

THE SPORTSMEN OF ST. JIM'S!

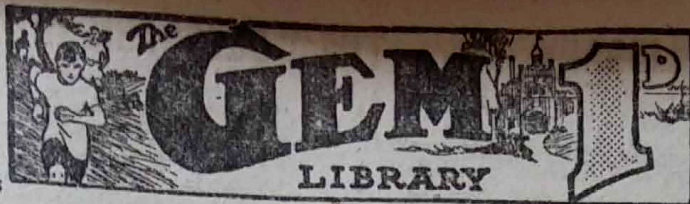
A Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



THE SCHOOL BAND'S STIRRING SEND-OFF!

A Great Scene in the Magnificent School Tale in this Issue.

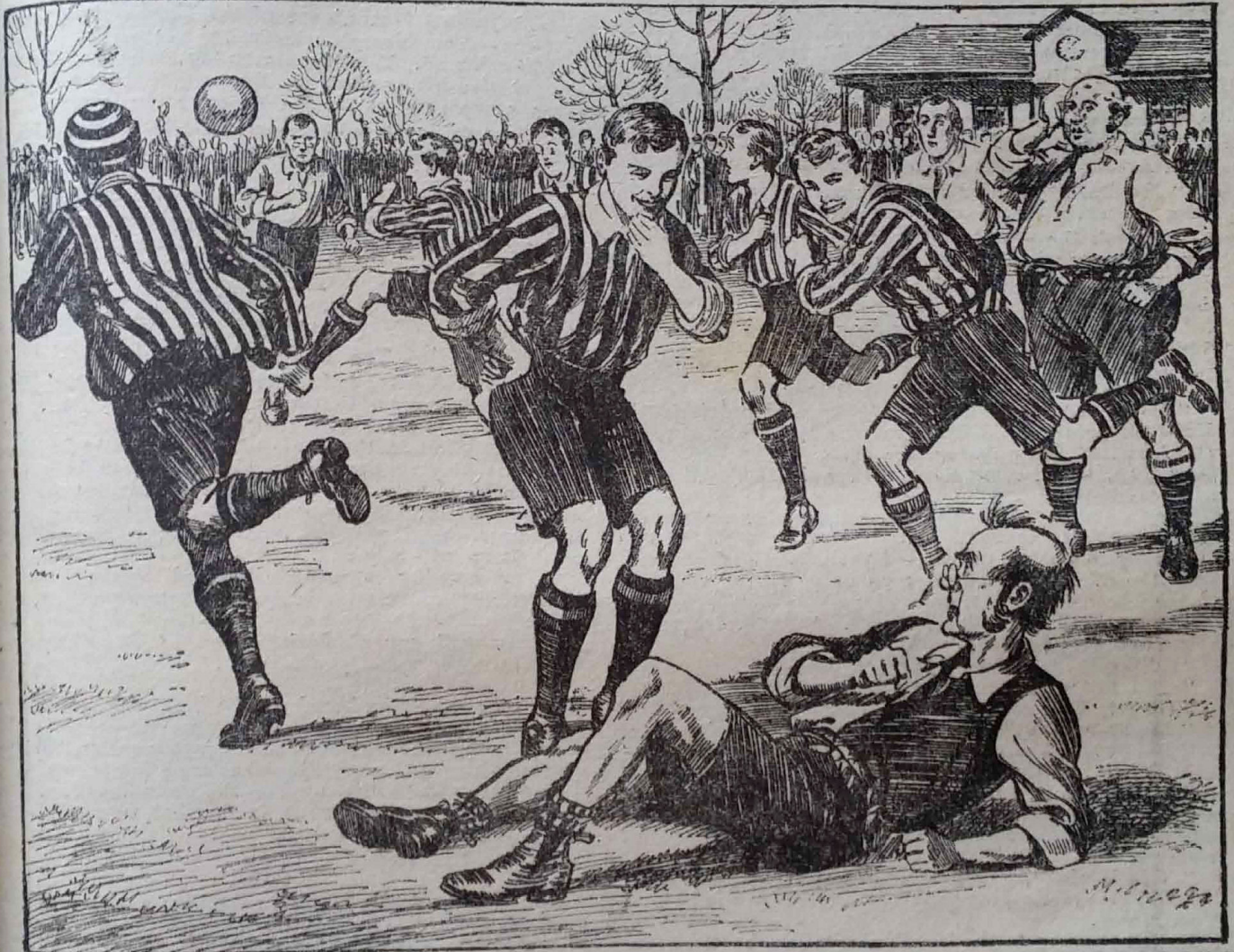
PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

THE SPORTSMEN OF ST. JIM'S!

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



"Boy! Figgins!" stormed Mr. Rateliff. "How dare you repeatedly pit your weight against me in such an unwarranted manner!" "It's all in the game, sir!" said Figgins, cheerfully. "Footballers must learn to take hard knocks, sir!" "You impertinent young rascal!" (See Chapter 13.)

CHAPTER I. Footballers All!

"GENTLEMEN—" began Tom Merry.
"Hurray!"
"On the ball!"
"I call for a toast in honour of footer,
the greatest game in the land, bar none!"
"Hear, hear!"

A dozen fellows sprang to their feet as one man, and drained their upraised glasses of ginger-pop.
In the Terrible Three's study in the Shell passage all was merry and bright. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the three inseparables—were there, likewise Blake & Co., the famous chums of the Fourth. Talbot had been seated on the window-sill, accommodation being limited,

and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the giants of the New House, were alongside.

It was a momentous occasion. St. Jim's had just met, conquered, and annihilated the redoubtable Grammar School heroes, and they rejoiced with an exceeding joy. Footer is an excellent game—excellent, indeed, to those who can usually contrive to win five matches out of six!—and the Saints felt very bucked with themselves and with life in general. A bumper repast had just been held, and when Tom Merry called for the toast none were slow to respond, save, perhaps, Fatty Wynn, who had stowed away sufficient to feed an Army Corps.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," said Tom Merry, when the din and hubbub had abated somewhat. "I have a very important proposition to make."

Next Wednesday!

"MANNERS MINOR!" AND "THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!"

"Fire away, O king!" said Monty Lowther.
 "It's about the footer," said Tom. "Look here! What a ripping stunt it would be if our team went on a week's tour!"

"What?"
 "My hat!"
 "We could fix up a series of matches," proceeded Tom, warming to his subject, "and the profits could go to the Red Cross. What do you chaps think of the idea?"

"Stale!" said Figgins promptly. "Came out of the ark with Noah!"

"Why, you fathead—"
 "Harry Wharton & Co., at Greyfriars, worked the same wheeze months ago!" said Figgy. "You're simply cribbing their idea!"

"Ahem! There may be a slight resemblance," said Tom Merry, flushing, "but, hang it all, what's it matter? The Greyfriars chaps played footer against counties; we can play against big towns—twig?"

"Bai Jove! That's a jollay good ideah, aftah all!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with enthusiasm.

"Not bad!" grunted Jack Blake. "The question is, how the merry dickens are we to get a week off?"

"There's the rub!" said Tom Merry. "Still, I think we can wangle it all right with the Head."

"If you wequiah a fellah of tact and judgment—" began D'Arcy.

"Dry up, Gusey! Suppose we send a deputation to the Head, you chaps?"

"Good egg!"
 "A wound wobin?" suggested D'Arcy.

"Rats! Let's go there in a body, and put it to the Head straight!" said Tom Merry. "We can harp on the fact that the gate-fees are going to the Red Cross. Now then, who'll come along with me? Don't all speak at once!"

They didn't. There was no mad rush to accompany the skipper of the Shell to the Head's study. It was extremely doubtful in what light Dr. Holmes would view the affair. He might even go so far as to resort to the free use of the cane.

"Come on!" urged Tom Merry. "One volunteer is worth ten pressed men!"

"I'll come!" grunted Manners.
 "And I!" said Monty Lowther.

"Good! You coming along, Blakey?"
 "Might as well," said Jack Blake, with resignation.

"Bai Jove! I'm not goin' to be left out in the cold!" said D'Arcy. "Come along, deah boys!"

That settled it. Everybody in the study rose to go, with the exception of Fatty Wynn, who, his arms folded across his chest, had sunk into a deep and profound slumber.

"This is where we get it in the neck!" said Manners.
 "Oh, rot! Nothing venture, nothing win!" said Tom Merry.

He led the way to the Head's study, and knocked confidently upon the door.

"Come in!"
 "Now for the giddy fireworks!" muttered Monty Lowther.

Dr. Holmes started up in surprise at the invasion.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Who—what is this?"

"We're a deputation, sir," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"A what?"
 "A deputation. We wish to ask you if we can be excused from lessons for a week."

The Head looked as if he could scarcely believe his ears.

"Are you joking, Merry?" he asked thunderously.

"Nunno, sir. We—we're dead serious, sir."

"Yaas, bai Jove!"
 "For what purpose do you wish to have a week's immunity from class?"

"We should like to make a tour of the Southern Counties, sir, to play football."

The Head almost fell down.

"You—you are, surely romancing, Merry?" he exclaimed.

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"Not at all, sir. The profits of the games would go to the Red Cross fund for wounded Tommies."

The Head's stern gaze softened.

"That is a very laudable object, my boy. At the same time, I should hesitate to do as you suggest. It is almost without parallel in the school's history!"

"Greyfriars did it, sir!" chimed in Figgins, eagerly.

"That is neither here nor there. You had better leave me to think the matter over, boys. I must consult with Mr. Railton and others."

"You think there's a chance, sir?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

Dr. Holmes smiled.
 "I think so."

"Hurray!"
 The juniors trooped out of the Head's study in high feather. Tom Merry's wheeze had not proved a "wash-out," after all. It was quite on the cards that the Head would give his sanction for the projected tour, in which case everything in the garden would be lovely.

"Now we must possess our souls in patience for the giddy verdict," said Manners. "Tommy, old son, you're a brick!"

"Yaas, wathah!" assented the swell of St. Jim's.

And the party of football enthusiasts proceeded to thump their leader on the back till he was obliged to howl for mercy.

CHAPTER 2.

The Head's Resolve.

JACK BLAKE of the Fourth burst into the junior common-room that evening like a cyclone. His face was tense with excitement.

"What in thunder—" began Monty Lowther, who was playing chess with Talbot. Then he gave a roar as Jack Blake sent the chess-board flying. Bishops and pawns and knights and rooks went hurtling in all directions, and it was quite obvious that the game had come to an untimely end.

"You howling maniac!" bellowed Monty Lowther, brandishing his fists furiously. "Explain yourself, fat-head!"

"Hurray!" roared Jack Blake. "Hoo-giddy-ray! We've got the week, you fellows!"

"Gammon!"
 "It's on the notice-board in the hall. Go and see for yourselves!"

And Jack Blake continued on his joyous career, bowling over anything and everything that came in his way.

Tom Merry & Co. hastened to the notice-board. There they found an announcement, in the neat, scholarly hand of Dr. Holmes, as follows:

"NOTICE!

"On Monday next a junior football team will commence a tour of the Southern Counties, the proceeds of the games to be devoted to the Red Cross Fund.

The following eleven has been selected for the occasion:

"Goal, Wynn; Backs, Figgins and Kerr; half-backs, Lowther, Redfern, and Reilly; Forwards, Blake, Noble, Merry, Talbot, and D'Arcy.

"Four reserves will travel with the team as under:

"Julian, Brooke, Manners, and Herries.

"The party will be presided over by Kildare, who is to referee the various contests.

"It is hoped that every junior will play his best for the side, and that there will be good games and good gates. The Greyfriars Football Club, which entered upon a similar tour some months ago, was instrumental in providing £110 for our wounded soldiers. Let us see if St. James' School cannot go one better!"

(Signed), R. HOLMES, Headmaster.

A perfect babel of voices arose as soon as the Head's generous notice had been read.

"How ripping!" said Talbot, with a deep breath.



"Oh, weally, you know!" protested Arthur Augustus. "Give a fellah time to get in!" But the cab was already bowling away, with Kidarc and the New House fellows inside, and Gussy was left gaping on the pavement. (See Chapter 7.)

"Glorious!" chortled Monty Lowther. "No lessons for a week! Old Linton can go and eat coke—"

"Indeed! I have no desire to sample that indigestible article!" said a deep voice.

Monty Lowther swung round as if petrified. The master of the Shell, in cap and gown, had come upon the scene unobserved.

"I—I— Oh, crumbs!" stammered Lowther, in dismay.

"So you are anxious for a week's immunity from old Linton?" asked the Form-master, with a smile.

"N-n-not exactly, sir. What I meant to say was—ahem!—oh, hang it all! I'm sorry I spoke, sir. I didn't see you coming."

"You had better be careful to moderate your remarks in future, Lowther, or I shall feel constrained to give you a heavy imposition! As it is, you are pardoned."

"Thank you very much, sir!" said Monty Lowther gratefully.

And the master of the Shell rustled away.

"Linton's a brick!" said Manners. "I thought it was all up with you that time, Monty, old son."

"What I want to know," said Grundy, glancing pensively at the notice-board, "is where do I come in in this confounded tour?"

"You don't come in at all," said Monty Lowther sweetly. "You stand out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a rotten shame!" hooted Grundy. "Everybody knows that so far as footer's concerned I'm a valuable acquisition—"

"To the other side!" chuckled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The great Grundy felt very annoyed. At Redelyffe, his previous school, he had always found a place in the footer team; but then, as Tom Merry pointed out, Redelyffe was only a tinpot institution, and couldn't hold a candle to a grand old school like St. Jim's.

"My hat! I'd like to have five minutes with the prize idiot who drew up that team!" declared Grundy. "I'd knock him into the middle of next week!"

"Then you'd better go and commit assault and battery on the Head!" said Tom Merry. "He made the selection."

Grundy snorted.

"A fat lot he knows about footer! I don't suppose he's ever played a game in his life, unless it's solo whist. Carry me home to die, somebody!"

"We won't go so far as that," said Herries. "But why not bump him?"

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"Yaas, wathah, Hewwies, deah boy!"
And a sweeping movement was made towards the unfortunate George Alfred.

"Keep off!" roared Grundy, in alarm. "Gerraway, you rotters! Ow! Yarooooop!"

Grundy descended on the hard floor of the hall with a resounding bump, which fairly made the dust rise.

"Once more!" sang out Tom Merry.

Bump!

"Yow-ow! Chuck it, you beasts!"

"And one for luck!" roared Manners.

Bump!

"Now go away, and be a good boy," admonished Tom Merry. "And don't criticise a jolly good selection, which can't be improved upon."

Grundy picked himself up, breathing threatenings and slaughter.

"All right!" he growled. "Just you wait! You haven't heard the end of this business yet, not by long chalks! You'll get a surprise-packet before long!"

And the discomfited Grundy limped painfully away to make himself presentable. After his retreating figure floated a yell of ironical laughter:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 3. A Rift in the Lute!

DURING the days that followed, the great winter game was taken up with much gusto at St. Jim's. Tom Merry & Co. were eternally practising on Little Side, in the quad, and even in such a sacred precinct as the Sixth-Form passage.

Kildare caught them once or twice, but the stalwart, good-natured captain of St. Jim's was even more tolerant than usual, for he was overjoyed at the prospect of a week's leisure. Monteith, of the New House, was to keep law and order in his absence.

Tom Merry had been very busy arranging fixtures with various teams, and when they were completed he called the members of the forthcoming excursion together.

"I've got it all out and dried," he explained. "We've got fixtures with Greyfriars and Rookwood, and a military match against the Loamshires."

"My hat! You had the sauce to challenge a regimental team?" gasped Jack Blake.

"Why not? We shall get licked, I dare say, but think of the gate we shall get! People will be amazed at our nerve, and they'll roll up in their thousands. Besides, the Loamshires will only be young chaps, though Railton might go over to Wayland to play for 'em. It's his old regiment, you know."

"Well, we'll put up the best game we know," said Fatty Wynn. "By the way, there are several good grub-shops in Wayland, if I remember rightly."

"Go hon!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Grub seems to draw old Fatty like a magnet," observed Kerr.

"Well, it's the 'Boys' Friend,' isn't it?" said Lowther.

"Oh, put a stopper on those putrid puns, for goodness' sake!" urged Manners. "They never cause any 'Chuckles!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order, please!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Look here, we're going to play representative teams of several towns. There's Brighton, Southsea, Reading, Swindon, Dover, and London."

"London!" gasped Talbot. "Ye gods!"

"It won't be so very formidable," said Tom. "The team will be made up of County Council School fellows, I expect. They know how to play footer, but I think we can give them a good run for their money."

"Quite so," agreed Harry Noble, the Australian junior. "But what puzzles me is how the dickens can we crowd nine matches into six days?"

"Perfectly simple, my son. On half the days we shall play two matches. See? For instance, on Monday we're playing Rookwood in the morning and Southsea in the afternoon. They're both in Hampshire, so we can wangle things all right."

"It strikes me we shall want no end of stamina to keep it up," said Jack Blake.

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"No doubt; but we're all fit as fiddles. Besides, we've got four reserves to fall back upon."

"Rather!" said Dick Julian, the Jewish junior. "We're not going to be used merely as ornaments, you know!"

"I should think not!" said Herries warmly.

"Tell you what," said Kerr suddenly. "We ought to make ten matches of it, if poss. D'you think there's any chance of the present fixtures being finished by Saturday afternoon, Tommy?"

"Yes, I think so. What are you driving at?"

"Why, what a ripping gate we should get if we fixed up a match with the masters!" said Kerr excitedly.

"My hat!"

"It's a shame to leave St. Jim's out in the cold," Kerr went on. "We're charging a tanner entrance fee everywhere else, and nothing's been done here. I vote we put it to the Head."

"By Jove, that's not at all a bad idea!" said Tom Merry. "We might have some difficulty in persuading the masters to play, though."

"Oh, they'll roll up quick enough for the good of the cause!" said Kerr confidently.

"Gee-whizz! Imagine old Ratty flaunting about as outside-right!" grinned Figgins. "It would be a sight for gods and men and little fishes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll tackle the Head, anyway," said Tom Merry. "You fellows wait here, and I'll go and beard the giddy lion in his den."

The captain of the Shell quitted the study. He returned in a few moments, his face radiant.

"All serene!" he exclaimed. "The Head's going to see to it. Matter of fact, he's going to play himself."

"W-w-what!"

"Sort of takes your breath away, don't it? But, after all, why shouldn't he? It'll bring a record crowd, and we ought to take anything up to fifteen quid."

The juniors grew wildly excited. The idea of the grave and reverend Head of St. Jim's playing in a rough-and-tumble footer match was distinctly novel. It was presumed, however, that Dr. Holmes would elect to keep goal.

"I think everything's settled now," said Tom Merry cheerily.

"Half a jiffy, though!" broke in Figgins. "We haven't decided who's going to be captain throughout the tour."

"I am, of course!" said Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Rats! Why not give a New House chap a look-in for a change?"

"Look here——"

"Look here——"

"Trouble in the family!" said Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"I'm captain of footer in the ordinary way, and I don't see why I should relinquish the position on the tour!" said Tom Merry warmly.

"Hear, hear!" chorused the School House contingent.

"That's all tommy-rot!" said Redfern. "It's not fair that you should always be in the limelight! I plump for Figgy!"

"Same here!" said Kerr and Wynn together.

Tom Merry looked worried. He was the last fellow in the world to be wilfully selfish, and he certainly did not relish the idea of a split in the team at this critical moment.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "we can't both skipper the side, that certain! Are you game to fight for it?"

