

THE THIRD-FORM SWEEPSTAKE!

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



BUMPED!

(An Exciting Scene in the Grand, Long, Complete School Story in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to — — — — —
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EVERY MONDAY ; EVERY FRIDAY ; EVERY SATURDAY.



For Next Wednesday :

"HERRIES' ORCHESTRA!"

By **Martin Cifford.**

The chums of George Herries are not particularly keen on his scheme for raising an orchestra to give a performance on behalf of the Red Cross Fund, and they call him several kinds of an ass when they learn that he has inserted an advertisement for performers in a local paper. Herries himself begins to be dubious when he finds what weird specimens answer this advertisement. But he carries his idea through with dogged pluck, though, except for Dick Brooke, the day boy, he gets little aid from inside St. Jim's. A caddish attempt to wreck the whole business is made by Crooke and Mellish—in fact, they made a series of attempts, one of which results in the coming over of no less a person than Billy Hunter of Greyfriars, to conduct the orchestra for Herries, if you please! Still, Herries sticks to his guns, and Brooke supports him loyally, and the end is a triumphant success for

"HERRIES' ORCHESTRA!"

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE.

Again and again I have told my readers that the insertion of a notice or a reply in next week's issue is absolutely impossible, for the simple reason that we print some time in advance. Some of them do not seem to understand what is meant. It is simply this. When your letter or notice is received, next week's issue—and, for the matter of that, the one to follow it—is already printed, and ready to go out. To insert anything in it could only be done at the trouble of printing ever so many thousand leaflets, and at a cost of many pounds. You hardly expect that, I am sure! So don't ask for a reply or an insertion next week, because it is useless, and, being useless, annoying. Most of the letters in which this request is made are without names and addresses of their senders, so that I am given no chance of replying to them at all. And on this matter of replies to letters, let me say here that the answering of letters is a favour, not a right which readers can demand. I take my correspondence quite seriously; but there are other things of more importance—getting each issue of the paper out in good time, for instance; and this means that there must be times when it gets behind. So be as patient as you know how, and try to remember that the imaginary pictures painted by a youthful correspondent whose angry letter was given publicity some few weeks ago, is—well, very imaginary indeed! He depicted me as sitting in an easy-chair, with nothing to do but to answer queries as to the ages of Tom Merry and Kildare. But there are lots of other things to be done, you know. In fact, unless I am very careful, I frequently find myself working quite hard!

A MISSING BOY.

To L. B. H. (Sunderland.)—Come home, or at least write. Mother ill. All forgiven.

THE "MAGNET" CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

Week after next. A really great issue. Mr. Frank Richards has written for it a magnificent double-length story, entitled,

"THE HOUSE ON THE HEATH!"

And there are no end of other attractions, including some pages of extracts from recent numbers of "The Greyfriars Herald." Price 2d.

OUR NOTICES.

Leagues, Correspondence, etc.

Private H. de Groot, 22457, B Co., 11th Batt. Gloucestershire Regt., South Camp, Seaford, is a South African reader without any friends in this country, and would be glad to correspond with some of our boy readers.

J. Murray, Mount Annan, Annan, wants more members for the Universe Correspondence League. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Laurence T. Murphy, 142, Stanley Road, Kirkdale, Liverpool, is forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League for readers of 13-15 anywhere in the British Empire, with a Correspondence Exchange.

F. Harling, 3, St. Mary's Road, Bishopcote, near Eastleigh, would like to correspond with some New Zealand readers.

Miss Violet Bird, 14, Bank Street, Bradley, Bilston, would like to correspond with another girl reader of about 12.

R. H. Brown, 2, Arthur Street, Anlaby Road, Hull, is trying to form an Amateur Photographers' League, open to anyone in the United Kingdom. Possession of a camera not a necessary qualification. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

J. Estcourt Hughes, 46, Dinsdale Street, Albert Park, Victoria Australia, would like to hear from any quite young boy story-writer.

Les Evans, 261, Bridge Street, Port Melbourne, Australia, would be glad to correspond with boy readers anywhere.

J. Mansfield, 42, South Bank Road, Edge Lane, Liverpool, is starting an amateur magazine, and would be glad to hear from readers who would care to contribute.

S. Cleaver, 27, Westville Road, Shepherd's Bush, W., is forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League and Correspondence Exchange, and will be pleased to send particulars on receipt of a stamped and addressed envelope.

B. Bashford, 265, Barclay Road, Warley, near Birmingham, would like to correspond with readers with a view to the formation of a "Gem" and "Magnet" League.

Miss Ethel Edwards, 208, Kotze Street, Pretoria, South Africa, would be glad to correspond with girl readers of 19 or over.

Back Numbers Wanted, etc.

By H. G. Clark, 80, Princes Road, Richmond—"Mason's Last Match."

Private A. Scott, 17662, 13 Platoon, D Coy., 32nd Royal Fusiliers, B.E.F., France, would be very glad to have current issue of the companion papers sent him regularly, if any reader will oblige.

H. Kennedy, Castle Street, Bellaghy, Co. Londonderry, would be glad to buy a pair of second-hand chamois leather boxing gloves.

By W. W. Tomlinson, 303, Great Western Street, Moss Side, Manchester—Any number of the "Gem" up to the end of Vol. 5.

By C. E. Hargreaves, 19, Chesterfield Road, North Shore, Blackpool—"Gem" and "Magnet," Nos. 1-400. Must be cheap.

By A. Harris, 8, Townshend Road, Richmond—"Gem," No. 394.

By G. Herbert, 5, Verulam Road, Hitchin—The stories of Talbot before No. 359, and the "Gem" Christmas Numbers 1915 (complete).

Your Editor

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

THE THIRD-FORM SWEEPSTAKE!

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



There was a queer smell in the Third Form-room as Levison of the Fourth opened the door and looked in. Wally & Co. had laid in kippers for supper, and they were cooking them at the fire. (See Chapter 5.)

CHAPTER I. Stamp Collectors!

“Gussy, old scout!”

Wally of the Third thus addressed his major, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

It was quite a disrespectful way of addressing the swell of St. Jim's; but Wally's manners, unlike his major's, lacked the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon his minor with a look which was calculated to wither on the spot any person less hardy and cheeky than the scamp of the Third. But Wally did not even turn a hair. He grinned.

“Weally, Wally, you are intewwuptin' me!”
“Well, I can't wait till the end of the century,” explained Wally. “So I'm bound to interrupt you.”
“Pway wun away, and don't be a checkay young ass, Wally!”

It was not a judicious moment for interrupting Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was laying down the law on the subject of the off-side rule to an interested and attentive audience. Blake and Herries and Digby were listening with all their ears. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were listening with expressions of owl-like gravity. Julian and Levison and Clive had gathered round also, hanging, as it were, upon the words as they dropped from the noble lips of Arthur Augustus.

A more suspicious fellow than Gussy might have guessed

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HERRIES' ORCHESTRA! AND **“FOES OF FORTUNE!”**

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that the solemn and attentive juniors were pulling his leg. But Gussy didn't. He was delighted to find so attentive an audience, and he ran on eloquently, laying down the law without a dissentient voice being heard.

And then came Wally of the Third, with his cheeky face and cheeky grin, and spots of ink on his collar, interrupting his major in the full tide of his eloquence.

Arthur Augustus was generally very kind to his minor. He lent him bobs, and gave him lectures upon keeping a neat appearance. Wally accepted the bobs with cheerful alacrity, and made wry faces over the lectures, which he never listened to unless they preceded the bobs. But just now Arthur Augustus had no time to waste on a fag of the Third. It was the first chance of expounding his views on the difficult subject of the off-side rule at full length. And he turned his back on Wally and proceeded.

"As I was remarkin', deah boys— Yawoooooh!"

Arthur Augustus did not really mean that he was remarking "Yawoooooh!" He uttered that startled ejaculation as Wally's elbow dug him in the ribs.

"Gwoogh! Wally, you young wuffian—"

"I'm speaking to you!" said Wally.

"Wun away, you young wascal!"

"Got any stamps, Gussy?"

"Wats!"

"I want some stamps!" said D'Arcy minor. "Now, shell out, cocky! I sha'n't let you go on gassing till you do."

"You disrespectful young wottah, how dare you chawact-wise my remarks as gassin'?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "You will weally dwive me into givin' you a feahful thwashin', Wally! I shall be sowwy—"

"You would, if you started!" agreed Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at in Wally's disrespectful remarks, you fellahs. Wun away and play, you young wagamuffian!"

"But I want some stamps!"

"Bai Jove! It's a feahful wesponsibility and wowwy to have a minah in the School!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "You are intewwuptin' me, Wally!"

"Yes. I want some stamps!"

"You are a weckless young-wascal to wun out of stamps. Howevah, how many stamps do you want?"

"Twelve."

"Gweat Scott! I suppose you are not goin' to w'ite twelve lettahs?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"I want twelve stamps," said D'Arcy minor. "Don't ask questions, Gussy. You've told me yourself that little boys shouldn't ask questions."

"You cheeky young wascal—"

"Ob, buck up, Gus! You do jaw, and no mistake!"

Arthur Augustus drew a deep breath. Wally was in great danger at that moment of receiving a "feahful thwashin'." However, Arthur Augustus decided upon the more brotherly course of acceding to his request, and getting rid of him in that way. He took out his dainty little Russia-leather pocket-book and opened it. He had a sheet of stamps inside. Gussy was generally careful in these matters, and did not run out of stamps like common or garden fellows.

