-sitting-room, with everything you want. Here's your room."

Levison had led the new junior by a roundabout course

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 331.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"PLAYING A PART!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

to the Sixth-Form passage. He opened the door of Knox's study. He had seen Knox on the cricket-ground, and so knew that there was no danger of the bully of the Sixth coming in just then. Algernon stepped in Knox's study, and surveyed his new quarters with satisfaction.

"Dear me! This is very nice!" he exclaimed. "I had no idea that junior studies were so large as this."

"Glad you like it," said Levison.

"And how very comfortable to have a bed in the study, nicely arranged in an alcove!" went on Algernon. "I understood that all boys below the Sixth slept in dormitories, and only used their studies for working in."

"Oh, that's quite out of date!" said Levison airily.

"But there is only one bed," said Algernon, slightly puzzled. "Surely one bed is not enough for three or four boys!"

"Ahem! The other beds are specially made up at night," murmured Levison. "We—we sleep in hammocks here, you know, some of us."

"Do you really?" exclaimed Algernon, his eyes opening wide.

"Certainly. They're slung late at night; but new boys always have a bed to start with. That's your bed."

"I understand. I should prefer to sleep in a bed at first, as I think a hammock would require getting used to," Algernon remarked thoughtfully.

"You'll find everything you want here," said Levison, with a wave of the hand. "In that cupboard, Knox—I mean, we keep our grub. If you're hungry, help yourself. Take anything you like—you're quite welcome."

"You are very k-k-kind."

"That's all right. I'll leave you here now."

And Levison quitted Knox's study, and joined his friends, Mellish and Gore and Crooke, in the quadrangle, and the young rascals yelled with laughter when they heard where Algernon was. Knox of the Sixth was one of the worst bullies at St. Jim's, and when he found Algernon making free with his quarters and his provisions, there was no telling what would happen, but it was certain to be something violent.

Algernon, without suspicion, made himself at home in Knox's study. He washed himself at Knox's washstand, and dried himself with Knox's towels, and brushed down his dusty clothes with Knox's brushes, and combed his hair with Knox's comb. Then he opened Knox's cupboard, and his eyes glistened with satisfaction as he saw the contents. Knox intended to stand a tea that afternoon to Cutts of the Fifth and Sefton and another friend or two, and the supplies were already laid in. There were ham and cold beef, and cake and tarts, and jam in abundance, and nice little rolls and butter.

"My goodness!" murmured Algernon. "This is really very nice. Levison is a very kind boy to place all these good things at my disposal. I must write home to my dear papa, and tell him what a nice boy Levison is."

And Algernon set out Knox's spread, and proceeded to pile into it. He had brought a very healthy appetite with him from Huckleberry Heath, and he did full justice to Knox's provisions.

He was enjoying himself immensely when the study door opened, after a light tap, and a very well-dressed and somewhat supercilious-looking fellow came in.

It was Cutts, the dandy of the Fifth, although Algernon did not know it. He hadn't the honour of Gerald Cutt's acquaintance so far.

The senior glanced at Algernon in surprise.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed.

Algernon rose to his feet and bowed. They had been very particular indeed about Algernon's manners at Huckleberry Heath.

"Who on earth are you?" asked Cutts. "What are you doing here?"

"I am having tea," said Algernon.

"Oh, you're the new kid who came in with a barrow, ain't you?" said Cutts, with a grin. "You are a bright specimen, I must say."

"It is very kind indeed of you to say so," replied Algernon gratefully. "I am very pip-pip-pleased to make a good impression."

"Mad," said Cutts, addressing space—"quite mad! Look here, young shaver, I've come to tea. Do you know where Knox is?"

"I am sorry, but I do not know Knox," said Algernon. "But if you have come to tea, please sit down. You are very welcome, and there is plenty for all."

Gilmore of the Fifth came in. He had come to tea, too, and, like Cutts, he was a little early. Knox was still on the cricket-ground. Gilmore stared at Blenkinsop, and then looked inquiringly at Cutts.

"What's the little game?" he asked.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 331.

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"Blessed if I know," he said. "I found this merchant here, tucking into Knox's feed. I should say there would be murder done as soon as Knox comes in. Blessed if I ever heard of such cheek—a new kid in the fags coming into a senior study, and tucking into a Sixth-Former's tea! I don't what this school is coming to!"

"My dear fellow, you are mistaken!" said Algernon, in surprise. "This is my study!"

"Your study!" shouted Cutts and Gilmore together.

"Yes, certainly!"

"You're not in the Sixth!" roared Gilmore.

"No; I am in the Fourth."

"It's a jape," gasped Cutts. "Some ass has shoved him in here. Hallo! Here comes Knox at last. Knoxy, old man, you've got a new study-mate!"

Knox of the Sixth came up the passage. He had his bat under his arm.

"Hallo! What's that?" he asked.

Then he stood transfixed. He had not seen Algernon arrive, and did not know him from Adam. He only saw a perfect stranger in his study, with many signs that he had made himself at home there, devouring his feed. Knox's eyes almost started from his head. He lost his voice for some moments. The two Fifth-Formers looked on, grinning, wondering what was going to happen to the amiable Algernon.

Algernon did not seem to think that anything was going to happen. He smiled up at Knox—a welcoming smile.

"Who are you?" stammered Knox at last.

"Algernon Blenkinsop, please. Would you like to have tea?"

"Who told you to sit down to my feed?" roared Knox.

"Your feed? Surely you are mistaken," said Algernon. "This is my study!"

"Your study?" gasped Knox. He let his bat slide down from under his arm, and took a business-like grip on the cane handle. "Your study? I suppose you're mad; and I always brain lunatics who get into my study! Now then——" And Knox rushed at Algernon.

If the swipe of the bat had reached Algernon, it would not have brained him, as it was not aimed at his head, but it would have hurt him considerably. Algernon was green, but he was not green enough to try to stop the bat. He leaped out of his chair with surprising celerity, and bounded away in alarm. Knox's bat, meeting with no resistance, swept through the air, and crashed upon the crockery upon the table, and there was the sound of a terrific smash.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Cutts. "Mind your eye! You're breaking up the happy home!"

"I'll smash him!" shrieked Knox. "I'll——" He bounded round the table after Algernon.

Algernon was in a state of wild alarm, but he did not stop to argue; he realised that it was a time for action, not for words. He leaped wildly for the door, dodging round Cutts and Gilmore. Knox rushed after him, bumping into Cutts, and hurling him across the study. He reeled himself from the shock, and Algernon nipped out of the study. Knox panted, and dashed after him.

Down the passage went the frightened Algernon like a deer. But Knox was faster. His heavy footsteps came closer and closer, and as Algernon reached the end of the passage, Knox's outstretched hand tapped his shoulder. Another moment, and Algernon would have been in the grasp of the avenger. In sheer terror, Algernon threw himself upon the floor, and, as it happened, it was the best thing he could have done. Knox, unable to stop himself in time, tripped over the junior, fell across him, and rolled on the floor, dazed and breathless. Algernon was on his feet again in a twinkling, and fleeing for his life.

It was a full minute before Knox scrambled up, considerably hurt, and quite dizzy. He looked round for Algernon, but that youth had disappeared. Knox, rubbing his head and muttering remarks which would have earned him the sack if the Head had heard them, returned to his study in a state of fury.

Algernon had found safety in the quadrangle. He stopped to take breath under the old elms, panting, and still in a state of great alarm.

"My goodness!" he murmured. "This is—is dreadful! My dear papa said that I should find some of the boys very rough; but really—really——"

And Algernon mopped his brow, wondering what his papa would have thought if he could have seen him then.

ANSWERS

CHAPTER 5.
A Run for Life.

"YOU bounders!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the Terrible Three came into the quadrangle.

Arthur Augustus had been waiting for them to come in, and he turned his eyeglass upon them with a severe expression.

Tom Merry & Co. were exasperated, tired and dusty. They had spent quite a considerable time looking for Algernon Blenkinsop, under the persuasion that the youth from the country was somewhere on the woodland paths. But they had not found him, and they had returned to St. Jim's at last, hot and tired, and a little cross, and wondering what had become of the new junior.

They stared at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he greeted them with reproachful accents.

"Hallo, what's biting you now?" asked Lowther, rather gruffly.

"Nothin' is bitin' me, Lowthah, and I wegard the question as widiculous," said Arthur Augustus, "and I considah it my dutay to tell you that I do not appwove of it."

"Wandering again!" said Manners, tapping his forehead.

"Poor old Gussy!"

"Weally, Mannahs, you know perfectly well what I am al'udin' to. Such a twick on a new boy is weally past all bounds."

"A new boy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Has the new boy come, then?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat! How on earth did we miss him, then?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in surprise. "It's all right, chappies! He's come!"

"You were perfectly awah that he had come, Tom Mewwy, since you sent him heah with his box on a wheelbarrow!"

"What!"

"You don't mean to say it wasn't you?" exclaimed Jack Blake, coming up. "The new kid said that Tom Merry advised him to bring his box here on a wheelbarrow."

The Terrible Three looked amazed.

"His box on a wheelbarrow!" said Tom faintly.

"Oh, ye gods and little fishes!" murmured Lowther.

"Didn't you weally know, deah boys?"

"Know!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "We haven't seen the new kid. I had a letter from my old governess about him, and we went down to the station to meet him; but we were late, and we missed him. We've been looking for the ass. Do you mean to say that he arrived here with his box on a wheelbarrow?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Somebody must have been japing him," grinned Blake.

"He certainly said Tom Merry had advised him to do it. Somebody's been taking your name in vain, old son. You should have seen Railton's face when Algernon came up with the wheelbarrow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where is the silly ass now?" asked Tom. "He must be frightfully green, to be japed like that. I've got to take him under my wing."

"Wish you joy of him," grinned Blake. "The last I saw of him he was with Levison. He's been put in Levison's study."

"Then he's not in the Shell!" said Lowther. "Glory be! You won't be able to have him in our study, Tommy!"

Tom Merry drew a breath of relief. He was quite willing to do all he could for the new boy, but he certainly didn't want the verdant youth from Huckleberry Heath fixed in his study. As the new junior was in the Fourth, that was fortunately impossible.

"Better see him, though," said Tom. "Anybody know where he is?"

"Here's Levison," said Blake. "Ask him. Levison, where's the new kid?"

"I think he's in the quad somewhere," said Levison calmly. "He's been in some trouble with Knox. I saw Knoxy chasing him out of his study. He seems to have fancied that Knoxy's study was his study, and made himself at home there. Queer, wasn't it?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Very queer," said Blake suspiciously. "I dare say you could explain how he came to make the mistake."

"I dare say," assented Levison coolly. "I never saw anybody quite so green. Are they all as green as that in Huckleberry Heath, where you come from, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry did not reply. He was shading his eyes with his hand, and looking round the old quadrangle.

"Is that the merchant?" he asked, as he caught sight of a lanky youth under the old elms.

"That's the duffer," said Blake.

"Well, I'd better speak to him," said Tom. "Come on, you chaps. He's got my quid, remember."

The Terrible Three started towards the new junior. Algernon was looking away towards the School House, and he did not see the Terrible Three till they were close on him. He did not turn his head, in fact, till Tom called out to him.

"Hallo, Blenkinsop!"

Algernon looked round then, and as his eyes fell upon the Terrible Three he turned quite pale and started back. He recognised at once the three desperate characters against whom Gordon Gay had warned him so solemnly. Evidently they were after him, and had fairly run him down in the quadrangle of St. Jim's.

"Keep off!" gasped Algernon.

"What!"

"Keep away! I—I— Help!"

Algernon turned tail, and ran as if for his life. The Terrible Three stood rooted to the ground, staring after him in astonishment.

"What's the matter with him?" exclaimed Manners.

"Is he mad?" gasped Lowther.

"Gweat Scott! He weally seems to be a little bit wocky in the cwumpet!"

Tom Merry & Co. broke into a run after Algernon. They had to make his acquaintance, in order to take him under their wing, as Miss Fawcett had requested; and still more important, in order to obtain the sovereign Miss Fawcett had entrusted him with for her ward. They ran after the fleeing Algernon, and quickly gained on him. Algernon was running towards the School House; but he remembered that the dangerous Knox was there, and swerved off towards the gym.

He glanced back over his shoulder, and saw the Terrible Three in full pursuit, and panted with terror.

"Stop!" yelled Tom Merry.

But Algernon did not stop. He dashed into the gym with the Shell fellows tearing after him. Right through the gym he went, palpitating with terror.

"He must be dotty!" gasped Tom Merry. "But we'll catch him here and bring him to reason. Mind he doesn't double back."

"Right-ho!"

Algernon cast a despairing look behind. His retreat was cut off, and he ran into the room at the back of the gym and slammed the door. The Terrible Three opened it a minute later and ran in. The window was open, and from the open window they saw Algernon sprinting away as fast as his legs would carry him.

"There he goes!" yelled Lowther. "Come on!" And he jumped from the window, with Tom Merry and Manners after him.

The Terrible Three were warming to the chase now, and they were determined to run Algernon down and make him explain his extraordinary conduct. Away they went in hot pursuit. Algernon ran well. Fear lent him wings. He broke away in the direction of the New House.

"Aftah him!" yelled Arthur Augustus, waving his eyeglass in great excitement. "Two to one on Algy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon drew near to the New House, and looked back. The Shell fellows were close behind. With a gasp, he dodged up the steps and ran into the House. Figgins & Co. were standing in the doorway, chatting. Algernon rushed through them, and Figgins reeled on one side, and Kerr on the other, and Fatty Wynn went sprawling. Without a glance at the wreck he had made, Algernon raced on, and dashed up the stairs.

"What the thump does this mean?" roared Figgins, struggling to his feet as the Terrible Three came up breathlessly. "What the—who the—how the—"

"Where's that lunatic?" gasped Tom.

"What the—"

"Come on!" yelled Lowther, catching a glimpse of Algernon on the stairs. "This way!"

The Shell fellows rushed upstairs, leaving Figgins & Co. staring. Algernon reached the Fourth Form passage, and paused to take breath; but the sight of the three desperados tearing up the staircase sent him on again. He went down the passage at top speed, and, seeing an open doorway, plunged in. It happened to be Redfern's study, and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence were at tea there. Algernon did not even see them. He grabbed the door, slammed it shut, and turned the key in the lock. Then he staggered to a chair and sank down, almost sobbing with relief.

"Oh dear! Saved! Goodness gracious!"

Redfern & Co. were on their feet in utter astonishment. They stared at the gasping junior.

"Who the deuce are you?" demanded Redfern.

"Oh dear! Save me!"

"It's that new merchant in the School House," grinned

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Lawrence—"the dotty duffer who came with his box on a wheelbarrow."

"Well, this study isn't an asylum for dotty duffers," said Redfern. "Look here, young Hopeful, what do you want here?"

"They're after me!" panted Algernon.

"Eh? Who are after you?"

"Those three desperate young villains from the reformatory! They are going to rob and murder me!" panted Algernon.

"My hat!"

There was a wrench at the door-handle, and then a loud thumping on the panels. The pursuers had arrived! Algernon palpitated.

"Here they come!" he shrieked. "Don't open the door! They are desperate! Help!"

"Open this door!" roared Tom Merry. "Let us in, Reddy!"

"Right-ho!" said Redfern. "Keep your wool on!"

"Don't open the door!" yelled Algernon. "We may all be murdered!"

"We'll chance it," grinned Redfern, and he unlocked the door. "Now, you School House bounders, come and take this babbling lunatic away."

The Terrible Three rushed in. Algernon leaped up, and sprang across the study, and seized the poker from the grate. He brandished it round his head, and there was a crash as the poker came in contact with the clock on the mantel-piece.

"Keep off!" yelled Algernon.

"Look here—"

"I will defend myself! I will not be robbed and murdered! I—"

Tom Merry almost collapsed.

"Robbed and murdered!" he articulated. "My only uncle's summer hat! What kind of a raving lunatic have they planted on us now?"

"I know you!" panted Algernon. "You—you ruffians! I know you belong to the reformatory—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Redfern. "You're found out now, Tom Merry."

"I was warned against you," said Algernon. "Tom Merry—"

"What! I'm Tom Merry!"

"Oh, it's that japer again, been stuffing him up with some rot!" gasped Lowther. "Oh, my hat! Green as the giddy grass. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put that poker down, you idiot," said Redfern. "Somebody's got to pay for that clock. That was a jolly good clock, and cost one-and-ninepence."

"It's all right, Blenkinsop," said Tom, laughing. "You've been japed, you ass. Somebody has been pulling your leg. I'm Tom Merry. I came to the station to meet you, and missed you."

Algernon looked at him suspiciously. But the yells of laughter from the New House fellows convinced him that there was nothing to be feared. He put down the poker.

"If you are Tom Merry I have been deceived," he said. "But the three boys who met me at the station told me they were Merry and Manners and Lowther, and pointed you out to me as dangerous characters. They said you belonged to a reformatory in the neighbourhood."

"My hat! Must have been some of the Grammarians!" said Redfern. "And this born idiot took them for St. Jim's chaps. Take him away and bury him."

"Come on, Algernon!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "You've got a quid for me that my governess gave you. Come and help us blue it at the tuckshop."

"You are very k-k-kind," said Algernon, convinced at last. "I am truly sorry for the mistake. If I meet those boys again I shall speak to them very severely. I shall tell them that I consider their conduct reprehensible."

"That will simply crush them!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "They will probably go right away and drown themselves."

"You don't say so," ejaculated Algernon.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come alone!" said Tom, seizing Algernon by the arm. "Reddy, you chaps come, too. We've got a quid to blue."

"Hear, hear!" said Redfern.

And they descended the stairs together. They found Figgins & Co. prepared to bar the way, with vengeful looks. But an invitation to the school shop disarmed Figgins & Co., and they joined the party in great good humour. The chums of Study No. 6 joined them in the quad, so quite a little army invaded Dame Taggles' tuckshop. The sovereign was duly produced and handed over by Algernon, and the juniors proceeded to "blue" it in riotous living.

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FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, 1^d.

CHAPTER 6.

Salute!

THE next day Algernon Blenkinsop took his place in the Fourth Form.

The peculiar manner of Blenkinsop's arrival at St. Jim's had drawn general attention to him, and the juniors especially were very much interested in the verdant youth. He was so excessively simple that the other fellows in the Fourth found him quite delightful.