"Rather! I'll meet you, with or without gloves, wherever you like!" said Figgins heartily.

"Right! Then we'll adjourn to the gym, and have it out!"

"Good old Tommy!" said Monty Lowther. "If you want a second, I'm your man!"

"And I'm Figgy's," said Kerr. "Kim on!"

And a movement was made to the gymnasium.

The news spread like wildfire throughout the school, and crowds of fellows thronged into the gym. It was not often that two such stalwarts as Tom Merry and Figgins met in fistic combat, and the encounter was bound to be a thrilling one.

Kildare of the Sixth, hearing what was afoot, came along to see fair play.

"Are you both prepared to abide by the result of the contest?" he asked.

The juniors nodded, and made ready for the fight, which was destined to be one of the most stirring and stupendous "scraps" ever witnessed at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 4.

A Spartan Tussle!

"SECONDS out of the ring!"
Monty Lowther and Kerr hopped out of the arena.

"Time!"

"Go it, Tommy boy!"

"Flatten him, Figgy!"

The two time-honoured rivals rushed upon each other, hitting out in hurricane style. Quite early in the proceedings Figgy received a smashing right-hander in the ribs that fairly doubled him up. The School House fellows cheered wildly.

The first round finished in Tom Merry's favour. His opponent had experienced a sorry time of it. The claret streamed profusely from his nose, and one of his eyes seemed to have temporarily gone out of business.

"Bravo, Merry!"

"Stick it out, old sport!"

The captain of the Shell responded right gallantly. The honours again fell to him in the second round, and his chums were overjoyed.

"Ten to one on Tommy!" said Monty Lowther expressively. "Any takers?"

But that tempting offer was laid waste on the desert air. As Croke remarked in his sporting language, it looked a dead-sure snip for Tom Merry, and he would be prepared to back the skipper of the Shell both ways. But nobody wanted to bet with Croke.

The two combatants stepped up grimly for the third round. Figgins had been receiving plenty of help and instruction from Kerr in the interval, and he was yet prepared to make a game fight of it. At the call of "Time!" he swung out his left, and Tom Merry went whirling against the ropes, having taken the blow fairly and squarely on the point of the jaw.

"Hooray! Well hit, sir!" chirruped the New House contingent delightedly.

Figgins swiftly followed up his advantage, and led Tom Merry a terrific dance for the rest of the round.

"Think you can stick it out, Tommy?" asked Monty Lowther, as he sponged his chief's face.

Tom Merry grinned breathlessly.

"It's going to be touch and go," he said. "Figgy's out for scalps!"

"But you mustn't go under," said Lowther. "You simply mustn't! It would be too foul for a New House bouncer to skipper the side! Go for him baldheaded next time, old scout!"

And Tom Merry did. He went for his man like a cyclone as soon as Kildare called "Time!"

But Figgins was proof against his fierce attack. He rallied strongly, and the two old rivals fought like tigers, each determined not to yield. Such a scrap had not been witnessed at St. Jim's for whole terms.

Both combatants were showing signs of wear and tear by the end of the fourth round. Figgy's right eye had undergone a startling change in colour, and Tom Merry's nose had swollen to almost hideous proportions.

"It strikes me that neither of them will be fit for the footer if they go on at this rate!" growled Jack Blake.

The next round proceeded more quietly, for both the Shell and New House leaders had bellows to mend. Towards the close of the three minutes, however, Figgins broke clean through his opponent's guard, and landed a straight drive, right on the mark, which sent Tom Merry spinning to the floor. Only the call of "Time!" saved the Shell fellow from almost certain defeat.

Monty Lowther bustled about with a will during the interval, and tried hard not to look glum. In his heart, however, he felt that Tom Merry was beaten. It seemed impossible that he could recover from Figgins' hurricane blow.

"Buck up, old man!" he murmured. "You're not done yet, by long chalks!"

Tom Merry mustered up all his courage and resource for the next stage of that grim struggle. Figgins possessed the advantage of reach, and that left of his wanted watching. Tom Merry fought strictly on the defensive during the sixth round, and but for his stubborn resistance Figgins would certainly have added to the successes already gained.

In round seven things bucked up again. There was some fierce in-fighting, in the course of which Tom Merry's elbow received a shock which set it tingling for the rest of the day.

"Break away, there!" said Kildare nonchalantly.

Tom Merry broke free, and stood ready, waiting for his opponent to come on. Figgins shot out his left, but the blow was parried; and then Tom Merry, stepping to one side, got in a well-timed jolt on the jaw which caused the New House fellow to reel.

"Bravo, Merry!"

The crowd applauded Tom's effort boisterously. They were glad to see a revival on his part.

Then followed a terrific game of rush and punch. Science was thrown to the winds for the time being. All that Tom Merry wanted was to get at Figgins; and all that Figgins wanted was to get at Tom Merry. The result may easily be imagined. Both fellows looked utter wrecks at the end of the round.

"Look here," said Kildare abruptly. "This has gone far enough. You don't want to make a sort of prize-fight of the affair. Better chuck it!"

Tom Merry and Figgins sprang up from their respective corners.

"Let's go on!" they exclaimed simultaneously.

"It'll save a lot of bad blood later on," chimed in Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kildare reflected.

"Buck up and get it over, then," he said reluctantly.

The next round was also destined to be the last. Figgins went all out for victory, but he was over-zealous. Had he given more attention to his guard the catastrophe might never have happened. But he exposed himself once too often, and Tom Merry, quick to seize the opportunity, rushed right in and floored his man with a heavy drive in the chest.

Kildare began to count.

"One—two—three—"

"Buck up, Figgy!" almost wailed Fatty Wynn.

"Four—five—six—"

The leader of the New House sat up, but that was about as far as he got.

"Seven—eight—nine—TEN!"

"Licked, by jiminy!" exclaimed Harry Noble.

And then the School House fellows literally went mad. They simply swarmed into the ring, and lifted Tom Merry in triumph on their shoulders, to the accompaniment of a deafening burst of cheers.

The captain of the Shell bore his blushing honours thick upon him. When at last he was lowered to the ground he approached the defeated Figgins, who was being studiously tended by his faithful chums.

Tom extended his hand, and smiled. The smile looked rather incongruous, since his lip was considerably swollen.

"You don't bear any malice, Figgy?" he asked.

"Of course not, you old duffer! Put it there!"

And Figgy's hand promptly shot out to grip that of his conqueror.

"You can go ahead with the captaincy of the team," he said, with a faint grin. "I was a fool to tackle you, really. I might have known I hadn't an earthly!"

"It was a jelly near thing," said Tom. "You fought like a giddy Trojan, old man!"

And then Tom Merry, escorted by Manners, Lowther, Blake, Talbot, and a crowd of School House fellows, went off to obtain a much-needed wash and brush-up.

He was likely to bear lively recollections of that terrific scrap for many a long day!

ANSWERS

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"MANNERS MINORI!"

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

CHAPTER 5.

"Some" Licking!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY of the Shell was going strong.

He was going a lot too strong for the liking of Tom Merry & Co.

Grundy was a decent enough fellow, in a way; but he possessed an altogether distorted opinion of his own powers. As a boxer he considered himself to be "IT"; as a runner, swimmer, oarsman, and cricketer he maintained that he was superior to every other junior at St. Jim's.

And then there was football. Grundy had a strange delusion that the mantle of the celebrated Steve Bloomer had descended upon himself. He regarded it as simply monstrous for him to be left out of the tour.

Shortly after the Head's notice had been posted up in the hall, Grundy had sought sympathy—and found it. Wilkins and Gunn, his two study-mates, agreed that it was a howling shame for the authorities to ignore Grundy's claim to a place in the team. Then Levison and Crooke and Mellish, ever ready to deal a blow at the prestige of Tom Merry & Co., threw in their lot with Grundy, and it was decided to raise a rival team.

Grundy had very little difficulty in completing an eleven. He already had six as a foundation, and Gore, Buck Finn, Trimble, Skimpole, and Roland Ray consented to enlist under his banner. None of them, save Gore and Ray had any idea of the great winter game, and they merely joined up with the prospect of fighting shy of lessons for a week.

"What I can't make out," said Wilkins dubiously, as he chatted with his chief on the steps of the School House, "is how you're going to get Tom Merry & Co. kicked out, and bag the tour for us!"

"It's quite simple," said Grundy loftily. "I sha'n't resort to any backhanded methods. I shall simply go to the Head, and tell him I've got a team that could knock Tom Merry's tinpot affair into a cocked hat. Then he'll let us take on the bizney instead."

"If he believes you," said Wilkins doubtfully. "Of course he'll believe me, you silly chump! I'm going to put it to him now."

And Grundy marched off to the Head's study. Dr. Holmes received him cordially enough. "You wish to speak to me, Grundy?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. It's about the football tour."

"Indeed!" said the Head, with a smile. "You are disappointed at being left out?"

"That's it, sir."

"I did not know you were a footballer, Grundy."

"I'm simply top-notch—ahem!—jolly good, sir! When I was at Redclyffe I won a great reputation, sir."

The Head coughed.

"I am afraid football ability at Redclyffe is judged by a different standard than at this school," he said. "Apparently, you do not agree with my selection of boys for the tour?"

"To tell you the truth, no, sir."

"I am sorry to hear that, since I have no wish to be unfair. I consulted at great length with Mr. Railton and Kildare before finally posting up the names."

Grundy hesitated a moment; then he boldly plunged into his subject.

"If there was a better team than Tom Merry's, sir, would you agree to substitute it in place of the present one?"

"Not unless I had ample proof that such a team really was superior."

Grundy's eyes gleamed.

"The fact is, I've got an eleven together, sir. Supposing we play Tom Merry's team and whack them? Will that enable us to take on the tour?"

The Head looked astounded.

"But you surely are not presumptuous enough to suppose you can improve upon what Mr. Railton and Kildare consider to be the better eleven?" he said.

Grundy nodded.

"We should lick them to a frazzle, sir! Just you let us try!"

Dr. Holmes reflected for a moment. Little as he knew of the internal football affairs of St. Jim's, he was aware

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that Tom Merry & Co. were the champions among the juniors. It would teach Grundy a good lesson, he considered, if the recognised eleven won by unlimited goals.

"Very well, Grundy," he said. "If Merry is willing, you may arrange a fixture with his team; and should you be victorious, I will reconsider my selection."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

And Grundy left the Head's study in high feather.

"What luck?" asked Wilkins, as his leader came out into the quad.

"The Head's a brick!" said Grundy joyfully. "We're going to play that fifth-rate team that's on the notice-board, and if we win we shall go on the merry old tour! Hurrah!"

"If we win!" murmured Wilkins, with emphasis on the first word. "I've got my doubts!"

"Then you can dismiss 'em at once! We shall jolly well squash Tom Merry's lot to a jelly! They won't be able to hold a candle to us!"

"That remains to be seen!" said Wilkins.

Tom Merry & Co. were amazed when they heard what was afoot. They were amused, too, little doubting their ability to beat a side which contained such hopeless freaks as Skimpole and Trimble.

On Saturday afternoon, the time fixed for the match, there was a record crowd on Little Side. It seemed absurd to the fellows that the Grundytes could possibly snatch a victory; but football is a funny game. The only thing certain about it is its uncertainty. Perhaps, by a miraculous series of flukes, the colours of Tom Merry & Co. might be lowered; and that remote possibility caused everybody to turn up for the match.

Darrel of the Sixth was referee, and he was looking forward to an enjoyable time. He sounded the whistle for the two elevens to line up.

"Pardon me!" said Skimpole, in a shrill voice. "But where do I stand?"

"Anywhere, so long as you keep out of the way!" grunted Levison.

"You shut up, Levison!" said Grundy majestically.

"I'm skipper of this side. Better go in goal, Skimmy, as you can't run, or pass, or shoot, or anything like that. You won't have any work to do in goal. I doubt if Tom Merry's crowd will ever get past the half-way line!"

And Skimpole, his benignant face wreathed in smiles, trotted off to keep the citadel.

"Shall I defend the other goal, my dear Grundy?" inquired Trimble, blinking through his big glasses.

"No, ass! You're left out!"

"Eh? Does that mean to say I am not to play?"

Grundy almost choked.

"Oh, you're too funny for words!" he spluttered.

"You're outside-left, fathead! Tell him where to go, Gore, for goodness' sake!"

"Ready for the slaughter?" asked Tom Merry.

Grundy scowled.

"Funny, ain't you?" he sneered. "You'll sing to a different tune after the match, I'm thinking!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry won the toss, and the game started to the accompaniment of cheers—mainly ironical—from the crowd on the touchline.

In the first minute Tom Merry and Talbot took the ball down to their opponents' goal. Talbot was about to essay a shot when Crooke, at back, lumbered up and deliberately fouled him.

Darrel promptly pointed to the penalty mark.

Redfern took the fateful kick, and the ball crashed past the harmless Skimpole into the net.

"Serves you jolly well right, Crooke!" said Darrel.

"Another foul, and I shall chuck you off the field!"

Redfern's goal was but the prelude to many more. Two minutes later Talbot, who was fortunately unhurt by his skirmish with Crooke, met a pass from the wing, and banged the ball home before Skimpole could say "Fiddlesticks!" Then Jack Blake scored with a shot the goalie never so much as saw, and Talbot put on another from close range.

"Four up!" chortled Monty Lowther. "How do you feel, Grundy?"



Kildare's relentless fist crashed into the fellow's ribs, almost doubling him up. But he soon recovered, and, the other ruffian rising to his feet at the same instant, the two came at the plucky senior like tigers.
(See Chapter 9.)

Grundy's only rejoinder was a savage snarl. Things were not pausing out exactly as he had anticipated. His fond dreams of victory were already shattered, and as time went on it became apparent that his side hadn't a dog's chance.

Skimpole was beaten thrice again before the interval, when the score was 7-0 in favour of the official team.

"It's about time that conceited ass Grundy was taught a lesson!" growled Jack Blake, as the players streamed off the field.

"Wathah! I agwee we go all out in the second half an' pile on all the goals we can, bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

"Good egg!"

Meanwhile, Grundy was bullying his men right and left.

"You're a set of duds!" he sniffed. "Levison, you smoky boulder, I haven't seen you kick the ball once! This is what comes of not keeping fit! Br-r-r!"

"Go and eat coke!" growled Levison. "It was a mad idea to play the match at all! If you'd thought out some dodge for getting Tom Merry & Co. into trouble, so that their tour was cancelled, and we went instead, it would have been a jolly sight more sensible!"

"You ead!" said Grundy hotly. "Do you take me for a beastly rotter like yourself? My hat! I've a good mind to wade in and slaughter you!"

Levison backed away in alarm. There were certain fellows who could never cotton on to his twisted code of honour, and Grundy was one of them.

"Look here! I'm fed-up!" muttered Crooke. "I don't feel like playing on!"

"Same here!" said Mellish, who was smothered in mud from head to foot.

Grundy swung round sharply upon the dissenters.

"Any chap who dares leave me in the lurch," he said, "will have to answer for it afterwards, with or without the gloves! I'm not going to stand any dirty tricks of that description!"

"Bravo!" murmured Wilkins and Gunn approvingly.

Then the whistle went for the resumption.

The second half was truly amazing. Tom Merry & Co. kept up a continual pressure, and there were none to say them nay. Again and again they penetrated the feeble defence of their opponents, and the score mounted up with astonishing rapidity.

"Excuse me!" said Monty Lowther blandly. "But do we happen to be playing a cricket-match by mistake?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus, on the wing, was going great guns. He accomplished the hat-trick, and made many openings for the inside forwards.

As for Darrel, he was almost doubled up with hysterical laughter. Never had it fallen to his lot to referee such a novel contest. Indeed, it had become difficult to keep count of the numerous goals registered by the virile, dashing forward-line led by Tom Merry.

All through the second half the farce continued. Most of Grundy's players were mere passengers, and Gore was the only one who did anything notable. He put in quite a good shot on one occasion, but Fatty Wynn was equal to it. He fisted the leather out, and the slaughter continued.

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Trimble had long ceased to take an active interest in the game. He was loitering on the touchline, mud-begrimed and miserable. Buck Finn, the American junior, had been throwing his weight about; but he was bowled over so many times that he soon threw up the sponge.

"What a game!" said Wilkins. "Oh, my sainted aunt! I told you this would happen, Grundy!"

"Don't speak to me!" hissed Grundy.

He was in one of those moods dangerous to friend and foe alike.

Relief came at last, in the form of the final whistle, and the absurd farce was over.

"Twenty-two to nil!" sobbed Jack Blake. "Hold me up, someone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Glad enough were the discomfited Grundyites to slink from the scene and hide their diminished heads. One thing was certain. Not one of them had even an outside chance of getting into the team which was to represent St. Jim's in the tour. They were dished, diddled, and done right along the line; and when the worthy Head of St. Jim's got to hear of the result of the match he enjoyed such a hearty laugh in the privacy of his study that Grundy would have turned quite green had he been able to witness it!

CHAPTER 6.

The Tour Commences.

POM, pom, pom!

The thunderous beating of a big drum, blended with the harmonious blare of a cornet, announced the joyful fact that the tourists were off.

Monday morning had dawned crisp and clear, and the Terrible Three and their chums were up with the lark.

Several fellows had collaborated with the idea of giving their schoolfellows a right royal send-off. Digby had borrowed the cornet belonging to Herries; Bernard Glyn had contrived to beg, borrow, or steal a big drum; and the rest of the improvised band consisted of mouth-organs and tin whistles. Half the school turned out for the triumphal march to the railway-station, and the scene was an animated one.

When the procession reached Rylcombe, the country-folk flocked to their doors to discover what all the rumpus was about. From the scared faces of a few elderly ladies one might have supposed that the Prussian Guard was marching through the village on battle bent.

Everybody was in high good-humour, and Tom Merry & Co., in particular, were in the seventh heaven of delight. A strenuous week lay before them, but they could stand any amount of strenuousness, so long as it was confined to footer. And there were sights to be seen, too—glorious sights, which had hitherto been more or less unknown to them.

The train was in when the procession reached the little station, and the band combined in a mighty chorus of final crashes, almost deafening the porters and passengers on the platform.

Bernard Glyn swung his drumstick with almost murderous frenzy; Digby, blaring on the cornet, looked as if he might burst a boiler at any moment; and the tin-whistle and mouth-organ brigade kicked up sufficient din to awaken the celebrated seven sleepers.

The footballers clambered into a second-class carriage, Kildare following them. Seniors and juniors streamed up to bid farewell to the team, and wish them the greatest of good luck.

"Mind you mop up Rookwood!" said Clifton Dane.

"Don't you dare to come back unless you give Greyfriars the kybosh!"

"Good-bye, Merry, old man!"

"Good-bye, Talbot!"

"We'll keep the home-fires burning while you're away!" promised Kerruish.

"Hear, hear!"

The train began to rumble out of the station. Miss Marie Rivers, who had accompanied the procession, grasped Talbot by the hand.

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"Play up, Reggie!" she murmured.

"Trust me!" smiled back Talbot. "I'm feeling fit as a fiddle! Good-bye, Marie!"

"Au revoir, Miss Mawie!" chirruped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Come ova to Wayland and see us when we play the Loamshires!"

Marie nodded, and waved her dainty white handkerchief as the train steamed on.

The fellows in the carriage heard the strains of the musicians for quite a long time; then they settled down to an animated discussion concerning the first match, which was with Jimmy Silver & Co. the redoubtable warriors of Rookwood.