"There you are, you young wuffian!"

"Thanks, old scout!" said Wally, taking the stamps. "I'll let you have the bob for them some time!"

"If you mean a shillin', Wally, I wish you would call it a shillin'!"

"I mean a bob!" said Wally. "Ta-ta! Now get on with the gas!"

And Wally walked away, whistling a shrill whistle.

Arthur Augustus returned his pocket-book to his pocket. His noble brow wore a severe frown.

"What the dickens does the kid want twelve stamps for?" said Levison of the Fourth.

Levison was rather inquisitive.

"Pwobably sendin' a contwibution to a war fund," said Arthur Augustus. "Now, as I was remarkin', deah boys, on the subject of the off-side rule—"

"Go ahead!" said Monty Lowther heartily.

"I am vewy glad you are intewwested, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, rather," said Lowther. "I'm watching you like anything."

"Watchin' me? You mean listenin' to me!" said Arthur Augustus, puzzled.

"I mean watching you," said Lowther. "It's quite an entertainment. Go on! You were talking about footer, or cricket, or something."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, I've got a bet on with Manners," pursued Lowther. "I've bet him even money in doughnuts that you can keep on moving your lower jaw for an hour without getting tired. Tommy's timing you."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus' aristocratic countenance crimsoned with wrath. For the first time it dawned upon him why the School House fellows were so deeply interested in his exposition of the off-side rule.

"Lowthah, you uttah wottah!"

"Go it!" said Jack Blake. "You've only done a quarter of an hour so far. But your lower jaw hasn't stopped a minute. I'm a witness."

"Blake, you feahful beast—"

"It's going," said Digby. "It's going strong. Keep it up, Gussy! Lowther will win that doughnut!"

"I wefuse to say anothead word!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "I wegard you as a set of wottin' boundahs!"

"It's still wagging!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The expression on Arthur Augustus' face made the juniors roar. Before the swell of St. Jim's could think of anything sufficiently crushing to say there was another interruption. Levison minor of the Third came up and nudged his major.

"Can you lend me twelve stamps?" he asked.

Levison of the Fourth stared at him.

"Hallo! You in want of stamps too? You subscribin' to war funds?"

"No," said the fag, colouring. "I—I want twelve stamps!"

"Well, here's a bob!"

"A bob's no good, thanks! I want stamps," said Frank Levison. "Never mind! I can cut down to the post-office, Ernie. I've got a bob, thanks!"

And Levison minor hurried off before his major could ask any questions.

Levison stared after him, evidently puzzled.

Hobbs of the Third was hovering round the group, and he came up.

"Any of you chaps got some stamps to sell?" he asked.

"Stamps!" exclaimed the juniors all together.

"Yes. I want twelve. I've got the money!" added Hobbs reassuringly.

"There seems to be a run on stamps in the Third," said Tom Merry, in astonishment. "What on earth's the little game?"

"I wegard you fellahs—"

"Got twelve stamps, anybody?" demanded Hobbs.

There was a shaking of heads. They were ready to oblige the fag, but nobody had so many stamps.

"Then you can go and eat coke!" said Hobbs.

And he walked off, and a few moments later was seen stopping Figgins of the Fourth in the quad, evidently with a request for stamps.

"Bai Jove, that is wathah peculiar!" said Arthur Augustus, forgetting his wrath for a moment. "What do all the young beggars want stamps for? Howevah, I was goin' to say that I wegard you wotten boundahs with nttah despision—I mean contempt—"

"Go it!" said Lowther. "It's been wagging for twenty minutes now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to address anothead remark to you uttah wottahs!" roared Arthur Augustus, and he stalked away with his noble nose high in the air.

And the juniors chuckled, and went in to tea, having expended a spare interval in the harmless and necessary amusement of pulling Arthur Augustus' aristocratic leg.

CHAPTER 2.

Very Queer!

"HALLO, Reggie!"

The Terrible Three were at tea in their study when Manners minor came in. Manners of the Shell greeted him cordially.

Tom Merry pointed to a chair.

"Squat down, kid!" he said hospitably.

Reggie shook his head.

"Thanks! I haven't come to tea," he said; "I've looked in for some stamps, if you've got any, Harry."

Tom Merry and Lowther stared, and Henry Manners uttered an ejaculation of surprise.

"Stamps!"

"Yes, stamps," said Reggie. "I want some stamps, and it's a long fag down to the post-office, so—"

"Twelve, I suppose?" said Manners.

"Yes, twelve. How did you know?"

"Oh, I guessed! You're the fourth fag that's wanted stamps in the last hour, and the others all wanted twelve," said Manners. "What's the little game?"

"Game?" repeated Reggie vaguely.

"Yes. What on earth does everybody in the Third want twelve stamps for, all of a sudden?"



"Well, what's on, Ernie?" Levison minor asked. "Only a jaw," said Levison major. The fag looked a little uneasy. (See Chapter 5.)

"Do they?" said Reggie. "Well, a chap wants stamps sometimes, you know."

"You mean you're not going to tell me?"

Reggie grinned.

"I've got some stamps in my desk," said Manners, with a very curious look at his minor. "These chaps can make them up to a dozen, I dare say."

"I've got one," said Lowther. "Reggie's welcome to that. It's been used once, though."

"Silly ass!" said Reggie. "I don't want used stamps. Keep your funny remarks for the 'Weekly,' old chap. Let's have the stamps, Harry!"

Manners major went to his desk and turned out eight stamps. Tom Merry added two.

"That's ten. I'll dig up two more somewhere else," said Reggie. "I've got the money; here you are!"

He laid tenpence on the table.

"Right-ho!"

Reggie Manners picked up the stamps, and left the study. Tom Merry and Lowther looked puzzled, and Manners frowned a little.

"That's jolly queer!" Manners remarked.

"Competition or something, I expect," said Tom. "Pass the toast!"

The Terrible Three had just finished tea, and were about to leave the study, when Joe Frayne looked in.

"Skuse me, Master Tom!" said Frayne.

Little Joe, once a plum denizen of the East End of London,

had never quite dropped his way of addressing Tom Merry as Master Tom. The cheery fag of St. Jim's had never quite forgotten the past, and he was never likely to forget what Tom Merry had done for him.

"Go it, kid!" said Tom encouragingly. "Anything wanted?"

"If you've got some stamps to spare, Master Tom—"

"Stamps!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Yes," said Joe, looking surprised. "I want some stamps—"

"Twelve—eh?"

"Yes, please! I've got the bob," added Joe quickly.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Lowther. "What the merry thunder does it mean? What do you want the stamps for, kid?"

"Oh, I—I want 'em!" said Joe, rather evasively.

"Is it a competition?" asked Tom Merry.

"A—a sort of one, Master Tom."

"Well, I haven't any stamps," said Tom. "Reggie's just been here and cleared the study out of stamps."

"Oh, I didn't know Reggie had been 'ere!" said Joe.

"Never mind, Master Tom. I dare say I can find 'em somewhere else."

And he quitted the study at once.

"The plot thickens," grinned Monty Lowther. "There is something weird and mysterious proceeding in the festive halls of the Third."

"The kids may be going in for a newspaper competition,"

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

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"HERRIES' ORCHESTRA!"

remarked Manners thoughtfully. "Curious they won't say what it is, though. You remember that shady cad, Trimble of the Fourth, went in for a competition some time ago—a racing competition I wonder—"

Tom Merry shook his head decidedly.

"Frayne wouldn't have anything to do with that kind of thing," he said. "Young Wally wouldn't, either."

"I can't be so jolly sure about young Reggie," grunted Manners. "If it's all above-board, I don't see why they want to be so jolly secret about it. Trimble may have brought in another of his rotten sporting papers, and the fags may have got hold of it. I think I'll speak to the fat bouncer."

"If that's the case, we'll jolly well bump him!" said Tom Merry emphatically.

The Terrible Three made their way to the Fourth Form passage. They passed Piggott of the Third on the way, and Monty Lowther stopped.

"Piggott, my pippin!"

Piggott looked at him in his sulky way. Piggott of the Third was not an estimable character. He spent more time with Crooke of the Shell and Mellish of the Fourth than with his own Form-fellows, and he was, in spite of his youth, as shady as the shadiest of the black sheep of the School House. Even Racke of the Shell was not a more thorough young rascal than Piggott of the Third.

"Hallo!" growled Piggott.

"Don't you want some stamps?" asked Lowther.

Piggott started

"Stamps!" he repeated.

"Yes."

"What the dickens are you getting at?" growled Piggott.

"Don't you want twelve stamps?" demanded Lowther, looking astonished.

"No, I don't!"

"Well, my hat! You're the only kid in the Third who doesn't!" grinned Lowther. "What does this run on stamps in the Third mean, Piggy?"

"Find out!" retorted Piggott, and he scudded away down the passage before Lowther could reach his ear.

"Well, there's one fag at least who doesn't want stamps!" remarked Tom Merry. "Here's Trimble's study."

Tom knocked at the door, and went in, followed by his chums. Baggy Trimble shared that study with Levison and Mellish and Lumley-Lumley, but the fat Fourth-Former was alone in it now. He was rummaging through a desk, and grunting with discontent, evidently disappointed at not finding what he wanted.

He stared round as the Shell fellows came in.

"You fellows got any stamps?" he asked.

"Oh, my hat! Stamps?"

"Yes, stamps. I thought there might be one or two in my desk, but there ain't," said Trimble. "I happen to want a dozen."

"Just a dozen?" asked Manners.