In Huckleberry Heath practical jokers were perhaps unknown, but the unfortunate Algernon found them flourishing in great numbers at St. Jim's. Levison of the Fourth had marked him as a special victim, and Levison's practical jokes were not always good-natured. The New House fellows, too, had an eye on Algernon. As he belonged to the School House he was fair game for the New House juniors. Altogether, Algernon seemed likely to have a very lively time at St. Jim's. Tom Merry certainly intended to look after him, but Tom's own pal, Monty Lowther, was of a humorous turn, and he saw great possibilities in Algernon.

The Fourth Form had to wait a little for Mr. Lathom, their Form-master, in the morning, that gentleman not being always quite punctual. As a rule, the Fourth-Formers would have filled up the interval with throwing paper pellets at one another, or perhaps playing leap-frog in the Form-room. Now, their attention was turned to Blenkinsop. It was already becoming a general amusement to pull Blenkinsop's leg.

Levison had taken him in hand, and the other fellows listened, grinning as Levison talked to the wide-eyed, open-mouthed Algernon.

"You haven't met Mr. Lathom yet?" Levison asked.

"Yes, he spoke to me yesterday," said Blenkinsop.

Levison looked very grave.

"Did you make the salute?" he asked.

"The—the what?"

"The St. Jim's salute."

"Nunno! I—I have never heard of it," said Algernon, looking distressed. "I trust I have not neglected any act of proper respect towards Mr. Lathom. My dear papa has told me to be always respectful to my kind teachers."

"Well, as you didn't know, I dare say Lathom won't say anything about it," said Levison consolingly. "But, of course, he'll expect you to learn about it by this time, and you'd better do it when he comes in."

"I will, certainly, if you will explain to me—"

"With pleasure," said Levison. "As Mr. Lathom goes to his desk you have to advance to meet him and make the salute with both hands. I suppose you know that all the old public schools have their own special customs. St. Jim's is just like the rest. At Eton they salute the headmaster by standing on their hands, and waving their feet in the air."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Algernon. "What a very extraordinary custom!"

"At Harrow they bend half-way to the ground, and nod their heads three times," said Levison. "At Winchester the custom is to turn twice round in a circle, and say 'Twice Two!' in a very loud voice."

"Dear me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Fourth-Formers, quite overcome with Algernon's expression of astonishment, at learning those peculiar customs of the great public schools.

"Oh, draw it mild, you fellows!" said Levison. "It's not fair to laugh at Blenkinsop because he doesn't know these things. How could he know them when he's been brought up at Chucklehead Green?"

"Huckleberry Heath!" murmured Algernon.

"Yes, Huckleberry Heath," assented Levison. "Well, now about the St. Jim's salute. You put the tip of your thumb to the tip of your nose—like this, and then stretch out all the fingers as far as they will go. That's called the First Salute!"

"That seems quite easy!" said Algernon.

"It's easy enough," said Levison, while the rest of the Fourth gurgled helplessly at seeing Algernon practise the First Salute. "That's what you do as Mr. Lathom enters, advancing to meet him at the same time. He will stop then—"

"I should jolly well think he would!" murmured Blake.

"And Algy had better stop, then, too."

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think—"

"Shut up, you chaps! Lathom may be in any minute, and Algernon will get into trouble if he doesn't salute him properly. Having made the first salute, Blenkinsop, you then put the tip of the thumb of the left hand to the tip of the little finger of the right hand, and stretch out all the fingers in the same way. This is called the Second Salute, and is used for Form-masters. The First Salute is for prefects."

"I see."



Tom Merry dragged Algernon out of the boat, and the new junior missed his footing on the slippery planks, and sat down, giving the hilarious juniors an extensive view of yellow stocking. "Ha, ha, ha!" they roared. "Oh, dear! Oh, Thomas!" gasped Benkinsop. (See Chapter 12.)

"There, you can do it already," said Levison. "Mind, step out of your place immediately Lathom comes in, and give him First and Second Salute."

"Thank you so much, Levison!"

"Bai Jove, you know—"

"Shurrup!" said Blake.

"But weally—"

"He can't be ass enough to do it," murmured Digby.

"But if he does— Oh, my hat!"

"Yaas, and I weally considah—"

"Here comes Lathom!"

The Form-room door opened, and Mr. Lathom entered. He blinked benevolently at the boys over his glasses, and went towards his desk. Levison nudged Benkinsop, and the new boy, anxious to do his duty, started from his place like an arrow from the bow. Mr. Lathom paused, and glanced at him.

Blenkinsop raised his right hand, and, looking directly towards the Form-master, placed the tip of his thumb to his nose, and extended the fingers of his hand.

The master of the Fourth jumped, and stood looking at him, scarcely able to believe his eyes. Then, as he stood rooted to the floor in astonishment, Algernon raised his left hand, put his thumb to the little finger of his right, stretched out the fingers, and added the Second Salute.

Mr. Lathom looked quite dazed. From the Fourth Form came an irrepressible yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon did not heed the laughter. He did not understand it. He was doing his duty, according to instructions, and that was enough for him.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Mr. Lathom at last. "Am I dreaming?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon Blenkinsop advanced towards the Form-master, his fingers still stretched from his nose in salute. If all had gone well, Mr. Lathom ought to have looked pleased. But all was apparently not going well. Mr. Lathom certainly did not look pleased. Blank amazement in his face gave place to anger, and thunder gathered on his brow.

"Boy!" he thundered.

Algernon jumped.

"Ye-es, sir!"

"What do you mean? How dare you, sir, treat your Form-master with—with such unexampled insolence?" shouted Mr. Lathom. "Silence, boys, how dare you laugh! Blenkinsop, you—you are an insolent young rascal, sir!"

"You—you don't say so!" gasped Algernon, his hands dropping from the salute. "I—I was only saluting you, sir."

"What!"

"I—I thought you'd be pleased, sir," said Algernon in dismay, and Mr. Lathom reached a cane off his desk.

"You—you thought that I should be pleased by this unparalleled impertinence!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom. "Are you out of your senses, boy?"

"N-n-n-no, sir. I hope not. I—I understood that that was the regular salute for a Fuf-fuf-form-master. I was tut-tut-tut-told so!"

"Ah," exclaimed Mr. Lathom, "someone has been deceiving this incredibly stupid boy! Who told you this ridiculous thing, Blenkinsop?"

Levison gave Blenkinsop a warning look. The unfortunate Algernon understood then, and he stammered. He realised that he had been japed, and he knew enough of schools, at least, to know that he was expected not to "sneak."

"I—I—I'd rather not say, sir," he stammered. "I fuf-fuf-fuf—"

"You what?"

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"PLAYING A PART!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 331.
A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"I fuf-fuf-fuf-fear that the boy has deceived me, sir. I assure you, sir, that I acted with the best intentions, sir, and never intended to be impertinent. I should be very sorry indeed to sus-sus-sus-sus—"

"To what?"

"To sus-sus-seem impertinent, sir. I intended to give you a kick—"

"What!"

"A kick-kick-kick—"

"Boy!"

"A kick-kick-kick-customary salute, sir!" Algernon got it out at last.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Fourth.

"You—you dreadfully stupid boy!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "I see that someone has been practising on your inexperience. You must not believe all that you are told. Go back to your place, and I will pass this matter over."

"Th-th-thank you, sir. I am sus-sus-sus—"

"That will do."

"Yes, sir, but I am really sus-sus-sus-sus-sorry, sir. Under the circumstances, sir, I am gig-gig-gig-gig—"

"Enough!"

"I am gig-gig-grateful to you, sir, for your kick-kick-kindness, and I shall be cook-cook-cook-careful, sir—"

"If you say another word, Blenkinsop, I will cane you!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Dear me! Go back to your place instantly and be silent."

And Algernon obeyed at last; but it was some minutes before the Fourth Form could be reduced to a proper state of gravity for lessons to commence.

CHAPTER 7.

Levison Makes a Collection.

LEVISON found the new boy distrustful of him after that experience in the Form-room. It was a case of once bitten and twice shy. Algernon did not bear malice; he was too kind and good-natured for that. He even presented Levison with a little tract, which he said was written by his dear papa, entitled "Hold to the Truth; or, the Cost of a Lie." Levison did not read the tract. He stuffed it down Algernon's back, and the well-meaning youth experienced considerable difficulty in extracting it again.

Algernon was well supplied with tracts suitable to all occasions, and he presented them to all sorts of fellows. He was also very eloquent on the subject of missionary work in the Gooralooral Islands. Algernon, green as he was, was not at all backward in coming forward, and he made himself quite prominent. That evening in the study, when the four juniors were at tea, he talked about the Gooralooral Islands, and the splendid work done there in inducing the natives to give up cannibalism and take to trousers. Lumley-Lumley yawned dreadfully, and retreated from the study. Mellish threatened to bump Algernon's head in the fender if he did not leave off; but Levison chipped in.

"Don't take any notice of Mellish, Blenkinsop," he said. "He does not understand these serious subjects. Go on. I'm awfully interested."

Mellish stared blankly at his chum; and Levison closed one eye—the eye that was furthest from Algernon.

Then Mellish understood, and held his peace. Algernon rattled on cheerfully. He was well up in his subject.

"That's jolly interesting," said Levison, with a nod, and stifling a yawn. "I'm specially keen on that kind of thing, because my brother's a missionary in the—the Booby-Gooby Islands. You have heard of them?"

Algernon shook his head.

"I am sus-sus-sorry, I cannot sus-sus-say I have," he remarked. Mellish changed a chuckle to a cough just in time, at a warning glare from Levison. This was the first Mellish had heard of Levison's missionary brother.

"The fact is, I'm making a collection for him," went on Levison blandly. "He requires twenty pounds in order to provide the Gooby-Booby Islanders with wheelbarrows. At present, you know, they have to carry the—the pearls in sacks on their shoulders, and if they had wheelbarrows it would be ever so much better for them. He is going to provide them with wheelbarrows, with tracts written out on them in the Booby-Gooby language, so that they will have the words always under their eyes."

"What a noble work!" exclaimed Algernon in enthusiastic admiration. "How proud you should be of your brother, Levison."

"I am!" said Levison solemnly. "I've been making a collection—some of the fellows have actually been without jam-tarts, for the sake of contributing to the fund. I myself have stopped eating toffee for six weeks, and saved up the money. Mellish has sold his bicycle to raise money for it. Unfortunately, I cannot raise any more, and the fund is still short of ten shillings. I don't know what's to be done."

Algernon beamed.

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"How very fuf-fuf-fuf—"

"What?"

"Fuf-fuf-fortunate! I have a half-sovereign that my dear papa gave me for pocket-money before I left home."

Levison was perfectly aware of that, having seen it in Algernon's hand. Algernon was very careful with that half-sovereign, taking it out of his pocket occasionally to make sure that it was safe.

"Have you really?" exclaimed Levison. "But I can't let you contribute it all. Oh, no, we couldn't think of that, could we, Mellish?"

Mellish shook his head solemnly.

"The unfortunate thing is, that a ship only goes to the Gooby-Booby Islands once a year," went on Levison. "If I don't get the money sent off this evening, it will miss the ship, and the Booby-Gooby Islanders will have to wait for their tracts—I mean their wheelbarrows, for another whole year. That is what is worrying me. It kept me awake all last night in the dorm thinking about it."

Algernon groped in his pocket for the half-sovereign.

"My dear Levison, you must take it, you must really. I insist upon it. I am proud and happy to assist in such a nun-nob-noble work."

"Well, if you insist," said Levison reluctantly, and his thin fingers closed on the coin. "This is very noble of you, Blenkinsop."

"Better go and send it off at once," said Mellish, rising with alacrity. "I'll come with you, Levison."

"So will I, my dear fellow," said Algernon.

But Levison gently laid his hand upon Algernon's shoulder, and pushed him back into his chair.

"No. I won't trouble you, Algy," he said. "You stay here, and—and—"

"No, no, I will come. It is no tub-tub-trouble at all."

"I'm in want of a tract to send to a chap in the village," said Levison hastily. "Look out one dealing with—with drink, will you, and have it ready for me when I come back?"

"Oh, certainly, Levison!"

And leaving Algernon thus congenially employed, the two young rascals quitted the study. They went chuckling down the passage. The chums of Study No. 6 were chatting outside their doorway, and then looked suspiciously at Levison and his comrade. When those two cheerful juniors were pleased, it was generally the sign that someone else had reason to be displeased.

"Hallo, what rotten trick have you been playing now?" asked Blake genially.

"Find out!" retorted Levison. And he hurried on with his companion, and they lost no time in getting to the school shop. That was the intended destination of the unfortunate Algernon's one-and-only half-sovereign.

"Bai Jove, they've been playin' some twick on Blenkinsop!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally do not appwove of these pwanks on Blenkinsop. Let's go and seen him."

The chums of the Fourth looked into Blenkinsop's study. They found him rooting among piles of tracts. He looked up with a beaming smile.

"My dear fellows," he exclaimed, "I have been very much mistaken in Levison. I really had a hard opinion of him, because he prevaricated this morning. But he is really a noble fellow."

"Is he?" said Blake. "This is the first we've heard of it; and you're the only chap that's made the discovery. What has he been doing now?"

"It is really splendid," said Algernon. "He is making a collection to send to his brother, the missionary in the Booby-Gooby Islands."

"What!" yelled Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"He has denied himself the luxury of toffee, and Mellish has sold his bicycle for the benefit of the fund to provide the Booby-Gooby Islanders with wheelbarrows—"

"My hat!" Blake staggered against the door. "Oh, my only sainted Aunt Josephine!"

"And he required just a half-sovereign to make up the required sum, so I—"

"Do you mean to say that he's squeezed a half-quid out of you?" exclaimed Herries.

"My dear Herries, it was for the collection—"

"The rotten swindler!" exclaimed Blake. "That's going too far. He's jolly well not going to welsh the duffer out of his money!"

"Wathah not!"

"It's a beastly swindle!" said Digby.

"My dear fellows, it is a nob-nob-nob-noble work, and I am delighted to find that my estimate of Levison's character was mis-mis-mistaken. He—"

"You frabjous ass!" roared Blake. "Levison hasn't any missionaries in the family—more likely he has convicts. He's welshed you."

"Oh dear! You don't say so?"
 "This is where Study No. 6 steps in," said Blake. "Where has Levison gone, fathead?"
 "He has gone to send the money to the mission—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Gone to the tuckshop more likely!" growled Blake.
 "Come on, you fellows! We'll make the cad refund that half-quit. You come too, Blenkinsop."
 "I am sus-sus-sus-sus-sorry, but I am looking out a tract for Levison—"
 "Well, I dare say he needs it; but that can wait. Come on!"

And Blake grasped Blenkinsop by the collar and whirled him out of the study. There was a shower of tracts in the air as Algernon thus departed. They settled like snow over the study, but Algernon was not allowed to stop and gather them up. He was rushed away down the passage, and the Fourth-Formers, in their haste, nearly collided with the Terrible Three, who were coming up to their study.

"Hallo! Whither bound?" exclaimed Lowther.
 "Levison has welsed this silly jay out of a half-quit," said Blake. "We're going to make him disgorge. You can come and lend a hand if you like."

"What-ho!"
 And the Terrible Three followed the Fourth-Formers, and they arrived, breathless, in the tuckshop.

CHAPTER 8.

Not a Success.

LEVISON and Mellish were seated upon high stools at the counter, enjoying themselves. Each of them had a plate of jam-tarts before him, and several empty ginger-beer bottles showed that they had not been wasting time. Blenkinsop's half-sovereign was not likely to last long at that rate.

The two young rascals looked rather alarmed as Tom Merry & Co. swarmed in. Dame Taggles, who was serving them, looked surprised.

"At it already—eh?" said Blake genially. "Have they paid for any of those things yet, Mrs. Taggles?"

"Not yet, Master Blake."
 "Good! Levison, my son, will you have the extreme kindness to hand Blenkinsop back his half-sovereign?" asked Blake, in a tone of elaborate politeness.

"Yaas, wathah; as otherwise we shall bump you, you young wascal, and depwive you of your plundah by force," said Arthur Augustus severely.

Levison set his teeth.
 "There seems to be some mistake, my dear Levison," said Blenkinsop mildly. "Blake says you have no brother who is a missionary—"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "That's too rich! Levison, with an imagination like yours, you ought to be a novelist or a journalist, or a Member of Parliament. There's been nothing like it since Ananias."

"I fuf-fuf-fear, Levison, that you have deceived me," said Algernon sorrowfully. "I doubt now very much whether there is such a place at all as the Gooby-Booby Islands—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I certainly do not remember to have seen them marked on the map. Under the circumstances, Levison, I must request you to return my half-sovereign, which you have obtained from me by fuf-fuf-false pretences."

"And we'll give you one minute to do it in," said Tom Merry grimly. "Japing a greenhorn is one thing, Levison; but swindling him out of his money is another. And the sooner you learn the difference the better it will be for you."

Levison set his teeth.
 "Look here, Blenkinsop lent me that half-quit—"

"Cheese that, and hand it over!"
 "I'm not going to do anything of the sort. I—I sha'n't be able to pay for these things—"

"That's your look-out! Hand over the loot!"

Levison and Mellish exchanged looks of dismay. They had "diddled" Algernon successfully out of his half-sovereign, and they had not expected Nemesis to overtake them in this way. And Dame Taggles did not allow credit, especially to fellows like Levison and Mellish, who were extremely unreliable in all money matters. If the half-sovereign were restored to Algernon now, Levison and his chum would be left in an exceedingly awkward position.

But there was no help for it. Tom Merry & Co. were in earnest. Blenkinsop was looking at the two young rascals reproachfully, but the other juniors looked threatening. They were evidently not to be trifled with.

As Levison hesitated the juniors closed round him and Mellish.

"Hand it over, Levison," said Mellish uneasily. "You can let me alone, you fellows. I've not got it. I really hadn't a hand in the matter at all. I simply came here with Levison to—to—"

"To share in the plundah, you young wascal!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard you as a pair of wottahs!"

"Now, Levison—"
 "Hands off!" growled Levison. "The silly ass can have his half-quit if he likes. He lent it to me." And Levison jerked out the half-sovereign and threw it at Algernon.

"Catch!"
 Algernon caught it—with his nose.
 "Ow!" he ejaculated. "Oh dear! My dear Levison, I—"

Tom Merry picked it up and handed it to the new junior.
 "There you are!" he said. "Now, take more care of your money, you fathead! And don't ever believe a word that Levison says to you. He can't tell the truth if he tries—and he never tries."

"You don't say so?" murmured Algernon.
 Arthur Augustus wagged his forefinger at Levison admonishingly.