"I hope you kids behave yourselves," said Kildare.

"Rely on us," said Monty Lowther. "We'll be as good as gold, virtuous as little Erics."

"Yes, rather!"

The train rattled on through the charming countryside, and the tourists clambered out at Wayland Junction, where they caught the connection to Coombe, the station for Rookwood.

The journey occupied nearly an hour, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were lined up on the platform to greet the arrivals. The morning was yet at an early stage, but Dr. Chisholm the Rookwood Head, had kindly consented to grant the school a whole day's holiday. In the afternoon Tom Merry & Co. were to proceed to Southsea, which, being in the same county, was easy of access.

A record crowd had foregathered on the Rookwood ground. Many a time and oft the two teams had done battle, and the honours had usually gone to St. Jim's, though not without a dour struggle.

"We'll see if we can turn the tables this time," said Jimmy Silver. "And if we don't lick you, I'll chuck footer and start keeping rabbits."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver always made this solemn avowal prior to a match, but he never kept it. After a licking, however great, he was as keen a footballer as ever.

Kildare blew his whistle, and within a minute the homesters were pressing. Lovell sent in a hard, fast shot, which Fatty Wynn got to with difficulty, and then Jimmy Silver forced a corner.

From the resultant kick, well placed by Newcome, Rookwood scored the initial goal of the match, amid vociferous cheering.

"Whew!" panted Monty Lowther. "Not a very brilliant beginning for the tour, my sons!"

"Buck up, you old pessimist!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There's time enough for dozens of things to happen yet. Are we downhearted?"

"No!" came in a responsive shout from the Saints.

Rookwood pressed again. They were evidently in earnest, and meant to go all out for victory. Determination was stamped on every line of Jimmy Silver's handsome countenance.

"Stick to it, my sons!" he urged. "Charge, Chester, charge! On, Stanley, on!"

Pat Flynn, a junior hailing from the Emerald Isle, tested Fatty Wynn severely with a great shot, and then Jimmy Silver himself dashed in and scored, following an unfortunate miskick by Figgins.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jack Blake. "This is pretty putrid! Let's buck up, you fellows, or goodness knows what'll happen!"

Still the Rookwooders continued to press. They were in great form that day, whereas the Saints had not yet got into their stride. Just before the interval, however, the celebrated Gussy sprinted away down the wing, and centred to Tom Merry for the latter to score a grand goal.

"Not so dusty as it might have been," was Talbot's comment, as he peeled a lemon in the dressing-room. "We must put our beef into it in the second half, though!"

"It strikes me," said Herries, who, being a reserve, had been watching the game with Julian and Brooke and Manners, "that you fellows are doing nothing but defensive work, when you ought to be attacking. Gussy's run was the only bright spark in a dry first half—dry so far as you're concerned, at any rate."

"Something in what you say," agreed Tom Merry. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings comes good advice sometimes."

"Why, you duffer!" began Herries wrathfully.

"Pax, my children!" said Monty Lowther. "Never let your angry passions rise. Time to return to the slaughter."

The second half was a delightful thrill, and St. Jim's bucked up tremendously. Where they had been slow before, they now became active and alert. Tom Merry and Talbot were the pick of the forwards, though D'Arcy contributed many sparkling runs, and Jack Blake and Kangaroo made the fur fly on occasion.

But it was from the foot of a half-back that the next goal was registered. Redfern gained possession, and, deftly dodging the opposing backs, wound up with a scorching shot, which left the Rookwood goalkeeper gasping.

"Level!" said Lowther. "That's tons better! We shall win yet!"

But it seemed that he spoke too soon, for shortly afterwards Tommy Dodd of Rookwood caught Fatty Wynn napping with a surprise shot from many yards out.

From end to end the fierce struggle raged. Both teams were going it in ding-dong fashion now, each realising that the time was ripe for them to display their utmost energy.

Rookwood were mainly attacking, but Figgins amply atoned for his bad blunder in the first half, and he and Kerr kept up an heroic defence. Time and again Jimmy Silver & Co. were beaten back when within an ace of scoring.

Then a change came o'er the spirit of the game, to put it in poetic parlance. Tom Merry & Co. were a heftier crowd than the Rookwooders, and their superior stamina began to tell. They put in attack after attack, and the equaliser soon came—from the foot of Harry Noble. The Cornstalk was heartily thumped on the back as the ball was returned to the centre.

"Three all!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We'll do it yet! Hope springs eternal, you know!"

Shots galore rained in upon the Rookwood goalkeeper, a youth named Tommy Cook. He fisted out a fierce drive of Jack Blake's, and shortly afterwards made a daring dash from his citadel, and took the ball from the very toes of Talbot.

The Saints had all the play now, but the winning goal simply refused to come. Tom Merry struck the post, and from the rebound D'Arcy all but scored.

A fierce five minutes followed. On one occasion Talbot actually netted the ball, but Kildare ruled the point off-side, much to the relief of the anxious Rookwood throng on the touchline.

How the Rookwood defence held out no one knew, not even the players themselves. The goal seemed to possess a charmed life, and the Saints were still hotly attacking when the whistle sounded for hostilities to cease. After a hard and strenuously-contested game, Jimmy Silver & Co. had managed to effect a draw on their native heath.

"My stars!" panted Jimmy Silver, clapping Tom Merry on the shoulder as the two teams left the field. "That was hot, while it lasted! You had hard cheese in not winning; you deserved to!"

"Thanks!" said Tom. "It's rather a bitter pill to swallow, but we'll try and take it out of Southsea this afternoon."

"Lucky chaps!" said Jimmy Silver, with a sigh. "They never let us go on footer tours at Rookwood, worse luck! How on earth did you manage it?"

"By a bit of brazen cheek," laughed Tom. "I put it to our Head like a Dutch uncle, and he agreed after a bit of persuasion, because of the proceeds going to the Red Cross, I suppose. We've clubbed together to pay our railway expenses, and all that sort of thing, and all the gate-money's going to the Tommies. How much d'you think we've collected here?"

Manners came running up at that moment with the information. Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, had received all the money for admission, and it had been handed over to Kildare.

"It's gorgeous!" declared Manners, with enthusiasm. "There were just over a couple of hundred spectators,

so the receipts have exceeded five quid. Not so bad for a start—what?"

"I should think not!" responded Jimmy Silver. "You ought to accumulate quite a lot of filthy lucre by the time you've finished. And now, who says lunch?"

"Lunch!" responded a score of voices, with one accord. And a movement was made to the dining-hall, where a bumper spread had been prepared.

The St. Jim's fellows—those who were playing, at any rate—ate sparingly. They had no desire to spoil the afternoon's play.

"Is everybody feeling fit?" asked Tom Merry anxiously. "Because if not I can put in some reserves against Southsea."

But nobody demurred. There had not been a single injury in the game with Rookwood. The Saints had enjoyed that game immensely, and, like the celebrated Oliver Twist, they were not averse to more.

The meal proceeded merrily, and shortly afterwards Tom Merry & Co. bade farewell to their rivals and caught the train which was to whirl them away to the scene of their next encounter.

CHAPTER 7.

Sunny Southsea.

"F RATTON! Alight 'ere for Southsea!"

A burly porter dashed along the platform, bawling into every carriage. The St. Jim's juniors, who had been improving the shining hour by playing a new war game in the train, snatched up their bags and alighted.

Kildare ran his eye over them to ascertain that no one was missing; then the merry throng passed out of the station.

"This is topping!" said Monty Lowther. "I can niff the sea-breezes already. Pity it's too early in the year for a bathe!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Some people bathe in wintah, you know. When I was stayin' heah duwin' a Chwistmas vac. once, with Cousin Ethel, quite a cwozd of fellahs were swimmin' in the bwin'!"

"More fools they!" grunted Manners. "I'm blessed if I'd tackle the sea now, even if there was the V.C. waiting for me at the end of it!"

There was a solitary cab outside the station, the driver of which looked as if he had lost a shilling and found ninepence.

"Here we are!" said Kildare. "This will take us to the Queen's Hotel, where we are staying the night. There's only room for half a dozen. The rest can take the tram, or walk, whichever they like."

"I plump for the cab!" said Fatty Wynn. "Quite apart from the beastly fag of walking, I'm famished—simply ravenous! Do they do you well at the Queen's, Figgy?"

"Oh, dry up, you blessed cormorant!" growled Figgins. "Why, only an hour ago you were feeding your face with ham and eggs at Rookwood. You don't seem to have a soul that rises above eating and drinking!"

"But a train journey always makes me feel faint," said Fatty pathetically. "Doesn't it you, Kerr?"

"I don't think so," grinned the Scots junior, "unless Gussy happens to be trying to sing a tenor solo!"

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Op in, if you're a-comin'!" growled the cabby. "You're wuss than old wimmin with yer jor, jor, jor!"

"Bai Jove! What a vulgah person!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, adjusting his monocle and giving the cabby a freezing stare, which was quite lost on that amiable gentleman.

"Gee-hup, Bess!" he growled, flicking his horse with the whip.

"Oh, weally, you know!" protested Arthur Augustus. "Give a fellah time to get in!"

But the cab was already bowling away, with Kildare and the New House fellows inside; and Gussy was left gaping on the pavement, much to the amusement of Tom Merry & Co. and the passers-by, who could not refrain from staring at the lavishly-dressed and elegant junior.

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"Kim on!" said Monty Lowther, seizing D'Arcy by the arm. "You'll have to resort to Shanks' ponies, Gussy! There don't seem to be a tramcar knocking about. I s'pose they run when they think they will, which is about once in a blue moon."

"Blow the trams!" said Tom Merry. "We needn't go straight to the hotel. That gives us a chance to have a look round the town. Better make hay while the sun shines, as it'll be dark after the match, and we're going off early in the morning."

"Good egg!"

The town-hall was the first place to rivet the juniors' interest. It was a grand, inspiring structure, and Redfern in particular was swift to chant its praises, for he was of local birth.

Portsmouth Harbour was next visited, and came in for a good deal of comment.

"Heaven help the Huns' navy if it ever drifts in here on a dark night!" said Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! How uttably magnificent!" said Arthur Augustus, in ecstasy. "Makes you think of Nelson, an' Napoleon, an' all those bwave boundabs, you know!"

"Napoleon wasn't a sailor, you duffer!" exclaimed Talbot. "He wasn't a Britisher, either!"

"Gweat Scott, no! I should have said Olivah Cwomwell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's go along to the old part of the town," said Tom Merry. "I've been told it's jolly interesting. There's the old Victoria Pier, where Charles the First landed once, and then there's the museum."

"And the house where the Duke of Buckingham was stretched in his gore!" said Redfern, with an unholy relish.

"Grog!"

"It strikes me there won't be a match this afternoon, "if we're going to explore every nook and cranny in the place," said Kangaroo.

"There's time enough for a flying visit," said Tom Merry. "We sha'n't need to stop to have grub. Good footer's impossible on a full stomach."

"Quite so," said Monty Lowther. "Lead on, Mac-duff!"

The juniors were greatly interested in everything they saw, and the old town had quite a fascination for them. There wasn't time for them to stay long at each place, of course; but it was quite possible that they would visit the town again later on. One of D'Arcy's relatives was an engineer-commander in his Majesty's Navy, and he had promised that when the war was over he would take them in tow and let them sample the delights of the place in full.

"We'll wind up with a walk along the sea-front at Southsea," said Tom Merry.

And the little party of tourists proceeded along the promenade from the Clarence to the South Parade Pier.

"Doesn't the sea look great?" said Manners, with a deep breath. "I don't like to think what Britain would do without it."

"No fesh!" said D'Arcy. "It serves as a safeguard against the envy of less happy lands, as Shakespeare says!"

As they were about to make tracks for the hotel to prepare for the match a great surprise came upon the St. Jim's juniors—a surprise which fairly took their breath away. They were hailed by a sudden shout, and a couple of youngsters approached them.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nearly fell down.

"Wally!" he gasped. "My minah—and Joe Fwayne! B-b-bai Jove!"

The juniors were thunderstruck. What were the two fags of the Third, who were supposed to be grinding out lessons many miles away, doing on the sea-front at Southsea? Some of the fellows rubbed their eyes, wondering if they saw aright. It was astounding!

"What cheer, old sports!" said Wally D'Arcy pleasantly.

"You—you—where on earth have you sprung from?" demanded Tom Merry, in amazement.

"St. Jim's, of course!" said Wally. "You needn't gape at me like that, Gussy, old pippin! I'm not Hamlet's ghost!"

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"Gweat Scott!"

Both the fags were smothered with mud and mire, and bore traces of much tramping.

"How in thunder did you get here?" gasped Jack Blake.

"By train as far as Petersfield," explained the scamp of the Third. "That was as far as our tin would permit. After that, we had to hoof it."

"My hat! You mean to say you've come about fifteen miles on foot?"

"We 'ave!" chimed in Joe Frayne. "And wot's more, we're jolly 'ungry! Got any grub to give a chap?"

"I—I'm blessed if I quite cotton on to this!" said Tom Merry. "Who gave you permission to come?"

"We did ourselves!" chuckled Wally D'Arcy.

"You mean to say you took French leave?"

"Right on the wicket first time!"

"Great jumping crackers! You've done it now! You'll be fired out of St. Jim's on your necks!"

"Cheery sort of cove, ain't he, Joe?" said Wally.

"'E is—'e are!" grinned Joe Frayne.

"Look here!" roared Jack Blake. "Do you seriously mean to say you've taken a day off to come to Southsea?"

"Certingly!" said Joe.

"What the dickens for?"

"To see you play, of course!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"There's no time to stand jawing here!" said Noble.

"The match is due to start in half an hour. What's to be done with these cheeky young cubs?"

"They must face the music, I suppose," said Tom Merry, with a worried look. "The little idiots must be stark, staring mad!"

"Kildare will be fuwious when he knows!" said Arthur Augustus. "Wally, you young wascal, I shall refuse to tweat you with twue bwotherly wegard again!"

"Blow your brotherly regard," said Wally disrespectfully, "and blow Kildare! Likewise old Selby! He saw us scooting, and tried to stop us, but we gave him the slip."

"Selby saw you coming!" gasped Manners.

"Yes, the beast!"

"Then you're up against it, fair and square!"

"Oh, dry up! Take us to your giddy hotel, for goodness sake! We're famished."

Like fellows in a dream, the footballers accompanied the two fags to the Queen's Hotel, where Kildare and the others were waiting, annoyed and impatient.

"Where on earth have you kids been?" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's. "I've been hunting for—G-g-good heavens!" He broke off suddenly as he caught sight of the scamps of the Third. "D'Arcy minor! Frayne! What are you doing here?"

"Come to see Southsea whacked to the wide!" said Wally D'Arcy cheerfully.

"My hat!"

"They've taken French leave, Kildare!" explained Tom Merry. "What's more, they've tramped all the way from Petersfield!"

Kildare looked grim.

"There'll be the dickens to pay for this!" he said. "It means the sack from St. Jim's, or precious near it!"

"Never mind that now," said Wally. "Give us some grub!"

The captain of St. Jim's summoned the waiter, who presently brought a steaming hot meat-pie to the two renegades.

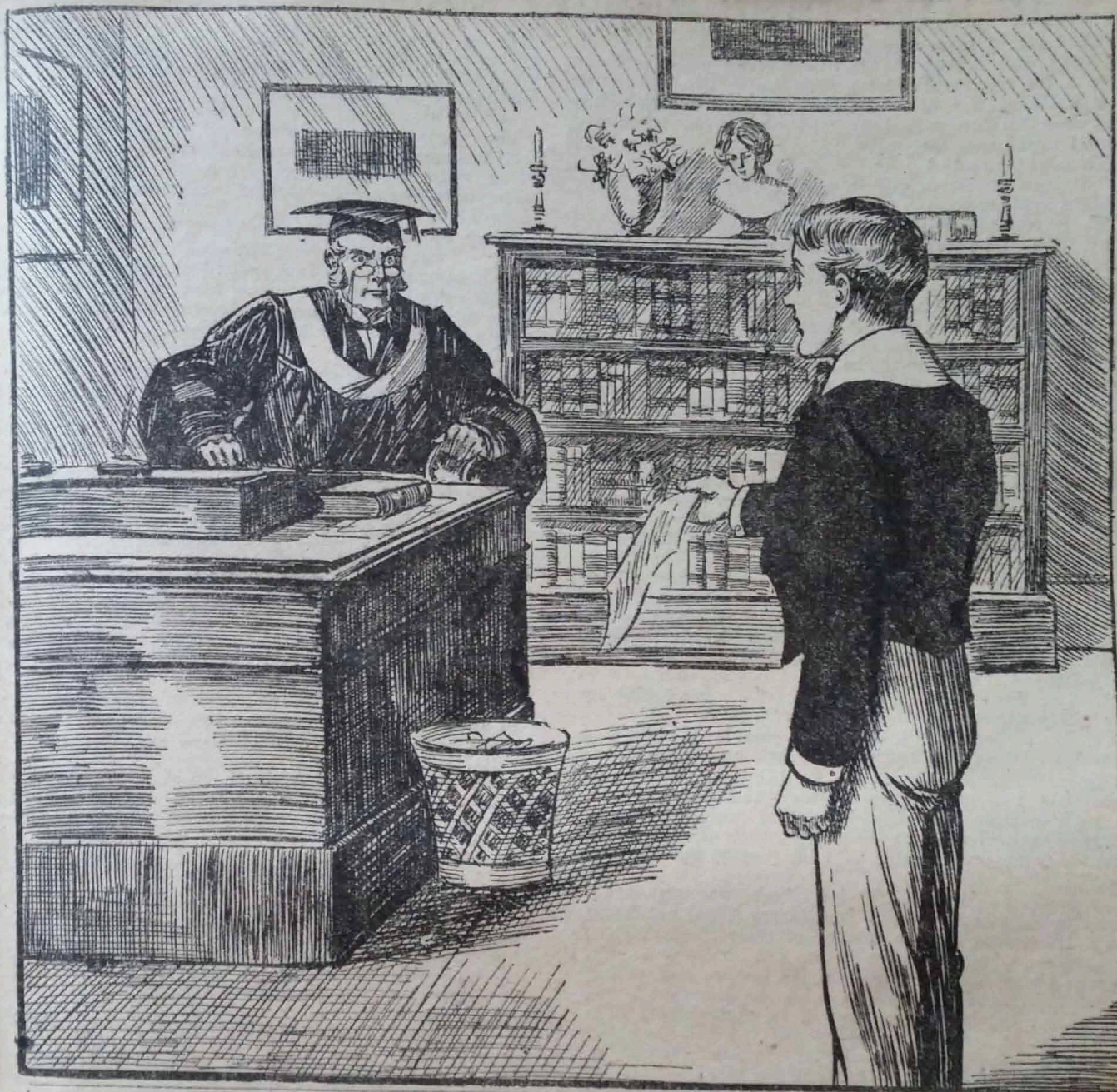
"Luckily," said Kildare, "we're going to Wayland in the morning to play the Loamshire Regiment, so I shall be able to take you both back to the school. Meanwhile, I'll wire the Head that you are all right. He'll be anxious about you."

"And can we see the match this arfternoon?" asked Joe Frayne eagerly.

"I suppose so, now you're here. Silly young idiots! You've tied a halter round your own necks!"

"Bow-wow!" mumbled Wally D'Arcy, pitching into the feed with great gusto. "You chaps can go on, if you like. We know where the ground is."