"Yes, just a dozen. I'll let you have the bob later on. Julian owes me a bob, and I'll hand it over when he settles."

"We've got no stamps," said Tom Merry. "We've come here to ask you a question. A lot of fags want a dozen stamps, and you seem to be on the same tack. What's the little game?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Is it a competition?"

"Sorry I've got no time to talk!" said Trimble calmly. "I've got to go and see Racke. Ta-ta!"

Manners shoved the fat junior back as he moved to leave the study. Trimble gave a howl.

"Look here, you know—"

"We want to know what's going on," said Manners.

"Mind your own business!"

"This may be our business. Some time ago you brought in a rotten racing paper, with a swindling competition in it. Is this the same thing over again?"

"No, it isn't."

"Is it a newspaper competition at all?"

"No."

"Then what is it?" demanded Manners.

Trimble blinked longingly at the door. But there was evidently no escape for him till he had answered Manners' question.

"I—I— The fact is—" he stammered.

"Go ahead!" growled Manners.

Trimble's eyes glimmered.

"You fellows won't mention it?" he asked.

"That depends."

"Well, I sha'n't tell you if you're going to spread it all over the School House," said Trimble. "A chap doesn't like to look like swanking."

"Swanking!" said Tom Merry.

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"Well, it's better to keep such things dark," said Trimble. "Everybody ought to send a bit to the Red Cross Fund, but a chap doesn't want to tell everybody that he's doing it. Looks rather rotten, you know."

"Do you mean to say that you want stamps to send to a fund?" exclaimed Manners.

"What did you think I wanted them for?" asked Trimble.

Manners eyed him very doubtfully. Trimble was not a very truthful youth, nor was he the kind of fellow to give anything away.

"Is that the truth?" demanded Manners, after a pause.

"Look here, you know—"

"And are the fags sending a bob each to the Red Cross as well?" asked Manners.

Trimble nodded cheerfully.

"Yes; they're following my example," he said. "I always try to set chaps a good example, you know. You fellows might do worse than keep your eye on me and follow my example sometimes. You'd feel all the better for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

"Oh, come on!" growled Manners. "I believe he's lying. But you can't get the truth out of him without a pair of forceps."

The Terrible Three left the study greatly puzzled. Trimble winked at the ceiling when they were gone, and chuckled a fat chuckle. Then he resumed his quest for stamps, and, with great impartiality, searched Levison's and Lumley-Lumley's desks as well as his own.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy's Advice is Taken.

"I HAVE been thinkin', Tom Mewwy—"

"Not really?" said the captain of the Shell incredulously.

"What with?" asked Monty Lowther, with keen interest.

"Pway don't wot, deah boys. I have been thinkin'. We are playin' the New House to-morrow at footah. What about givin' Levison a chance?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I have been thinking of that myself," he remarked.

"I think it's a wathah good ideah," said Arthur Augustus. "Levison has been takin' up footah in weally a cweaditable way, and he ought to be encouraged. Pway excuse me for shovin' in my oar on the subject," added Arthur Augustus gracefully.

"My dear chap, your advice is always worth listening to—especially on the subject of the off-side rule."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But it's right about Levison," said Tom doubtfully. "He's shown jolly good form, and I think he ought to have a chance in a House match. Now he's a member of the club he must have a look-in. Of course, some other fellow will have to stay out to make room for him."

"That's only fair, deah boy. Chaps can't bag places in the matches all the time, with equally good playahs hangin' about."

"Quite so. I'll give Levison a chance."

"Vewy good."

Arthur Augustus, having put in that kind word for Levison of the Fourth, sauntered gracefully away.

"It's a good idea," said Tom Merry to his chums. "I thought Levison was playing the ox at first, but he's sticking to footer, and he's entitled to his turn in the House matches at least. Here's the eleven." Tom drew his footer list from his pocket. "Herries in goal, Reilly and Glyn, backs; Manners, Kangaroo, Lowther, halves; Talbot, Julian, self, Blake, and D'Arcy, forwards. That's a good House team."

"Jolly good, especially the halves," said Lowther, and Manners grinned and nodded.

"As good as the New House can put up, I should say," Tom remarked. "Of course, their goalie's best. Fatty Wynn can't be beaten. But everywhere else we're a point or two ahead, especially in the front line—ahem! Now, who's going out to make room for Levison to-morrow?"

"Levison's a forward," remarked Manners casually.

"Yes; he will have to be in the front line."

"What about centre?"

"Bow-wow! He's as good as Julian, but it's Julian's first chance in a House match, too, so I can't turn him out very well. Talbot can't be spared at any price; and I'm a fixture in the middle. It's between Blake and Gussy. I say, Blake!"

Jack Blake of the Fourth was passing, and he came up as Tom Merry called.

"Hallo!" said Blake cheerily.

"I'm thinking of giving Levison a show in the House match to-morrow."

"Not a bad idea!" assented Blake. "He's sticking to it. It seems to be genuine."

"Outside or inside left?" said Tom. "Which do you think?"

Blake glared. He was inside-left.

"Oh, don't be funny!" he said. "Study Number Six can't stand out. I've let you leave out Dig to give Julian a turn already."

"You don't think we could spare inside-left?" grinned Tom.

"No, I don't! Quite impossible!"

"Levison's all right at outside," said Monty Lowther. "And it was Gussy's suggestion to play him."

"Ha, ha!"

"Good! Outside-left it is!" said Tom Merry; and he wrote down Levison's name on the list, crossing out that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "After all, Gussy will be pleased at having his suggestion adopted."

"I don't think he quite expected you to adopt it in that way," grinned Blake. "Still, it's only fair for Levison to have a chance."

Tom Merry proceeded in search of Levison of the Fourth. He found that youth in his study.

He was not smoking, as he generally was when he was found alone in his study. Ernest Levison had made some changes in his personal habits since his minor had come to St. Jim's; and, though it was doubtful how far his reform had gone, it had certainly gone further than most of the fellows who knew him had ever expected.

"What are you doing to-morrow afternoon, Levison?" the captain of the Shell inquired.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm going down to see Grimes in Rylcombe," he said—"unless you want me in the House match," he added sarcastically.

"Just what I do want."

Levison started a little.

"You're going to play me?"

"Yes, if you're willing."

"Oh, I'm willing enough!" said Levison, with a laugh. "I never expected you to give me a chance, that's all."

"I don't see why you shouldn't," said Tom quietly. "You're a good forward, and you're entitled to your turn. I'm putting you in as outside-left."

"Good!" said Levison heartily. "You can depend on me to play a good game."

"No more smokes till after the match at least," said Tom.

"That's understood."

"It's settled, then."

Tom Merry left the study, and went downstairs to post up the list on the board. He wondered whether he had been rather unjust in previous times to the black sheep of the Fourth. Levison was a curious mixture of good and bad, but certainly of late the good seemed to be predominating.

A number of juniors gathered round to read the list as Tom Merry pinned it on the board.

House matches were not so important as school matches, but the rivalry between School House and New House was keen, and fellows were glad to see their names in the list.

"Hallo! You've got Levison in!" remarked Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Yes; he's playing to-morrow."

"Wippen!" said Arthur Augustus, coming along the passage. "I am vewy glad you have adopted my suggestion, Tom Mewwy."

"Don't mench," said Tom. "I couldn't do better."

"Yaaa, that is vewy twue. I suppose you are leavin' out Julian?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, pewwaps Blake won't mind standin' out to give Levison a turn," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Blake's not standing out," smiled Tom Merry.

"Not Talbot, surely?"

"No, not Talbot."

"Bai Jove! You are not standin' out yourself, Tom Mewwy, and puttin' in Levison as centah-forward?"

"No fear!"

"But Levison is a forward. You are not puttin' him in at half or back?"

"Oh, no!"

"He would not be so good as Hewwies in goal, deah boy."

"Herries is keeping goal, old scout."

"Then I weally do not see where you have put Levison," said Arthur Augustus, in a very perplexed way.

There was a chuckle among the juniors, and Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass suspiciously upon the captain of the Shell.

"Where have you put Levison, Tom Mewwy?"

"Outside left," said Tom blandly.

"You uttah ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then where are you puttin' me?" demanded Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"My dear chap, you said somebody wouldn't mind standing out to make room for Levison."

"I was weferrin' to one of the infewiah playahs, of course," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Yes, I've left out one of them," assented Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard that we mark as uttably asinine, Tom Mewwy! I wepeat, if I am not goin' to be outside left, what am I goin' to be?"

"Left outside," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Always give me good advice, whenever it comes into your head, old fellow," said Tom Merry. "I'll always try to follow your advice, Gussy. This was a ripping suggestion of yours, old chap!"

And Tom walked away before the swell of St. Jim's could find words to reply.

Arthur Augustus gazed fixedly at the list on the board, and then shook his head and walked off, apparently not wholly satisfied with the adoption of his valuable suggestion. And Levison minor, who had been gloating over his major's name in the footer list, hurried off to spread the news in the Third that Levison was playing for his House—news that was received at first with incredulity, and then with wonder, by the fags.



CHAPTER 4. A Tempting Offer.

P IGGOTT of the Third came into Levison's study. The occupants of the study had finished their prep, and Mellish and Trimble and Lumley-Lumley had gone down. Levison was about to follow, when the Third-Former came in.

"Hold on a minute!" said Piggott.

"I want to speak to you."

Levison gave him a look of distaste.

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

"I hear you're playing in the House match to-morrow," said Piggott, eyeing him very curiously.

"You can see my name on the board, if you look."