"Pway let this be a lesson to you, deah boy!" he said. "Weflect ovah your wascally conduct, and wesolve to turn ovah a new leaf. I am vevy much afwaid that you will come to a vevy bad end if you keep on like this."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"
 "Weally, Levison—"

"Come away, fathead!" said Blake, seizing D'Arcy by the arm. "Levison will get all the sermons he wants from Blenkinsop. You needn't pile in. Kim on!"

Tom Merry & Co. departed from the tuckshop, taking Blenkinsop with them.

Levison and Mellish slid down from their stools. The feast was over. It was an unfinished match, so to speak. And Dame Taggles remained to be dealt with. She was looking at them with a grim eye. She made a calculation with a stump of pencil upon a fragment of wrapping paper, and stated the result in uncompromising accents.

"Four shillings and tenpence, please."

"Hum!" said Levison. "You—you see, Mrs. Taggles—"

"I'll see you later, Levison," said Mellish, moving towards the door.

"No, you won't!" he said. "You're in this with me. You'll have to stump up half."

"Can't be did. I've only got threepence!" said Mellish. "You were standing treat. You ordered the things. Didn't he, Mrs. Taggles?"

"Yes, you ordered the things, Master Levison. Four shillings and tenpence, please."

"I—I can't settle it now!" growled Levison. "I've only got a tanner. You can have that. I—I'll settle another time."

"You know I don't allow credit," said Mrs. Taggles, with a firmness worthy of a Suffragette leader. "You will settle now!"

"Those rotters have collared my cash!" said Levison, going anxiously through his pockets. "Hand out your three d., Mellish. And here's sevenpence. You'll have to leave the four bob over for a bit, ma'am. I tell you I'm stony."

"I will leave it until this evening," said Mrs. Taggles grimly. "Unless you pay this evening, I shall complain to your Housemaster."

And the good dame turned away, and Levison and Mellish quitted the tuckshop in dismay.

"This is a go!" said Levison. "Where are we to get four bob from, Mellish?"

"Don't say 'we'!" snapped Mellish. "It's no business of mine! I didn't quite like the idea of squeezing money out of Blenkinsop like that, anyway, but I let you run on. You're too unscrupulous, Levison."

"Why, you—you—" exclaimed Levison, clenching his fists.

Mellish walked away.

There was evidently no help to be had from Mellish. Levison walked to the School House in a decidedly uneasy frame of mind. He knew that Dame Taggles meant what she said, and if she complained to Mr. Railton it was pretty certain that the whole story would come out, and Levison knew what the Housemaster would think of the swindling of Algernon. He would entirely fail to see the humorous side of the story of the Booby-Gooby Islanders. He would consider Levison a dishonest young rascal—as indeed he was. And Levison's palms tingled in anticipation of what would follow.

The cad of the Fourth looked in at Crooke's study. He was on chummy terms with Crooke of the Shell, and Crooke had plenty of money. He also had a gift for looking after it with great care. It was not an easy matter to extract a loan from Crooke; but Levison resolved to try. He came in with an agreeable grin, and started by relating the little joke on Algernon. Crooke roared with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! That's too rich!" he exclaimed. "You are an awfully deep beggar, Levison. You'll be a millionaire some day, or a convict, or something of the sort."

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"Funny, wasn't it?" grinned Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha! I should say so. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only Tom Merry and the rest found it out, and made me hand back the half-quad," said Levison.

"Ha ha, ha! That's funnier still!" roared Crooke. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I owe Mrs. Taggles four bob," said Levison. "I suppose you don't mind lending me four bob for a few days, Crooke, old chap?"

Crooke became quite grave all of a sudden. The humour of the matter no longer appealed to him, apparently.

"Sorry!" he said. "I'm rather short of money. And you never pay up a loan, Levison. You owe me money now."

"When I get my allowance—"

"Two bob a week, isn't it?" said Crooke, with a sneer.

"Thanks! It's not good enough. Sorry I can't oblige you!"

"And you call yourself a pal!" snorted Levison.

"Chap isn't obliged to find his pals in pocket-money, I suppose," said Crooke, with a yawn. "You're always over-reaching yourself, Levison. You should be more careful. Excuse me now, will you? I've got my prep to do."

Levison left the study, with a black brow. He knew that Crooke probably had two or three pounds in his pocket, and his feelings towards his "pal" were more bitter than towards Tom Merry & Co. He looked into Gore's study next. Gore and Skimpole were doing their preparation there. Levison explained the situation, and Gore was greatly tickled with the story of the missionary in the Booby-Gooby Islands; but when Levison came to the point, Gore "froze" up as promptly as Crooke had done.

"Well, you are an ass," he commented. "Railton will wallop you if Mrs. Taggles tells him the yarn. Sorry I can't help you!"

"It's only four bob!" urged Levison.

"You owe me ten bob now," said Gore. "Ever since your pater went on the rocks, you've been sponging on somebody or other, Levison. I've got no tin to give away."

"My dear Levison," said Skimpole, blinking at him through his big spectacles, "if you would like me to give—"

Levison turned to him eagerly.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "You shall have it back next week—"

"Some advice—"

"Oh, you idiot!"

"I should advise you to go to Mr. Railton and make a clean breast of it," went on Skimpole. "That is the best thing you can do; and also resolve not to be dishonest in the future. Then—Ow—ow—ow! Let go my nose, Levison! Ow!"

Levison stamped out of the study, and slammed the door, leaving Skimpole nursing his nose.

CHAPTER 9.

A Burnt-Offering.

"**B**AI JOVE! What's the mattah with you, Levison?"

It was nearly bedtime when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came upon the cad of the Fourth, in a corner of the passage. Levison had his hands tucked under his armpits, and was squeezing them hard, and bending forward painfully, and groaning at the same time. Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass and looked him over.

"Is that somethin' new in gymnastics, deah boy?" he asked.

Levison scowled at the swell of St. Jim's.

"You rotter!" he groaned. "Ow! I've been through it! Yow! Railton gave me six on each hand! Groogh! Ow!"

"Bai Jove, I'm sowwy; though, I dare say you deserved it," said D'Arcy. "But what have you been licked for this time?"

"You know jolly well!" said Levison, between his teeth. "Mr. Taggles complained to him because I couldn't square up four bob. Then it came out about that fool Blenkinsop. And my allowance is stopped to pay Mrs. Taggles, and I've been licked—Ow—ow!"

And Levison squeezed his hands again.

"Weally, it was your own fault, Levison. But why didn't you bowwow the money fwom one of your fwriends? Cwooke and Goah have plenty of money."

Levison gritted his teeth.

"They wouldn't lend it to me," he said. "I'll make them sorry for leaving me in the lurch like that, somehow. Ow! Ow!"

And Levison wriggled away, still mumbling and groaning.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "He is a wottah, but it was up to the othah wottahs to stand by him. I wegard them as mean beasts. But it serves him wight!"

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FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, 1^d.

And, with that comforting reflection, Arthur Augustus went his way.

Levison was still looking pained and ratty when the Fourth Form went to their dormitory. He found a tract laid upon his pillow—a kindly gift from Algernon Blenkinsop. It was entitled, "Honesty is the Best Policy; or, the Little Boy who Lied!"

Levison picked it up, and looked round with a gleaming eye for Algernon. Blenkinsop met his glance with a beaming smile.

"That is for you, Levison," he said. "It was written by my dear papa. I have some more which may be useful to you, when you have read that."

Levison clenched his hands hard. He was inclined to repay Algernon's kindness by smiting him hip and thigh; but he restrained himself. It was not his policy to quarrel with the verdant youth.

"Thank you, Blenkinsop," he said. "This is really kind of you."

"I am so glad you like it," said Algernon. "Some fellows to whom I have given little tracts are not pleased at all. Some of them have been quite rude about it. Knox of the Sixth, actually cuffed me violently, because I gave him a tract entitled 'Keep Your Temper; or, How Georgie Lost His Prize.' It was a very good tract, written by my dear papa. I do not see at all why you fellows are laughing. I have a tract which may be very useful to you, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes; it is entitled, 'Waste not, Want not; or, the Vanity of Fine Raiment.'"

"You uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus witheringly. "Do you think that ewevy fellow is bound to dwess as you do in Hucklebewwy Heath, you feahful fathead? I wegard you as a fwabjous ass, Blenkinsop!"

"But reflect, my dear D'Arcy," urged Algernon. "You have six or seven pairs of trousers, and the inhabitants of the Gooralooral Islands have no trousers at all—actually none at all! Would it not be better to send the money to the Gooralooral Fund? My dear papa raises a collection for the Gooralooral Islands regularly every year before he goes on his summer holiday—What ever are you fellows laughing at?"

What the fellows were laughing at remained a mystery to the gentle Algernon.

The Fourth-Formers turned in, and were soon sleeping the sleep of the just. One of them did not sleep, however; perhaps because he was not one of the just. After the other fellows were asleep, Levison crept out of bed, and he was busy for a quarter of an hour with Blenkinsop's clothes, and he chuckled silently as he crept back to bed.

The rising-bell clanged out in the sunny summer morning, and Algernon Blenkinsop was one of the first out of bed. A puzzled expression came over his face when he tried to pull his trousers on. They came on to a certain distance, and then stopped; his feet refused to emerge.

"Dear me!" ejaculated Algernon. "This is very extraordinary. What ever is the matter with my trousers?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "They've been sewn up!"

"You don't say so!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no doubt about it. The "bags" had been sewn up during the night, and the sleeves of the jacket were treated in the same way. Algernon regarded his "clobber" in dismay. The sewing had been strongly done, and it was not an easy task to undo it.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That is wathah a wotten trick! It is wotten to play pwanks on a chap's clobbah."

"Dear me!" said Algernon. "I shall have to put on some other clothes. This is really very annoying."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Goodness gracious! Someone has taken away the key of my box, and it is locked!" exclaimed Algernon, in tones of distress.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fear that someone has been playing a practical joke upon me," said Algernon, as if that had just dawned upon him.

And the juniors shrieked.

Algernon sat down to unpick the sewing of the "bags," and the rest of the juniors went downstairs and left him still busy. Algernon missed early chapel, and he was late for breakfast. Mr. Lathom gave him a sharp reprimand, and declined to listen to any explanation.

But Algernon was determined to explain. His papa had impressed upon him to be a good boy at St. Jim's, and, as he said pathetically afterwards, it was impossible for him to leave the Form-master under the dreadful impression that he had been a bad boy.

"It was really not my fuf-fuf-fault, sir," he said. "If you will lis-lis-lis-listen—"

"That is enough," said Mr. Lathom. "If it occurs again you will be punished."

"Yes, sir, b-b-b-but—"

"I desire to hear nothing more," said the Fourth Form-master, with a frown. "Pray be silent, Blenkinsop!"

"But, sir, I wish to give you a kick—"

"What?"

"A kick-kick-concise explanation, sir. It was owing to the fuf-fuf-act that my tut-tut-trousers were sus-sus-sown—"

"That will do, Blenkinsop."

"But my tut-tut-trousers—"

"If you say another word, Blenkinsop, I shall dismiss you without breakfast," said Mr. Lathom, exasperated, "and the next boy who laughs will be caned!"

So, Algernon gave it up. Levison joined him as they left the dining-room.

"Rather hasty, old Lathom," Levison remarked. "Why don't you give him a tract on the subject, Blenkinsop? Just leave it on his desk in the Form-room, where he will find it. He will take it very kindly."

"My dear Levison, that is a most valuable suggestion: I shall certainly act upon your advice."

When Mr. Lathom came in to take the Fourth that morning, and went to his desk, he blinked in astonishment. In a prominent position on the lid of the desk lay a sheet, with the title in large letters:

"BE PATIENT; OR, THE COST OF A HASTY WORD."

Mr. Lathom's face assumed a most extraordinary expression. He took up the tract in his finger and thumb, and held it up, and his eyes roved over the class. The Fourth-Formers gasped. They had nearly all been presented with tracts by Algernon, but that that cheerful youth would venture to "plant" them on his Form-master had never occurred to them. They waited for the storm to burst.

"Someone," said Mr. Lathom, his voice trembling with anger—"someone has had the audacity—I may say the unparalleled audacity—to place this—this obnoxious paper here for me! I demand to know who has been guilty of this impertinence!"

"Oh crumbs," murmured Blake, "this is where Algy gets it in the neck!"

"Yaas, wathah! The cwass ass!"

Blenkinsop rose in his place.

"If you pip-pip-pip-please, sir—"

"Did you place this obnoxious and ridiculous paper here, Blenkinsop?" asked Mr. Lathom in an awful voice.

"If you pip-pip-pip—"

"Come here, Blenkinsop!"

Blenkinsop came out before the Form rather reluctantly. Levison had assured him that Mr. Lathom would take his little attention kindly; but kindness was not to be discerned in the Form-master's countenance at that moment.

"How dare you place this paper here, Blenkinsop?"

"I was tut-tut-trying to pi-pip-please you, sir," stammered Algernon. "It is really a very good tract, sir, written by my dear pi-pip-pip-papa!"

"Hold out your hand, Blenkinsop!" thundered Mr. Lathom.

Algernon held out his hand, under the impression that Mr. Lathom was going to hand him the tract. He jerked it back in alarm as the Form-master's cane came swooping down. The cane, meeting with no resistance, swished upon Mr. Lathom's own leg, and he uttered a howl of pain. The Fourth Form burst into an irrepressible giggle. Algernon had not intended anything of the sort, but Mr. Lathom did not know that. He grasped the verdant youth by the collar, and whacked him across the shoulders with great energy.

"Oh, oh, oh, oh!" roared Algernon, struggling and wriggling in the Form-master's grasp. "Oh! Ow! Yaroooh! Dear me! My goodness! Yarooooop!"

There was a yell of laughter from the Fourth. In Algernon's wild wriggles, several bundles of tracts that were stuffed into his pockets came tumbling out, and fluttered open, and a regular shower of tracts rained round him on the floor. Mr. Lathom gasped with astonishment. Every shake that he gave Algernon caused that youth to shed more tracts, till it looked like a snowfall.

"Bless my soul," exclaimed Mr. Lathom, "this is—this is extraordinary! I fear that this boy is not right in his head. Blenkinsop, what do you mean by having your pockets full of these ridiculous and obnoxious papers? Answer me, sir."

"If you pip-pip-please—" stuttered Algernon.

"Collect them up, sir, and take them to the grate and burn them at once!" thundered Mr. Lathom. "Do you hear me?"

"Bub-bub-bub-bub—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bub-bub-burn them, sir!" stuttered Algernon. "Oh, sir! I—I—"

"Immediately," shouted Mr. Lathom, "otherwise I shall cane you severely. Not a word. Burn that rubbish at once!"

"My g-g-g-goodness!" groaned Algernon.

But the Form-master was not to be trifled with; and the distressed Algernon had to gather up that valuable literature and stuff it into the grate, and light it. Then Mr. Lathom made him turn out his pockets, and more and more tracts were added to the conflagration, Algernon watching the destruction with tears in his eyes. Then he was sent back to his place, with an imposition of two hundred lines. Algernon wore a dolorous look the rest of the morning. The impot did not worry him so much as the loss of the tracts, with which he had hoped to do extensive good, and, like Rachel of old, he mourned for that which was lost and would not be comforted.

CHAPTER 10.

Up the River.

"AND Algernon!" said Tom Merry.

Manners and Lowther grunted.

It was Saturday afternoon; and as there was no important cricket-match to detain the Terrible Three, they were planning to go up the river. The junior eleven was playing the Third Form, and mighty men like the Terrible Three were not needed to deal with Wally & Co. of the Third. They left that match to the lesser lights. But Tom Merry was mindful of the request Miss Priscilla Fawcett had made. He was asked to look after Blenkinsop, and he was full of good nature. Manners and Lowther were good-natured, too; but they did not relish the idea of having the verdant youth from Huckleberry Heath "planted" on them, as it were.

"He won't do any harm," urged Tom Merry. "We'll make him steer the boat, too, so he will be useful. The other fellows don't seem to yearn for his company very much, and it's up to us to look after him a bit."

"But we're going to bathe," said Lowther, "and I bet you that duffer can't swim!"

"We'll teach him!"

"Look here," roared Lowther, "I'm not going to spend my half-holidays in teaching a blessed chump to swim."

Tom Merry shook his hand at him chidingly.

"If Algernon were here, he would give you a tract about 'Unselfishness; or, the Dreadful Fate of the Little Boy who Wanted to Enjoy Himself!'" he said severely.

"Let him give me any blessed tracts, that's all," said Lowther sulphurously.

"Oh, let him come!" said Manners resignedly. "I can see you mean to have your way, Tom, so there's no need to waste breath. Come on!"

And the Terrible Three looked for Blenkinsop, and took him along with them. Blenkinsop was very pleased to go. He liked Tom Merry; and Miss Fawcett had counselled him to make a close friend of him. Blenkinsop meant to do so.

"This is very kick-kick-kind of you, Thomas," he said. "You don't mind if I call you Thomas, do you?"

"Ow!" said Tom Merry. "Make it Tom, for goodness' sake!"

"And buck up," said Lowther. "We've got to get the boat out."

"Certainly, Montague. You don't mind if I call you Montague?"

"You can call me Uncle William if you like," said Lowther resignedly. "Now, then, get a move on. Can you swim?"

"Yes, I can swim a little," said Blenkinsop. "I have often bathed in the delightful stream at Huckleberry Heath. I can also row. I shall be very pleased to row you up the river."

"May as well give him an oar," said Manners, as they carried the boat out. "I don't suppose he can row; but we'll make him work."

"I shall be delighted to work, my dear Henry—you don't mind if I call you Henry?"

"Any old thing," said Manners. "Don't fall over the oar, fathead! Oh, you ass!"

Algernon promptly stumbled over the oar lying on the raft, and rolled over, dragging the boat after him, and the Terrible Three with it. Lowther, who received a bump on the shin from the boat, looked daggers at Blenkinsop.

"Oh, you chump!"

"I am truly sorry, Montague."

"Come on," said Tom Merry, laughing. "You carry the oars, Blenkinsop. Don't help with the boat any more, please."

The boat was launched, and the Terrible Three entered it. Blenkinsop brought the oars down to the edge of the raft. He tossed one of them in, narrowly missing Lowther, and as he lifted another, the Shell fellow roared:

"Chuck it, you silly ass!"

"Certainly, my dear Montague."