And the footballers, amazed at such a reckless escapade on the part of the Third-Formers, made their way to the



"The fact is, sir," said Grundy, "I've got an eleven together. Supposing we play Tom Merry's team, and whack them, will that enable us to take on the tour?" The Head looked astounded. (See Chapter 5.)

Garrison ground, where the match with Southsea was to be played.

Kildare sent a wire to Dr. Holmes, and it was pretty evident, on the face of it, that the adventure of the two fags would terminate disastrously for themselves. It might mean the sack for them, but they did not seem to mind. As Wally D'Arcy had said, sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. They were determined to witness the tussle with Southsea that afternoon, and as for the morrow—well, the morrow could take care of itself!

CHAPTER 8.

A Game for the Gods!

A GIGANTIC, good-humoured crowd of sightseers had assembled on the Garrison ground, for the match between a representative team of Southsea fellows and the celebrated heroes of St. Jim's had been lavishly announced by means of posters throughout the town.

A couple of petty officers were receiving the gate-money, which must have reached enormous dimensions by this time.

Tom Merry & Co. were introduced to their opponents, a good-looking set of fellows, who bore the unmistakable stamp of sportsmen. A youth named Bob Weston skippered the side, and a p'ump "Pompeyite" named Pryor, whose proportions almost rivalled those of Fatty Wynn, was to keep goal for the home team.

The Saints sprinted on to the field first, and a roar of encouragement greeted them, but the demonstration was trebly terrific when Bob Weston & Co. came out in their royal blue jerseys and white knickers.

St. Jim's seemed to have the advantage of height and weight, though there was very little in it. A good, keen tussle was promised.

Just as Kildare started the game, Wally D'Arcy and Joe Frayne came on the scene, refreshed by a square meal, and looking quite unabashed. Such was their devotion to the old school of which they were members that they would have tramped the whole distance from Rylcombe to Southsea had it been necessary.

"I don't suppose we shall be sacked!" said Wally lightly. "Fellows have done worse things than this, and come off all right. It'll probably mean a jolly good licking apiece, but we can stand that—especially if old Gussy scores a goal!"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"MANNERS MINORI!"



"Not 'arf!" responded Joe Frayne.

Gussy didn't look at all like scoring a goal at the outset, for the simple reason that the St. Jim's forwards saw little of the ball. Southsea did all the pressing, and Bob Weston missed by inches when the game was only two minutes old.

Tom Merry looked grim.

"Strikes me we've got to pile in even more than we had to against Rookwood!" he said.

There was something very attractive about Southsea's play. The forwards were a masterpiece. Their control of the ball was perfect, and they showed excellent speed. It soon became apparent that the Saints would have all their work cut out to win, or even draw.

Figgins and Kerr, at full back, had the busiest time of their lives, and the former in particular played a grand game. He saved the situation on innumerable occasions, and watched every movement of the wily Bob Weston, who found himself greatly handicapped in consequence.

The locals had all the play in the first half-hour, and then—as is often the case with the better team—they had the mortification of seeing the other side score first. From a sudden and unexpected break-away on the part of the Saints, Jack Blake shot through a forest of legs and scored a somewhat lucky goal. St. Jim's led by one to nil at the interval.

"Talk about luck!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "We seem to be having it showered on us in large chunks! On the run of the play, we ought to be at least a couple of goals to the bad. There's no denying that. Those Southsea chaps seem to know the difference between a goalpost and a maiden over!"

"I should say so!" said Redfern. "We must play up like giddy demons in the next half!"

"Faith an' ye're right entirely!" said Reilly, who had proved a conspicuous figure in the half-back line.

The game was renewed in thrilling fashion, Fatty Wynn just managing to tip a fierce shot from the Southsea right-winger over the bar. The resultant corner kick was well cleared by Kerr, and then the St. Jim's forwards came prominently into the picture for the first time.

The Southsea defence, like its attack, was very good. It had need to be, for when Tom Merry & Co. got fairly going, they were foemen worthy of their steel. Pryor, the custodian, was for ever fisting out shots, and once, when he threw himself at full length to save a scorching shot of Noble, the crowd cheered him to the echo.

But even Pryor, marvel though he undoubtedly was, was beaten at last. Tom Merry met the ball from the wing, and crashed it into the net in hurricane style, thus putting St. Jim's two goals to the good.

"Bwavo, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "That was gweat!"

And Wally D'Arcy, standing with Joe Frayne on the touchline, let out a wild whoop of delight.

The Southsea players took their reverse smiling. It was cruel misfortune that they should be two goals in arrear, for they had been doing the lion's share of the attacking.

Bob Weston was a footballer of great force, and, what was more, he was backed up by a couple of speedy wingers and two useful inside men. Half-way through the closing stage of the game Weston beat Kerr for pace, and shot hard and true for goal. The ball eluded Fatty Wynn's frantic clutch and crashed into the net.

"Goal!"

The crowd woke up, and thundered out its approval. It was high time Dame Fortune smiled on the efforts of the home team.

The game proceeded at a terrific pace. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy just skimmed the crossbar, and Reilly, rushing up from the half-back line, all but scored.

Then misfortune overtook the gallant sons of Southsea. Their centre-half, a youth named Kennedy, who had been a tower of strength to the side, came into violent collision with Redfern. The latter came off best, but Kennedy was so badly shaken up that he found it necessary to retire from the field.

Still, the Southseaites did not lose heart. One of their forwards fell back to fill the gap, and the other four,

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rallying strongly, kept the St. Jim's defence constantly on the alert. The applause was deafening when, from a well-placed flagkick, Weston headed a second goal, thus putting the two teams on a level.

Ten minutes to go!

The excitement was intense. Would Southsea, with their ten men, manage to avoid defeat? Would "Tabby" Pryor, Fatty Wynn's great rival, be able to hold the fort successfully against the terrific bombardment of the St. Jim's fellows?

"Play up, Gussy!" came in shrill tones from D'Arcy's minor. "Put it across 'em, old son!"

As if in response to this excited appeal, the swell of St. Jim's sped along the wing. An opposing back came out to meet him, but Gussy deftly sent the leather across to Kangaroo, who scored a magnificent goal.

"Hurrah!"

"Leading, by jiminy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Oh, my hat! What a game!"

There was something simply splendid in the way Southsea kept on keeping on. Many teams would have thrown up the sponge on being a goal to the bad five minutes from time; but not so Southsea. It was a pathetic sight to see Kennedy come limping on the field, hoping to be of some assistance to his side at the eleventh hour. But it transpired that he was too badly hurt to be anything but a mere passenger; and Bob Weston entreated him to leave the field.

Kennedy, however, meant to see the game out to the bitter end. The ball whirled across to where he was standing, and with a deft jerk of his uninjured foot he sent it to the outside-left, who, racing down the field, beat Fatty Wynn at close range with a scorching shot.

"Bravo!" came in a roar from the crowd.

"My 'at!" said Joe Frayne. "Them Southsea fellers is 'ot stuff—wot? They keeps on bein' down, an' always manages to pick up agen. Wunnerful, ain't it?"

Wally D'Arcy nodded.

"Only another two minutes," he said breathlessly. "Kildare's looking at his watch already. Talk about a thrill! I'd have faced fifty lickings to see a game like this! Play up, St. Jim's!"

And the four reserve men, viewing the match from Fatty Wynn's goal, re-echoed the cry till the field rang again and again:

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

Tom Merry fastened on to the ball, and sped down the field. Kennedy made an heroic effort to pull him up, but it was unavailing. The rest of the Southsea defenders were scattered before that fierce onslaught like chaff before a cyclone.

"Go it, Tommy!" panted Monty Lowther, pounding along in the rear.

Tom Merry steadied himself to shoot; then the ball whizzed in with deadly velocity.

Thud!

The leather came into violent contact with the plump gloved fist of Fatty Pryor, and came hurtling out on to the field of play again. Redfern, rushing up from his position with the halves, charged a couple of opponents at once, and then drove the ball in with a force which nearly broke the net. It was the winning goal—scored on the very stroke of time!

"I wanted to do it, and yet I didn't," explained Reddy, as his comrades hoisted him shoulder-high and bore him in triumph from the field. "I was playing against the town of my giddy nativity, which made it rather hard. Never mind! It was a tophole game!"

The Southsea players took their defeat in the way that only sportsmen can. But for the unfortunate mishap to Kennedy they would certainly have drawn, if not won outright.

But, as Weston remarked, it was no use crying over spilt milk. A draw might have been a fairer result, on the run of the play; but the applause which the Southsea players received from the enthusiastic multitude was an all-sufficient recompense.

"Well played, you fellows!" chortled Wally D'Arcy, scampering up to Merry & Co., with Joe Frayne at his heels. "Gussy, old sport, you were great! So were Talbot and Tom Merry, not to mention Reddy."

"I should have played a gweat deal better, Wally," said Arthur Augustus severely, "but for the fact that

I was considerably wowwied about you. I was thinkin' of the sort of weception you'll get in the mornin', when you return to St. Jim's."

"Still harping on that old chord?" growled Wally.

"Give it a rest, for goodness sake!"

The St. Jim's footballers struck off across the wide expanse of common to their hotel, to do justice to a magnificent spread. Kildare came up with them a moment later. The stalwart captain of St. Jim's was looking unusually pleased with himself.

"The gate receipts are mounting up," he said. "Eight hundred and fifty people were present on the Garrison Ground. That means a profit of twenty-one pounds, five shillings."

"Hurrah!"

"Your pockets must be almost bursting with filthy lucre, Kildare!" said Jack Blake.

"Don't be absurd! I changed all the cash for notes." And Kildare pulled out his pocket-book to make sure that the fivers and currency notes were intact.

Then the merry party sat down to a royal repast, cracking jokes by the dozen, and recounting the many exciting incidents of that eventful day.

And for quite a long time afterwards they were likely to cherish happy recollections of that great and glorious game with the heroes of Sunny Southsea!

CHAPTER 9.

Straight from the Shoulder!

"WATCHMAN, what of the night?"

Monty Lowther asked that question of Tom Merry, who stood on the balcony of the hotel and looked seawards.

"It's crisp and cold, and a trifle windy," said Tom.

"The weather's all that can be desired."

"I vote we spend the evening at the theatre," said Jack Blake, strolling up. "Better than loafing here playing ludo, and games of that sort. Fatty Wynn's curled up in front of the fire in the lounge, and gone to sleep. Young D'Arcy and Frayne have gone for a stroll—goodness knows where. The rest of us might just as well amuse ourselves as stay in and mope."

"Yaas, wathah!" came D'Arcy's voice. "I shall be most happy to stand tweat!"

"Good old Gussy!" said Lowther, slapping the swell of St. Jim's on the back. "You're a gilt-edged brick!"

"Yow-ow! I considah you are most wough and violent, Lowthah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, bein' holiday-time, we must make allowances for your youth and ignowance."

"Why, you fathead," exclaimed Monty Lowther indignantly, "I'll jolly well scalp you!"

But Kildare came upon the scene just then, and the scalping operations had to be deferred.

"How are you kids going to spend the evening?" asked the captain of St. Jim's pleasantly.

"We were just suggesting a theatre," said Tom Merry.

"Shocking depravity!" laughed Kildare. "Still, you deserve it, after beating Southsea."

"Will you come, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry eagerly.

"I think I'd better, to keep you from getting into mischief!"

"P'r'aps we could rout out Bob Weston, and get him to come, too," suggested Manners. "Weston's an awfully decent chap. He told me he was dead nuts on photography."

"Bow-wow!"

Kildare put on his overcoat.

"I know where young Weston lives," he said. "It's in the Garrison Square. His pater's an officer in the R.G.A. I'll go over now."

And the captain of St. Jim's stepped out into the night.

The hour was still early, comparatively speaking, but darkness had descended in a black pall upon Southsea Common, and the absence of lights, to conform with the police regulations, rendered it impossible for Kildare to see more than a few yards in front of him.

He kept to the narrow asphalt path, whistling cheerfully as he walked. The football tour was proving an immense success, and if the Saints continued to prosper it would be a big feather in his cap.

Then, without a word of warning, a couple of forms

loomed up in the darkness, and Kildare found himself seized in a grip of iron. It was all so sudden, so totally unexpected, that the captain of St. Jim's was powerless for a moment.

"Quiet!" hissed one of the two assailants. "Keep that rat-trap shut, or it'll be the wuss for you! This is the cove, ain't it, Charlie?"

"That's 'im, right enough!" assented the other scoundrel. "Down 'im—sharp!"

Kildare understood at last. These men were after his money, or rather, the money which he carried on behalf of the British Red Cross Fund.

The whole thing was plain as a pikestaff. The men must have mingled with the spectators at the recent match, and discovered, afterwards, that Kildare was treasurer of the tour. They had tracked the captain of the St. Jim's fellows to the hotel, and thence across the common, where, taking advantage of the darkness, they had waylaid him in this insolent manner.

"Hands off!" panted Kildare, starting to struggle.

"What's the little game?"

"Jest you 'old yer tongue!" snarled one of the men.

"We don't want to 'ave to do yer no 'urt!"

For answer, Kildare broke free by a superhuman effort, and shot out his right straight from the shoulder. The blow caught the man known as Charlie full on the mark, and he went down to the grass in an undignified heap.

"At 'im, Mike!" he groaned viciously.

Mike was a gentleman possessing considerable slogging powers, and the next moment he and Kildare were going it hammer-and-tongs.

Thud!

Kildare's relentless fist crashed into the fellow's ribs, almost doubling him up. But he soon recovered, and, Charlie rising to his feet at the same instant, the two came for the plucky senior like tigers.

The St. Jim's captain began to realise the hopelessness of it all. Good fighting-man as he undoubtedly was, he could not hope to keep the two ruffians at bay for long.

But he would go under fighting. He was quite resolved on that score. They would not gain possession of his pocket-book without a hard struggle.

Biff!

The man named Mike dealt him a savage blow on the temple, and Kildare reeled and fell. A sickening sensation came over him, coupled with a feeling that all was lost.

"You—you scoundrels!" he blurted out. "You shall answer for this!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" guffawed Charlie, in rare enjoyment. "I sorter reckon you're the under-dog this time—wot? Jest you 'and over them notes quiet, or, by jiminy, we'll 'alf murder you!"

Kildare, glancing up, saw the face of the speaker peering down at him through the gloom. He saw a couple of fierce, glinting eyes, a clenched hand upraised ready to strike, and then— A great feeling of hope surged up in the senior's breast. Help was at hand!

"It's old Kildare!" came a voice, unmistakably that of Wally D'Arcy. "They're robbing him, the scoundrels! Quick, Joe! Sock it into 'em!"

Then followed a fierce affray, in the course of which the two fags, though they received many hard knocks, greatly distinguished themselves. Kildare, who had recovered from Mike's cruel blow, chimed in, and a wild and whirling fight was soon in progress.

It did not last long. Little Joe Frayne, who revelled in a scrap of this sort, hit out valiantly, and gave the redoubtable Mike a warm time. Then, just as the tide of battle was turning full in favour of the three St. Jim's fellows, a bullseye lantern gleamed suddenly on the proceedings, and a sharp voice exclaimed:

"What's all this?"

The intruder was a policeman.

Charlie and Mike, scared and affrighted, endeavoured to bolt; but the constable soon took them in tow. He seemed to recognise them, too, much to their chagrin.

"Have they been trying to rob you?" he asked, turning to Kildare.

"Yes, They'd have succeeded, too, but for these plucky kids."

"You'd better come with me," said the man in blue grimly. "I know you and your pal of old, Mike! No;

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it won't be any use struggling, for I can summon help in half a jiffy by means of this whistle. What's that? You'll come quietly? Good! That's the wisest decision you could arrive at. You young gentlemen had better come along, too, to hear the charge made."

Kildare hesitated.

"I don't know that I should care to see them get into trouble," he said slowly. "After all, they've not taken the money. P'raps it would be as well to let them off with a caution."

Charlie and Mike brightened up at that generous suggestion.

"We won't never give no trouble agen," said Mike soberly. "I'll swear to that!"

"Louts like you ought to be in the Army!" said Wally D'Arcy severely.

"Which I'm a married man!" whined Charlie.

"An' I'm workin' in the dockyard," said Mike.

Kildare started.

"You're in regular work, and yet you come down to a thing like this!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"I got seven kids to keep!" was Mike's sorrowful rejoinder.

"That's no excuse for downright dishonesty and assault! But for these kids, I might have been lying unconscious now!"

"We wouldn't 'ave 'urt a single 'air of yer 'ead!" said Charlie solemnly.

Kildare laughed.

"Oh, come off!" he exclaimed. "Let the brutes go this time, constable."

And he pressed a half-crown into the policeman's palm.

"All right, sir! Just as you like."

Charlie and Mike, only to glad to evade the arm of the law, thanked Kildare as briefly as possible, and were soon wrapped up in the gloom. The constable went back to his beat, and the adventure was over.

Then Kildare turned to his two rescuers.

"I sha'n't forget this in a hurry," he said. "I'm very grateful to both of you! Goodness knows what would have happened to me if you hadn't chipped in! Shake!"

And the captain of St. Jim's gripped Wally D'Arcy and Joe Frayne warmly by the hand.

"You'd better accompany me," he said—"if you're keen on a theatre, that is."

"Wot-ho!" said Joe Frayne promptly.

The three proceeded straight to Bob Weston's house. The Southsea skipper was in, and he readily consented to form one of the party which was to visit the King's Theatre.

Kildare found Fatty Wynn still asleep before the fire, but the rest of the fellows were all eager for the entertainment, which, when it came to pass, was voted first-rate on all sides.

Thus ended the first day of the tour. Of the two matches played, one had been won and one drawn by the stalwarts of St. Jim's, and they felt highly pleased with themselves; but many stern struggles were to be enacted, and many thrilling incidents would take place, ere the tourists resumed the even tenor of their way at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 10.

The Luck of the Loamshires.

GREAT was the excitement the next morning when Kildare, with Wally D'Arcy and Joe Frayne in custody, arrived at St. Jim's. Tom Merry & Co. had gone on to Wayland to make preparations for the match with the Loamshire Regiment.

Mr. Selby met the returning trio in the quad, and his sour, thin face had a more vindictive expression than usual.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "So you have brought these reckless renegades back, Kildare?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are aware, D'Arcy and Frayne, of the enormity of your offence? You flagrantly defied me in broad daylight, and absconded from the school! Such an action merits instant expulsion! Come with me at once to Dr. Holmes!"

THE "GREYFRIARS HERALD," 1D.

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Wally ("gasped Arthur Augustus, "My man—no! Joe Frayne! No—no! No!") The justice with toothache struck. What were the two lads of the Inard, who were supposed to be spending out leisure many miles away, doing on the sea-front at Southsea? (the Chapter 1.)

Quite a crowd of juniors watched the little procession wind its way to the Head's study.

"Back up, Wally, old scout!" murmured Carly Gibson. "Keep a stiff upper-lip!"

Wally grinned. "I've faced worse things than this," he said. "Don't worry about me."

Dr. Holmes was writing at his desk when Mr. Selby knocked at his study door and entered.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "So these boys have returned?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Selby maliciously. "They were brought back this morning in the custody of Kildare."

The Head looked grim. "Do I understand that you two boys absented yourselves from the school without permission in order to witness the football match at Southsea?" he asked.

"That's it, sir," said Wally D'Arcy, unmoved. "G-g-good gracious! Have you any explanation to offer for your heinous conduct?"