"Yes. It's jolly queer!"

"Is that all you've got to say?"

"Oh, no." Piggott closed the study door. "This may turn out a jolly good thing, Levison. Have you got any money on the match?"

"No," growled Levison.

"Then it doesn't matter to you which way it goes?"

Levison stared at him.

"I don't follow you. I want my team to win, if that's what you mean."

"What the dickens does it matter to you whether it wins or not, if you've not got a bet on the result?" demanded Piggott.

Levison did not reply to that.

"Well, I've got a bet on," said Piggott, in a low voice.

"It's with Racke of the Shell. He's backed School House for two quids with me!"

"Well?" snapped Levison.

"I've backed New House. They can't beat Fatty Wynn in goal, and the rest of the men are much of a muchness," said Piggott. "I think New House have the best chance of pulling it off, don't you?"

"Not if I can help it!"

"That's what I'm coming to. Racke gave me two to one, and I stand to lose a quid if we win the match."

"I hope you will," said Levison.

"If Figgins' team wins, I bag two quids," said Piggott; "and I'm willing to go halves."

"Halves?"

"Yes. I think Figgins has the best chance; but it's a mighty uncertain game. But with you in the School House team, it ought to be a dead cert—if a quid's any good to you!"

Levison looked fixedly at the young blackguard.

"You're asking me to give the match away, so that you can bag a quid from Racke?" he said.

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"There'll be a quid for you, too," said Piggott eagerly; "and I could put on some more money, if you agree. Racke would put up some more, and I think I could work it with Crooke, too. I'll put on some money for you, if you like. Of course, you'd better not appear personally in the matter."

Levison clenched his hands hard.

He had no right to blame Piggott for making such a proposition. It was quite in keeping with the kind of rascality the black sheep of the School House were accustomed to.

Piggott evidently had no suspicion that Levison would feel insulted at the suggestion. Why should he?

Why should he, indeed? The change in Ernest Levison had perhaps gone deeper than he had suspected himself.

He felt an almost irresistible desire to take the young rascal by the scruff of the neck and pitch him headlong out of the study.

The glitter in his eyes struck Piggott, and he started back a little.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Levison laughed, a hard, bitter laugh. After all, what right had he to be angry or indignant?

"Nothing," he said. "You expect me to do as you ask?"

"Why not? You've got a good place in the team, and you can let the N w House have every chance. The teams are pretty well matched, anyway, and a rotten player on one side will make all the difference. If you choose, you can make a New House win a dead cert."

"No doubt about that!"

"And I can get a lot of money booked on the match," said Piggott, his eyes glistening. "I might get a bet with Cutts of the Fifth. He's backed the side several times, I know."

"What a merry harvest we might reap between us!" remarked Levison.

"You'll do it?"

"No, I won't do it," said Levison coolly.

Piggott's eyes gleamed.

"Why won't you do it? Why should you care twopence about Racke or Crooke? Do you think they wouldn't serve you the same trick, if they could?"

"I know they would."

"And I tell you there's a pot of money in it," urged Piggott. "Look here, I'm in funds now, and I can afford to put up money. Fellows like Cutts wouldn't bet with me without money down, but I happen to be in funds."

Levison looked at him suspiciously.

"I don't see where you got your funds from," he said. "You're generally hard up. I know you jolly well haven't made anything on geegees!"

"Never mind where I got my tin," said Piggott coolly. "I'm in funds, and that's enough. I've got four quids to lay on the match, if it's a dead cert!"

"Four pounds!" ejaculated Levison.

"Yes."

"Out of half-a-crown a week pocket-money?" exclaimed the Fourth-Former. "Whom have you been robbing?"

"Don't ask questions, and I'll tell you no lies," said Piggott calmly. "I've got the money, and money talks. Look here, Levison, it's a big chance, and you stand to get halves!"

Levison pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said briefly.

"You won't do it!"

"No!"

"But why won't you?" persisted the fag. "What's the game?"

"There isn't any game. I happen to be going straight for once, that's all," said Levison. "You can travel!"

"You've got something on that you won't let me into, you mean," said the rascally Third-Former, with a bitter sneer.

"Don't jaw to me about going straight. You couldn't go straight, you rotter! Only last week you cleared me out of ten bob at nap!"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Is it because of your precious minor in my Form?" sneered Piggott. "Good little Frank, who can't say 'Bo' to a goose! I could tell you something that would open your eyes about Franky, if I liked."

Levison made a stride towards him.

"You little beast!" he said, between his teeth. "You have nothing to do with my minor. I've told Frank never to speak to you!"

Piggott laughed mockingly.

"Well, he does speak to me," he jeered. "He's a chip of the old block, if you want to know. If you're beginning the goody-goody bizney on his account, you may as well chuck it!"

"I know there's something going on in the Third," said Levison slowly. "What is it all the fags have been wanting stamps for?"

"Find out!"

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"You've got a hand in it, whatever it is," said Levison. "Is it some rotten gambling game?"

Piggott sneered.

"Perhaps it's something quite in your line," he replied. "Anyway, you needn't worry about Franky; he's learning our ways fast enough, and he will be quite like his major before the term's over."

"You horrid little rotter!" muttered Levison. "I believe you'd lead him into harm if you could, out of sheer rascality."

"He doesn't want much leading," jeered Piggott.

"Will you tell me what you are up to?"

"No, I won't."

Levison drew a deep breath.

"Suppose I do as you've asked?" he said, after a pause.

Piggott chuckled.

"That alters the case, of course. I don't want your minor's rotten bob, so far as that goes. You back me up in this spec, and I'll leave him out of what's going on in the Third. Is it a go?"

Levison's eyes glittered.

"So there is something going on, something rotten, and you've got my minor into it?" he said.

"Exactly!"

Levison clenched his hands and unclenched them again. His face was black as midnight for a moment, but it broke into a grin.

"After all, this is a chance too good to be missed," he said. "You say you've got four quids in hand?"

"Just four."

"And how much will you put on for me?"

"I'll stand you halves of the whole bag if New House wins," said Piggott eagerly. "I can get odds on the School House, too; but at even money it's jolly well worth having."

"Yes, rather! It's a go."

"I can rely on you?"

"You can rely on me. But mind, it's understood that you leave my minor out of your rotten game, whatever it is."

"Done!" said Piggott. "I knew you were only fooling. This may mean a fiver for you, and you're harder up than I am. It's a go, Levison!"

And the rascal of the Third, all smiles now, turned to the study door and opened it. There was a startled exclamation outside, and Trimble of the Third almost pitched into the study as the door was suddenly opened.

"You rotter!" shouted Piggott. "You've been listening."

"I—I was just coming in," stammered Trimble. "I suppose a chap can come into his own study if he likes? I haven't heard a word, of course."

Piggott gave him a dark look and went out. Trimble regarded Levison with a peculiar grin on his fat face.

"You were listening," said Levison quietly.

"Well, I might have heard a word or two. Of course, I'm not going to give you away," said Trimble. "You're a pal."

"Thank you for nothing."

"But I say, Levison."

"Well?" said Levison, turning back as he was leaving the study.

"Can you lend me a bob?"

"No."

"Look here, you know——"

Levison walked out without replying. Trimble gave a very discontented grunt. He felt that his knowledge of the shady scheme was worth a bob at least, but evidently Levison did not think so.

CHAPTER 5.

The Sweep.

THERE was a queer smell in the Third Form-room as Levison of the Fourth opened the door and looked in.

Evening preparation was over, and Mr. Selby was gone, and the fags of the Third had the Form-room to themselves until bedtime.

Round the fire at the end a group of the fags had gathered, and the smell showed that some of the weird cooking of the Third was proceeding. Wally & Co. had laid in kippers for supper, and they were cooking them at the Form-room fire. To judge by the smell, there was more burning than cooking going on.

Wally and Reggie Manners, Levison minor and Joe Frayne and Hobbs and Curly Gibson all seemed to be taking a hand in the cooking of the kippers, and Wally especially had a very shiny face.

"We ought to have had a frying-pan," said Wally. "It



Levison was rushed down, but Blake was in time to take a pass from him. (See Chapter 9.)

was rotten of the house-dame to refuse to lend us a frying-pan. Kippers ought to be fried."

"Grilled," said Hobbs.

"Fried!" said Wally, with a snort.

"Grilled!" persisted Hobbs.

"Perhaps you know more about cooking kippers than I do, young Hobbs?" said D'Arcy minor, with crushing sarcasm.

"I dare say I do," said Hobbs. "If I'd bought those kippers, f'rinstance, I should have picked out some that weren't quite so wangy."

"They're not wangy!" roared Wally.

"Well, not now; but they were simply talking before you began to burn 'em."

"I'm not burning them, you silly fathead! You're burning that one. Do you think you can cook a kipper by sticking it on a couple of pens in front of a fire? You've jolly well burnt the tail off already."

"Well, I wasn't going to eat the tail."

"We want butter to shove over 'em," remarked Levison minor.

"Dripping," said Hobbs, who seemed to be in an augmentative mood.

Wally gave a scoffing laugh.

"Who's ever heard of cooking kippers in dripping?" he demanded.

"Who's ever heard of cookin' 'em on the bars of a grate?" jeered Hobbs. "You won't be able to eat it. Mine's all right."

"Look here, young Hobbs—"

"Look here, young D'Arcy—"

"Franky!" called out Levison.

Levison minor looked round.

"Hallo, Ernie!"

"I want to speak to you for a minute."