And Algernon chucked it—not in the sense that Lowther

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intended. The oar bumped into the boat, and the end dropped on Lowther's boot heavily. Lowther gave a ferocious whoop.

"You howling fathead! What did you chuck that for?"

"But you told me to chuck it!" exclaimed Blenkinsop in surprise.

"Oh, you—you—you——" Words failed Lowther. He grabbed the other oars away from Blenkinsop just in time.

"Come in, Blenkinsop!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Here, take an oar, and sit down. Ow! Don't brain me with it!"

Blenkinsop's oar was passed through the rowlocks, and he sat down to row. Manners took the lines. Lowther sat beside Blenkinsop, taking the other oar. Tom Merry took a pair. They pulled out into the river. The fellows on the landing-raft looked after them, and howled with laughter. Blenkinsop's rowing was a sight for gods and men.

"That's an oar, not a spade," said Lowther, breathing hard, "and if you jam that end of it under my chin again, I'll slaughter you."

"My dear Montague——"

"Shove it further through the rowlock, fathead! You're not supposed to hold an oar in the middle like a balancing pole!" yelled Lowther.

"Pull away," said Tom Merry, looking round. "There are no crabs in this river, Algy, so you needn't waste time trying to catch them."

"I was not trying to catch anything, Thomas," said Blenkinsop in surprise.

"You'll catch something without trying to, if you're not careful!" growled Lowther.

"My dear Montague——"

"Oh, shurrup!"

Lowther bent to his rowing, and Blenkinsop followed his example. He bent to it a little too earnestly, and caught Tom Merry in the middle of the back with his oar. There was a roar from the captain of the Shell.

"Ow! What's that?"

"It's only Algy!" grinned Lowther.

"I am sorry, Thomas——"

"Ow, you ass!" groaned Tom Merry, wriggling. "Here, you take my place! I'm not going to sit in front of you; you're dangerous! Can you pull a pair?"

"Yes, indeed. I was considered rather a good oarsman at Huckleberry Heath."

"They must be tremendous watermen there, then," said Monty Lowther sarcastically.

Tom Merry took Blenkinsop's place beside Lowther, and Blenkinsop was entrusted with a pair of oars. He pulled away lustily. In his rowing at Huckleberry Heath he had not, apparently, ever considered it necessary to keep in time. His oars described weird angles, that would have puzzled Euclid himself, and sometimes they were deep in the water, and sometimes they weren't.

Sometimes one was deep down, digging for crabs, and the other flourished in the air. The progress of the boat was not fast, and the roars of laughter from the raft came ringing across the river.

"Buck up, for goodness' sake!" growled Lowther. "We didn't come out here to give an exhibition! Pull, you ass!"

Blenkinsop pulled. He pulled very hard indeed, but unfortunately both his oars missed the water altogether that time. The result was that Algernon flew backwards, and his heels flourished in the air as he pitched over Tom Merry and Lowther.

"Oh dear!" he gasped.

"My goo-goo-goo-goodness!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the raft.

"Lie down!" roared

Lowther, as Algernon was scrambling up. "You'll have the boat over next! If you touch those oars again, I'll scalp you!"

Tom Merry rescued Algernon's oars, which were floating away, and laid them aboard.

"Sit down and hold tight!" he said, laughing. "Don't bother to row. We can manage."

"But I should be delighted to help you, Thomas. My papa has always cautioned me not to be lazy, and allow other fellows to do the work. I——"

"Here, come and take the lines, if you must do something," said Manners; and he jerked Blenkinsop into the stern. "Now sit tight and steer, and don't jaw!"

"Certainly, Henry!"

The Terrible Three rowed, and Algernon steered, and the boat gathered speed. The raft disappeared astern, but there were a good many boats on the river opposite the school grounds, and careful steering was required. Algernon steered very carefully. He jerked hard at the line as they passed a boat containing Cutts and several other Fifth-Formers.

Unfortunately, he pulled the wrong line, and the next moment there was a crash, and a roar of fury from Cutts & Co.

"You thumping asses! Where are you coming?"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Firth-Form boat was rocking like a rocking-horse. The Fifth-Formers glared at the Shell fellows, and roared at them. Cutts's flow of language was eloquence itself. Monty Lowther pushed off, resting the end of his oar against Cutts's chest for that purpose.

The boats separated, and Cutts sat down with sudden violence. He jumped up again, raving; but the Terrible Three were pulling hard, and were out of the reach of vengeance. Manners dragged Blenkinsop out of the stern seat, and took the lines again.

"My dear Henry!" said Algernon, blinking at him. "Cannot I do anything to help?"

"Yes, you can sit down, and not move," said Manners.

"If you move so much as a finger, I'll fetch you a lick over the napper with this boathook. See?"

"Oh dear!" said Algernon.

And he sat down.

The Terrible Three rested upon their oars about a mile up the river. The Ryll was narrower there, and deep woods shaded the shore on both sides.

"We're going to swim here," said Tom Merry. "You'd better sit in the boat, Blenkinsop. It's too deep for you—if you swim as well as you row!"

Blenkinsop looked doubtfully at the deep river swirling past the boat.

"My papa has warned me never to go out of my depth," he remarked. "But I should very much like to bathe, Thomas."

"Oh, all right! We'll pull you in to the shore first, then," said Tom. "Give way, you chaps!"

The boat drew in to the distant bank, where the water was shallow among the willows, and Blenkinsop landed.

"Now, mind you don't go out of your depth," said Tom. "We'll come back for you presently. All right?"

"Yes, my dear Thomas."

The Shell fellows pulled away again. They were all good swimmers, and they did not want to paddle about in the shallows with Algernon. The boat pulled away to the island in the river, and there they attached the painter to an overhanging bough, and then stripped in the boat for the swim. In a few minutes they were enjoying themselves in the water, and had forgotten all about Algernon.

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

PLAYING A PART!

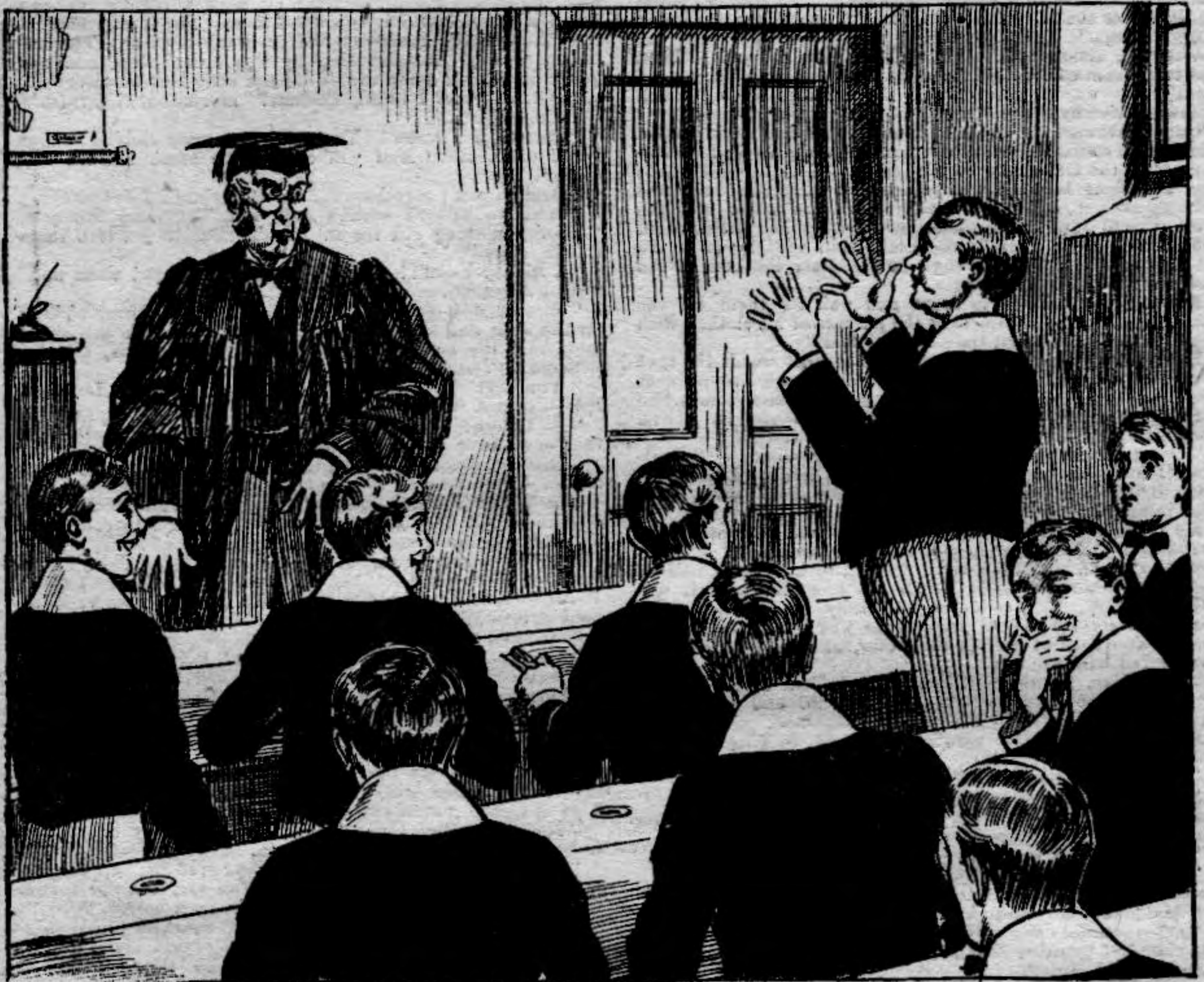
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Mr. Lathom stood rooted to the floor in astonishment as he observed the peculiar antics of the new boy. Algernon was following out the instructions Levison had given him to the letter! "Goodness gracious!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Am I dreaming?" "Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Fourth-Formers. (See Chapter 6.)

CHAPTER 11. A Change of Attire!

"MY hat! It's Algy!"
"Algy, by gum!"
Gordon Gay and Wootton major stopped and looked out through the openings of the willows

The two Grammarians were strolling through the wood along the Ryll, when they caught sight of the festive Algy disporting in the water. Algernon was in the shallows, splashing about with a great deal of noise, and puffing and blowing like a grampus. It was the puffing and blowing that drew the Grammarians' eyes first in his direction, and then they recognised the verdant youth they had japed in Rylcombe a few days before.

Gordon Gay's eyes twinkled as he gazed at the unconscious youth from the trees on the bank. The chums of the Grammar School had intended to bathe themselves, but Gay changed his mind now. His glance wandered up and down the grassy bank.

"His clobber must be here somewhere," he murmured.

Wootton chuckled.

"Good egg! It will be funny to watch his face when we've hidden his clothes!" he murmured.

"We're not going to hide them," said Gay coolly. "We're going to take them away. We'll leave them with the porter at St. Jim's!"

"Oh crumbs! But—but how will he get home?" gasped Wootton.

"Well," remarked Gay, "we shall have to get him some others, I suppose. After making friends with Algy, and allowing him to call me Thomas, it's up to me to look after him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You look for his clobber, and nail 'em, while I cut off on

my bike," said Gay. "I sha'n't be long. Don't let him see you."

"Right-ho!"

Gordon Gay ran through the wood. The Grammarians had ridden there on their bicycles, and left the machines on the bridle-path, only a hundred yards distant. Gay quickly reached his bicycle, and mounted it, and pedalled away towards Wayland. Meanwhile, Wootton major, keeping out of sight of the bathing Blenkinsop, sought for that unsuspecting youth's clothes.

Algernon had folded up his clothes very carefully, and placed them on the bank, with a large stone upon them to keep them there. He had only just entered the water when the Grammarians came upon the scene, and he was not thinking of coming out yet.

Wootton soon found the clothes, and gathered them up, carrying them away into the wood; and then he watched Algy, and waited for the return of Gordon Gay. It was nearly half an hour before Gay returned. Wootton heard his bicycle on the bridle-path, and then Gordon Gay came through the trees, with a bundle under his arm.

Wootton glared at it.

"What on earth have you got there?" he asked.

"Clobber for Algy!" grinned Gay.

He opened the bundle. Wootton major with difficulty suppressed a shriek when he saw what it contained.

"Oh, you ass! Feminine clobber!" he gasped.

Gay nodded calmly.

"The good Algy is so sweet and gentle, I think he would make a ripping young lady," he remarked. "I got this lot cheap at Ikey Solomons', in Wayland. They're rather small for a girl of Algy's age—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I think he will wear them; he can't go home without. The colour scheme is pretty good—any variety of

colours. They were a job lot, Ikey said, and I couldn't stand on the cut or the fit. Take 'em, and put 'em where you found Algy's things."

Wootton, almost suffocating with laughter, obeyed. Then the two Grammarians gathered up Blenkinsop's clothes, and went their way rejoicing, with the satisfied feeling which follows a friendly action.

Quite unconscious of the change that had been made, Blenkinsop continued to disport himself in the water for some time after the Grammarians were gone. The Terrible Three had not come back, but Algernon felt that he had had enough at last, and he crawled out of the water into the willows, and towelled himself down with much satisfaction. He looked away towards the island, but the chums of the Shell were out of sight, though he could see the boat in the distance moored to the branch.

Algernon determined to dress, and wait for them on the bank. He had several tracts in the pockets of his clothes, with which he could pass the time very pleasantly.

Having towelled himself down, he stepped towards the spot where he had left his clothes, and then his big, round eyes almost started from his head. He gazed at the clothes like a fellow in a dream. Clothes were there, carefully placed under the large stone, but they were not his clothes.

"G-g-goodness gracious!" gasped Algernon. "S-s-sus-some female person has left her clothes here! I did not know that ladies bathed in this spot! Oh dear! Oh dear! This is simply dreadful!"

He made a wild rush for the towels, and wrapped them round him. Then he ventured to look round again. There was no sign of his clothes, and no sign of any other bather. Only his boots remained, beside the new clothes. It was extraordinary. Algernon sought wildly up and down the bank, but he sought in vain. He was still seeking when there was a dash of oars in the water, and the boat bumped among the willows.

"You here, Blenkinsop?" called out Tom Merry. The Terrible Three had finished their swim, and they had dressed in the boat, and returned for Algernon.

Blenkinsop came into view on the bank, looking very red and flustered.

"I am here, Thomas—"

"Get into your duds, then. We want to get home to tea," said Tom. "We're hungry. Why haven't you dressed, you ass? Do you want to catch cold?"

"It is very extraordinary—"

"Oh, buck up!" said Monty Lowther. "We've got jolly good appetites, and we want to be home before morning."

"My kick-kick-clothes have gone!" stuttered Algernon.

"Oh crumbs! Some silly ass has been along and hidden his clothes," growled Manners. "Why don't you look for them, you chumps?"

"Someone else has been bathing here and d-d-dressed in my clothes by mistake, I think," said Algernon distressfully.

"Well, if he's dressed in yours he must have left his own," said Tom Merry. "Find 'em and get into them."

"I have found them—"

"Well, tumble into them, and let's get off."

"I kick-kick-kick-can't!"

"Why not?" demanded the Terrible Three together.

"They—they won't do for me!" wailed Algernon. "She has taken my clothes by mistake, and left me hers."

"SHE!" roared the Shell fellows.

"Yes."

"You—you frabjous ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry, springing ashore. "There are no lady bathers here, and if there were, do you think a feminine gender could dress in your clothes by mistake, you silly jossler? Some silly ass has taken your clothes, and left the others. Oh, my hat! Is this the clobber?"

He stared at the clothes left for Algernon, and burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is n-n-nothing to laugh at!" said poor Algernon. "This is really very distressing. How can I dress in that attire?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Shell lifted the "clobber" to examine them. There was a short skirt of a bright blue colour, a very large bodice of red, a pair of yellow stockings, and a sailor-hat trimmed with big black feathers. That was all, but it was enough to throw the juniors almost into hysterics.

"Oh, crumbs! Fancy Algy going home in these!" gasped Lowther.

"I—I kick-kick-can't do it!" groaned Algernon. "I begin to think that sus-sus-somebody has been playing a practical joke on me."

"Only beginning!" sobbed Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell fellows almost wept. But the idea of taking Algernon home in such attire was too dreadful, and they

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hunted through the thickets for his clothes, hoping that the practical jokers had only concealed them. But it soon became clear that Algy's garments had been taken away. The unfortunate Algy was shivering by this time. The sun was going down, and damp towels did not keep him warm.

"Whatever am I to do, Thomas?" murmured Algernon.

Thomas gurgled.

"Blessed if I know! You must get some clobber on, or you'll catch cold. And you can't come home without any clothes."

"And he can't stay here for ever!" grinned Lowther.

"And we haven't even a coat with us!" said Manners. "There's nothing else for it. You'll have to get into these things, Algy."

"I kick-kick-can't! I don't know how to put them on!" wailed Algernon.

"Blessed if I quite do, either," said Tom Merry, picking up the skirt and surveying it gingerly. "I think this thing goes over the head. Shove your silly head here, and I'll help you. There!"

"You ass! You put the big end on first," said Lowther. "You've got it upside down."

"So I have!" said Tom, reversing the garment. "Wriggle that down over you, Blenkinsop."

"Groo-hooh-hoogh!" came in muffled tones from Algernon, almost suffocated with his struggles inside the garment.

The Terrible Three grasped it together, and dragged it down. It was very short and very tight for Algernon, and did not quite meet round his waist.

"There ought to be something to pull it tight," said Lowther, scanning it. "No, there are hooks. It won't meet. We shall have to hook the hooks into Algy, if they're to be hooked into anything."

"Oh dear!" gasped Algernon.

"I've got some string," said Tom. "We can tie it round his waist. It comes down below his silly knees, and the stockings are long enough. Get the stockings on, kid."

"Oh dear!" groaned Algy, as he struggled with the stockings. "If my dear papa could see me now—"

"He would have a fit, I should think," gurgled Lowther, almost overcome by the sight of Algernon in a blue skirt and long yellow stockings. "You—you look a picture! This is better than a cinematograph."

"Now the other thing," said Tom. "Does this rotten thing fasten at the front or the back, you chaps?"

"Give it up," said Lowther. "Some of 'em go on one way and some another, I believe. You may be able to tell by the sleeves. Work it on the way it feels comfy, Algy."

"It does not feel comfortable at all," moaned Algernon.

"The beasts have taken his cap," said Tom Merry. "Shove the hat on, Algy. Oh dear—oh dear! I believe I shall fracture my ribs! Ha, ha, ha!"