"We were carried away by our enthusiasm to see St. Jim's win, sir," said D'Arcy minor. "They did win, too! It was a great game, sir. The pitch was hard, though rather slippery."

"Silence!" rumbled the Head. "How dare you address me in such a familiar manner, D'Arcy? You and Frayne have caused considerable worry and anxiety at the school. Moreover, you have deliberately absented yourselves from lessons for a whole day! It is scandalous—unheard-of!"

"I would suggest that the young rascals were expelled without delay!" said Mr. Selby.

"I am afraid that is the only course I can adopt," said Dr. Holmes, with a worried frown. "I should be loath if the occasion demanded, but I really cannot close my eyes to the gravity of this escapade. D'Arcy! Frayne! You are expelled from the school!"

Then, while the scamps of the Third stood stock still, their faces filled with wild dismay, Kildare strode forward.

"Excuse me, sir," he said politely. "There is another and a happier side to this business, which it is only right you should know. Last evening, whilst crossing Southsea Common after dark, I was attacked by a couple of scoundrels who desired to rob me of the gate-money I had in my possession. I went for them tooth-and-nail, of course, but was overwhelmed; and had not these two boys come to my aid in the nick of time, not only might I have been robbed, but should doubtless have sustained grievous bodily harm."

"Dear me!" gasped the Head. "This—this is most amazing, Kildare!"

"It sounds like a very pretty romance!" sneered Mr. Selby.

Kildare looked nettled. "It is the truth, plain and simple," he said. "The timely intervention of D'Arcy minor and Frayne probably saved my life, for the fellows who attacked me were of the type that stops at nothing."

"Quite so—quite so!" murmured Dr. Holmes. "Under the extraordinary circumstances I cannot, of course, inflict the maximum punishment of expulsion."

Wally D'Arcy dug Joe Frayne joyfully in the ribs.

"On the contrary, I must commend you two boys for your plucky action," said the Head. "You have rendered Kildare a great service."

"I fail to see how that detracts from the enormity of their wrong-doing!" chimed in Mr. Selby acidly. The Head frowned.

"I am sorry I cannot agree with you, Mr. Selby," he said. "D'Arcy and Frayne have acquitted themselves in a highly creditable manner, and I confess that I am proud of them. They will, however, receive a severe caning for the gross liberty they took in going to see the match."

Cheerfully the rascals of the Third accepted that caning. Dr. Holmes laid it on with great vigour, but neither D'Arcy nor Frayne made so much as a murmur. They well knew that, but for Kildare's able defence of their conduct, they might have received something infinitely worse.

Mr. Selby was furious. He considered that the punishment did not fit the crime, and that his precious pupils had got off far more lightly than they deserved.

However, Dr. Holmes had dealt with the two scapegraces, and Mr. Selby had no recourse but to consider the matter finished.

When the Third-Formers learned what had happened they were jubilant. Wally D'Arcy and Joe Frayne had to recount their exciting experiences at Southsea to a tremendous crowd; and then the fellows began to bustle about in readiness for the forthcoming match with the Loamshires.

It was common knowledge that Mr. Railton, the popular Housemaster, was to play at centre-half for his former regiment. Mr. Railton was a great sportsman, and excelled vastly at cricket; but few of the fellows had ever seen his prowess on the football-field, and the occasion was one of great moment.

"They'll never lick the Loamshires!" said Rushden of the Sixth, with conviction, as he walked over to Wayland with Kildare and Darrel. "It's preposterous for a junior schoolboy team to stand up against a regimental side! Merry and his friends will be beaten to a frazzle!"

"Don't make too sure," said Kildare, with a twinkle in his eyes. "If you could have seen 'em lick Southsea, old man, you'd think differently. The Loamshires will win, I dare say, but not by the ridiculous margin you seem to imagine."

"Well, we shall see what we shall see," said Darrel sagely.

The crowd on the Wayland Recreation Ground was enormous in consequence of the fact that gentlemen in khaki were admitted free. Marie Rivers came over to see the match with the Head's wife. The fair nurse who kept sway in the school sanatorium had more than a passing interest in the game, for her father, John Rivers, was fighting in Flanders with the first battalion of the Loamshires.

There was a mighty cheer when Mr. Railton led his men on to the field for a few moments' preliminary practice. The cheer was repeated when Tom Merry & Co. came out, but it was ironical this time. It seemed absurd, on the face of it, that such comparative pigmies should pit themselves against the mighty men of Kitchener's Army.

The St. Jim's players looked very fit, nevertheless. There was only one change in the team, Dick Julian coming in for Lowther at left-half. The forward line that had acquitted itself so gloriously at Southsea remained exactly the same.

Tom Merry tossed with Mr. Railton for choice of ends, and the latter won. Then pheeep! went Kildare's whistle, and the next moment an animated tussle was in progress.

The Loamshires justified all the glowing things which had been said of them prior to the match. They cut

through the St. Jim's defence like a knife through butter, and Corporal Bates, at centre-forward, sent in a rasping shot which brought Fatty Wynn to his knees.

The soldiers continued to attack, and all but scored on numerous occasions. They were a hefty, bustling side, and but for the sterling defence put up by Figgins and Kerr would have enjoyed a considerable lead at quite an early stage of the game.

The first goal fell to the lot of Mr. Railton, whose pace and footwork had been alike excellent. The Housemaster cleverly tricked Figgins, and crashed the ball past Fatty Wynn in a manner which made the Falstaff of the New House think of fireworks.

For half an hour the hot bombardment continued; and then the St. Jim's forwards broke away. A perfect bout of passing enabled them to take the ball well into their opponents' territory, and then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy delighted the St. Jim's contingent of the crowd by foiling three men in succession.

"Shoot!" roared Tom Merry, with an excitement he could not contain.

And Gussy shot. The ball travelled hard and fast, and crashed against the crossbar. An inch lower, and it would have been in, with the military custodian helpless.

But the chance had not yet vanished. No sooner did the sphere rebound on to the field of play than Talbot pounced upon it, sending in a glorious first-time shot which left the goalie gaping.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

The field rang with wild cheering. By luck and pluck the gallant schoolboy team had brought about the equaliser; and Talbot, catching sight of Marie's radiant face in the stand, felt a strange thrill of rapturous enjoyment.

Then the whistle blew for a truce, and the players streamed off the field, to refresh themselves in the dressing-room.

"This is great!" said Tom Merry, ecstatically. "If only we can keep it up!"

"It's a jolly big 'if,' I'm thinking!" said Jack Blake. "We're lucky not to be behind, considering they've been doing nine-tenths of the pressing."

"Wailton's a stunnin' footballah!" said Arthur Augustus, with enthusiasm. "Bai Jove! That goal of his was a weal corkah!"

"Rather!"

"He'll have a job to get another," growled Fatty Wynn. "I never felt in finer form in my life! You might shy over that packet of toffee, Figgy. I'm famished!"

Figgins complied with a grin, and then the juniors sprinted on to the field for the second half.

The game continued to be stubbornly contested. Mr. Railton was a constant source of danger, but Figgins and Kerr and Dick Julian gave him small scope for his activities. Ten minutes after the resumption, however, a portly sergeant met a pass from the wing and drove the leather in with terrific force.

"Good!" chuckled Corporal Bates. "Jolly good indeed! We're leadin', by gad!"

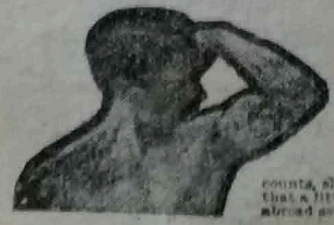
But the lead was not destined to last long. Nothing daunted, the Saints broke away, and Tom Merry had the honour of scoring the equalising goal.

A ding-dong straggle ensued. Both goals had narrow escapes, and some of Fatty Wynn's saves bordered on the marvellous. He seemed to be a mass of arms and legs and hands, and even the Tommies on the touchline could scarce forbear to cheer him.

The Loamshires, tanned by wind and sun, and rendered wonderfully fit by long training, gave the impression that they could easily hold out to the end. Tom Merry & Co., on the other hand, were beginning to feel the effects of

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long-continued struggle, and it looked as if they would suffer defeat.

Presently Kerr gained possession, and balloned the ball well up the field. It fell at the feet of Rangaroo, who kicked it goalwards in rushed time. The Cornstalk shot, but his kick was out that day. The ball rebounded against the upright, and the left-back of the Leamshires easily cleared.

Ten minutes to go, and the score was two all. Could the St. Jim's defence possibly hold out?

Just after shot rained in upon Fatty Wynn, but the young junior was all there. He held the feet right bravely, and now Kildare was glancing at his teammates.

"Kick it out!" panted Kerr.

Then followed a fierce duel between Figgins and the Leamshires winger. The latter won, and sent in a searching shot, which Wynn was only able to divert round the post.

The ensuing corner-kick was well-placed, and, on the very stroke of time, Mr. Bailton met the ball with his head, and it shot in like a pip from an orange.

"GOAL!"

The Leamshires had won. Mr. Bailton had gained the credit for them at the eleventh hour. It was a cruel disappointment to Tom Merry and his comrades, but they bore it manfully.

Mr. Bailton extended his hand to Tom Merry with a smile.

"Hard lines, my boy!" he said sympathetically. "You all played a splendid game, and St. Jim's is proud of you."

To which Corporal Bates, his mouth distorted by a large piece of chewing-gum, heartily added:

"Yes, 'ear!"

CHAPTER II.

The Greatest Game of All.

FOOTBALL was over for the day, and the travelling team returned to St. Jim's, where they were to stay the night. On the morrow a couple of highly-important games were to be played—one with the famous town of Dover, and the other against Greyfriars, with whom Tom Merry & Co. had had so many stirring tussles in the past.

The players were early astir next morning, for the Dover match was timed for eleven o'clock.

There were many alterations in the team. Herriot came in for Kerr at back, and Manners and Dick Brooke displaced Talbot and D'Arcy respectively in the forward-line. It was Tom Merry's intention to keep his men from getting stale, and he wanted to field a full team in the afternoon for the match with Greyfriars.

Despite the drastic alterations, the Saints acquitted themselves well at Dover. The boys of Kent played pluckily all through, but were quite outclassed, and the final score in favour of Tom Merry & Co. was three to nil. Then the tourists caught the connection to Friarsdale, the station for Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton & Co. were waiting for them on the platform, and the Greyfriars fellows looked wonderfully fit.

"How's the tour going?" asked Harry Wharton, as he shook hands cordially with Tom Merry.

"Famously! We've got something over forty quid already!"

"And how have the games gone?"

"We've done remarkably well, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, beaming through his monocle at the captain of the Greyfriars Reserve. "We drew with Wookwood, licked Southsea afitah a great stwuggle, and licked Dovah this mornin'. Our onlay defeat was against the Leamshires Wagiment."

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, the sunny, good-natured hero of that select band known as the Famous Five. "You haven't done so badly, considering you boned our wheeze!"

"Shush!" said Harry Wharton warningly. "Be civil to the stranger within the gates, Bob!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"We're quite willing to give you chaps the credit of

having thought of a tour first," he said, "and I hope we can lick you this afternoon. I'm not counting on it as a certainty, like Jimmy Silver usually does, but I'll say this much, we mean to give in our hardest to lower your giddy colours."

"Glad to hear it!" said Wharton, with a laugh.

"It's a high time we did something, I'm thinking!" said Talbot. "Greyfriars have licked us about four times the last year. We went under in the sports for Lieutenant Howell's Cup last December, and again when the Priars had their tour. Now let's see if we can possibly turn the tables."

St. Jim's were at full strength again, and they took the field with an air of quiet confidence. The recent games had worked wonders for the side, and they played together with perfect understanding.

Greyfriars, too, looked in great trim. Bulstrode, Bull, and Brown formed an indomitable defence, Cherry, Peter Todd, and Mark Lintley were a veritable trio of halves, and in the forward-line Wharton, Nugent, Penfold, and Vernon-Smith were valiant troubadours, while the dusky face of Hattie Jamant Ram Singh, the Indian junior, seemed to herald goals galore.

A strong wind had sprung up from the sea, and it was a matter of no small moment who won the toss.

Tom Merry spun the coin, and Harry Wharton called—heads.

The Greyfriars skipper proved wrong, and found himself forced to kick against the wind—a disastrous state of affairs, under the circumstances.

Tom Merry & Co. swept down the field like a cyclone, bearing all before them. A solid kick sent the ball flying, and it was difficult for the Saints to control it. It was still more difficult for the Greyfriars defenders to keep the leather out of the dagger-zone.

The first goal was not long in coming. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy found himself flustered by Johnny Bull, but in the nick of time he touched the ball to Jack Blake, who beat Bulstrode with a lightning drive.

The Greyfriars fellows took their revenge with smiling faces. Probably they were thinking of the second half, when that all-powerful wind would be in their favour.

For the next twenty minutes St. Jim's pressed continuously. Their forwards were in fine form, and banged in shots galore. Bulstrode drove them out again with easy-going assurance. He was a great goalie, was Bulstrode, firm as a rock in any emergency. He withstood the hostile bombardment until near the interval, when he was beaten again—this time by Harry Noble.

"Two up!" chortled Monty Lowther, in the dressing-room. "This is glorious! Stick to it, my sons!"

But was a two-goal lead sufficient, bearing in mind the fact that the Priars would have the wind in the second half? Tom Merry & Co. could not help having their doubts.

When the game restarted the wind had developed into a veritable tornado. The caps of the spectators constantly blew off, and Kildare, who refereed, was gasping like a fish out of water.

As for Harry Wharton & Co., they speedily adapted themselves to the conditions, and set about the heavy task of making up the arrears.

Figgins and Kerr fought fiercely in the face of the gale, but the barriers of their defence were broken ruthlessly down when Vernon-Smith dashed through and scored, ten minutes after the resumption.

The game had now resolved itself into an affair of attack versus defence. The Priars attacked, and the Saints defended, both sides getting through a gigantic amount of work in heroic fashion. It was a game goadily to gaze upon—one of those encounters wherein British pluck and British courage are tested to the uttermost.

Fatty Wynn, who had rendered yeoman service throughout the tour, had the busiest time of his life that afternoon. How he managed to keep his citadel intact in the teeth of that terrific hurricane was a mystery beyond solution. Fatty was as cool as a cucumber, despite the fact that the Greyfriars forwards swarmed round the goalmouth like so many bees.

At last the pressure was relieved. Redfern robbing Penfold of the ball and kicking clear. Lowther and Reilly-battled their way against the wind, and actually took the leather within shooting distance.

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

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

"MANNERS MINORI!"

"Pass, dear boys!" called Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Boldly lobbed the leather across, and the oval of St. Jim's, making due allowance for the wind, loomed in a great shot, which had Babette beaten all the way.

"Three to one!" roared Tom Merry. "That's topping! Good old Gussy! Come to my bosom and weep!"

Instead of weeping, Arthur Augustus laughed joyously. It was no light achievement to have scored that brilliant goal in defiance of the champions, and Gussy felt universally pleased with himself.

"This is rotten!" said Harry Wharton. "Back up, Friars!"

And then the home team settled down once more to a steady and persistent attack.

Harroo Singh forced a corner after a period of hot pressure. Taking the kick himself, he lobbed the ball neatly on to the waiting head of Harry Wharton, who scored easily. The crowd, dismal and sullen a moment before, awoke to new life. There was a chance for Greyfriars yet!

Still the Friars pressed boldly, determination well largely on the faces of their forwards. They had beaten St. Jim's many times in the past, and lunged fervently to keep their glowing record unscathed.

Harry Wharton, in particular, was in dazzling form. He initiated openings again and again, only to find himself foiled by Paddy Wynn.

"Stick to it!" came in stentorian tones from Bob Cherry. "Never say die, you fellows!"

At that moment, however, misfortune overtook the plucky Greyfriars team. Mark Linley, who had proved a tower of strength in the half-back line, in endeavouring to rob Tom Merry of the ball, stumbled and fell, ricking his ankle in so doing.

The game was temporarily held up.

"Cracked, old man!" asked Bob Cherry sympathetically.

"I—I'm afraid so, Bob."

"You won't be able to play on!"

Mark Linley smiled faintly, though his ankle caused him considerable pain.

"I'll stick it out!" he said stoutly.

But Mark was a mere passenger. Everybody saw that. He could scarcely limp, much less kick the ball, and at length, realising that he was more of a hindrance than a help to his side, he came off the field.

With ten men, and only a few minutes to go, Greyfriars were in a pitiable plight. To make matters worse, the wind brought with it a drenching rain, which soon soaked the players to the skin.

"Come on!" urged Harry Wharton, shaking himself like a drenched terrier. "Into 'em, Friars!"

Then followed five crowded minutes. Never had such a series of thrills been witnessed, even on the historic ground of Greyfriars.

The Saints suddenly broke away, and Jack Blake sprinted unchallenged down the field. It was all so sudden, so unexpected, that the Greyfriars defence was

caught napping. Jack Blake shot hard against the goal, and the ball hit the crossbar. The danger might have been averted had not Tom Merry, rushing to

Four goals to two in favour of the Saints, and only five minutes to go! It was incredible, hopeless, for Greyfriars to expect to win now.

But they didn't lose heart, although handicapped by the enforced absence of one of their star players. They returned to the attack, and Harry Wharton scored a significant goal from a well-judged pass by Frank.

One more minute, and the Friars still a goal in arrears. Could they possibly make up the twenty? The crowd was on tenterhooks.

And—wonder of wonders!—they did it. For Cherry, the curly-headed champion of the Romans, was again a side. He forced his way through a crowd of players, and wound up with the best shot of the day—a shot which would long be remembered in the annals of the great schools.

Fatty Wynn was a great goalkeeper, but his position had its limits. He was absolutely incapable of stopping that terrific drive, and the ball came crashing past him into the net. Simultaneously the band whistled wildly, and from three hundred throats a chorus of cheering came out in honour of the fine fight put up by the Friars at a time when things had seemed as black as midnight to them.

Tom Merry gripped Harry Wharton's hand hard. "Well played!" he exclaimed. "Well played indeed! You deserved to draw, if anyone ever did! My, my! What a stunning game!"

Harry Wharton grinned broadly. "There hasn't been another like it for whole years," he said. "It was simply glorious! I say, they're coming to carry me off! I must look!"

The captain of the Romans was too late. The mass of delighted supporters fairly surged up to him, and he was carried to the dressing-room in exultant triumph to the accompaniment of deafening cheers.

Bob Cherry, too, was not forgotten. He was taken to one of the most enthusiastic demonstrations ever witnessed at Greyfriars. All parties were pleased with the result of the match, which had left honours even between the two famous schools.

Tom Merry & Co. were entertained to a bumper supper that evening, and they departed from Greyfriars in good spirits to journey to Guildford, where they were to meet eleven boys of Surrey on the morrow.

But whatever happened in future games on the test—however thrilling the contest might be—some was destined to be an altogether entrancing and enjoyable as that great and glorious game with Greyfriars.

CHAPTER 12.

From Strength to Strength!

TOM MERRY & CO. much enjoyed their brief stay in Surrey. They spent the night at an hotel close to historic Hindhead, and early next morning went for a long ramble through the countryside, which was beginning to be veiled in the mantle of spring.

They saw the spot where the unknown sailor was murdered over a century ago, and were awed by the vast depths of the Devil's Punch-bowl. Then they proceeded to Witley Camp, where Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a soldier relative.

A couple of cars conveyed them to the Guildford Recreation Ground; and then the match commenced. It was timed as early as nine o'clock, for the tourists had to proceed to Reading immediately afterwards for a tangle with the boys of the famous biscuit town.