"Can't it wait?" asked Frank. "These blessed duffers will ruin the kippers if I leave them to it. They can't cook."

"Who can't cook?" roared Wally.

"Well, you can't, for one."

"If I could leave this kipper," said Wally, in concentrated tones, "I'd jolly well rub your napper in the ashes, young Levison!"

"Lucky for you you can't leave the kipper, then."

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

"Bow-wow!"

The heat of the fire and the burning kippers were having bad results on the tempers of the fags, and excitement was growing. Levison of the Fourth grinned and took his minor by the shoulder.

"Come on, Franky! You'll be suffocated if you stick this much longer."

"You clear out, you Fourth Form cad!" snapped Wally. "For goodness' sake, go along with your major, young Levison! You're only spoiling the cooking."

Levison minor sniffed; and, unwillingly relinquishing his share of the cooking, he departed with his major.

He carried a fragrant scent of the kippers out of the Form-room with him.

"Well, what's on, Ernie?" he asked in the passage.

Levison led him to the broad window-seat at the end of the

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"HERRIES' ORCHESTRA!"

passage, and sat down. Frank, wondering a little, dropped into the seat beside him.

"Only a jaw," said Levison major. "I'm not going to call you over the coals, Franky. There's something I want to know."

The fag looked a little uneasy.

"I haven't any secret from you, Ernie."

"What is it that's going on in the Third, that the kids are all wanting stamps for?" asked Levison abruptly. "I know there's something, and that that shady young scoundrel Piggott is in it. What is it, Frank?"

"I—I'd rather not tell you."

Levison's brow darkened.

"Frank!"

"It's nothing wrong," said the fag hastily. "Only—only it was agreed that it would be best to keep it quiet. People might misunderstand."

"Have you promised not to tell?"

"Oh, no! Only it was agreed—"

"Then you can tell me."

"I—I suppose I could, Ernie. But—but it's really nothing—only a sort of competition."

"Well, what sort of a competition?" persisted Levison.

"A sweep," confessed Frank.

Levison started.

"A sweepstake!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that's it," said Frank. "No harm in it, of course. It's not gambling, you know; it's not for money."

"Not for money!" exclaimed Levison, staring at him. "I've never heard of a sweep for anything else. What's it for—nuts?"

The fag laughed.

"Oh, no! Stamps!"

"Stamps!" ejaculated Levison.

He understood now what the Third-Formers had all wanted stamps for.

"Yes. Of course, I wouldn't have touched it if it had been for money," said Frank. "Piggott explained that he wouldn't do anything of the sort himself—that would be gambling. But a dozen stamps, you know—that's different."

"And where does the difference come in?" demanded Levison sternly.

"Well, Piggott says it's different," said Frank uneasily. "Wally thinks so, too. He came into it, and so did Hobbs, and Frayne, and Gibson, and most of the Third—some of the Fourth, too."

"Piggott's getting it up, of course?"

"Oh, yes! He first thought of it. It's on the race to-morrow at Lynwood," said Frank. "There's a lot of horses entered, and Piggott thought of making up a sweep in the Third. Wally was down on it at first, but when Piggott explained that it was only to be for stamps, he came round."

Levison grinned slightly. It was a distinction without a difference; but it had been enough to satisfy the scruples of the unthinking fags. Piggott had a great deal of knowledge of human nature for one of his years. He knew the value of words and names. Called by its real name, the sweep would not have found more than two or three supporters in the Third Form at St. Jim's. But as actual money did not enter into the transaction, Piggott was able to keep up an affectation that it was not gambling. The young rascal, of course, was laughing in his sleeve at the simple fellows who allowed themselves to be persuaded by such a distinction.

"You see, there's no harm in it," said Frank, relieved at seeing his major's face relax. "Of course, I wouldn't have touched it if it had been gambling, and Wally wouldn't, either, at any price."

"Whoever wins the sweep gets all the stamps, I suppose?"

"Yes, of course."

"What is he going to do with them?"

"Cash them at the post-office, I suppose," said Frank doubtfully.

"And turn them into money?"

"Ye-es."

"Then what's the difference whether you use stamps or money in the first place?"

Frank coloured.

"Well, there doesn't seem much, if you put it like that," he stammered. "But—but Piggott didn't put it like that. He said it wasn't gambling unless money was used. A—fellow isn't bound to cash his stamps, you know. He could send them to a fund if he liked."

"Look here, Frank," said Levison abruptly, "the thing's gambling, and if you think about it for a moment, you know it. I'm not a chap who has any right to preach, I know," he added bitterly. "I suppose you're thinking that."

"Ernie! Of course not! I—I—"

"You know I've done a lot of shady things," said Levison. "You found all that out soon after you came to St. Jim's."

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But—but I never thought you'd be following in my footsteps, Franky."

The fag looked very contrite.

"I wouldn't have touched the thing if I'd thought about it," he said. "Only—only a fellow doesn't want to make out that he's better than other fellows, you know—it looks so rotten!"

"I know. Piggott's a cunning little beast, and he trades on that."

"But Piggott doesn't stand to gain anything," said Frank eagerly. "He's only taken one chance like the rest of us."

"You young ass! How much does the sweep come to altogether—about four pounds, I suppose?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, suppose I tell you that Piggott's spending the money already on another kind of gambling swindle?"

"Oh, he wouldn't! You see, he only holds it till after the race, and then he has to hand it to the chap who's drawn the winner."

"Piggott will get the winner."

"Oh, he can't, you know, not more than anybody else."

"What's the race?" asked Levison.

"The Lynwood Plate."

"Grey Deer is the favourite," said Levison. Levison was remarkably well informed in such matters. "The bookies think nobody's got a chance against Grey Deer. Whoever draws Grey Deer will bag the sweep. Who's got that horse?"

"Well, Piggott drew Grey Deer," confessed Frank.

Levison laughed.

"Of course! It's a swindle!"

"Oh! I say—"

"What geegee have you drawn?" asked Levison.

"Blue Bonnet."

The Fourth-Former laughed again.

"Blue Bonnet's a rotten outsider. It's doubtful if he'll run at all," he said. "Your silly bob's gone!"

"Well, I don't care!" said Frank. "I'd rather not win, after what you've said."

"You might win, all the same. Outsiders get home sometimes. Look here, Frank, I'd like you to get out of the sweep altogether. I haven't asked you any favour since you came to the school."

The fag looked very uneasy.

"I—I should have to explain to—to Wally and the rest," he muttered. "It would look like—like—being a funk. I know the Housemaster would be down on it if he knew. I don't want to look like a funk."

"Then you won't do as I ask?" said Levison roughly.

"I—I'll speak to Wally if you like, and see what he says. If he gets out of it, I'll do the same."

"It's gambling, Frank, and you know it."

Frank looked oddly at his major. He did not utter the thought that was in his mind; but Levison could read it there. Levison, the black sheep of the House, the fellow who smoked, and played cards for money, and betted with shady book-makers—it was odd enough to hear him denouncing gambling in such tones!

The Fourth-Former crimsoned.

"That's enough!" he exclaimed, rising to his feet. "Do as you like, Frank, and be hanged to you! What does it matter to me whether you turn out a dashed young scoundrel like Piggott, or not?"

And he strode away.

"Ernie!" called out Frank, starting to his feet.

But Levison of the Fourth did not look round. Levison minor made his way slowly back to the Third-Form room.

CHAPTER 6.

Trimble's Reward.

TRIMBLE of the Fourth eyed Levison as he came into the Common-room. Baggy Trimble was feeling annoyed and resentful. Baggy's fat ear had been at the study keyhole during most of the conversation between Levison and Piggott, and Baggy had possession of the secret. According to the worthy Baggy's views, a fellow who held a secret like that ought to make something out of it. Suppose he told somebody—then Levison's scheme of giving away the House match would be knocked on the head. Why should he hold his tongue unless it was made worth his while? Baggy argued to himself. After all, he was shocked at Levison. On reflection, Baggy felt quite certain that he was shocked. He was not going to be shocked for nothing. And Baggy resolved that he would ease his mind by telling Tom Merry about it, as he was in duty bound to do—unless Levison treated him as a pal. Of course, he wouldn't give a pal away—not Baggy! And treating him as a pal meant supplying him with small loans whenever they were asked for.

Trimble had made up his mind; but Levison's temper was so uncertain that he hesitated to approach him for some time. It would be quite like the beast, Baggy thought, to hit him in the eye. True, he could have hit Levison in the eye in return. But Baggy was not a fighting man.

He screwed his courage up to the sticking point at last, and came up to Levison, who was staring moodily into the fire by himself, with nobody very near him. It was a favourable moment for Baggy. He stuck his fat thumb into Levison's ribs to draw his attention.

Levison turned round with an angry exclamation.

"What do you want, confound you?"

Baggy backed away a little. He didn't like the look in Levison's eyes.

"Look here, you know, I'm hard up," said Trimble pathetically. "I've lent my last five bob to Kerruish."

"Don't try that yarn on me, you fat fool!"

Trimble's piggy little eyes glittered. Contempt is said to pierce the shell of the tortoise, and Baggy was not much thicker-skinned than a tortoise. He was getting angry.

"You won't lend me five bob?" he snapped.

"No! Go and eat coke!"

"Suppose I tell Tom Merry about your little game to-morrow?"

"Tell him anything you like!"

Trimble blinked at him.

"You're bluffing!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Tom Merry would turn you out of the team at once if he knew."

"Yes, if he took your word," said Levison, unmoved.