The sight of Algernon in yellow stockings, blue skirt, red bodice, and a black-feathered hat was too much for the juniors. They threw themselves into the grass and wept. Algernon's face was woful, however. He was not unaccustomed to providing mirth for his acquaintances, but to enter St. Jim's in that guise was a little too much for him.

"Oh dear! Everybody will stare at me if I go home like this!" he mumbled.

"I fancy they will!" murmured Lowther. "But it looks stunning! Get into the boat, and keep down out of sight as much as you can. You'll pass for a girl, but nobody will take you for a beauty."

"It is tut-tut-too b-b-b-bad!"

"Get in!"

Algernon stepped into the boat. The Terrible Three wiped their eyes and followed him, and pulled off. They could not look at Algernon without laughing, and they pulled away down the river in a breathless state.

CHAPTER 12.

Algernon Causes Excitement.

"GWEAT Scott! I wondah who that is?"

The chums of Study No. 6 were pulling back to the school raft, after a row down the river. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was steering, and he let go the lines, and rose to his feet and jammed his eyeglass into his eye, in great astonishment.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter?" asked Blake.

"Gweat pip! Ha, ha, ha! Those Shell boundahs have a lady in their boat, and she is weally dwessed in an extwaordinawy mannah. Look at them, deah boys!"

"I haven't any eyes in the back of my head, fathead."

"It is weally extwaordinawy. She has short hair. Bai Jove, it isn't a gal at all. It's that cwass ass Blenkinsop, dwessed as a gal!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"What!"

Blake and Herries and Digby screwed round then to stare at the Shell boat. At the sight of Algernon they burst into a shriek.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a crowd of fellows on the raft, and all eyes were turned upon the peculiar passenger in Tom Merry's boat. Some of the fellows recognised Algernon, and some did not. He was not easily recognisable in his strange attire. The Terrible Three brought their boat along the raft, and jumped out.

"Buck up, Algy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "For goodness' sake get in as quick as you can. We shall have the whole giddy school yelling round us soon."

The fellows were yelling already. Tom Merry dragged Algernon out of the boat, and the new junior missed his footing on the slippery planks, and sat down, giving the hilarious crowd an extensive view of yellow stockings.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh dear! Oh, Thomas!"

"Buck up!" shrieked Manners.

They dragged Algernon up, and hurried him across the raft, amid shrieks of laughter. The chums of No. 6 jumped on the raft, and followed them.

"What is it?" howled Blake. "Who is it? Introduce your lady friend, Tommy!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway pwsent us to the lady, deah boys."

The Shell fellows broke into a run, hurrying Algernon up the path towards the school. It was not easy for Algernon to run in his tight skirt, and the way he waddled made the spectators almost double up with merriment. Figgins & Co. met them on the path to the school gates, and stopped dead in amazement.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Figgins. "Who's that? I didn't know Algernon had a sister."

"Tain't Algy's sister; it's Algy!" snapped Lowther.

"Algy! In that clobber! Oh, my only Uncle Sam!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"For goodness' sake gather round, you fellows, and keep him screened, while we get him into the school," groaned Tom Merry. "If I ever take Algy out again you can use my head for a football!"

"My dear Thomas, it was not my fault if some evil-disposed person purloined my kuk-kuk-clothes!"

"Hurry up!"

"Yes, sus-sus-certainly, b-b-but it is rather dud-dud-difficult to hurry up in these garments," stammered Algernon. "Oh dear—oh dear! What would my dear papa say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake and his chums and Figgins & Co. loyally gathered round, to shield Algernon from view as much as possible as he entered the school gates.

They had to cross the quadrangle to reach the School House, and they were in full view of all the windows. The yells of laughter in the quad brought fellows who were indoors to their windows, and several of the masters too. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, looked out of his window crossly. He did not like disturbances. At the sight of the strange female figure in company with the Terrible Three, the master of the Shell almost fell down. He stared at them blankly, scarcely able to believe his eyes. The Shell fellows and their companion passed out of his sight towards the porch of the School House, and Mr. Linton gasped for breath.

"Good heavens! What can it mean? Merry and Manners and Lowther bringing that extraordinary-looking female into the House! She—she cannot be a relation! This—this is unparalleled! I must see!" And Mr. Linton thoughtfully selected a cane before he went to see.

"Buck up!" gasped Blake. "Old Linton's spotted you from his window. I saw his chivvy, and he looked excited."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three rushed Algernon into the house, and hurried him upstairs. Blenkinsop tripped in his skirt, and tumbled over on the stairs. There was not a moment to lose, and the Terrible Three grasped Algernon, dragged him up, and rushed him onward in their flight.

That was the sight that met Mr. Linton's shocked and astonished gaze as he came hurrying on the scene.

The master of the Shell stood rooted to the floor, unable to speak. It was difficult to believe his eyes. With a last flutter of blue skirt and yellow stockings in the air, Algernon disappeared. The Shell fellows rushed him into the dormitory and bumped him down, breathless and stuttering.

The heavy tread of Mr. Linton sounded in the passage. The master of the Shell looked into the dormitory, with a thunderous brow. Algernon was seated on the floor, pumping in breath. Mr. Linton gazed at him without recognising him in his strange attire, and then fixed his eyes upon the Terrible Three.

"Merry! Manners! Lowther!" Mr. Linton's voice was

like the rumble of distant thunder. "Who—who is this person? How dare you—how dare you, I say, bring a female person into the house? Dressed in this way, too! And—and—"

Speech failed Mr. Linton.

"If you please, sir—"

"Explain your conduct!" shouted Mr. Linton, finding his voice again. "Who is this person? What is she? You—"

"Taint a she," gasped Monty Lowther. "It's a he—I mean it's a him, sir—that is to say—"

"Oh dear!" groaned Algernon.

"Who are you?" shrieked Mr. Linton.

"I'm sus-sus-sus—"

"What!"

"I'm sus-sus-sorry, sir! I am not surprised that you are ass-ass—"

"Wha-at!"

"Ass-ass-astonished, sir! But it is really not my fault. These are not my clothes. I do not know where my clothes are. I am miss-miss-miss—"

"Miss what?" thundered Mr. Linton. "I shall see to it that your parents, whoever they are, are made acquainted with this escapade, miss. Who are you, I repeat?"

"I am miss-miss-mystified to know what has become of my own clothes, sir. These were put in their pip-pip-place, sir, while I was bathing."

"It's Blenkinsop, sir!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"What! Do you mean to say that this is Blenkinsop's sister?"

"Nunno, sir. It's Blenkinsop himself."

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Linton peered at Algernon's flustered and dismayed face. "Is it possible? And how dare you, Blenkinsop, enter the school attired as a person of the other sex! Answer me, sir! This shall be reported to the Head!"

"It wasn't his fault, sir," gasped Lowther. "His clothes—"

"Silence! Follow me to the Head, all of you! Blenkinsop, come with me!"

And the angry master grasped Algernon by the shoulder, jerked him to his feet, and marched him out of the dormitory. The Terrible Three followed in dismay. Mr. Linton was too angry to listen to an explanation. He marched Algernon directly to the Head's study, knocked at the door, and opened it. Mr. Railton was with the Head, and both the masters looked at Mr. Linton in astonishment as he strode in, with rustling gown, marching in the weirdly-attired Algernon. The Terrible Three followed with demure faces.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head. "Who—what is this, Mr. Linton?"

"It's mum-mum-me, sir," almost sobbed Algernon. "It is a jig-jig-jig—"

"What!"

"A jig-jig-joke, sir."

"This extraordinary boy has dressed himself like this, as he says, for a joke," said Mr. Linton. "I leave you to deal with him, sir."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed the Head. "Is it Blenkinsop? Yes, I recognise you now! Boy, how dare you dress in female attire?"

"It was a jig-jig-joke, sir," stuttered Algernon. "A practical jig-joke, sir, of some evil-disposed person. My clothes were taken away while I was bub-bub-bathing, sir, and these gig-gig-garments, sir, were all that were left for me, sir. I could not come home without any gig-gig-garments, sir, and these gig-gig-garments—"

"Dear me!" said the Head, while Mr. Railton passed his hand over his mouth to conceal a smile. "This is—very extraordinary! Who took your clothes away?"

"I dud-dud-don't know, sir."

"Somebody collared them while he was bathing, sir," said Tom Merry. "They left these things for him. He had to put them on to come home, sir."

"Why did you not explain that before?" exclaimed Mr. Linton crossly.

Tom Merry did not venture to explain that his Form-master hadn't given him a chance. That would only have made Mr. Linton angrier. Besides, it is the soft answer that turneth away wrath.

"I'm very sorry, sir!" said Tom meekly.

"Take him away and let him change his clothes," said the Head, trying not to laugh. "This is most ridiculous. You should be more careful of your clothes when you bathe, Blenkinsop. Go away at once."

The Terrible Three drew Algernon out of the study. They could hear Mr. Railton and the Head laughing as they departed. But Mr. Linton was not laughing. He lacked a sense of humour. He followed them, frowning, into the passage.

"You will take a hundred lines each for this ridiculous escapade!" he exclaimed severely. "And if anything of the kind should occur again—"

Mr. Linton did not say what would happen in that case. He left the dreadful consequences to the imagination of the juniors.

Taggles, the porter, met the juniors as they returned to the dormitory. Taggles had a bundle in his hand and a broad grin upon his face.

"Master Gay, from the Grammar School, left this 'ere parcel for Master Blenkinsop, sir," said Taggles.

Tom Merry opened the parcel. Algernon's clothes were inside. There was a little note, too, in Gay's handwriting:

"With kindest regards from Gordon Gay."

"The Grammarians!" murmured the Terrible Three.

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Algernon. "Gay must have found my clothes and returned them for me. This is really most kind of Gay, and I must find an opportunity of thanking him."

"You—you—you— Oh, there ain't a word for you!" said Monty Lowther, in disgust.

And the Terrible Three left Algernon to change his clothes, which he did with great relief, at the same time thinking out a nice little speech with which, when opportunity offered, to thank Gordon Gay for his great kindness.

CHAPTER 13.

Caught in the Act.

GORE of the Shell stopped to speak to Levison and Mellish when the Fourth Form came out after lessons on Monday afternoon. George Gore's manner was mysterious.

"In the old tower at five," he murmured, and passed on.

Mellish nodded, but over Levison's face there came a peculiar expression. He knew what Gore's cryptic remark meant.

"You're coming, Levison?" asked Mellish, a little doubtfully. For the last few days Levison had not been on the best possible terms with his old comrades. He could not forget the licking he had received from Mr. Railton in consequence of the refusal of his "friends" to lend him the small sum of four shillings to settle with Dame Taggles. Levison had a short memory for benefits, but a very long one indeed for injuries of any kind.

"No; I don't think I'll come," said Levison. "I haven't any pocket-money this week, and I can't stand my whack."

"Crooke will stand the smokes," said Mellish.

"I don't care to sponge on Crooke."

Mellish stared at him. It was the first time he had observed any scruples of that kind about Levison.

"Well, just as you like," he said. "I'm going."

"That's your business."

And Levison walked away by himself, with his hands in his pockets. Towards five o'clock he observed Gore of the Shell making his way towards the old tower of St. Jim's. Gore slipped in quietly, as if desirous of avoiding observation. A few minutes later Crooke followed him in, in the same stealthy way. Five minutes more, and Pigott of the Third strolled up to the old building and popped in quickly. Mellish of the Fourth was the last of the party. When he also had gone into the old tower, Levison walked away from his post of observation, grinning.

It was what the young rascals called a "smoking-bee." They met in solemn secret to smoke cigarettes, and pretend to enjoy it. The only real enjoyment about the matter being a sense of "doggyishness" and "nuttiness" in thus stealthily breaking the laws of the school. Sometimes they crept away from these secret meetings with green-and-yellow complexions, and unpleasant feelings inside, especially when they ventured upon cigars instead of cigarettes.

Levison was generally one of the party, but on this occasion he had his own reasons for standing out. He walked away in search of Algernon Blenkinsop, and found that cheerful youth on the cricket-ground, looking on at the juniors practising.

Blenkinsop had an idea that he could play cricket, and he had made one or two essays since coming to St. Jim's, causing Homeric laughter to resound over the playing-fields. He just knew one end of a bat from the other, and that seemed to be the sum total of his cricket knowledge.

He was watching the players now with a critical eye, and nodding his head sagely, perhaps comparing the Terrible Three unfavourably with the cricketers he had seen at home in the rural seclusion of Huckleberry Heath.

Levison tapped him on the elbow, and Algernon turned on him with a suspicious look. Even Algernon could be suspicious. Levison's collection for the Booby-Gooby Islanders had shaken Algernon's faith in him.

"Watching the game—eh?" said Levison cordially. "I saw you at it on Saturday, Blenkinsop. You've played a lot of cricket, I should think."

Algernon smiled amiably.

"I was considered rather a good bat at Huckleberry Heath," he said modestly. "I hope that Thomas will put me in the eleven soon. I hear that there is to be a House match on Wednesday, and I should very much like to pip-pip-play."

Levison grinned at the idea of Algernon playing in a House match. He was just as likely to play in a match at Lord's.

"If you had a little time to spare now, Blenkinsop—"

"Certainly!" said Algernon. "What is it? I hope you are not thinking of playing any more of your pip-pip-practical jig-jig-jokes on me, Levison? I disapprove of pip-pip-practical jokes."

"Not in the least. I was wondering whether you would care to look after some chaps who are getting themselves into trouble?" said Levison blandly. "You're not on good terms with them, I know—"

"That makes no difference," said Algernon. "I should be very glad to show them a good example. I still have some tracts—"

"It isn't a matter of tracts," said Levison. "You see, there are some chaps making up a party to smoke. That's very bad for their health. If they were found out, too, they would be punished. I am very anxious about them."

"That is very kick-kick-kind of you, Levison!" said Algernon. "Pray tell me where they are, and I will certainly go at once and speak a word in season."

Levison shook his head.

"They'd boot you out," he said. "That wouldn't be any good. My idea is that you might tell Kildare, and take him along with you. You see, Kildare would point out to them the error of their ways, and they couldn't boot him out because he's in the Sixth."

"But would Kildare take the trouble?" asked Algernon.

"Oh, yes, he's an awfully good-natured chap. And he wouldn't punish them—ahem!—not at all. He would simply speak to them gently and kindly, and make them see the error of their naughty ways. I would do this myself, only I'm on rather bad terms with Kildare, and don't care to speak to him. But you're so good-natured—"

"Not another word!" said Algernon. "I will do it immediately. You are sure that Kildare will not punish them? I think he is a prefect, isn't he?"

"Quite sure. He will take them by the hand and speak to them in kind and gentle tones," said Levison. "That's his way."

"What a dear, good, kind fellow!" said Algernon. "My dear papa would like him very much. Where are those misguided boys, Levison?"

"In the old tower yonder."

"I will find Kildare at once."

And Algernon hurried away, intent upon his good work.

Levison grinned a sardonic grin. Kildare's methods, if he found the "smoking-bee" at work, were not likely to be exactly as Levison had described them to Blenkinsop. Quite different, in fact.

Algernon found Kildare in his study. The captain of St. Jim's gave him a good-natured nod.

"Well, what is it, kid?" he asked.

"If you pip-pip-pip—" began Algernon.

"If I what?" asked Kildare, in astonishment.

"If you pip-pip-please, I have something to tell you, Kildare. There are some misguided youths smoking cigarettes in the old tower, and—"

Kildare fixed him with a stern look.

"Do you know that this is sneaking?" he exclaimed.

"You should not tell tales, Blenkinsop."

"G-g-goodness gracious! I certainly did not mean to tell tales," said Algernon, in distress. "I was mentioning this so that you could speak to them, Kildare, and point out to them the error of their ways. As you are in the Sixth, I think they would not venture to kick you out if you remonstrated with them."

"I think not," said Kildare. "As your intentions are good, you young ass, I won't lick you for sneaking—"

"My g-g-goodness!"

"But don't tell tales any more. However, as you've told me, I must look into the matter."

And Kildare picked up a cane and left the study.

Algernon hurried after him in alarm.

"I s-s-say, Kildare, what are you taking the cane for?"

"To remonstrate with them," said Kildare, with a laugh.

"B-b-b-but—"

Kildare did not wait for the dismayed Algernon to finish. He strode away to the old tower. It was in a somewhat secluded spot, and quite safe, as a rule, for the "smoking-bee." Kildare strode in, and a scent of tobacco smote upon

his nostrils at once. Algernon's information was evidently well-founded. From the narrow stairs that led to the first storey came a sound of voices:

"Give me a match, Mellish!"

"I say, these fags are jolly good!"

"Have another?"

Kildare smiled grimly, and strode up the stairs. He heard an exclamation of alarm from the room above, but the smokers had no time to prepare for his coming. He strode into the room, and a gasp of dismay greeted him.

The captain of St. Jim's looked round with a grim eye.

Crooke and Gore of the Shell, Mellish of the Fourth, and Pigott of the Third, were there, and the atmosphere of the room was thick with smoke. Each of the juniors had a cigarette going, and there were burnt matches and fag-ends scattered on the floor. The four young rascals sat transfixed as the prefect strode in. Their cigarettes seemed to become frozen to their mouths.

"Well?" said Kildare, looking at them.

"Oh!" murmured Gore.

There was a sudden yelp from Percy Mellish. In his terror at the sight of the prefect he had allowed his cigarette to burn down to his lips. He spat it out, and yelped with pain and clasped his hand to his mouth.

"You silly young rascals!" said Kildare sternly. "Throw that rubbish away at once! Now turn out your pockets! Put all the smokes you have on the floor!"

He watched them while they obeyed. Between the effect of the cigarettes and fear of the consequences, the "nuts" were pale and sickly. A heap of cigarettes and several cigars came out of their pockets. Kildare carefully stamped upon them till they were reduced to fragments. Then he swished the cane in the air.

"I won't tell you how idiotic this sort of thing is, because you know it as well as I do," he said. "But you've broken the rules of the school. You know that too. Hold out your hands. You first, Gore!"

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Ow-ow-ow-ow!" groaned Gore.

"Now you, Crooke—"

"Look here—" began Crooke.

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Kildare.

Crooke's hand came out quickly enough then, and the cane swished again, and Crooke joined Gore in producing a chorus of groans.

Mellish and Pigott had their turns next. Then Kildare pointed to the door with his cane.

"Get out!" he said. "And if I catch you again—"

The four unhappy "nuts" crawled out of the tower. Kildare followed them out, and walked away to the School House without another glance at them. Gore & Co. squeezed their hands and groaned dismally.