The game with Guildford was stubbornly contested. The opening half saw many thrills, but no goals; and ten minutes from the close the only point of the game was notched by Dick Brooke, who had been brought in for Talbot. The gate might have been considerably bigger had the hour been later, but, under the circumstances, it could not be helped.

A very different game took place at Reading four hours later. Goals were scored with remarkable profusion, and

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...the home team enjoyed a lead of 4-2. But Tom Merry & Co., playing with the wind in the second half, performed great deeds of valour, and succeeded in getting the game out of the line, ultimately winning by 5 goals to 2.

"Swindon next!" said Mooty Leather cheerfully. "I've done my best! Only one kicking, and that's about a full-blown team of Swindon!"

"And the gate-money so far," said Kibbles, as the party made their way to the railway-station, "amounts to over fifty pounds. Swindon, when they went on here, managed a hundred and ten. We must try our level best to beat it."

"Yes, wotah!"

The juniors were dead-tired when they reached Swindon, and were only too glad to get to their hotel and retire to rest. It was essential that they should enjoy a good night's sleep in order to be fit on the morrow.

Fatty Wynn was in his element. After sleeping the clock round, he ate sufficient breakfast for four, and would have proceeded to a further onslaught on the ham and eggs had not Figgins and Kurr lovingly held him back.

Despite their long rest, the Saints seemed just a trifle lark when they encountered the stalwarts of Swindon. The latter were essentially a footballing team, and had produced many giants of the game in the past.

Right from the kick-off the Swindonists, who played in red jerseys and white knickerbockers, monopolized the game. They had a nifty set of forwards and a pack of sturdy backs, and went about their work with almost deadly precision. Despite all this, however, the interval came without a score, though the Saints were undoubtedly best to be on terms.

"Back up, let grubhouse take!" roared Tom Merry, making a house at the interval. "We want to wind up the rest in a blaze of glory, you know!"

Accordingly, the Saints asserted heavy presence in the second half. Tom Merry himself had the honour of opening the score, and shortly afterwards the Swindon centre-forward equalized. Jack Blake put the visitors ahead, and a few minutes from the end Fatty netted a grand goal, St. Jim's thus winning comfortably.

The tourists had a long journey in front of them. They were playing eleven London boys next morning in town, and the journey from Swindon was a hefty one. When it was accomplished the juniors conformed to their usual practice, and proceeded straightway to bed.

When they awoke they were feeling refreshed and rejuvenated, and quite ready for the task of London. The match was booked to be played at Stamford Bridge, the celebrated Chelsea ground, and the crowd which assembled at the appointed time was simply colossal.

"My hat!" exclaimed Mooty Leather. "I shall suffer from stage-fright, I'm sure! It's a crowded house, and so mistake!"

Only Fatty Wynn remained cool and calm and collected. This was not the first time the Palatoff of St. Jim's had made his bow to the public. Time was when he had appeared as goalkeeper to a professional side. Much water had flowed under the bridges since then, but the occasion was still fresh in Fatty Wynn's memory.

The captain of the Londoners was a pleasant-faced youth named Carr, and he greeted the Saints very cordially.

"Come for a kicking—what?" he said.

"The boot's on the other foot!" laughed Tom Merry. "We mean to beat, batter, and annihilate your contemptible little team, in the words of that fabled fanatic, the Kaiser!"

"Poor chap!" said Carr, shaking his head sorrowfully. "You don't know what you're up against, I'm afraid."

Carr led the Londoners on to the field, and the crowd greeted them with a rousing cheer.

The cheer was re-echoed when Tom Merry & Co. sprang out into the arena. Fatty Wynn's corpulent figure raised a general laugh.

The St. Jim's fellows felt ill at ease at first, but they soon got into their stride, and treated the onlookers to a feast of exhilarating football.

After twenty minutes' play the Londoners opened the scoring, Carr beating Fatty Wynn with a hard drive at close range. The Saints retaliated hotly, and Arthur

Argentine D'Arcy equalized with a scorching shot from the wing.

The game was alternately contained up to the interval, with no further scoring.

"But so dusty!" shrieked Tom Merry. "For the past ten in the second half, just sleep!"

A long-drag struggle ensued after the interval. Care would seem to spare occasion for the Londoners, their scrapping the second half.

Tom Merry & Co. were not going to stand that. Rather not! They quickly made converts for just themselves, and Tuffin scored in brilliant style.

The Londoners were Londoners all—masters of mind and muscle. They adopted the more scientific sort of game, and used their heads. This was far more likely to tell against the St. Jim's fellows than a more rough-and-tumble encounter, and Figgins and Kurr were given plenty to think about.

Fatty Wynn was once again a red in purple for his side. For his initiative on and the home team failed in all sorts and conditions of plans, and Fatty ran to the rescue in a manner which delighted the hearts of the crowd. His arms were outstretched to see and wonder at, and soon, when he slipped a foot, rising shot from Carr over the crossbar, he was chosen to the side.

A goal-kick a moment later relieved the pressure, and Kibbles, deftly dodging a host of opponents, took the ball well up the field. Thus he sent it out to Arthur Argentine, whose sparkling run was quite a feature of the game.

Grey found himself confounded by Stewart, the centre, bustling back at the Londoners. The two met together with a terrific collision, and D'Arcy came off second best. He sat down suddenly in the mud and roared.

"Yeraw! Goodness!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Kibbles, rushing up, took the ball from the feet of Stewart, and sent in a scoping shot, which struck the upright and was deflected into the net.

"Goal!"

"There all!" said Tom Merry, with belated satisfaction. "We're giving 'em a run for their money, at any rate!"

"We is, we are!" chuckled Mooty Leather. "There's going to be a fierce fight for the winning goal, Tommy, old son!"

Leather was right. The game waxed fast and furious after the Corbett's grand goal, and many valiant deeds were performed by the members of both teams.

"Back up, London!" came in a never-ending roar from the crowd, who did not wish to see their heroes beaten by players hailing from a country school.

And London did back up, with a vengeance! Their forwards swept down the field in line, and hopefully bottled up the St. Jim's defence. Then the outside-right sent the leather past Fatty Wynn with a fine solo effort.

That goal was destined to be the last of the match. Tom Merry & Co. played heroically to the finish, but they had met their superiors. Both sides were loudly applauded when they came off the field.

"Now for some grub!" said Fatty Wynn. "The only way I can bury my disappointment at the result is to eat, and go on eating, till further order!"

"Shut up, you blessed bladder of lard!" growled Figgins. "There's only time for a snack. We've got to be homeward bound shortly."

Half an hour later the tourists sat in a whizzing train returning, not without numerous regrets, to Weyland Junction, where they were to catch the local train to Hylcombe. The match with the masters would write "Fins" to a highly-unsuccessful tone, which had amply demonstrated, beyond everything else, the fact that the St. Jim's juniors were whole-hearted British sportsmen, who played the game in the spirit it should be played right to the final whistle!



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NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"MANNERS MINOR!"

CHAPTER 13.
The Grand Finale!

"HERE they are!"
"Good old Talbot!"
"Well played, Tom Merry!"
"Give 'em a cheer!"
"Hip, hip, hip—"
"How-giddy-ray!"

A terrific demonstration awaited the football heroes as the train slowed up at Rycombe Station. The self-same band that had been responsible for giving Tom Merry & Co. such a thrilling send off had now assembled to march the tourists back to the old school in triumph.

The gate receipts had reached almost fabulous proportions. Exactly a hundred pounds had been amassed, and it was now quite reasonable to assume that the Greyfriars grand total would be knocked into a cocked hat, especially as some of the more wealthy fellows would pay shillings and half-crowns to witness a match with the masters.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Monty Lowther. "My legs feel like leaden weights! How the merry dickens can we expect to lick the masters!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"We'd lick 'em if we were all halt, maimed, and blind!" he declared. "Barring Railton, they can't play footer for toffee!"

"Imagine old Ratty prancing about in the forward line!" chuckled Figgins. "It'll be a sight for gods and men and little fishes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The footballers partook of a hearty meal when they reached the school, and meanwhile George Alfred Grundy and other enthusiastic youths were busy persuading everybody to roll up in force to see the match.

It was the first time in history that the masters had unbended to the extent of playing football together, and they would never have done so but for the fact that the profits were going to the Red Cross Fund. No man worthy of the name of patriot could resist playing under such circumstances.

Mr. Railton and Mr. Lathom had no compunctions whatever in donning jerseys and knickers, and little Mr. Linton was not averse to a game of football; but Mr. Rateliff, of the New House, and Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, had rooted objections to being held up to ridicule. Neither of them understood anything about the great winter game, and neither was half so agile as in the days of his youth.

But the Head had undertaken to keep goal for the masters, and where Dr. Holmes led, his subordinates followed. They had little choice in the matter.

Big Side, where the match was to be played, was thronged with eager spectators long before the appointed time for the kick-off. Mrs. Taggles closed her tuckshop for two hours, and wended her way to the ground; and Marie Rivers and the Head's wife were early on the scene.

"Three o'clock!" said Digby of the Fourth. "They won't be long now."

"Here they are!" spluttered Clifton Dane, almost suffocated with mirth. "My hat! What a collection! Talk about the wild men of Borneo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The masters were, indeed, a motley crowd. The Head, attired in a woollen sweater, just about passed muster; but Mr. Rateliff presented a most comical appearance. He was got up to kill, with a vengeance! He sported a gaudy jersey, reminiscent of Joseph's famous coat of many colours, while his stockings were sufficiently short to betray his long, thin calves. The stockings were masterpieces in their way, and looked as if they had been manufactured from a cast-off fancy waistcoat belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"My only Aunt Sempronia!" gasped Bernard Glyn. "Carry me home to die, somebody!"

"Coloured socks cover a multitude of shins!" laughed Digby. "Old Selby's got a pair, and so has Linton."

"It's worth a jolly sight more than a tanner to see 'em in their togs alone!" said Clifton Dane. "When they start playing I believe I shall burst a boiler!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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The masters formed up, Mr. Railton kindly allotting them to their respective positions. He discreetly placed Mr. Rateliff on the opposite wing to himself, for had they played side by side it was possible that there would have been friction between the rival Housemasters. Tom Merry won the toss, and from the outset the juniors went away in spirited style. Talbot found himself with only the Head to beat, and he sent in a good shot, which, to the unbounded surprise of the spectators, Dr. Holmes stopped with ease.

"Saved, sir!" came in a chorus from the touchline. The ball then travelled towards Fatty Wynn's goal, and Mr. Railton severely tested the plump junior, who brought off a capital save. It was perfectly clear that the match would be no walk-over for Tom Merry & Co. Mr. Railton was a veritable giant in the field, and Toby the page, who played for the masters, proved a very speedy winger.

For a time play ruled fast and exciting. The Head kept goal wonderfully well for a gentleman of his years, and when he fisted out a hot drive of Jack Blake's, he fairly brought the house down, in theatrical parlance.

"Cheer him, you chaps!" muttered Digby. "Then p'raps he'll give us an extra half-holiday next week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Some midfield play followed, and then Mr. Lathom, securing the ball, sent it across to Mr. Rateliff, who had hitherto been roving aimlessly about the field.

The master of the New House fastened on to the sphere with fierce exultation. After all, he reflected, why should he not prove to the world that he was a second Steve Bloomer, despite the heavy weight of years which chained him down? He had often told some of his colleagues that he had been a first-class footballer at the Varsity, he would now prove to them that his boot had lost none of its cunning.

Figgins, at full-back, waited for Mr. Rateliff with a lurking grin. He foresaw a chance of getting his own back for past injustices upon the obnoxious Housemaster.

Mr. Rateliff came lumbering up, with the ball at his feet. On one occasion he stepped on it, and nearly pitched headlong, much to the delight of the crowd. But he recovered himself, and endeavoured to force his way past Figgins, who was watching him with catlike eyes.

Suddenly Figgy leapt into the air and charged. The impact was terrific as he bounced into Mr. Rateliff, bowling him over like a skittle. Then the New House junior easily cleared the ball.

Mr. Rateliff picked himself up gingerly from the slough of mud into which he had been precipitated, and felt himself all over, apparently with a view to ascertaining if he was still in one piece. He looked a perfect wreck. His knickers were covered with damp mud, and his many-coloured jersey bore a positively hideous appearance, reeking as it was with oozy slime.

The infuriated master glared at Figgins and Figgy. In return, smiled his most angelic smile.

"Ratty's ratty!" observed Monty Lowther, pausing to lace up his boot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Faith, an' he'll be rattier still by the time Figgy's finished with him!" grinned Reilly. "Look at that, ye omadhaun!"

Once again the full-back came to loggerheads with the Housemaster, and once again the objectionable Ratty came off second best. He raved and fumed, and dearly longed to raise his hand against his presumptuous pupil, but the other masters would speedily have intervened, and Ratty was powerless.

Whilst Figgins was leading the tyrant of the New House a fine old dance, Kerr, on the other side, was doing precisely the same thing to Mr. Selby. The treatment meted out to that unfortunate gentleman was greatly to the liking of the fags of the Third, who cheered Kerr to the echo.

Just before the interval Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raced down the field, and beat Dr. Holmes at close range with a hot shot. By this solitary goal the juniors led when the two teams came off the field at half-time.

"Looks like a close thing," observed Talbot. "Railton's been on the winning side before, when we played

the Lonsdales. Mustn't let him have too much of a good thing."

"Bal Jove, no!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Poor old Ratty!" said Monty Lowther. "He looks like a chap who's lost a bob and found a bad penny! Haven't you finished putting him through the mill, Figgins?"

"Not quite. He's going to have another dose next half."

"So's Selby," said Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Both the masters mentioned would have been devoutly thankful had the earth opened and swallowed them up. They had been in the wars since the match started, and Manners had been detected "snapping" Mr. Ratcliff with his camera when the mud-begrimed Housemaster came off for the interval. Mr. Ratcliff had shouted like a man determined for Manners to hand over the camera at once, but the Shell fellow had taken to his heels, and the monster well knew what an undignified figure he would cut if he gave chase in his weird and wonderful attire.

Figgins and Kerr renewed the offensive in the second half, as they said they would; and once, when Mr. Ratcliff went to the ground with extra-special force, he could contain himself no longer.

"Boy! Figgins!" he stormed. "How dare you repeatedly pit your weight against me in such an unwarranted manner!"

"It's all in the game, sir!" said Figgins cheerfully. "Footballers must learn to take hard knocks, sir!"

"You impertinent young rascal!"

"Better not use strong language, sir, if you don't mind my giving you the tip. If the ref hears you, he has the right to order you off the field!"

"What? What!"

Mr. Ratcliff was beside himself with passion. He could never remember having been so much "up against it" in his life, unless it was when Kerr, disguised as a charming young lady, had sued for his hand.

Figgins sensibly shifted to another part of the field when he saw that Mr. Ratcliff's rage was such that he might at any moment proceed to assault and battery, and a few minutes later, following a well-judged pass by Toby, Mr. Railton scored the equalising goal for the masters.

Then Tom Merry, profiting by a bad bloomer on Mr. Linton's part, broke through and scored, and the juniors held grimly to their lead till the end. It was quite on the cards that they could have added further goals; but, being good sportsmen, they did not wish to attempt to show up the older and less-experienced side.

The spectators cheered loud and long when Kildare's whistle rang out. The tour was now at an end, and Tom Merry & Co. had covered themselves and their school with glory. The Head announced, later on in the evening, that nearly a hundred and twenty pounds had been collected for the brave fellows who had sustained wounds whilst fighting for the Old Country; and, needless to remark, there was great rejoicing. The old rafters in Big Hall rang again and again with whole-hearted cheers for Tom Merry and his comrades, who had proved themselves to be British boys worthy of the name, sound sportsmen, and heroes all!

THE END.

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The First Instalments.

REGGIE WHITE, an orphan, is befriended by MR. ANTHONY DELL, a millionaire film-producer, and given a position as actor in his company.

Among others in the company, Reggie makes the acquaintance of RICHARD TURNEY, a boy whom he likes; HUBERT NIXON, a snobbish youth, whom he dislikes; and WILLIE BURR, a jovial, fat boy.

CHARLES RICKFIELD, an escaped convict, is befriended by Mr. Dell, who is certain of his innocence.

On being recaptured, the convict entrusts to Mr. Dell some papers with which he hopes to clear his name.

MRS. HORACE DELL, Mr. Dell's widowed sister-in-law, informs Mr. Dell that her daughter Dolly has been kidnapped.

Mr. Dell advises her to go to the police, but she answers: "I want your assistance, because the police are of no use in this affair!"

(Now read on.)

Mr. Dell's Decision.

Mr. Dell was bewildered.

"I don't see—" he began.

"You never did!" said Mrs. Horace. "You always were the fool of the family. Let me put it plainer. Dolly has been stolen from me, and the man who wrote that letter knows that I cannot take her back by legal means."

"Why not?"

"Because I cannot! Is that plain? I am afraid to do so, if you like. So he calmly takes her to his house, and keeps her there under the care of his housekeeper. He stole her from me, and now he mocks me, knowing that I dare not even consult a policeman. What is the obvious thing to do?"

"I don't know!" sighed Tony Dell. "You use the word obviously so weirdly. What is—what is your plan?"

"Steal her back!"

"Steal her back?" said Tony. "Well, I dare say you are right. But why do you come to me? How can I help?"

"Gracious take the man!" said Mrs. Horace, with warmth. "Here is a being of resource employing a large number of

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trustworthy people, any half-dozen of whom would be capable of doing this work, and he asks what I come to him for!"

Tony Dell laid his cigar on the table, and stared at his sister-in-law.

"Let me understand," he said. "You want me to raid this man's house on the off-chance that Dolly is there—eh?"

"She is there!" replied Mrs. Dell.

Mr. Dell was not satisfied.

"How do I know she is?" he asked. "It would be awkward to make a mistake. Why should this man steal her?"

"For ransom, if you want to know, Tony," said his sister-in-law. "You are an amazingly simple man for one of your wealth. It always surprises me that you should be so ignorant as to what an attraction money has for some folk in this world. The man I speak of wants money, and he knows that I have plenty of it. That is why he has stolen Dolly. He knows that, for a certain reason, I will not put the case in the hands of the police. Also, he knows that he dare not demand money from me, so he steals this poor innocent child, and gives me a strong hint that a money payment will bring her back."

Tony puffed at his cigar.

"I still say 'Go to the police,'" he said doggedly.

"And I still say that you are the fool of the family!" returned his sister-in-law.

Tony gave in.

"We had better get to work," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I see that you mean me to rescue the child. How many men do you want? And, by the way, who is this kidnapper, and where does he live?"

Mrs. Horace pointed to the letter.

"Don't you know the writing?" she asked him.

Mr. Dell admitted that the hand looked familiar, but he could not state where he had seen it before.

"What about your friend Nixon?" she asked.

"Oh, absurd!" said the millionaire.

But, nevertheless, he went to a filing cabinet, and took out a letter. This he laid side by side with the one that his sister-in-law had brought.

"I am amazed!" he said, after he had compared them.

Then he suddenly became active, turning, as was his

from a quiet, reflective manner to one of vigorous energy. "I'll do it!" he declared, bringing his fist down on the table. "I'll get that girl out, if I smash half Hampstead!" "One moment, sir," said Reggie. "I have an idea." They asked him to explain somewhat impatiently; but for five or ten minutes Reggie was still outlining his plan, making it fit the various necessities of the case as the two Dells saw them. "Excellent!" said Mr. Dell, when he had concluded. "We will do it! Now we'll pick our men!"