"Tell him by all means. By Jove, I'll tell him for you! I say, Tom Merry!"

Tom was chatting with Manners and Lowther across the room. He looked round as his name was called.

"I say, you know, don't be an ass!" whispered Trimble.

Levison did not heed him.

"Trimble's got news for you, Tom Merry," called out Levison, evidently careless whether the whole Common-room heard him or not. "He's going to tell you that I've arranged to sell the match to-morrow—"

"What?"

"Unless I give him five bob," continued Levison calmly.

"I'm not going to give him five bob, so you'd better hear his yarn."

"My hat!"

There was a laugh from some of the juniors. Tom Merry looked curiously at both Levison and Trimble.

Baggy's fat face crimsoned with rage. Levison had fairly taken the wind out of his sails by plunging into the matter like this before half the Lower School.

"You fat rascal!" said Tom Merry. "Do you think I should believe a yarn like that, if you told me?"

"It's true!" yelled Baggy.

"Oh, dry up!"

"I heard him scheming it!" said Baggy. "I heard every word! I felt it my duty to tell you, Merry, as skipper of the team!"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom.

"When did you hear it?" grinned Lowther.

"About an hour ago."

"And you haven't told Tommy yet?"

"Ahem! I—I—"

"You've been trying to screw cash out of Levison because you thought a yarn like this would be believed about him!" said Lowther severely.

"I—I haven't! I—I asked him for a loan, that's all—"

"Little beast!" said Manners. "Bump him!"

"Here, hands off!" yelled the indignant Baggy. "I tell you it's true! Levison's got money on the match, and he's going to lose to the New House to-morrow. He's fixed it up with Piggott!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Rats!"

"You blessed fat Prussian!" said Blake.

Some of the fellows looked rather oddly at Levison. Levison was a dog with a bad name, and it was easy to believe evil of him. But Trimble's untruthfulness was too well known. Tom Merry did not believe a word of it.

"Of course, there's nothing in this, Levison?" said Tom.

"Do you think there is?" asked Levison, looking hard at him.

"No, not for a moment."

"Well, I'll answer you, then. There's nothing in it."

"You've not got any bets on the match?"

"None!"

"Well, I thought that part might be true," said Tom.

"You do that kind of thing, you know."

Levison laughed.

"I'm not doing it this time."

"Bai Jove! That young wascal Twimble ought to be

sewagged!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wrathfully. "I regard him as a howwid little Hun!"

"Bump him!"

"Collar him!"

Baggy Trimble fairly shook with alarm as half a dozen juniors closed round him. This was quite an unexpected result of his disclosure.

But he could not expect anything else. That he had been trying to screw money out of Levison was evident, so that even if his story was true, he was guilty of something very like blackmailing, and on his own showing he had played the eavesdropper. A blackmailer and eavesdropper could scarcely expect his word to be taken.

The fat Fourth-Former was grasped by half a dozen pairs of hands and whirled off the floor.

"Give him three!" said Tom Merry. "One for listening, one for lying, and one for luck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yow-ow woop!" roared Baggy.

He sat on the floor, gasping and blinking at the grinning juniors. Monty Lowther wagged a warning finger at him.

"Do you see the error of your ways, my young friend?" he asked, with great solemnity.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Do you want some more?"

"Yow-ow! No!" yelled the unhappy Baggy. "Keep off! Yow-ow!"

"Unless you see the error of your ways, you are going to have some more," said Lowther. "Now, do you see the error of your ways?"

"Oh dear! Yes, yes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You confess that you were telling whoppers about our worthy and respected—ahem!—friend, Levison?"

"Yow-ow! Yes!" groaned Trimble. He would have confessed anything to escape another bumping.

"Good! Gentleman, the fat Hun confesses, and I suggest kicking him out of the room to meditate on his sins in the passage!"

"Hear, hear!"

Baggy Trimble fled. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped Levison kindly on the shoulder.

"Pshaw don't think anybody believes a word of it, Levison," he said. "We know that fat wottah was lying."

Levison grinned.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus was somewhat taken aback by the question. "I am guah you wouldn't do anythin' so uttably wotten!"

"Oh, I might!" said Levison coolly.

And he sauntered away, leaving Arthur Augustus staring after him in an extremely perplexed manner. But all the fellows were not quite so trustful as Arthur Augustus. When Levison went to his study, Crooke and Racke of the Shell followed him there, with very disagreeable looks.

"What's this yarn about you and Piggott?" asked Racke abruptly.

"Look here, is there anything in it?" demanded Crooke.

"Piggott's got both of us to lay money on the School House. I wondered why he was so sure of New House winning to-morrow!"

Levison grinned.

"School House will win, I think," he said. "They've got a jolly good outside-left, anyway."

"You're going to play the game straight?" asked Crooke, eyeing him.

"Straight as a gun-barrel!"

"But Piggott believes you're not?" asked Racke.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"There's no accounting for what Piggott may believe," he said coolly. "Piggott's been getting my minor into a black-guardly sweep, and perhaps I'm going to make him pay for it. If you've got money on the School House team you'll most likely win—if you make the little beast put up the stakes in advance. He won't pay otherwise."

"That's settled already. Gilmore is stake-holder," said Crooke. "You're pulling Piggott's leg, then?"

"Exactly!"

The two Shell fellows looked at him with surly doubt.

"You're such a tricky beast!" said Racke. "Perhaps you're pulling our leg, and not Piggott's!"

"Perhaps!" said Levison calmly.

"Look here, we want to know the truth about it!" exclaimed Crooke savagely. "It's too late to call off our bets now—the money's put up!"

Levison yawned.

Racke and Crooke, with angry looks, advanced towards him. Levison caught up a heavy inkpot from the table. They paused.

"Come on!" said Levison invitingly.

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The two Shell fellows did not come on. They gave Levison dark looks, and went out of the study. Levison's mocking laugh followed them.

CHAPTER 7.

Trouble in the Third.

"MORE stamps?" said Cutts of the Fifth. Gerald Cutts and St. Leger of the Fifth were in their study. Piggott of the Third, who fagged for Cutts, was there, too. The fag was turning stamps out of a leather purse, and they seemed to be unnumbered.

"As good as money, I suppose?" said Piggott.

"Oh, certainly!" said Cutts. "I can get them changed."

"But where the dickens did you get them from?" asked St. Leger, eyeing the fag suspiciously. "Have you been robbing the desks?"

"I've won them. A little sweep in the Third," said Piggott.

"A sweepstake for stamps?" said Cutts, laughing.

"Just so."

Piggott did not add that the sweep had not yet come off. Doubtless he was certain that Grey Deer, the horse he had drawn in the sweep, would be an easy winner. And owing to the arrangements he had made with Levison, he did not expect to lose the stakes he was now putting up.

Cutts and St. Leger regarded the rascally fag with amusement. Piggott of the Third was very useful in his way to the Fifth Form "sportsmen." He was accustomed to taking messages from them to places of doubtful resort, and to smuggling smokes into the school, and making himself useful in many shady ways. If there had ever been any good qualities in the young rascal, he had lost them in his association with Cutts & Co. The sweep he was managing in the Third Form was in imitation of some of Cutts' proceedings in the Fifth; though when Gerald Cutts got up a sweepstake it was always for sovereigns, not shillings.

"There you are!" said Piggott. "Two pounds. Sorry it's in stamps; but if you win you can cash them."

"That's all right," said Cutts. "Here's my money."

He tossed three currency notes on the table, and St. Leger gathered them up with the stamps. Reckless gamester as Cutts was, he was not accustomed to having bets with a fag like Piggott; it was really good-nature—Cutts' kind of good-nature—which had led him to take the fag's bet.

"Three to two on the School House," said St. Leger; "and the stakes to be handed to the winner immediately after the race—I mean the match."

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"That's it," said Piggott.

"What makes you so jolly certain the New House will win, Piggy?" asked Gerald Cutts curiously.

"Well, they've got a first-rate goalkeeper, you know—Fatty Wynn," said Piggott.

"But they haven't a forward like Talbot."

"About even chances for them, I should think, so far as I've noticed these fag players at all," remarked St. Leger.

"Much of a muchness," assented Cutts. "But I rather think the School House will pull it off. Chap ought to back his own House, anyway."

"Piggy isn't doing that," grinned St. Leger.

"Blow the House!" said Piggott coolly. "I'm backing the team I fancy."

"So you've been getting up a sweep in the Third," said Cutts, "and you happened to draw the winner?"

"Yes."

"How did you hold the draw?"

"Names on slips of paper in a hat," said Piggott. "I held the hat."

Cutts burst into a laugh.

"You young rascal!"

"Oh, it was quite fair, of course!" said Piggott.

"Of course!" said Cutts. "You'll go to prison some day, my tulip!"

"I dare say I shall meet you there, Cutts," retorted Piggott; and he left the study, leaving the Fifth-Formers laughing.

Piggott's precocious rascality seemed very amusing to Cutts, and he had no doubt whatever that the

young rascal had wangled the draw. But even Cutts did not guess that the sweep had not yet come off, and that Piggott was making bets with money that was not his own.

Neither did it occur to him that Piggott had wangled the House match, and was certain of winning his bet on it. Piggott's education in Cutts & Co.'s honourable society had gone further than Gerald Cutts suspected.

Piggott grinned to himself as he went down the passage. His reflections were full of satisfaction.