"How the dickens did he spot us?" growled Crooke. "We've smoked there a dozen times without being found out! Hallo, ass! What do you want?"

That question was addressed to Blenkinsop. He came up with a concerned and distressed expression upon his face.

"My dear fellows," he exclaimed, "I trust that Kildare has not caned you? I hoped that he would speak a word in sus-sus-season when I told him about you—"

"You told him about us?" roared Gore.

"Yes, for your own sus-sus-sakes— Dear me! Please let me go! Ow-ow! Wharrer you doing? Yaroooh! Oh dear! Goodness gracious! Yow-ow!"

And Algernon uttered wild ejaculations as the four smokers piled on him. But they did not heed his ejaculations. They swept him over and bumped him, and rolled him on the ground till Algernon was quite unaware whether he was on his head or his heels. His impression was that a particularly violent hurricane had smitten him.

When Gore & Co. were satisfied—which was not till they were tired—they left him, and Algernon sat up on the ground in a dazed state. His jacket was split up the back, his collar hung by a single stud, his hair was wildly ruffled, and he was smothered with dirt and dust. He was in a state of almost idiotic bewilderment.

"Oh dear!" he gasped. "My goodness! What would my dear pip-pip-papa say if he could see me now? Oh, goodness gracious! Ow, ow, ow! I will never, never, never seek the welfare of those ungrateful boys again—never, never!"

And he never did.

CHAPTER 14.

A Very Valuable Recruit.

TOM MERRY & CO. came out of the Form-room on Wednesday with cheerful faces. It was a bright and sunny day, and that afternoon there was the House match—the School House junior team against Figgins & Co. of the New House. Tom Merry & Co. were in great spirits,

anticipating victory. Tom Merry was also expecting a visitor that afternoon. His old governess and guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, was coming. And as Miss Fawcett generally left a substantial tip with her dutiful nephew, there was a prospect of a handsome feed in the study to follow the cricket match.

Miss Priscilla was coming down to see her ward, and also to see how Algernon Blenkinsop was getting on in the school. She was deeply interested in the welfare of the fourteenth son of the Rev. Rabbits Blenkinsop. She had told Tom in her letter that she hoped to find him on the best of terms with Algernon, and that she would see them playing football or marbles together like dear little boys. As it was the middle of the cricket season, she was not likely to find them playing football, and marbles was not a game much patronised by Shell fellows; but Miss Priscilla was blissfully ignorant upon those matters.

"We must get Blenkinsop to come and see the match, and he can talk to Miss Fawcett while we play," Tom remarked. "She is a good old soul, and she likes to watch us, though she doesn't know the difference between cricket and hop-scotch. Hallo, Algy! Are you busy this afternoon?"

Blenkinsop, who had just come out with the Fourth, turned to the Terrible Three with his usual beaming smile.

"Not at all, my dear Thomas," he replied. "I was quite prepared to play in the House match, if you require my services."

"To—to—to what?" gasped Tom Merry.

"I was considered rather a good cricketer at Huckleberry Heath," said Algernon. "If you would like me to play, I am quite at your service. Figgins says he would like to see me in your eleven."

"I dare say he would," grinned Monty Lowther. "But we're not making arrangements to give the match away to Figgins."

"I would do my best," said Blenkinsop. "I have no doubt that I shall score a large number of runs if my wicket is not knocked down. Generally I am prevented from doing my best by my wicket being knocked down."

"That does make a difference to a chap's score, doesn't it?" remarked Manners. "But wouldn't be quite fair to play you, Algy. We must give the New House a chance."

"You can come and look on, and take care of Miss Fawcett," explained Tom. "You will be awfully useful to us—off the field."

"I should prefer to play—"

"That's settled then," said Tom, apparently not hearing. "Turn up on the ground at half-past two for the start. It will be a pleasure to play under the eyes of a really good critic of the game."

"B-b-but, my dear Merry—"

But the Terrible Three were walking away. Algernon looked very thoughtful, and sought out Figgins & Co.

"Tom Merry does not appear to want me in his team, my dear George," he said. "You don't mind my calling you George?"

"Not a bit," said Figgins affably. "But why doesn't Tom Merry want you? He doesn't often get an offer from a player like you."

"I cannot quite account for it. However, if you like, I am willing to play in your team, George."

George gasped.

"Mum-mum-my team? No, thanks! I—I mean, you see, we can't play School House chaps in a New House team in a House match. Otherwise," said Figgins solemnly, "we should jump at the chance—simply jump at it with both feet! But, under the circumstances, it's quite impossible—quite."

And Figgins walked away hastily, seeming to be suffering from some internal pain.

After dinner, the Terrible Three walked down to Rylcombe to meet Miss Fawcett at the station, and escorted her to St. Jim's. The kind old lady was accommodated with a seat in the shade of the pavilion to watch the game. Miss Priscilla liked seeing Tom Merry play, and she always had a fixed conviction that it was Tom Merry who won the game if it was won; and if it was lost, of course, it was the other fellows who had lost it.

She greeted Blenkinsop affectionately, and asked him after his health, and told him the news from Huckleberry Heath while Tom Merry & Co. were preparing for the match.

Figgins & Co. came down to the field, and raised their caps very politely to Miss Fawcett. When Tom came out of the pavilion in his flannels, Miss Fawcett signed to him. She had been talking cricket with Blenkinsop now. Tom came up with a smile.

"You are just going to kick off?" asked Miss Fawcett.

The good old lady had picked up a certain number of expressions from the juniors, and she used them indiscriminately, to prove that she was not wholly ignorant of the game that interested her ward so much.

Tom Merry smiled.

"Yes," he said cheerfully.

"Algernon is a good cricketer," said Miss Fawcett. "He has often played at Huckleberry Heath, and taken a large number of—of goals."

"Has he really?" murmured Lowther. "He must be an awfully good player, ma'am, to take goals in a cricket match."

Tom Merry stamped on his foot.

"I should like to see Algernon playing with you, Tommy dear," said Miss Priscilla. "Please let him play while I am here."

The School House cricketers looked at one another. The importance of a House match was quite unknown to Miss Fawcett. To her eyes, Tom Merry & Co. were simply a number of dear little boys playing in a dear little game.

"Oh, my only hat!" murmured Blake. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ejaculated "Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry reddened a little. It was difficult to refuse Miss Fawcett's request, and impossible to make her understand that it was impossible for Algernon to play in a House match.

"Ahem! I—I— You see, dear, the team is full up!" said Tom hurriedly. "We have all the eleven here."

"But why could not Algernon play as well?" asked Miss Fawcett innocently. "Why not play twelve instead of eleven?"

"Oh, F-f-figgins would object—"

"I am sure Figgins would not mind," said Miss Fawcett. "Figgins is a very good-natured boy. I will speak to Figgins—"

Tom Merry suppressed a groan.

"That wouldn't be any good," he murmured. "You see, it's—it's the rules of the game."

"My dearest Tommy, I very much want to see you and Algy play together. I am sure you could arrange it somehow."

The cricketers tried not to grin. Tom Merry felt horribly uncomfortable. If he played Algernon, he risked throwing away the match, and the rest of the team would be ready to scalp him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came to the rescue.

"It's quite imposs to wefuse the wequest of a lady, Tom Mewwy!" he murmured. "One of the chaps will have to stand out, and you must play Blenkinsop. It's aw'f'ly hard, but weally you cannot hurt Miss Fawcett's feelings."

"You ass! Shurrup!" whispered Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I considah it Tom Mewwy's duty. Good mannahs, I twust, come befoah cwicket. One of the fellows must stand out for Algy, and the west of us can play up like anythin', and beat Figgins & Co."

"I hope you will try to please me in this matter, Tommy dear!" said Miss Fawcett gently.

Tom gave his chums a hopeless look. He felt that he could not refuse, and he resolved to risk being slaughtered afterwards by his team.

"All right," he said resignedly. "I'll play him."

"That is my dear good Tommy!"

"I accept your offer to stand out, D'Arcy—"

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"What! I did not offah—"

"Yes, you did. You suggested one of the fellows standing out to make room for Algernon."

"You uttah ass!" said D'Arcy, in a ferocious whisper.

"I meant one of the othah fellows, of course!"

"Lend Algy your bat," said Tom Merry, suddenly deaf.

"I wefuse to stand out!"

"Get into your flannels, Blenkinsop. Gussy, old man, you'll look after Miss Fawcett while we're playing, won't you?" said Tom. "Coming, Figgins?"

And Tom Merry tossed with Figgins for choice of innings. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood rooted to the ground. The rest of the team burst into a joyous chuckle. The expression on D'Arcy's face was, as Lowther remarked, worth a guinea a box. But there was no help for the unfortunate Arthur Augustus; he had made the suggestion, and it had been adopted, and it was only fair that he should be the sacrifice.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as the cricketers moved off and left him standing beside Miss Fawcett's chair. "Bai Jove! I wegard this as uttahly wotten! It is simply thwowin' away the match, too!"

"Are you not playing, Arthur?" asked Miss Priscilla.

"Ahem! No, ma'am," faltered Arthur Augustus. "I—I am simply a spectatah this aftahnoon. I—I want to watch Blenkinsop playin'."

Politeness came before everything with Arthur Augustus, and he crushed down his inward feelings, and devoted himself to Miss Fawcett.

Tom Merry won the toss, and elected to bat first. He opened the innings himself, with Kangaroo at the other end. The rest of the batsmen stood waiting their turn, while the

New House team went into the field. Miss Priscilla raised her glasses and glanced at them.

"Why does not Algernon play with Tommy?" she asked Arthur Augustus.

"Ahem! He goes on latah!" D'Arcy explained. "It's one of the wules that only two chaps go on at a time, ma'am."

"But Figgins has eight—nine—ten boys with him," said Miss Fawcett, puzzled. "Is that quite fair—eleven on one side, and only two on the other?"

"Yes; it's—it's one of the wules, you know."

"Dear me!" said Miss Fawcett. "Of course, there is very much in these little games that I do not understand."

"Yaas, wathah. I—I mean, not at all!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Are they going to kick off now?"

"Ya-a-a-as!"

"Ah! I see, the fat little boy—Wynn—is going to throw the ball to Tommy!"

"Bai Jove! He won't thwow it. If he does—"

"There! He has thrown it!" said Miss Fawcett.

"Ahem! That wasn't a thwow. He bowled it," said Arthur Augustus.

"Dear me! What is the difference?"

Arthur Augustus did not feel equal to explaining the difference.

"Bai Jove! That was a good hit!" he exclaimed, as Tom Merry sent the ball away almost to the boundary. "That will be a thwee at least!"

The batsmen were running, and Miss Fawcett watched them with great interest. Three runs were taken, and Kangaroo stopped at the batting end. There was a cheer from the School House fellows round the field. It was a good beginning. Miss Fawcett joined in the ripple of handclapping.

"Is that a goal, Arthur?" she asked.

"That's a thwee."

"Three goals?" asked Miss Fawcett, in surprise.

"Nunno! Thwee wuns! We don't take goals in this game, you know."

"Dear me! I suppose there is really a great deal of difference between cricket and football," said Miss Fawcett thoughtfully, as if that had just occurred to her.

Arthur Augustus grinned and agreed that there was.

CHAPTER 15.

The Catch of the Season.

"WELL bowled! Oh, well bowled, sir!"

The New House crowd roared.

Fatty Wynn had sent down a ball that boat Tom Merry to the wide, skilled batsman as he was. There were ten runs to Tom Merry's credit, and his wicket was down. His side had looked for at least three times as many from him, but his luck was out. The formidable Fatty had been one too many for him. Tom looked grimly at his wrecked wicket, and tucked his bat under his arm and walked off. He gave Blake a nod to go on in his place.

Perhaps the knowledge that he was to play Blenkinsop against such dangerous opponents as Figgins & Co. had got on Tom Merry's nerves. Certainly he had not shown up at his best; and, considering that there was a rank duffer in the team, the best was wanted of all the School House players. But it could not be helped, and Tom took it as philosophically as he could. He contrived to smile with an unclouded face as he joined Miss Fawcett.

"Have you finished playing already, Tommy dear?" asked the good lady.

"Yes; I'm out," said Tom. "It's a single-innings match, so I sha'n't be batting again this afternoon, worse luck."

"You are very soon finished," said his guardian, with a fond glance at him. "It is so like you, Tommy dear."

Arthur Augustus could not help chuckling.

"Is it?" said Tom rather warmly. "I generally stay in longer than that."

"Yes, and it is so like you to come off, and let the other boys play with the bat," said Miss Fawcett. "That is my good, kind, unselfish Tommy."

Arthur Augustus had great difficulty in smothering a roar of laughter; never had the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere been put to so severe a strain.

"Bravo, Blake!"

Jack Blake was hitting away in great style. Between them, Blake and Kangaroo were making the fur fly. But a catch by Figgins at point dislodged Blake, and he came out, with the score standing at twenty-five for the School House.

"When is Algernon going to play?" asked Miss Priscilla.

"Oh, I'll send him on next," said Tom. "May as well get it over," he added, to himself. "Buck up there, Blenkinsop; man in!"

"Yes, Thomas; I am quite ready," said Algernon, taking

up a bat. "I have great hopes of making a century—perhaps two. I shall certainly do my very bub-bub-best."

"Make it two centuries, Algy," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "It will take you about three centuries to do it, but go ahead! 'England expects every man to do his duty,' you know, as Nelson said in the great match."

"Man in!"

"Yes, I am coming," said Algernon, buttoning his glove carefully. "More haste, less speed, you know. I am gig-gig-going—"

Lowther gently shoved him out of the pavilion, and Algernon went to the vacant wicket. A general cackle greeted his appearance there. Redfern had the ball, and Redfern grinned at his comrades. Algernon took up a position at the wicket, standing well away from it, and bending over his bat, so that with his bat he looked like a capital U upside down. He blinked along the pitch at Redfern.

"Now I am quite ready!" he said cheerfully.

Redfern took a little run, and the ball came down like a bullet. Algernon's bat swept the air, described a complete circle without hitting anything but the atmosphere, and Algernon, losing his balance, sat down.

"Oh!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How's that?" shrieked the New House.

"Out! Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon sat in a dazed state, and blinked round for the ball. He had not seen it, and he wondered dimly where it could possibly be.

"Dear me!" murmured Algernon. "Have you seen the ball, you fellows? I do not think that my bat struck it, or I should have observed it. Where is the ball?"

"Here it is, you fathead!" said the wicket-keeper, holding it up.

"My goodness! What is the matter with my wicket? It is quite disarranged—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get off the grass, you ass," said Lowther, coming along to take Algy's place.

"Excuse me, Lowther; I have not batted yet—"

"You're out, fathead!" roared Lowther.

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Algernon, in surprise. "Oh dear! I conclude, then, that the ball must have struck my wicket."

"Oh crumbs! Yes, it struck the wicket," gasped Lowther; "and I'll strike you if you don't clear off! You're out! Buzz!"

"I did not see it," said Algernon. "But, of course, I take your word for it, my dear Montague. If you insist upon it, I will certainly go away; but I should have liked to bat a little longer. You are quite sure—Ow—ow! Yes, I am going!"

And Blenkinsop dodged the lunging of Lowther's bat and cleared off.

Redfern, as soon as he could control his laughter, bowled again. Algernon looked a little crestfallen as he came into the pavilion. His fellow-batsmen were laughing; they could not help it, but they felt inclined to bump him all the same. It was a wicket lost for nothing, and the School House needed all their wickets. Miss Priscilla gave Algernon a kind smile as he rejoined her.

"You are tired already?" she asked.

"I am not tut-tut-tired, but I am out," Algernon explained. "Owing to my not hitting the ball, it appears to have struck my wicket. I really think they might give me a second chance, as we do sometimes at Huckleberry Heath, but it does not appear to be the custom here. I must not kick-kick-complain. I assure you that I have done my best, Thomas."

"I'm sure you have!" said Tom Merry grimly. "But it's a great disappointment, after the century we were expecting from you—Hallo! There goes Kangy!"

Kangaroo was out, and Manners went on. The New House bowling was deadly, and the School House batsmen were not making a record number of runs. They were all doing their best, but Fortune did not favour them.

The wickets fell at a steady rate. With nine down, the score was at sixty-five runs.

Reilly and Clifton Dane were the last men in. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the field, and sighed.

"Looks like a licking for the School House," he remarked. "Weally, Tom Mewwy, I must say that your wecklessness will cost us deah. It was howwibly wash to leave out the best batsman in the side. Howevah, it is too late now."

Tom Merry grunted. He was not pleased at the way the innings was going. Clifton Dane and Reilly, however, brought the score up to eight-six before Dane was caught out by Kerr.

"All down for eighty-six!" said Blake. "Well, it's not bad, considering that we were playing Algernon. We've got to see that the New House bounders don't beat it, that's all."

"I shall certainly try hard to take some wickets, my dear John," said Algernon. "You don't mind my calling you John?"

"No; I don't mind your calling me John!" snorted Blake. "But I should mind if Tom Merry let you bowl. Rather!"

"I was considered rather a good bub-bub-bowler at Huckleberry Heath," said Algernon mildly.

"They must be regular terrors there," remarked Lowther. "Now, then, who says ginger-pop?"

"Are you finished, my dear boys?" asked Miss Fawcett.

"Only our innings," explained Tom Merry. "Figgins & Co. are going to bat now, after we've rolled the pitch a bit."

Miss Fawcett looked round in surprise—perhaps for the pitch.

"My dear Tommy!" she said anxiously. "Surely there is a porter, or somebody like that, kept here for doing dirty work of that kind! You will make your dear little hands very black if you roll pitch. You know, there is a proverb that you cannot touch pitch without being defiled. At all events, I hope you will put some gloves on."

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

"My dearest Tommy—"

"I mean the cricket-pitch," Tom Merry explained. "The—the ground, you know."

"Oh, I see!" said his guardian. "That is quite different. Yes, my dear Arthur, I think I should like some lemonade."

Arthur Augustus was looking after the good old lady nobly. Figgins & Co. refreshed themselves with dough-nuts and ginger-beer; and then the New House innings opened. Figgy and Redfern went to the wickets, and Tom Merry led his men into the field. Algernon blinked round him.

"Where shall I field, Thomas?" he asked.

"Wherever you like, so long as you keep out of the way," said Tom Merry politely.

"You do not want me to bowl?"

"Nunno; we won't bother you to bowl. Get along there—further off—and keep your eyes open—not your mouth, fathead—your eyes! If the ball comes your way, catch it!"