Pirates to the Rescue.

An hour or so later a remarkable-looking vehicle drove up to No. 37, Donfitter Grove, Hampstead, and a most weird collection of people got out.

The first was Silas Shock, disguised in false side-whiskers, and a Trilby hat worn coquettishly on the side of the head. He carried a camera of almost repulsive ugliness. It was quite a useless implement, by the way, though no one knew this fact but himself. It had been a fearsome instrument in youth, but Silas had increased its eccentric appearance by judiciously added nuts and screws and cunning projections.

Ben Wheeler, too, was of the party. He was attired as a stage policeman, of pantomime-like uncouthness. As a real policeman was standing near when the vehicle stopped, Ben soon had some humorous opportunities of explaining himself to this worthy.

"You will have to help me keep the crowd back, brother Smut," he said.

"What ever is the game?" inquired the genuine constable. Ben explained the game, with sundry digs in the ribs and chuckles.

A black-bearded pirate, who looked as if he had just landed from some black-flag lugger on the Spanish Main, spoke through the ragged fringes of a hideous red beard:

"We come to hale a fair damsel to our gory cavern, and hold her to ransom, or make her a pirate's bride!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the real constable. "You moving-picture people are the limit! I suppose you want me to lend you a hand to keep these kiddies back?"

A more youthful pirate stepped forward. He was masked, and had a penny-plain-tuppence-coloured look about him, and swaggered in such a manner as Captain Kidd might envy. This youngster, who was none other than Reggie White, went boldly up to the door and knocked.

The girl who came out seemed startled at the appearance of the visitors.

"We have come to do the acting for the moving picture," said Reggie. "I suppose Mr. Nixon has told you?"

"Mr. Nixon said nothing about it," replied the girl; "and I want you all to go away, because there is a young lady in the house who isn't very well."

"She has only just come, hasn't she?" inquired the elder pirate, who was in reality Mr. Dell himself.

"Yes."

"Why, that's all part of the play," he went on. "She is one of us. We have come to steal her away!"

"You can tell all that to Mrs. Cranswick," said the girl obviously.

Here a woman of very different appearance came forward. She didn't look the kind of person to be trifled with. She was of middle-age and suspicious manner.

"Get away out of it!" she cried indignantly.

"All ready!" cried Tony Dell, turning his back on her and addressing the stage policeman.

Silas Shock fixed his camera, and began turning the handle with a look on his face that would have done credit to a Cabinet Minister. Two more pirates and a lady pirates—this was Mrs. Horace—appeared from another taxi-cab that had followed behind, and in a moment had flung themselves on the unlucky Mrs. Cranswick, who, as Mr. Nixon's house-keeper and general factotum, had been doing her best in his interests.

"Help! Help!" cried Mrs. Cranswick, struggling hard at the top of the steps before the door.

"Struggle more!" shouted the sham policeman, as if he were stage manager, determined to make the real policeman unsuspecting.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the real policeman, quite convinced.

"It's as good as a play!"

"What's this?" cried another policeman, coming up.

"Moving pictures, Bill. Such fun!" said the first. "Help keep the crowd back!"

"Struggle more! Do you hear?" shouted the real policeman.

"Make it more like a real fight. Bang the pirates

about, and put more go into it, as if you were fighting for life!"

Mrs. Cranswick seemed to obey. She only had two to struggle with now, as the others had gone into the house.

Reggie was the first to find Dolly, who had been locked in a room on the third floor. As Mr. Dell had brought a jemmy and one of the others a hatchet, the lock didn't keep them out long.

The rescuers found the poor girl was positively stupid, her condition and appearance proving plainly that she had been heavily drugged. Her uncle lifted her gently on to his shoulder and carried her downstairs. The servant-maid caused some disturbance at the ground floor, but Dell soon settled her.

"You are not in the act," he said, "so you hold your tongue, or Mr. Nixon will be very angry with you when he comes home."

The crowd outside was growing slightly impatient by this time, as the other pirates had rushed the housekeeper into the house, and were keeping her quiet in the dining-room at the back.

But the onlookers' interest revived immediately when they saw the pirate chief turn up with Dolly over his shoulder. They saw in the action just the sort of thing a pirate might be expected to do, and the policemen enjoyed the spectacle as much as any of the crowd.

So far, all went well; but now came the hitch. A most unfortunate thing happened, just as Dell was placing poor Dolly in the taxi-cab.

Mr. Nixon himself suddenly pushed his way through the crowd.

"What does this mean?" he yelled angrily.

Ben Wheeler, doubling the parts of comic policeman and stage manager, saw a way of dealing with this new interruption, and quickly gave a hint to the others.

"You are always late at rehearsals!" he cried, addressing the astonished Nixon. "Now you have nearly spoilt the scene! Back with that child, chief pirate, and come down the steps again!"

Mr. Dell caught at Ben Wheeler's idea, and carried Dolly up the steps once more, while Silas Shock went on turning his handle with a look like an inspired idiot.

Of course, Nixon rushed at Tony Dell.

"Now you others!" cried Ben Wheeler to the other pirates, "sit on him! Careful—not real blows!"

The pirates obeyed, though Reggie, who was one of them, took care that some of his were very like "real" blows.

"Police! Murder! Help!" yelled Nixon.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the real policemen.

"It is the funniest thing I have ever seen!" said one.

"I shall die of laughing!" cried the other.

"Help!" yelled Nixon.

"All in!" cried Ben Wheeler.

There was a rush for the taxi-cabs. The camera was dragged in last of all, and Mr. Nixon remained sitting on the pavement.

"You acted that very well, sir," said one of the policemen cheerfully. "I wish my missus and the kiddies could have seen you!"

"I call it a bit of all right!" remarked the other policeman.

"You asses!" shouted Nixon. "Why didn't you come and help me?"

"We wouldn't interfere, of course, sir," said the first officer. "We did our best to keep the crowd back, sir!"

This was said ingratiatingly, as if hinting that if a little tip were forthcoming it would not cause offence. The police seemed to have got it into their heads that Nixon had been left behind specially for the purpose of dispensing tips.

But he soon convinced them of their error.

"You idiots!" he cried. "That wasn't play acting. This is my house, and those men were thieves, and you have been helping in a burglary!"

The police doubted—then wavered—then suddenly developed an alarming state of mind. They talked of telephoning and wiring, and at first Nixon encouraged them. But suddenly he changed his mind.

"No, I'll be hanged if I will!" he said. "I don't want any more police messes over this job! We'll let the thing go!"

Rickfield at Liberty.

After the exciting rescue of Dolly Dell from Mr. Nixon's house at Hampstead, the two taxi-cabs turned sharply away to the west across Kilburn, the drivers purposely choosing quiet roads, so that the actors in the rescue scene might be able to transform themselves into respectable-looking citizens again as the cabs raced along.

This was quickly done, and before many hundred yards had

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been travelled, Ben Wheeler had ceased to be a pantomime-policeman, Mr. Dell and Reggie had flung off the appearance of Spanish Main piracy, and Mrs. Horace was herself again. Even the awesome contraption that Silas Shock had manipulated as a camera, had assumed an innocent guise.

At Kilburn the cabs parted from each other, the first going to Mrs. Dell's apartments at Lancaster Gate, and the second heading straight for Victoria.

Having seen Dolly and her stepmother to their apartments, Reggie returned with Mr. Dell to Mitcham. On the way, Mr. Dell became unusually conversational. He was at all times a pleasant and approachable man, and he had a wonderful knack of making everyone feel at ease, so that Reggie was able to converse with him with absolute freedom.

"That was an awfully amusing suggestion of yours," said the millionaire laughingly. "I had no idea that I should make such a good pirate, though I was enjoying another piece of fun all the time that I don't suppose you thought of."

"What was that, sir?" asked Reggie.

"The joke that was tickling me all the time," replied Tony Dell. "was that perhaps Dolly wasn't in that house after all."

"Goodness!" said Reggie. "What ever would you have done then?"

Mr. Dell laughed aloud.

"I would have managed somehow," he replied. "I would have made out to Mr. Nixon that the whole affair was a practical joke, and I would have squared that housekeeper of his with a pretty little present. Anyhow, I saw a chance of some fun for a ten-pound note."

"Mrs. Dell was right, though," said Reggie.

"M'ye-es," admitted the millionaire.

When the two got back to Mitcham, there was a pleasant surprise for them both. There were several visitors, who, it turned out, were quite as anxious to see Reggie as they were to see Mr. Dell.

First and foremost of these was Charles Rickfield, the ex-convict, now a free man. With him were his wife and child, and his wife's brother, Professor Carless.

"I am free, as you can see," said Rickfield, "and it isn't a case of breaking prison this time. I have the King's pardon."

"Yes," put in Professor Carless; "and we are told that a handsome present is to be made by the Government. We don't know how much it is, but it will be substantial."

"Just fancy," he went on, "getting a pardon for what one has never done."

"Of course, everyone knows what that means," said Dell. "It is only the form the official whitewashing takes. All the world knows that you are innocent. But how about your business, Mr. Rickfield?"

The ex-convict explained that he had been invited to resume his old duties in his old business.

"Our firm has received a great deal of sympathy from the trade ever since the story got out, and I shall benefit from this," he said. "I am sure, Mr. Dell, I hardly know how to express my gratitude to you for all that you have done. As for my little kiddie, that child would not stop home when she heard where we were going, but insisted on coming with us to give away a few kisses."

It really was most satisfactory, both to Reggie and to his employer, to think that the incident at Storm Park House had had at least one satisfactory conclusion—that an innocent man had been given his freedom and a clean reputation. And then came a question that interested Reggie.

"There was nothing about Mr. Nixon in any of those papers that I passed you?" asked Mr. Rickfield.

"Nothing," said the millionaire.

Then he went on:

"And you think that he was in the swindle?"

"I am sure he was."

"What proofs have you?"

"None. But I am positive that he worked the swindle. Why, he had hardly a penny when he came, and he was able to buy picture-palaces, and launch out in a big way when he left."

"That fact is no proof," said Dell. "Ours is a queer trade; many a picture-palace has been started by a man who had less than nothing. Our line is almost as good for making fortunes out of nothing as for losing them out of a tidy sum."

There was a pretty little incident to finish up the visit. A mysterious package was produced and passed to Reggie by the smallest of the visitors. Opened, this was found to contain a gold watch and chain, neatly inscribed:

"PRESENTED TO REGINALD WHITE
BY THE INNOCENT MAN
HE RESCUED FROM PRISON AND RUIN."

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Reggie was tremendously touched by receiving such a kind remembrance, and went from the office feeling some-thing higher.

But this did not end the adventure.

In leaving the office in which the interview with the ex-convict had taken place, Reggie nearly fell over someone who was listening at the keyhole.

It was Hubert Nixon.

"Don't you accuse me of listening, you young monkey!" cried Nixon, flushing angrily. "I wasn't listening; I would scorn such an action."

"I didn't accuse you, in the first place," said Reggie. "In the second, it wasn't necessary to do so. And in the third, who was it boasted that he had listened outside the caravan?"

Reggie Has a New Task.

Reggie turned away from Hubert Nixon without giving him a chance to reply.

Strangely enough, this was not to be his last adventure with the Nixon family that day, for almost immediately after leaving Hubert, Reggie was informed of the exceedingly rare occurrence to him—that someone wanted him to come to the telephone.

He recognised the voice the moment he put the receiver to his ear. It was that of Mrs. Horace Dell.

"You've got to come right over here at once," she said.

"Where's that?" he asked.

She replied by giving her address at Lancaster Gate, the apartments to which he and Mr. Dell had taken her and Dolly in the taxi-cab.

"Tell Mr. Dell that I want you, and that he may expect you back when he sees you," she added.

But Reggie simply explained to Mr. Dell that Mrs. Horace had telephoned for him.

"In that case, my boy," said Tony Dell, "pack off at once before she comes to fetch you!"

It was fairly late in the evening when Reggie arrived at Lancaster Gate. Mrs. Horace Dell was waiting for him, and showing some impatience.

"I want you," she said, "and it is in a piece of work that must on no account be bungled."

"I'll try to be careful," said Reggie.

Mrs. Dell sniffed a little scornfully.

"It isn't a case of trying," she remarked firmly. "It must be a case of succeeding, and no heel-taps either."

Reggie knew her moods and manner pretty well by this time, so he waited till she spoke again.

"That man has spoken to me," she said.

Reggie guessed that the man she referred to was Mr. Nixon, and she hastily confirmed the correctness of his guess.

"He rang me up on the telephone," she said, "and he wants to have a quiet talk with me. He appoints Hyde Park Corner, in an hour from now. I don't know what his plan may be, and I don't trust him an inch farther than I can see him. Do you understand?"

"You want me to follow you, and keep my eyes open?" asked Reggie.

"Bless the boy, you've got the whole thing!" declared Mrs. Horace with enthusiasm. "Those words might easily be spoken by a muddler, but you aren't a muddler, and when you speak in that way, I see I needn't say much more."

But she did say much more, all the same. On the way to Hyde Park Corner she gave her young escort a fairly clear view of what was expected from him. First and foremost, he was to see that the villain didn't kidnap her, and second, he was to try to overhear all that he could so as to assist Mrs. Dell's memory, and thirdly—this was the chief point—he was to use his wits and not be as foolish as Mr. Tony Dell would be if he were called on to do similar work.

Near Hyde Park Corner, Reggie and Mrs. Horace Dell separated, but the boy kept Mrs. Dell well in sight.

Just as she reached the entrance to Hyde Park, he saw her overtaken by a man whom he had little difficulty in recognising as Mr. Nixon.

The two turned into the park together, and Reggie, who had made himself as much like a street arab in appearance as it was possible to do, followed them.

It was in this park that Reggie overheard one of the most curious conversations he had ever heard in his life.

"Well, Agnes," commenced Nixon, "I suppose I may thank you for all this sensational nonsense at my house. I suppose you were with these Spanish Main pirates—eh?"

"Yes, John!" said Mrs. Dell. "You stole my little girl, and I simply stole her back, so the account is square so far."

"I am not so sure," replied Nixon, in a manner that was just a little threatening. "You must remember that I don't seem to have had what I wanted."



In leaving the office Reggie nearly fell over someone who was listening at the keyhole. It was Hubert Nixon. "Don't you accuse me of listening!" cried Nixon, flushing angrily. (See page 24.)

"Meaning a cheque!" said Mrs. Dell.

"Precisely!" said Nixon.

"And your game is blackmail, then?"

"You can call it blackmail if you care to," said Nixon. "I don't look at it in that light. Mr. Horace Dell was one of the richest men in the country when he died—almost as rich as his brother, Anthony Dell, and he left you a tidy part of his fortune, to say nothing of an interest in it all, till that girl comes of age."

"That is quite true, John," said Mrs. Dell. "I am amply provided for."

"I can make you lose the lot," said Nixon.

"Can you? Then why don't you?" asked Mrs. Dell.

"You are afraid. I allow you five hundred pounds a year hush-money, a sum that should be quite sufficient."

John Nixon laughed.

"You are as fond of bluff as ever," he said. "You always were good at that sort of thing. I know you are afraid of me, and that you daren't say a word, whatever I do. You knew very well that when I stole Dolly from you that you could get her back by putting the case in the hands of the police. Did you do it? No! You were afraid."

"I tell you five hundred pounds is all you will get, so don't you steal my little girl again!" said Mrs. Dell.

"She isn't your little girl!"

"She is my step-child, and I love her more than most women love their own children."

"That is the whole point," said Nixon. "If I speak, you will lose her as well as your money."

"And if I speak," said Mrs. Dell, "you will lose your five hundred pounds a year, and go to prison as well."

"How do you mean?"

"You have tried to blackmail me, and I have a witness."

"A what?"

"A witness," repeated Mrs. Dell. "Come out, Reggie!"

Reggie White stepped from behind the bushes. He was still greatly perplexed as to what it all meant. But Mrs. Dell went on quite calmly:

"Now, John," she said to Nixon, "you are afraid of me, and I am afraid of you, and each of us is in the other's power. If you are foolish I may lose all my money and Dolly. If I am foolish you will lose a good deal more, for not only will your five hundred pounds a year go, but I will see to it that you get into prison as well."

"Besides," she went on, "I may not lose my money, however much of an idiot you turn out."

John Nixon scarcely noticed these words. He was staring at Reggie.

"You are silly, Agnes," he said, "to trust a little gutter-snipe like that."

Mrs. Dell became indignant.

"How dare you say such a thing!" she cried. "That boy has got more of the gentleman in his little finger than you have got in your whole body. I suppose you think that I am putting myself in his power? Well, supposing I am? I am putting you much more in it, and I know whom he will be true to out of the pair of us. He will stand to Dolly's mother, I am pretty sure, but he won't be very friendly to a blackmailer and forger!"

"Forger!" cried Nixon.

"What else?" asked Mrs. Dell angrily. "You think because that poor man Rickfield couldn't prove what he said that no one believes him. Well, I believe him, any way! I say again, you are a forger and a cheat!"

Nixon laughed again, a bitter, unpleasant laugh.

"Good evening!" he said. "That makes you a forger's wife."

And he turned away.

Mrs. Dell touched Reggie on the shoulder.

"Come, my boy," she said. "We'll cross the park!"

On the way she suddenly became communicative.

"I suppose you don't understand all this?" she said.

"No, ma'am," said Reggie.

"Well, I had better explain. I may want you to help me," said Mrs. Dell. "I really did marry that man."

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Reggie opened his eyes in astonishment. He was beginning to piece things together.

"It was ten years ago," said Mrs. Dell, "and I was young enough to be foolish. He proposed, and I married him. Any way, we didn't get on, and it wasn't a very happy married life. John Nixon thinks a woman should do as she is told and not answer back. You can ask Ben Wheeler if he thinks that such a part would suit me."

Reggie could imagine Ben Wheeler's reply, for even of his own knowledge, Mrs. Horace Dell was not at all the kind of woman to make a submissive wife to a tyrant.

"Instead of separating in a straightforward way," went on Mrs. Dell, without a pause, "that wretch came to me and said that he had 'discovered' that his first wife was still alive, and that we never really had been married."

"I suppose you were glad, ma'am?" said Reggie.
"Glad!" assented Mrs. Dell. "I was almost beside myself with happiness. It was not only that I disliked the man, but I had found out how bad a man he was, and that he was entirely without principles. Now you will keep all this to yourself!"

She asked the last question abruptly. Of course, Reggie promised that he would do so. It surprised him greatly to be taken into such confidence, especially as Mrs. Dell did not look the kind of woman who would be too eager to discuss her private affairs with anyone.

"I expect you are wondering," she went on, "how I came to marry Mr. Dell, after my adventure with John Nixon? I want you to understand that I told Mr. Dell everything about my previous marriage; I didn't deceive him, and he believed all I had to say. I think I ought to tell you this because my husband was a man of noble character. Indeed, you can see that when you look at Dolly, and think that he was her father. My husband wasn't the least bit like his brother, Mr. Tony Dell."

She brought this out quite earnestly. It was one of Mrs. Dell's articles of faith that Tony Dell was a very poor lot compared with his late brother.

"Then," she went on, "as soon as ever I was left a widow, with all that money and Dolly to take care of, up comes John Nixon and tells me that he and I really had got married, after all; that his first wife was dead at the time he married me, and that I had no right to any of Horace Dell's money, or to have married him at all."