"Grey Deer's certain to pull it off to-morrow afternoon," he said to himself. "I'm safe there. My hat, if Grey Deer lost, I should have to account for those dashed stamps!" He laughed. "But they're safe enough. I win on the House match, for a cert, and St. Leger will have to hand them back to me after the game. I'm quite safe all round. It's rather rotten having to divvy with Levison; but, after all, he doesn't know how much I've got on. And a couple of quid will be enough for him, hang him!"

There was a buzz in the Third Form-room when Piggott came in. An argument was proceeding. The kippers had been disposed of, though their fragrance was still lingering about the Form-room. Wally D'Arcy and Frayne and Hobbs were all talking at once, and their remarks were addressed to Levison minor.

"Gambling, is it?" Wally was saying. "And your major says so, does he? Well, he ought to know about gambling—all about it, by Jove!"

"Yes, rather!" chimed in Reggie Manners. "If the Head knew all he knows about it, he'd be sacked from the school jolly sharp!"

Levison minor flushed angrily. Any disparaging reference to his major made him angry.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" asked Piggott.

Wally gave a contemptuous snort.

"Levison's been preaching to Franky," he said. "Levison preaching—that's good, isn't it?"

"Rich," said Hobbs.

"Bloomin' cheek, I call it!" growled Joe Frayne. "Do you think I'd gamble, you cheeky young waster, arter all Master Tom's told me about it?"

"My major says it's gambling," said Frank. "He says it doesn't make any difference whether we use stamps or money; it comes to the same thing."

"So you think I'd go in for gambling?" demanded Wally.

"No; but—"

"Levison minor can get out of the sweep, if he likes," said Piggott scornfully. "I suppose he's funky of the House-master getting on to it; that's what's the matter with him!"

"Most likely," jeered Reggie.

"It isn't that," said Frank. "But if it's all right and above-board, why shouldn't Mr. Railton know about it, if you come to that?"

"Well," said Wally rather slowly, "Railton's a good sort, but he wouldn't understand. It's only a bit of sporting, and we're not using money."

"It comes to the same thing."

"You didn't say so at first."

"Well, I didn't think much about it. I went into it because all the others did," said Frank uncomfortably. "But—but I'd rather call it off now, before the race comes off. Piggott can hand all the fellows back their stamps—"

"Catch me!" sneered Piggott. "That's because you've drawn a rank outsider."

"It isn't!" said Frank hotly. "I'd say just the same if I'd drawn the favourite."

"Gammon!"

Frank Levison clenched his hands. But he was, as he realised, in a weak position. To want to call the sweepstake off after he had drawn a rank outsider certainly had rather a questionable appearance.

"Well, I don't think that," said Wally. "Levison minor isn't that kind of a sneak, and you're talking out of your hat, Piggott. But if he wants to stand out, let him! Give him his bob back!"

"I don't want that," said Levison minor; "and I sha'n't stand out unless you do, Wally, and Frayne, and Hobbs, and Manners minor."

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There was a rush of fags at Outts, and the dandy of the Fifth was fairly wrenched away from his victim, and bundled to the door. "Kick him out!" roared Wally. (See Chapter 11.)

"Well, I sha'n't, for one," said Hobbs. "I've drawn Dinky Duff, and he's got the next chance to the favourite."

"And my gee-gee's got a chance," said Frayne. "I shouldn't wonder if Pinch of Snuff pulls it off. But if young Levison is going to call us gamblers—"

"Oh, he's thinking of his major!" said Curly Gibson. "You can't think of Levison major without thinking of gambling, and smoking, and all kinds of rot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Frank. "If you fellows keep in the sweep, I shall keep in it, too. You'll only think me funking if I get out."

"So you would be," grunted Hobbs.

"I'll hand out your bob, Levison minor," said Piggott. "Your major's been jawing me about it. We don't want to tarnish the spotless angel—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the fags.

"Dear little Franky mustn't be contaminated with our wicked ways," grinned Piggott. "Here's your bob, and you can hand over your gee-gee."

Levison minor shook his head.

"I shall stay in if the others do," he said.

"Well, I've made you the offer," said Piggott, holding up

a shilling. "You can't say that's not fair. I'll take your outsider as an extra chance."

"Go and eat coke!"

Piggott laughed, and slipped the shilling back into his pocket.

"Well, I told your major I'd leave you out of it," he said. "If he asks you, you can tell him I did my best."

"Oh, rats!" said Frank gruffly.

And the matter dropped. But there was a good deal of surliness among Frank's friends in the Third afterwards. As a matter of fact, the fags were feeling a little uneasy inwardly on the subject. The cunning Piggott had drawn them into his scheme by his specious arguments, and they had fallen into the snare unthinkingly; but when they came to think about the matter, they could not help realising that Levison major's statement to his minor was right enough. But to be preached at by the cad of the Fourth, the black sheep of the School House, was rather too big a pill to swallow. If only because Ernest Levison was down on the sweep, Wally & Co. were determined to go through with it; and though they felt some inward twinges of conscience, they did not change their minds. But they were

angry and uncomfortable, and there were some very grumpy looks exchanged in the Third Form-room till Darrel of the Sixth shepherded the fags off to their dormitory.

CHAPTER 8.
The House Match:

TOM MERRY & Co. were punting a ball about, after breakfast the next morning, when Levison joined them. It was no longer surprising to find Levison of the Fourth among the footballers; he had soon dropped into his new habits, and his presence at footer practice was taken as a matter of course. And there was no doubt that it was doing him good. There was a new colour in his fallow face, and his sharp eyes were less furtive in their glance. There was a new spring in his step, and he had almost dropped his old slouch. Indeed, Levison wondered sometimes that he had never taken up this new line before. Playing the giddy goat on the lines of Crooke & Co. was a "mug's game"; there was no doubt about that; and Levison prided himself on being anything but a mug.

Piggott of the Third met him as he came in to morning lessons, eyeing him very curiously.

"Been at practice?" he asked.

"Just punting the ball," said Levison.

"You look pretty fit."

"Can't say the same for you," said Levison, with a contemptuous look at the fag's unhealthy face.

"Keeping up appearances, I suppose?" said Piggott, unheeding his tone. "They don't suspect anything so far, I suppose?"

Levison laughed.

"Oh, no! Why should they?"

"I heard about Trimble jawing," said Piggott. "That was rotten unlucky, the spying cad! Crooke and Raoko have been tackling me. I told them it was only Trimble's gas!"

"So did I," said Levison.

"But it's rotten unlucky, all the same. Fellows will be watching you to see how you play this afternoon," said Piggott uneasily.

"That's all right," said Levison calmly. "There are ways and means of doing these things. I sha'n't put the ball through my own goal, you know!"

"No," said Piggott, laughing. "After all, you're deep enough to play a rotten game and keep up appearances all the time!"

"I fancy so."

"I've settled it with Cutta last night," said Piggott, lowering his voice. "He's laid three to two on the School House. There will be a good divvy afterwards, when the New House win. You stand to get as much as I do!"

"Halves, of course," said Levison.

"That's it."

"And what about my minor? Has he got out of the sweep?"

"He wouldn't. I suppose he's told you all about it!" growled Piggott. "Well, I offered him his bob back, and he wouldn't take it. I couldn't do more!"

"Of course you couldn't," said Levison, with a deadly gleam in his eyes, calmly as he spoke. "You've done your best, Piggy, and I sha'n't forget what you've done! Come down and see the match this afternoon. It will be worth watching!"

"I shall come, of course!"

Levison went on into the House, leaving Piggott quite reassured.

Levison was very cheerful at breakfast. It seemed to have bucked him a great deal to be included in Tom Merry's team for the House match, and most of the fellows noticed it. Piggott noticed it, too, and grinned over it. His belief was that Levison was bucked at the prospect of fingering two or three pounds that afternoon, as the reward of betraying his side.

Levison minor joined his major when the juniors came out of the Form-room after lessons. Levison eyed him grimly.

"I'm sorry, Ernie," said Frank, colouring. "I—I couldn't do as you asked!"

"You wouldn't, you mean!" growled Levison.

"I would, only—only Wally and the rest have been rowing me," muttered Frank. "I told them what you said, and it only made them ratty. They won't admit that there's anything wrong in it!"

"They know there is, all the same!"

"Well, they went into it without thinking, and now they won't admit it, even if they do think so. They think I'm preaching at them," said Frank, flushing. "You wouldn't want me to look like a preaching prig, Ernie!"

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"Oh, you may as well see it through, as you're in it!" said Levison. "It isn't for me to talk to you about it, anyway!"

"I'll never get into anything of the kind again," said the fag earnestly. "Wally won't, either; I know that. It's bothering him now, now that it's been pointed out to him!"

"All serene!" said Levison.

"We're coming down to see you play this afternoon," said Frank, changing the subject. "I say, it's ripping for you to be in the House team! You'll be playing for School next!"

"Perhaps!" said Levison, laughing.

"And—and you ain't waxy about the sweep, Ernie?"

"No, you young ass; only keep clear of Piggott for the future!"

"I will," said Frank earnestly.

The fag scuttled off as Arthur Augustus came along. D'Arcy bestowed a genial smile on Levison.

"Feelin' fit, deah boy?" he asked.

"Fit as a fiddle!"

"Good! You've got my place in the House team," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I don't gwudge it for once!"

"Thanks!"

"I am comin' along to see you play," added Arthur Augustus graciously. "I'm suah you'll play a wippin' game! I congwatulate you, Levison. This is wathah bettah than wottin' about smokin'—what?"

"Heaps!" said Levison cheerily.