"I will certainly do my bub-bub-best!"

"And your bub-bub-best will be fuf-fuf-funny," Monty Lowther remarked. "I think it will be worth sus-sus-seeing, you owl!"

"My dear Montague—"

"Shut up!" said Tom Merry briskly. "Get further off, and mind you watch for the ball. Now go and get Figgins out, Blake."

"I'll try!" grinned Blake, as he caught the ball.

It was not so easy to get Figgins out. Figgins was a mighty man of his hands. He knocked the bowling all over the field, and piled up runs with Redfern. Tom Merry changed the bowling several times in the first half-dozen overs, but Figgins was not to be caught. Figgins continued to hit mighty swipes, and the score piled up. Arthur Augustus looked on sadly. He felt that Tom Merry's recklessness had thrown that match away. But the players still had hopes.

Redfern was caught out at last, and Lawrence came in, and Blake bowled him first ball. The field cheered up. Owen followed Lawrence, and fell without a run, and the School House fellows roared applause. And when Blake took Thompson's wicket with the next ball, the enthusiasm was unbounded. It was the hat trick, and the side sorely needed it.

"Bravo, Blake!"

"Hurray! Well bowled! Hurray!"

Tom Merry's face brightened up. It was not to be a walk-over for the New House, at all events. Four down for 30!

After that, Figgins and Fatty Wynn made a stand for some time, but the fat Fourth-Former fell to a deadly ball from Tom Merry. Then Kerr was caught out, with the score at 46. Figgins was going strong still. He had been first in, and it looked as if he would be not out. The School House bowling was utterly unable to touch his wicket, and he gave them no chance of a catch. Or, rather, he gave chances to no one but Algernon. Algernon had some chances, but as he could not take advantage of them, it did not benefit the side much.

The batsmen delighted in sending the ball in Algernon's direction; and once it actually brushed his arm, and Algernon looked after it as it sped away, with a blank expression on his face. Once he touched it with his fingers as it swept by, and it fell on the ground. Then the team looked daggers at him, and said things.

"Butterfingers!"

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

And the New House juniors grinned. They were five down for 46, and Figgins was batting again, and the score jumped to 60. Figgins & Co. were already anticipating

(Continued on page 25.)

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OUR GRAND SPORTING 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.

Geoffrey is offered a place in the Surrey County Cricket Club, and in his first match—Surrey versus Notts—he does some good work for his team.

Later, Geoffrey once more meets Patrick Mulready, who informs him that trouble is coming in South Africa, and that a man named Joe Gost, who has raised a troop of men to fight the insurgents, is none other than Major Foster, Geoffrey's father! Mulready forms a band of men, and sails to help Joe Gost, and Geoffrey returns to play for Surrey.

While he is playing against Somerset, Jeffcock meets a pugilist known as the Tea Taster, and Alfred Brookes, two deadly enemies of Foster's. He bribes them to attack the cricketer, and this is done; but Trooper Haines, once a schoolfellow of Foster's, comes to the rescue. The scene is taken by the club officials to be a vulgar brawl, and Geoffrey is relegated to the second eleven, despite Jellotson's defence that Foster was attacked first.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Ruined Wicket—The Fates Play Against Geoffrey.

Geoffrey wandered about, dull and dejected. Enough that he was not to play against Yorkshire. He really did not mind much. He wanted leisure in which to think, and it was afforded him by his inactivity.

Yorkshire batted the whole of the first day. When stumps were drawn, Hirst, who had piled up his usual century, was dismissed, the innings ending for a score of 365. Surrey were to go in in the morning, and with a hot night intervening, the wicket, it was reckoned, would be at its very best next day.

Geoffrey could not sleep that night. He felt an overwhelming desire upon him to walk, and sauntering out after supper,

he trudged on for miles and miles through the deserted streets, first turning his footsteps this way, then that, until when day had broken, he found himself in the neighbourhood of the Oval. He walked round the ground, full of thought. It was rumoured that the 29th, his father's old regiment, was to be one of the first to be drafted to South Africa. Haines was in it; he had heard that Jellotson and Hewitt, who had passed brilliantly at Sandhurst, and who were not playing in the match against Yorkshire owing to pressure of military duties, might sail as lieutenants in the same regiment.

How he wished he was going, too! The son of a soldier, he felt his blood boil at the very thought, and in his ears he fancied he could hear the scream of a bugle calling them to the charge.

No, it was no bugle, but the sound of water being discharged from a hose. There could be no mistaking that steady, musical s-s-s-s-s-z-z-z-z-z.

At first he disregarded it; then he stopped in his walk as the conviction grew upon him that the noise proceeded from the centre of the Oval.

There could be no need for the use of the hose on the grass at that time, he knew full well; besides, they would not be watering the grass at daybreak.

He hesitated; then, seized with an overmastering curiosity, he scaled one of the entrance gates with some difficulty, let himself down on the other side, and walked to the edge of the cricket-field. Then he stared in amazement, as well he might. There lay a length of thick hose where it had been placed hours ago, and a broad stream of water was pouring from the mouth of the tube, flooding the wicket until the water was inches deep.

Geoffrey gave a cry, then ran to the hose and swept it round on its carriage by main force.

The wicket was ruined—irretrievably ruined! Geoffrey, whose horror at the wickedness of the act passed all bounds, went to the metal connection and turned the water off. Then he went to the place where the hose is stored, and which had been broken into in order to get it out; and as he looked round he saw a sheet of notepaper lying on a bench near by. He took it up in idle curiosity, when, to his amazement, he discovered that it was addressed to himself:

"Dear Mr. Foster,"—ran the words—"I think it is a dirty shame you should be put out of the team like this, just because they are playing Yorkshire. I have a great idea by which you could have your revenge. Why not soak the pitch overnight? It could easily be done. The hose wouldn't take long to get out, and a two or three hours

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

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soaking would render it totally unfit for play. I reckon they'd think twice about putting you out of the team a second time.—Yours faithfully,
A Wellwisher."

What did it mean?

Was this another ghastly plot? Had that letter been placed there purposely to try and implicate him? He reckoned it must be so. And, with his head whirling, he left the place hurriedly, crossed the grass, got over the wall, and dropped into the road beyond.

In his haste he caught his coat on the wall, and as he dropped, the letter that he had placed insecurely in his pocket fell out, and remained on the ground for anyone to pick up who might chance to come along.

The Fates were playing against Geoffrey. At that very moment Fielding, the instructor, came riding from the direction of Vauxhall Bridge on his bicycle. He had been spending the evening playing cards with some friends, and after a refreshing wash was riding home for breakfast. He saw Geoffrey drop over the wall, and he saw the paper fall, and blow, fluttering, across the road.

Geoffrey, with his head bowed in thought, did not hear Fielding call to him. The man, reaching the spot where the sheet of paper lay, leapt from his bicycle and picked it up. It wouldn't take him a minute, he thought, to catch Geoffrey up, restore it to him, and ask him why he had been into the Oval at that hour of the day.

Then, overcome with the curiosity that some men and all women possess, but which, however, is scarcely honourable, he read the letter through.

His face paled as he scanned the lines. Good heavens! Did it mean that the lad had acted upon the cowardly, unsportsmanlike suggestion of the anonymous correspondent?

Fielding, altering his mind, did not ride after Geoffrey; but, propping his bicycle against the wall, clambered on to the leather saddle, and made his way thence into the Oval. One look at the lawn was enough. There lay the hose, and his experienced eye told him in a moment that the wicket had been ruined. There would be no further play in the Yorkshire versus Surrey match, and the club would suffer to the extent of some hundreds of pounds.

Fielding's rage was indescribable. He never doubted that

Geoffrey was guilty for a moment; and when the first members of the committee turned up a little before the hour fixed for play, Fielding had his tale to tell, and Geoffrey Foster was soon dishonoured in the eyes of them all.

Discharged from his County—Jellotson's Faith Unshaken—Trooper Haines Makes a Suggestion—Geoffrey Decides to Serve his King.

"Foster, you had better go!"

Captain Hilton pointed sternly to the door; and Geoffrey, holding his head aloft as he bravely faced his accusers, paused for a chance to speak.

"Will you hear me, sir?" he asked.

"No!" said Captain Hilton sternly. "We have heard what Fielding has to say. We have all read the letter. What explanation can you have to make?"

"Merely that I did not do it," said Geoffrey. "It is a vile plot against me, in which my enemies have succeeded only too well. I've told you that I was walking by the Oval a little before Mr. Fielding says he saw me, and heard the hose going. I entered the grounds and turned it off. I found the letter in the hose-house. I intended to show it to you, and explain what I had seen when I met you this morning. That I should lose the letter, and in the presence of Mr. Fielding, is an accident I could not have foreseen."

"An idle tale," said Captain Hilton, whose face was black with anger. "Would you have us believe such a childish story? You say the theft for which you were expelled from Grovehouse was a plot against you. You say that the theft for which you were dismissed from Grice & Mortimer's was a plot against you. When you take part in a vulgar brawl outside the very doors of your own club you say that was a plot against you. Now there is the same old tale. The thing is absurd. You must take us for children if you think we could believe that."

"I believe it," said Jellotson, now lieutenant in the 29th Regiment of Hussars. "I believe it, and so does Hewitt here. We were responsible for his introduction into the club, and in fairness to us we ask that further investigations shall be made in order to find out the real culprits."

"I have a great regard for your friendship, Lieutenant Jellotson, and also that of Lieutenant Hewitt here; but I cannot believe in Foster," said Captain Hilton. "Nothing now could make me believe in him. Look at his father's record! After what I have seen of his son, I must confess I have lost my faith even in him!"

Geoffrey's handsome face hardened. The last blow was too much for him to bear. His mind was made up. He would leave the country for ever. He would seek his fortune elsewhere.

"Geoffrey," said Jellotson, turning to his friend, "put your hand in mine."

The lad obeyed.

"Now look me straight in the eyes."

Foster's blue eyes looked fearlessly into those of his friend.

"Now will you pledge your word of honour as a Grovehouse boy that you had nothing to do with the ruining of the wicket last night?"

"I pledge my word of honour," said Geoffrey slowly, uttering each word distinctly, and without a tremor, "as a Grovehouse boy, and as a Hedley Foster, that I had nothing to do with the ruining of the wicket last night, or with the other crimes that have been laid to my account."

"I know you were innocent of the thefts at Grovehouse and at Grice & Mortimer's," said Jellotson quickly, "and I believe you, Geoffrey. Captain Hilton, will you investigate this case?"

"No," said the chairman of committee; "the committee are unanimously decided. There is no need to discuss the case further. We might take severer measures against Foster than merely dismissing him, if he were not a friend of yours. As it is, he must go. And the sooner the better."

"I have nothing to say," said Geoffrey, with a heartbroken sigh. "You have all done me a gross injustice, gentlemen, for which one of these days you will feel sorry. I wish the club all good luck, and you gentlemen all prosperity. As for me, I am past caring what happens to me now."

He turned and walked with a firm step out of the room, and down the stairs towards the exit. Another moment and he was in the street. Then he heard his name called, and saw Hewitt and Jellotson coming after him.

"What took you out last night, Foster?" asked Hewitt. "May we know that? It would perhaps be best. It would explain the reason for your wandering about in that strange way. It is suspicious, you being in the Oval at daybreak, you know."

"You are men of honour," said Geoffrey. "I don't see

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"PLAYING A PART!"

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why you shouldn't know what nobody in England knows but myself. You will not betray the secret I am about to tell you."

They looked at him in amazement. "Joe Gost, the famous leader of the Irregulars, whose action in trying to suppress the rising in South Africa has been so misunderstood," said Geoffrey, "is my father, Major Foster, late major of the 29th Regiment of Hussars!"

Jellotson and Hewitt uttered a cry of utter astonishment. "Can't you see now," said the boy, clenching his fists, and looking at them both earnestly out of his deep blue eyes, "what I must have suffered, with my father's very life trembling in the balance? I could not rest, I could not sleep. It was impossible."

"My dear lad," said Hewitt, placing his arm around Geoffrey in that fine friendly way of his, "it is enough. I understand. So does Jellotson. And we both of us can say nothing but God bless you!"

"And now," said Geoffrey, "do you mind if I leave you? I have much to think over. I'll come and see you before the regiment is drafted to Southampton, en route for Africa. A strange fatality dogs my footsteps, Hewitt; and I fear I have much to go through before the end is reached."

They understood; and as the lad turned away Jellotson shook his head sadly at Hewitt.

"Hard hit, Will," he said—"devilish hard hit! But he's got the pluck of twenty men. He'll pull through, mark my words!"

Geoffrey wandered on aimlessly. He heard knots of people who had gathered on the pavement, and who had been making their way towards Kennington Oval, in front of which a great crowd had gathered, discussing the flooding of the wicket and the abandonment of the match with Yorkshire. But he did not heed; he walked on with his head bowed in thought.

Of a sudden someone coming towards him stopped with an exclamation of surprise, and, looking up, he saw Haines, in his uniform of trooper in the 29th Hussars, standing in front of him.

"What's to do, Foster?" asked the soldier. "What's this I hear about the wicket at the Oval being ruined, and the game with Yorkshire being abandoned?"

"It's true," said Geoffrey laconically. "You don't say so! Who did it?" "I don't know," answered Geoffrey, in a hard voice. "I have been accused of doing it, and have been discharged for it. I'm an aimless wanderer in the world again."

Haines, with a cry, linked his arm in that of his old Grovehouse chum, and walked onward by his side.

"Up against it again, old man," he said. "Well, what's the use of battling against unseen enemies, and odds you cannot fight? Give it up. Your father was a soldier. There isn't a finer horseman in the country than you. Look how you used to play the very deuce with us when we went out riding at Grovehouse. They'll take you in the 29th out of hand if you get the influence of Lieutenant Jellotson and Lieutenant Hewitt behind you. You'll be a comrade of mine, old man—of irresponsible, mad, fat-headed Haines! It's not bad fun being a trooper. Come and serve your King, Geoffrey—come and serve your King!"

Geoffrey looked at Haines for a moment in silence. Then, with a flood of recollection, he remembered his father, and what his father was doing for the Empire's cause in South Africa. He hesitated no longer.

"Yes, Haines," he said bravely, "I will. If they'll have me, I'll come with you. I was born to be a soldier. I think I shall make my mark there. I think I may find my father if I can go with you. Yes, I'll serve the King!"

Under the Shadow of the Rackensberg — Trooper Haines's Idea of How Best to Kill Time—A Three-Cornered Match Arranged.

Encamped upon a break in the hills, a large open plain, over which, some ten miles away, towered the summit of the Rackensberg, 4,483 feet above the level of the sea, like some grim sentinel, were two regiments of mounted infantry and the regiment of the 29th Hussars.

For several weary weeks, in which the weather had alternated between the fierce heat of summer and the cold, bleak misery of damp, inclement winter, the combined forces had been operating for miles in the region of the Crocodile River, without having once come into contact with the enemy.

True, their outposts and scouts had been occasionally fired upon; but the shifty, restless rebels, hurled back upon their base by the advance of the British troops, which swarmed the

country for more than five hundred miles, north, east, and west, had gone to cover—to use a sporting expression—and the back of the rebellion had been broken.

It had cost the Empire dearly in loss of men and true home blood; but a lesson had been well taught—a lesson which would last those who had learnt it all their lives.

The majority of the malcontent Colonials and rebellious Dutch had thrown down their arms after decisive defeats at Rettespur, Bethlehem, and Ralfontein, and those who had still the hardihood to dispute the ground with the victorious troops had vanished into the thickly wooded and wild country of Matabeleland, where for a time they considered themselves safe from pursuit. Another, but smaller, force had journeyed along the Crocodile River; and it was in their pursuit of the latter that the three regiments that are most nearly concerned in our story had, by a clever movement, managed to get between them and the river, and, by now guarding the path across the valley of the Rackensberg, effectually prevented them from joining forces with the main body of the enemy.

It was a period of calm, during which the men enjoyed the luxury of camp-fire and bivouac, and the horses rested their tired limbs, and even began to fatten under a more liberal diet, in which grass was plentifully mingled.

One bright morning, when everything seemed to speak of joy and life, Lieutenant Jellotson stretched his arms out wearily, and, with a prodigious yawn, said to a comrade and fellow-officer:

"I say, Hewitt, what can we do to kill time? Active service is all very well, but it has its drawbacks. Here are we all growing fat and lazy and bad-tempered for the want of something to do. We can't leave this blessed pass, or the enemy might slip us. I wish we could hear from Du Cros whether he has captured the beggars yet or not. This is the third week we've been stuck here."

"Annoying, I admit," assented Lieutenant Hewitt; "but there it is. I don't know what the deuce we can do to amuse ourselves. Playing cards is dull when you haven't any money to stake, and I O U's are all rot. Jeffcock, for one, would never pay up. I know! I've got it! Let's all take quinine to keep off the malaria!"


And, for example, he poured a dose out of a medicine-bottle that had been placed on the ground by the side of his camp-stool, and drank it off.

Jellotson shuddered. "No, my boy," he said. "Go on or go out—I don't care which—but you'll never see me play with physic!"

At that moment an orderly approached and saluted. "What is it, Haines?" asked Lieutenant Hewitt, once captain of Grovehouse. "Hang it all, don't stand on too much ceremony with me! I'm not your lieutenant-colonel; I'm an old Grovehouse boy, like yourself!"

"Commissariat just arrived, sir," said the orderly, grinning, and his eyes twinkling merrily. "Got through without a sight of the enemy. Has brought a batch of letters and newspapers with it, sir, but none for us—ahem!—I mean, you!"

"What do you mean by us, Haines?" asked Jellotson,



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trying to look stern. "Have you been promoted to lieutenant?"

"No, sir; not even non-com., sir," answered Haines, smiling. "By us I meant Grovehouse. Oh, yes, there was, though! One for Jeffcock—ahem!—I mean, Lieutenant Jeffcock. Poor Foster and myself, we didn't get any!"

"Confound you! You're not the only sufferer!" growled Jellotson, piqued. "What about Hewitt—I mean, Lieutenant Hewitt—and myself?"

"Well, we'll forgive you, Haines," said Hewitt, playing with his bottle of quinine, "if you can suggest some good idea for killing time. If I don't kill time, it will kill me!"

"Trooper Foster has done wonders with your mare, sir," said Haines, coming to the salute, and looking reflectively at the summit of the Rackensberg.