"How brutal!" said Reggie, with emphasis. "The cad ought to be kicked! And I suppose you don't know what to believe, ma'am?"

Mrs. Dell put her hand almost affectionately on his shoulder.

"You have said it, my boy!" she declared. "I don't know whether I was really married to Nixon or not. I have thought of putting detectives on the case; but I wouldn't trust a private detective with my secret, because such people often turn out to be blackmailers. That is why I am telling you."

"Me!" gasped Reggie.

"Yes. You always strike me as about as sensible a boy as I have ever met in my life. And, what is more important, I am sure you are as straight as a line. I want you to find out the truth for me."

"But how?"

"There is one person besides Mr. John Nixon who knows the truth. You must get hold of him."

"Who is that?"

"Hubert Nixon. He will know if his mother is still alive, or if she were alive ten years ago when Mr. Nixon married me."

Reggie suddenly understood why he had been selected for this work.

"I will find out," he said. "I am glad you asked me to do this. I should like to find out."

Mrs Dell's Secret.

Reggie White lost no time in doing the work that Mrs. Dell had asked him to undertake. He knew that it meant getting on the right side of Hubert Nixon and finding out all that he could from him.

It had been a great surprise to him that Hubert was still a member of the company. After the way he had tried to ruin Mr. Rickfield, Reggie would not have been at all surprised at seeing this young hopeful sent about his business, for Mr. Dell had ample cause to suspect that Hubert Nixon was just as bad as his father.

But the fact was Tony Dell was one of the most forgiving men to be found. Naturally unsuspecting and kind-hearted, he hated punishing even the guilty; and as for visiting the sins of a father upon his son, this would be the last thing that Tony would dream of doing.

So Hubert Nixon remained in the company.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 420.

Reggie shocked one old friend by his new intimacy with Hubert Nixon. This was Ben Wheeler.

"I'm rather surprised at you," said that worthy. "You're what I call a decent, clean youngster. I don't like to see you hand-in-glove with that howling young cad."

"Kindly keep at a low temperature, Ben," answered Reggie. "I am rather inclined to think that I am not really so foolish as I look."

Ben Wheeler became almost fierce.

"You leave the Nixons alone," he said; "they're dangerous."

Reggie did not let this warning affect his decision. He still cultivated Hubert Nixon, and battered himself that Hubert was quite convinced of his friendliness. If he had heard a conversation that took place at Hampton between father and son he would have had a surprise.

"That Reggie White is pumping me hard, pater," said Hubert.

"About your mother, I suppose? When she died, or whether she is really dead—eh?"

"Yes. You told me to lead him on. I'm doing it."

John Nixon looked very thoughtful.

"That youngster is going to be very useful to us," he said. "He thinks he is helping Mrs. Dell, but he is really doing a bit to help me. Did I tell you about the Dunsley Street picture-palace?"

"That's the one you lost so much money on—eh, pater?"

John Nixon nodded.

"Why don't you close it?"

"What about the money it cost to fit and furnish?" asked his father. "No; I'm going to get that money back somehow. And I think we'll use your new friend to do it."

For nearly two hours Hubert and his father talked over the way in which the money was to be got back. It wasn't a nice scheme.

The day after the conversation between the two Nixons Hubert suddenly surprised Reggie with a proposal.

"You have never seen any of the pater's palaces," he said. "I wish you would come with me and have a look over one of them."

Reggie readily agreed to the proposal, and together they set off to the picture-palace, which was situated in a decayed district near Euston.

As soon as ever Reggie saw the outside of the place he marvelled at the stupendous faith of any investor who could build such a gorgeous building in such a hopeless position; but when they got inside the building his wonder increased, as he remarked the almost princely luxury with which the building had been fitted.

The two boys were alone in the building, Hubert Nixon having come provided with a key to the side door, and they wandered about at their own sweet wills.

"Did you ever see a thousand pounds' worth of old films?" asked Hubert suddenly.

Reggie never had.

So Hubert led him down to the cellars, and here he showed him the old films.

"Good gracious," said Reggie, "they're lying about all over the shop!"

Hubert Nixon explained that workmen were careless, and didn't know the value of films. He then pointed to a small mirror.

"You stay here," he said, "and I'll go upstairs. I want you to watch that glass over in the corner and see if you notice any lights appear on it."

Reggie promised to do as he was requested, and the young plotter left him.

But the moment Hubert left the cellar a sudden suspicion crossed Reggie's mind. It was increased by the fact that he heard a slight click as the door closed. Swiftly he darted after Hubert, and the next minute understood what the click meant.

Hubert Nixon had locked the door of the cellar.

Films—terribly inflammable, almost explosive articles—lay about in heaps.

He feared now that Hubert meant to do a desperate deed. There might be a few seconds only, perhaps a minute or two. A glance at the door showed that there was no chance of escape that way.

Windows?

There were two—both long, narrow slits, and high up, and both secured with bars. The place seemed a terrible death-trap.

But a noise struck his ears—a noise of dripping water, and in one corner he saw a huge tank.

Just as he saw it, there appeared a glow of flame in a corner. The next moment there was a blinding flash and a wild roar, and the piles of old films burst into flames.

Another long instalment of this spine-did new serial story next Wednesday. Order your copy early!

UNIQUE FOUR-FOLD HAIR GIFT.

SPLENDID NEW ADDITION TO "HARLENE HAIR-DRILL."

Every Reader to Receive Valuable Hair Culture Parcel—FREE.

1,000,000 OUTFITS NOW READY.

SINCE the first day that Mr. Edwards gave to the world his wonderful plan of Harlene Hair-Drill—millions of people the world over have accepted what up to now has been described as his Triple Gift for Hair Beauty.

To-day he announces the astonishing fact that he yet further adds to the value of his Hair-growing Gift, and from henceforth everyone who desires to cultivate Hair Beauty may, simply by filling in and posting the Form below, secure the Harlene Hair-Drill Outfit of Four-Fold value.

It is the simplest thing in the world to encourage Hair Beauty, and no matter what the present state may be, whether you are suffering from scurf, dandruff, splitting hair, hair falling from the scalp, etc., you may by accepting this gift immediately eradicate all these troubles and grow hair in magnificent abundance.

THE NEW HAIR BEAUTY GIFT.

Just think for a moment of the contents of the wonderful parcel that you will receive:

(1) A Trial Bottle of "Harlene," the wonderful Hair Grower, which has been proved to grow hair at any age in the rich and lustrous abundance of health.

(2) A Packet of "Cremex" Shampoo Powder, the most wonderful hair cleanser and scalp refresher in the world, which prepares the head for "Hair-Drill."

(3) A generous trial bottle of "Uzon" Brilliantine that gives a wonderful "final" touch to hair beauty.

(4) A copy of the specially written "Harlene Hair-Drill" Manual, giving full directions for carrying out this delightful hair-growing Toilet Exercise.

If you are one of those who have not yet tested this marvellous method of growing healthy hair, you cannot appreciate what a simple yet perfectly delightful toilet task this is, and in addition it must be remembered that behind "Harlene" and the famous "Hair-Drill" method there is concentrated the science and a knowledge of a lifetime given to the study of hair culture.

WHAT "HARLENE HAIR-DRILL" REALLY IS.

"Harlene" itself is a wonderful Tonic Stimulant preparation which, sinking to the hair roots and being absorbed by the hair shafts, at once overcomes those

hundred and one evil conditions that make the hair weak and eventually fall out.

"Harlene" supplies just that perfect natural food that the hair needs, and immediately it is applied to the hair one can see how true this is by the fact that where previously the hair was dull and lifeless, with the use of "Harlene" it takes on a new brilliancy, a sparkle and snap that is its true natural condition.

To secure your Four-Fold Hair Beauty Parcel and commence your course of hair rejuvenation, which will incidentally take years from your appearance, simply fill in and post the form below.

If you have never tried the Harlene "Hair-Drill" method you will be delighted with this morning and evening task. Not only does it give Hair Beauty, but it gives a sense of freedom, elasticity to the scalp, and it is indeed a wonderful pleasure to see how day by day the hair takes on a new vitality and "snap" which perhaps it never before possessed.



A PLEASANT DAILY TASK.

When you have tested, by sending for the Four-Fold Harlene Gift, the wonderful results Harlene "Hair-Drill" will produce, you can always obtain larger supplies of Harlene in bottles at 1s., 2s. 6d., and 4s. 6d.; "Uzon" Brilliantine, 1s. and 2s. 6d.; and "Cremex" in 1s. boxes of 7 Shampoos, or single 2d. from any chemist, or direct post free on remittance from Edwards' Harlene Co., 20-26, Lamb's Conduit Street, London, W.C. Postage extra on foreign orders.

GREAT FREE

"HARLENE HAIR-DRILL" GIFT.

Fill in and post to Edwards' Harlene Co.,
20-26, Lamb's Conduit St., London, W.C.

Dear Sirs,—Please forward me free of all charge your "Harlene Hair-Drill" Four-Fold Outfit and all materials. I enclose 4d. stamps to pay postage to any address in the world. (Foreign stamps accepted.)

Name.....

Address.....

GEM, February 26th, 1918.



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — — — —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON ST. LONDON, E.C.
OUR · · THREE · · COMPANION · · PAPERS!
"THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY CHUCKLES.
— LIBRARY — ; — POPULAR — ; — — 1/2° —
EVERY MONDAY ; EVERY FRIDAY ; EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday:

"MANNERS MINOR!"

By Martin Clifford.

In next week's grand, long, complete school story of the chums of St. Jim's we are introduced to Master Reggie Manners, the reckless, unprincipled brother of the celebrated Shell photographer. Master Manners comes to St. Jim's as a pupil with great reluctance, and soon sets himself at enmity with the school in general, and his own Form-fellows in particular. He proves to be a thorough sneak, and the Saints naturally detest sneaking in any shape or form, and give the new boy a very rough time. Despite his failings, however, it is seen that there is a touch of the right stuff about

"MANNERS MINOR!"

and that he will probably settle down when he has been successfully licked into shape.

A BOOK THAT ALL SHOULD BUY.

On Friday, March 3rd, my Gemite chums will be given a rare and refreshing treat, for on that day famous Frank Richards will delight the hearts of the boys of Britain with his grand new threepenny book story, entitled:

"RIVALS AND CHUMS!"

Although the scene is laid mainly at Greyfriars, every reader of the "Gem" Library will cordially welcome such an entrancing story; and if the book sells well—as it deserves to do—I shall have pleasure in instructing Mr. Martin Clifford to produce another threepenny book exclusive for Gemites.

"Rivals and Chums" will be easily distinguished by its striking cover, which depicts a couple of close chums walking arm-in-arm along the country road at sunset.

Those of my chums who make a point of keeping a little library of these extra-special threepenny books, and who already treasure copies of "Tom Merry & Co.," "Through Thick and Thin," "The Boy Without a Name," and "School and Sport," will be very anxious to enrich their collection with "Rivals and Chums"; but I would forewarn them that it is necessary, in order to obtain a copy of Frank Richards' latest masterpiece, to order at once from their newsagents

THE "BOYS' FRIEND" THREEPENNY COMPLETE LIBRARY, No. 328.

TRY FOR A TUCK-HAMPER TO-DAY!

Every Gemite who has not yet purchased a copy of that delightful little halfpenny paper the "Greyfriars Herald" should do so at once. The main attraction is, of course, the splendid Tuck-Hamper contest, which all can enter without any fee or charge whatsoever.

Read the following letter from a lucky prizewinner:

"2, York Place, North Wingfield.

"Dear Editor.—Thank you very much for the delightful tuck-hamper which I received on Wednesday night.

"When I was bringing it from the station, it got so heavy that I was tempted to lessen its weight. What a surprise when I got home! It was ripping!

"I have told all my friends, and I think I have got five

new readers. The 'Greyfriars Herald' is splendid, and I wish it every success.

"The hamper was well worth winning, and I am going to try to get another.—Your sincere reader,

"CYRIL CHAPMAN."

I sincerely hope all my chums will take a leaf out of Master Chapman's book, and compete in our grand contest of skill to-day.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"A Son of Birmingham."—Imaginary, not real. As to other queries: (1) Knox is a prefect, as being one of the seniors of the Sixth; (2) D'Arcy is called "Gussy" because of his name—Augustus; (3) Bob Cherry is a humorist, and so, in quite another way is Skinner, whose humour takes the form of unpleasant and often caddish practical jokes. Tom Brown is a humorist of the right kind. Wibley might be counted one. And there are others!

R. Rennie (Aberdeen).—I don't suppose this is your real name. You say our stories are sheer rot, and go on to ask such questions as these: "Why has every school story that you have written got the same things, viz., an oak-tree beside the wall for the juniors to break bounds when required; a freak junior; a fat boy who could eat ten shillings' worth of stuff in five minutes? Why has Tom Merry a different face every week? Why don't you put in decent stories into the papers? Juniors like Ponsonby & Co. would be up to our mark. They smoke, swear, drink, and gamble. Why can't the goody-goody juniors like Merry and Blake mind their own business? They are always poking their nose into other people's business. How can juniors fling into water with their hands in their pockets? You will see this in 'Mason's Last Match.' Why do you make readers believe that Lowther would be so soft as to pay Trimble's accounts?" What a nice boy you are! I would undertake to produce plenty of loyal "Gem" readers who would, if you were obliging enough to place yourself within a yard of a ditch, very speedily put you into it without removing their hands from their pockets. They would enjoy it, too! Tom Merry, with a new face every week, ought not to have to share a nose with Blake, as you suggest he does—"their nose"! Write again, and cheer us up!

"Pierre" (Glasgow).—Talbot hardly ever is in the limelight now? Queer thing, but the Anti-Talbotites say he's always there! Bunter's ventriloquism is not by any means a lost gift.

Frank B. (Hamilton) writes: "Reggie Talbot is simply great!" He is evidently not one of the antis!

A. M. (South Croydon).—Glad to hear from you, but story-ette not quite up to the mark.

Grace E. (Highbury).—"And, above all, be at one of their study feeds!" It makes you sound quite Bunterish, doesn't it? But, as a young lady, you are not, I am sure, the least like W. G. B. Many thanks for very nicely-expressed praises.

"Glencairn."—I don't think the really up-to-date boy has much use for the Deadwood Dick type of yarn. The cinema is rather a different matter. All sorts of tastes are catered for there. Sorry your first letter remained unanswered.

Your Editor

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

HER PLAN.

Mrs. Justwed: "Well, dear, I've found a nice little flat, and the cars run right past the door."

Mr. Justwed: "But won't the noise of the cars disturb you, my love?"

Mrs. Justwed: "Oh, the landlord assured me that I wouldn't mind that after the first two nights, and, of course, we can sleep the first two nights at mother's."—Sent in by F. H. Watson, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

ATTENDING TO HIS NEEDS.

"The study of the occult sciences interests me very much," remarked the new boarder "I love to explore the dark depths of the mysterious, to delve into the regions of the unknown, to fathom what is believed by others to be unfathomable, and to—"

"May I help you to some of this hash, professor?" interrupted the landlady.

And she is still wondering why the other boarders smiled audibly.—Sent in by B. Dawce, Burnley, Lancs.

OVERHEARD AT A MILITARY CAMP.

Old Lady (to soldier): "Will you please tell me where I can find my son?"

Soldier: "What company does he belong to?"

Old Lady: "I don't know."

Soldier: "Well, what's his name?"

Old Lady: "Bill—my Bill—Bill Smith."

Soldier: "That won't help me much. What's his rank?"

Old Lady: "Oh! He's a general!"

Soldier (very much surprised): "A general, ma'am! Are you quite sure?"

Old Lady: "Well, I don't quite know whether he's a general or a corporal, but I'm sure he's a 'ral' of some sort."—Sent in by G. Drage, Rugby.

AN UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE.

Stationmaster: "I think someone will get into trouble over that train being three minutes late in starting from here."

Assistant: "Why? Any of the passengers complaining about it, sir?"

Stationmaster: "No; but the refreshment-bar manager says he'll make it hot for whoever's responsible. The passengers actually had time to eat what they had paid for."—Sent in by W. R. Stanton, Walsall, Staffs.

CAUTIONED!

Servant: "Please, mum, I want to leave; I've got a job in a munition factory."

Mistress: "Well, Mary, if you drop the shells about, as you do our crockery, you won't be there long!"—Sent in by Miss Stanley, Camberley.

PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE.

"What are you studying now?" asked Mrs. Jones of her son, who was receiving the benefits of a first-class education, a boon she had never received.

"We have taken up the study of molecules, mother," replied the son proudly.

"I hope you will be very attentive and practise constantly," said the mother. "I tried to get your father to wear one, but he was unable to keep it in his eye."—Sent in by C. H. S. Bassett, Anfield, Liverpool.

UNEXPECTED BREVITY.

A large audience had gathered to hear a certain noted dean give an address on a subject of topical interest.

The chair was taken by a local celebrity, who fancied himself as a speaker, and who held forth for nearly an hour in introducing the star of the occasion. At last he drew to a close, and announced:

"The dean will now give his address."

The dean, an irritable little man, sprang to his feet quivering with impatience.

"My address," he snapped, "is the Deanery, Blankchester, and I'm going back there now!"—Sent in by A. L. Evans, Swansea.

UNMISTAKABLE GENEROSITY.

The taximeter registered exactly two shillings, and the dear old lady, after fumbling for some time with her purse, tendered the driver, by way of payment, a florin and a half-penny.

The man took the coins, and was about to thrust them into his pocket, when:

"Ere, mum!" he shouted. "You've made a mistake. This 'ere's a ha'penny!"

The old lady's silver hair glistened in the sunlight as she turned towards the driver with a look of genuine admiration on her face.

"You're a very honest man," she remarked softly; "but keep the coin, please. As a matter of fact, it's quite all right. I never give less."—Sent in by J. Flood, King's Cross, W.C.

A COUNTER ATTRACTION.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered the hosier's shop in Wayland, and regarded the man behind the counter with distinct disapproval.

"I say," he piped, "could you take that yellow tie with the pink spots out of the window for me?"

"Certainly, sir!" said the shopman politely. "Pleased to take anything from the window for you at any time, sir!"

"Thanks awfully!" retorted the one and only Gussy, with a sigh of relief. "The beastly thing bothers me howwibly every time I pass the shop. Good-morning!"

And before the shopman had time to recover from his surprise, Gussy had disappeared.—Sent in by E. Higgs, Westminster, S.W.

SHE WAS DETERMINED TO KEEP COOL.

A man was walking along a certain street, and noticed that a fire had broken out in a house opposite. He rushed across the road and rang the bell.

After some time, a lady, who proved to be slightly deaf, appeared at the door.

"Madam, your house is on fire," the man hastily informed her.

"What did you say?" came the calm rejoinder.

The man began dancing up and down in his excitement, and, pointing up at the flames, yelled:

"I said your house is on fire! Flames bursting out! No time to lose!"

"What did you say?"

"House on fire! Quick!" bellowed the man desperately.

The lady smiled.

"Is that all?" she said sweetly.

"Well," replied the man, thoroughly exasperated "that's about all I can think of just now!"—Sent in by Eric E. Naylor, Sheffield.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

THE BOYS' FRIEND, 1d.,

Published every Monday,

in order to give more of our readers a chance of winning one of our useful Money Prizes.

If you know a really funny joke, or a short, interesting paragraph, send it along (on a post-card) before you forget it, and address it to: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND and GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, E.C.

Look out for YOUR Prize Storyette in next week's GEM or BOYS' FRIEND.



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