"What the deuce is that to do with the question, Haines?" bawled William Hewitt.

"Lieutenant Jeffcock, of the 4th Regiment, King's Own Mounted Infantry, was over here just now, saying, sir, that there wasn't a horse on campaign in the British Army in South Africa who could beat his for a mile at a gallop!"

"A very good thing for Lieutenant Jeffcock," put in Jellotson drily, "should he meet the enemy and want to go the other way!"

"Well, come to the point, Haines!" said Hewitt irritably, the quinine getting hold of him a bit.

"Out here, sir," said Trooper Haines, with a wave of his hand that took in most of the plain, "there is as fine a stretch of grass, in parts, as you could wish to see. A few sticks and ropes, and a well marked-out course can be arranged. Betsy, your mare, sir, has recovered from her lameness, thanks to Trooper Foster's attention, is sound in wind and limb, and as dear an old thing as you could wish to see. She was biting her tethering-rope to be off this morning, sir. She's deceptive to look at. Bit thin, stoops with her shoulders, has a dull eye, excepting when she means mischief, and all that sort of things, sir. Lieutenant Jeffcock's Hyacinth is fast—there's no gainsaying that—but she's not the unbeatable he thinks. He's anxious to back her against anything in camp. You can tell that by the way he goes on. Back Betsy against him, sir. Get up some races. I dare say some 'silk' can be dug up amongst some of you. Get up regimental sweepstakes, or something of that sort. Have a Grand Gold Cup race, owners or others up, and see what fun you can get out of it. Some of the rich ones amongst you—and there can't be many at this stage of the campaign, sir—can make a book. A sort of Pari-Mutuel, so that we Tommies can have a cut in. It'll be the best fun of the whole outing!"

"Calls this serious business an outing, as if it were a picnic from Grovehouse!" grumbled Jellotson, moving restlessly. "My arm's so badly hurt through that fall I had the other day that I'm hanged if I could ride my horse Jimcrack, even if I entered him. But the idea's a grand one. We might get some fun out of it, Hewitt!"

"It is a grand one," assented Hewitt, forgetting all about his quinine and his malaria. "And as for Jimcrack, there's a good man could ride him for you. What better man could you have than Trooper Foster?"

"None," said Jellotson, his eyes glistening. "But you know there would be some ill-feeling shown somewhere if he were permitted to ride. Most of the officers are arrant snobs. They'd never agree that a trooper could be as much a gentleman as themselves!"

"Never mind, he can ride," said Hewitt. "Haines, send word round that a race committee meeting is to be held at the commander's quarters at twelve o'clock!"

"Yes, sir," said Haines, coming to the salute; and, with a brisk, firm step he walked away.

"Dear old Haines!" said Jellotson, as the trooper disappeared. "He's one of the very best! What a pity he isn't an officer like ourselves!"

"Soon will be," said Hewitt. "He'll be made corporal tomorrow. It won't be long before he's sergeant, and then his promotion will be rapid. He's got a head, has Haines. By gad, I shouldn't like to be his enemy when the troops dash into them!"

At twelve o'clock the ground in front of the commander's quarters was literally covered with officers in uniform, each one eagerly discussing the proposed race-meeting.

Presently, as Lieutenants Jellotson and Hewitt stood talking over some of the details of the suggested meeting, Lieutenant Jeffcock, clad in the khaki regimentals and distinguished badges of the 4th King's Own Mounted Infantry, approached them.

(Another splendid long instalment of this grand serial, next Wednesday. Order your copy in advance. Price One Penny.)

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"PLAYING A PART!"

ALGY OF ST. JIM'S!

(Continued from page 21.)

victory with wickets in hand, when Fortune smiled upon the School House again. Koumi Rao and Pratt were bowled out in quick succession for a couple of runs apiece; seven down for 50. Then Figgins and Dibbs made the running, and the score was at 65 when Dibbs fell to Jack Blake's bowling.

Figgins and his next partner piled up the runs. It was in vain that Tom Merry & Co. plied Figgins with all kinds of bowling. Figgins was impregnable. When the bowling came to Figgins, there was "nothing doing" for the School House; but there was very much doing for Figgins. Up went the score by leaps and bounds; and the New House fellows cheered loudly when it touched 80. Then Figgy's partner was caught out; nine down for 80.

"Last man in!"

Smith minor joined Figgins at the wickets.

Seven runs wanted to win, and Figgins still well set, and at the top of his form. The New House fellows grinned with anticipation. Seven more runs, after what he had done, would not be much to Figgins, and that over was going to finish the match. There was a shout from the New House crowd.

"Go it, Figgy!"

And Figgy grinned and "went it."

He started with a boundary off Tom Merry's bowling, and the New House yelled again. Three wanted to win. The next hit would do it, in all probability. The field were breathless as Tom Merry prepared to deliver the fateful ball. The fieldsmen were all eyes and hands, watching for chances. Figgins waited coolly for the ball. It came down at last—

Smack!

The willow met the leather, and it scared away—away—away. There was a tremendous yell.

"Look out, Blenkinsop!"

It was one chance more for Algernon—if he had been wide-awake. Figgins paid no more heed to Algernon in the field than if he had been a stone image.

Algernon's round, wide eyes were fastened on the ball, his hand went up—smack!

It was the sheerest of flukes; but Algernon's fingers closed round the ball, and held it, and then he nearly dropped it, but fortunately not quite. There was an almost hysterical yell from the field.

"Caught! Oh, well caught!"

"Oh, my only sainted uncle," gasped Figgins, "that—that duffer—that booby—that—that graven image—he's caught me out! Oh, take me away and bury me, somebody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bravo, Algy!"

The fieldsmen, shrieking with laughter, surrounded Algernon. Algernon was still holding the ball, astonished to find it in his hand. Figgins was out—right out—and the School House had won by two runs; and Algernon had made the winning catch—the catch of the season, as Monty Lowther put it.

"And you've won the match, Algy!" roared Tom Merry, thumping him on the back. "Do you hear, you fathead, you've won the match! Ha, ha, ha! You thumping ass, you've won the match! Ha, ha, ha! Shoulder high, you fellows!"

And Algernon was raised on the shoulders of the cheering cricketers, and borne off the field. They set him down before the pavilion, glowing with pleasure. He did not quite understand how he had won the match, but he was willing to take their word for it.

"Have you won, Tommy dear?" asked Miss Priscilla.

"Yes, rather, and Algy's made the winning catch!" grinned Tom Merry. "We've beaten the New House to the wide! Good old Algy!"

"I shall be pleased to play again for the House team, my dear Thomas," said Algernon, beaming. And Tom Merry murmured under his breath, "I don't think!"

But the match was won, and Algernon, by the wildest of flukes, had helped to win it; and they made much of Algernon at the celebration in the Terrible Three's study after the match. For that afternoon the hero of the hour was the verdant youth from Huckleberry Heath, who had caught out the mighty Figgins, although in cricket, as in everything else, he was green as grass.

THE END.

(Another magnificent long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Wednesday, entitled, "Playing a Part!" by Martin Clifford. Order in advance.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 331.

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

ST. JIM'S JINGLES.
No. 1.—TOM MERRY.

Sing hey, the skipper of the Shell!
A great and gallant leader,
Whose winning ways are known full well
To each devoted reader.
His smile is sunny and serene,
And thus it is not curious
That when he comes upon the scene
The fun rules fast and furious.

In every branch of sport he ranks
Among the first and foremost;
And when on foes he plays his pranks
He always seems to "score" most.
A couple of courageous chums
With Tom became united,
And now, when storm or sunshine comes
They stand in honour plighted.

From time to time the rival Co.'s
Unfurl their mighty banners,
And fall before the furious blows
Of Monty, Tom, and Manners.
A reputation of renown
Surrounds the Three so famous;
And he who thinks to put them down
Is quite an ignoramus!

In one respect our hero can't
Be termed exactly lucky;
For, lo! he has a maiden aunt
Who calls him "darling ducky."
Pronounced in private, such remark
No doubt is sweet and winning;
But Merry's chums enjoy the lark,
And will persist in grinning.

A pile of boxes packed with pills
For persons weak and ailing,
Are sent to Tom to cure the chills
Supposed to be prevailing.
While yards and yards of flannelette
The dotting dame despatches,
In case her charge, in getting wet,
Acute pneumonia catches!

When Tom is faithfully infused
With treatments sound and drastic,
His schoolmates seem to be amused,
And often wax sarcastic.
The incensed junior lashes out
With most amazing quickness,
And proves to them, beyond a doubt,
That he is free from sickness!

Brave sons of Britain, when forlorn,
With spirits sunk to zero,
Adopt the actions which adorn
This curly-headed hero!
Extend to each the sunny smile,
And all their burdens banish,
That, acting in this splendid style,
Your own regrets may vanish.

Next Week:

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY.

**"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."

Rue Arnold, Wilson Street, Horsham, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in Views, Stamps, Birds' Eggs, etc.

H. Kay, c/o G.P.O., Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England, age 14-15.

R. C. Masters, 102, Malakoff Street, Marrickville, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 13-14.

Miss Emilio Trestain, 27, Michael Street, North Fitzroy, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England, age 17-18.

Miss L. Olsen, Post Office, Leichhardt, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers living in England, Australia or America, age 15-17.

Miss Marie Stuart, 252, McKean Street, Clifton Hill, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 19-23.

Walter J. Zimmer, City Watch House, Geelong, Victoria, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps, age 14-16.

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A. Tighe, Box 111, Winton, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in Australia.

Harold L. Edwards, Railway Station, Geraldton, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, age 16-19.

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The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

HOW'S THESE?

Question: Why is the bootmaker's business the most profitable trade?

Answer: Because every pair of boots are soled before they are finished.

Question: Why are people who go up in aeroplanes called aeronauts?

Answer: Because they are never sure whether they can stay in the air or not (aeronaut).

Question: What is the difference between a pretty girl and a convict?

Answer: One always has the beau, and the other the arrows.

Question: What is the difference between a drain-pipe and a stupid Dutchman?

Answer: One is a hollow cylinder, and the other is a silly Hollander.

Question: What is the difference between a carpenter's-shop and a fish-shop?

Answer: Because in one there is a smell of deal, and in the other a deal of smell.

Question: What is the difference between a young lady and an old man?

Answer: One is careless and happy, and the other is hairless and cappy.

—Sent in by B. H. Roberts, Liverpool.

MIXED.

Patrick was called to the local police-station to give evidence in a certain case, and was interviewed by the inspector.

"Patrick McSweeney," roared the inspector, "what countryman are you?"

Pat shifted uneasily.

"An Oirishman," he answered.

"And," continued the inspector, "your business?"

"Faith, I'm an Italian organ-grinder!" said Pat.—Sent in by W. T. Lack, Northants.

ANOTHER TWISTER.

"I bought a felt hat at Jubb's, and of all the felt hats I ever felt, I never felt a felt hat that felt like that felt hat felt; and if ever I feel a felt hat that feels like that felt hat felt, I'll buy that felt hat in memory of the felt hat that I felt at Jubb's.—Sent in by Harry Jaques, Dewsbury.

VERY HOT!

If a Hottentot, taught a Hottentot tot
To talk ere the tot could totter,
Ought the Hottentot tot
To be taught to say "ought,"
Or "naught," or what ought to be taught her?

If to hoot and toot a Hottentot tot
Be taught by a Hottentot tooter,
Should the tooter get hot if the Hottentot tot
Hoot and toot at the Hottentot tooter?

—Sent in by G. P. Jones, Cardiff.

A SAILOR'S YARN.

Seated round the table were several men, passing away their time by telling yarns. They had all had their turn except an old sailor, who had remained silent all the time, until pressed by the others to do his share. He began thus:

"I was once in a dreadful storm, and all the provisions were washed overboard. I was very ill, and ate nothing for four days. At the end of that time I began to feel hungry, and the steward gave me beef, chicken, port-wine, and eggs."

"But you said all the provisions were washed overboard," said one of the company. "Where did the beef come from?"

"From the bulwarks (bullocks)," said the old salt.

"And where did you get the chicken from?"

"From the hatch."

"And the port-wine?"

"From the port-hole."

"And the eggs?"

"Eggs," said the sailor. "I didn't say eggs, did I?"

"Oh, yes, you did," said the men. "We've caught you!"

The old sailor had to consider.

"Oh, yes, I did have eggs," he said at last. "The captain ordered the ship to lay-to, and he gave me one."—Sent in by A. Norman, Liverpool.

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE.

Gentleman (in railway-station): "How did this accident happen?"

Guard: "Someone pulled the cord and stopped the train, and the boat express ran into us. It will take five hours to clear the line for us to go ahead."

Gentleman: "Five hours! Great Scott! I was to be married to-day!"

Guard (suspiciously): "Look here, are you the chap who stopped the train?"—Sent in by S. T. Arnold, East Ham, E.

RATHER DIFFICULT.

A member of a certain scientific society went to visit an old friend in the country. The old friend tried to be interested, and asked the young scientist what particular work he was doing at present.

"Oh," said the young man, "I am trying to find a substance that will dissolve everything. Just you think what a great thing that would be!"

"Hum!" said the rustic. "What would you keep it in?"

—Sent in by Miss E. North, London, N.

THE FULL AMOUNT.

They were firm friends, one an Englishman and the other a Scotsman, and had just alighted from the train after a long and tedious journey. To while away their time they had indulged in a game of cards, and on parting company the Scottish party was the winner by 1s. 6½d.

The Englishman paid up 1s. 6d., but found he had no coppers for the odd bawbee.

"Weel," said the Scotty, "never mind; I'll just be takin' yer evenin' paper!"—Sent in by R. Dane, Yorks.

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 other-wise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



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For Next Wednesday,

"PLAYING A PART!"
 By Martin Clifford.

In our next splendid, complete school story, entitled as above, the principal part is played by Monty Lowther, the humorous member of Tom Merry & Co. On this occasion, however, Lowther takes himself very seriously indeed, and causes his chums much anxiety on his behalf. Secrets between the Terrible Three are almost unknown, and when Tom Merry and Manners perceive that their chum is deceiving them—enlisting their aid in carrying out a mad and reckless project, while refusing to give them any explanation of his extraordinary conduct, there is naturally trouble.

All attempts to dissuade the perverse youth from the risky course he has adopted prove futile, until his chums discover a mean plot against him which will spell disaster.

It is then they make a final, desperate effort to save their old chum from the consequences of the folly which has led him into

"PLAYING A PART!"

THIS WEEK'S NEW FEATURE.

My readers will find on page 26 of this issue the first of a series of bright little poems dealing with some of the principal characters in Martin Clifford's ever-popular school stories. For the next few weeks, at all events, these pleasing little poetic efforts will form a new feature in the good old "Gem" Library, which I am quite sure will meet with the hearty appreciation of my chums.

It is fitting that the first of these "St. Jim's Jungles," should deal with the chief of the famous juniors of the grand old school.

DON'T MISS THIS!

This week's issue of our grand companion paper, "The Penny Popular," contains a particularly fine trio of complete stories, and I strongly advise all my "Gemite" chums to be early at their newsagent's on Friday, in order to secure a copy with as little delay as possible. Perhaps the most interesting item to my "Gem" chums is the long, complete tale of the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. in the United States, entitled

"THE BLAZED TRAIL!"
 By Martin Clifford.

At the same time, the complete tale of Sexton Blake and Tinker, entitled

"TINKER'S PERIL!"

and S. Clarke Hook's amusing complete story of Jack, Sam, and Pete, entitled

"BILL'S REFORMATION!"

are stories which will make a powerful appeal to all fiction-lovers.

Don't let this week go by without making the acquaintance of the latest issue of

"THE PENNY POPULAR."

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Dan Riley (Blackburn).—I am afraid I do not know of a cure for bow-legs. I should advise you to consult your physician.

"A Loyal Reader" (Liverpool).—The remedy I recently

gave for knock-knees is recognised as being the most likely cure. I should not trouble if I were you in trying any other. If that one fails to cure you, I can only say, consult your physician.

P. Flanagan (Co. Mayo).—The character you mention is perhaps slightly exaggerated, for the sake of effect, but is, nevertheless, extremely popular with readers.

HINTS TO YOUNG CRICKET CAPTAINS.

There must be a number of readers of the "Gem" Library upon whose young shoulders rests the burden of captaining a cricket team. A great deal of the success of a team depends upon the captain, and to those "skippers" who are not above taking an old cricketer's advice, the following few hints are addressed. In the first place, you must remember your position, and, for the time at least, you are "cock of the roost." The team must obey your orders without question. If they grumble, give them the option of obeying or leaving the field. By this, I don't mean bully them. They elected you captain, and must abide by your rule.

Now, my reader captains, remember most of the battle on the cricket-field is fought by the bowlers. Therefore, do not be afraid to change your bowler after he has had a few overs. Obviously, a fast bowler can't keep his length exactly right, and pitch them down at the same rate, if he is compelled to bowl the whole game through. Besides giving your bowler a rest, a change will often serve to prevent the batsmen from settling down.

Your man in the slips must be quick of eye and hand. No "butter-fingers" should hold this position. Men who are good at ground-fielding should be placed out in the long-field.

With regard to the batsmen, don't put your stone-wallahs in first. They certainly help to keep your wickets up, but they don't make your runs. If you yourself are a good bat, then go in first, and thus set an encouraging example to your team mates. Confidence has a lot to do with the batting, you will agree, and therefore it is most inadvisable to put your "rabbits" in early. Their fallen wickets do much to encourage the fielders to greater efforts, not to mention the fact that they will have exactly the opposite effect on your batsmen. Good bats first, mediums next, to be followed by your "stone-wallahs," and "rabbits." Of course, the combination of a stone-waller and a brilliant bat is often most effective.

A word about appearances. A cricket captain should make a point of being on the field of play not a minute later than the fixed time. If he slacks and turns up late with a mouthful of apologies, he sets a very bad example to his fellow-players. And when on field, he should put a stop to all shouting across the pitch. If "Bill" wants to talk to "Tom" there is plenty of time for a few words when the fielders are changing over.

Lack of enthusiasm on the part of the captain has lost many a game. Your team may start out to field with a determination to win, but because the man in the slips, say, misses a catch, he is grumbled at. If you young captains don't put a stop to this early, it will breed discontent all through the team. Pass over any mishap with a cheerful laugh. You will put the unfortunate "butter-fingers" at his ease, and a game in a cheerful atmosphere is much more pleasant than a game where the fielders are constantly grumbling and bickering with each other.

(Another special article next Wednesday.)

The Editor

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