When the junior footballers went down to Little Side, Levison went with them in great spirits. Figgins & Co., of the New House, were on the ground, and evidently in great form, and anticipating victory. The New House team was composed of Fatty Wynn; Thompson, Owen; Redfern, Lawrence, French; Kerr, Pratt, Figgins, Kouni Rao, and Jimson.

It was a good team, and in goal it was especially strong, Fatty Wynn being a tower of strength between the posts.

Figgins & Co. regarded Levison rather curiously as he turned up with the School House players. Levison noticed it, and smiled sarcastically. Figgins did not expect much of a game from the slacker of the Fourth. But Figgins was likely to meet with a surprise on that score.

Juniors gathered round the ground in good numbers to see the kick-off. Levison minor came along with a group of fags to see his major play a great game for his House. His companions, however, had no expectations of that kind. They had come to see Levison major crock up in the first ten minutes.

Piggott was with the Third Form fags, in great good humour. The youthful imitator of the sportsmen of the Fifth had great cause for satisfaction, from his own peculiar point of view. The money subscribed for the sweep, which his companions believed to be safely locked up waiting for the winner, had been laid in bets against the School House—a stroke of genius, as Piggott regarded it.

With substantial winnings on the House match, and a win on the sweepstake, the young rascal expected to be in great funds for some time to come. His satisfaction was not destined to last as long as the House match, however.

Figgins won the toss, and gave Tom Merry the wind to kick off against. The ball rolled, and the House match commenced.

CHAPTER 9. Levison's Goal.

"BRAVO, Levison!"

It was a shout from all the fellows round the ground.

Levison of the Fourth had not crocked in the first ten minutes, as Wally had confidently predicted he would.

He was going strong. There was a School House attack on the enemy's goal, and the forwards brought the ball up the field smartly; and when Kerr, on the wing, captured it, Levison robbed him of it in the neatest way, and rushed it on.

He wound round French like a serpent, and as Owen tackled him he centred to Tom Merry—Blake being down—and Tom ran the ball on and kicked for goal. Fatty Wynn drove it out with a fat fist, however, and Owen cleared to mid-field.

The attempt had not materialised, but it had been a close thing, and Levison's good play was good enough to strike all observers.

Frank clapped his hands, and grinned at D'Arcy minor.

"What did I tell you?" he chortled.

"Well, he can play," admitted Wally. "He's sticking it, too. Can't have been smoking overnight, after all!"

"Oh, rats!" said Frank.

Piggott's face was a study.

True, Levison might simply be keeping up appearances by good play at the start. But he had very nearly secured a goal for his side, and a goal would have counted very much in a match that was certain to be closely contested. The plotting young rascal was disconcerted.

He had taken it as undoubted that Levison had entered heart and soul into his rascally scheme. It would have been like Levison, as he knew him. For the first time it came into Piggott's mind that the Fourth-Former might be playing him false, instead of swindling Tom Merry.

Piggott ground his teeth at the thought.

He had relied upon Levison being as great a rascal as himself—as he had always known him.

The teams were so well-matched that treachery from Levison would have given away all Tom Merry's chances for a win. But if he played up well, the result was very doubtful. Cutts—a good judge—thought that the School House chances were three to two.

Piggott was not likely to enjoy that footer-match with those disturbing thoughts in his mind.

With puckered brows and glittering eyes he watched the game, not losing a single movement of the School House outside-left.

The ball was in mid-field for some time, each side essaying in vain to get away, but the New House neared goal at last, and the School House had to defend with all their might.

Herries in goal was hard pressed, but he kept his citadel intact, and Reilly cleared at last to the forwards.

Then Levison's chance came.

He was on the ball in a twinkling and speeding it up the field, dribbling it on his own through the New House.

The forwards were fast after him, and Blake was in time to take a pass as Levison was rushed down.

The ball went in to Tom Merry, but he was robbed of it by Redfern, who kicked it clear, and it came down close to the touch-line.

Levison was on it again.

Thompson and Redfern were almost upon him, rushing him down, and the crowd expected the ball to go into touch.

But Levison, with perfect coolness, kicked almost from the touch-line, and the leather shot like a bullet for goal.

It was a daring shot, with about a thousand chances to one against its coming off—so many chances against it, in fact, that Fatty Wynn was not on his guard as usual.

When the fat goalkeeper realised that the ball was on him he made a jump at it—a second too late.

It passed his outstretched fingers and shot into the corner of the net.

There was a gasp from the crowd.

"Goal!"

"Great pip! Goal!"

"Goal!" yelled Frank. "Good old Ernie! Goal!"

"Bai Jove! That was wippin'!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus in great admiration. "I weally could not have beaten that myself, bai Jove!"

Which was a very true statement.

Tom Merry rushed up to his outside-left and slapped him on the back ecstatically.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed. "Ripping! What luck!"

"Topping!" gasped Blake.

"Good man!"

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

Fatty Wynn blinked as he tossed out the ball. Figgins stared at Levison. This was the slacker of the Fourth—the fellow who had taken that unexpected and almost impossible goal!

The players walked back to the centre of the field, Tom Merry & Co. greatly elated. Tom had considered that Levison would be worth his salt in the match, but he had not looked for play like this. There was evidently more in the slacker of the Fourth than met the eye.

"Well, the fellow can play," remarked Wally, as Figgins kicked off. "Looks like a win for the House, and no mistake!"

"What-ho!" chortled Frank in great glee.

"What's the matter with you, Piggy?" said Wally, staring

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"HERRIES' ORCHESTRA!"

at the pale, scowling face of the black sheep of the Third. "Do you want New House to win?"

Piggott muttered something unintelligible, and moved away. He could hardly tell the School House fags what was in his mind.

He had no further doubts now. Levison was playing him false—at least, he was playing his side true.

The match would be touch-and-go now, with the chances in favour of the School House. Piggott's "dead cert" was turning out extremely uncertain, as dead certs so often do.

Piggott's feelings were unenviable as he watched the first half to its close. Figgins & Co. struggled hard to equalise, but they could not succeed, and the School House were still one up when Lefevre of the Fifth, the referee, blew the whistle.

When play ceased at the interval Piggott came up to the School House players. He felt that he must speak to Levison, risky as it was with so many eyes on them.

The winger grinned as the fag came up to him.

"Enjoying the match, Piggy?" he asked.

Piggott ground his teeth.

"What game are you playing?" he muttered.

"Game!" repeated Levison, without lowering his voice in the least. "Football, of course! Did you think I was playing cricket?"

"You've taken a goal—"

"Yes; that was luck, wasn't it?"

"What do you mean by it?" muttered Piggott, his eyes gleaming with rage at Levison's bantering tone. "You're fooling me, I suppose? You were pulling my leg all the time, you bound!"

Levison laughed mockingly.

"Got it in once!" he said.

"And—and you're playing to win?"

"Of course."

"You—you know what I've got on the game? Look here, if you want to make terms, I'll agree to anything you like—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Levison.

"Hallo! What's the merry joke?" asked Tom Merry.

Levison roared again.

"It's the joke of the season," he said. "I'll tell you—it's too good to keep to myself. You remember the yarn Trimble told you—"

"Yes," said Tom in wonder.

"Well, Trimble had some of it right. He really did hear Piggy arranging with me to give the match away!" chuckled Levison.

"What?"

"Piggy thought that sort of thing was in my line," chuckled the Fourth Former. "He offered me halves—half what he made in bets on the New House, you know."

"Why, the confounded young rascal!" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly.

Piggott's face was a study. This exposure, before the whole crowd of the footballers, was a thing he had been far from expecting. He stood rooted to the ground, his breath

coming in gasps. He made a movement to back away, but Jack Blake took him by the collar.

"Not just yet!" said Blake. "We'll hear the rest of this."

"Oh, that's all," said Levison. "I thought I'd let him run on—partly for making such a proposition, partly because he's got my minor into a precious game in the Third, and partly because it was such a ripping joke. The giddy sport has laid all his tin against the School House, and he's just offered me extra good terms for giving away the match."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You—you rotter!" panted Piggott. "You meant to do it, too, only you've changed your mind."

Levison chuckled.

"My dear ass, I was pulling your leg!" he said. "I never told you I'd give the match away. I simply said you could rely on me. I meant that you could rely on me to play up for the House."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is what comes of fags following the merry example of Cutts of the Fifth," grinned Monty Lowther. "You'd better leave sporting speculations alone, Piggy. Leave 'em till you're in the Fifth."

"Let me go!" muttered Piggott, choking with rage.

"Not just yet," said Blake. "You're not going to get off scot-free, you young scoundrel! Bump him!"

"Let me go!" shrieked Piggott.

"Bump him!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

Piggott of the Third smote the football field with great force three times in succession, and he yelled with anguish.

Then he was released, and the football-boots commenced operations upon him.

Every fellow was anxious to get in a kick as the young rascal fled, and by the time Piggott got clear he felt as if he had been under a particularly heavy tank.

He crawled away groaning, and the footballers, grinning, returned to their game.

CHAPTER 10. The Loser Pays!

THE whistle went for the second half, and the House match was resumed. Piggott was no longer among the spectators. He was feeling sore in mind and body, and he had disappeared from Little Side.

He had nothing to expect there unless it was a further application of football-boots to his person.

But the rest of the crowd looked with keen interest on the second half. Levison's play excited a good deal of curiosity.

No more goals fell to outside-left, but his play was consistently good, and his passing was very useful to his side. After his fine shot from the touch-line some of the fellows expected swanking play from Levison, and perhaps attempts at playing the game on his own, instead of playing up as part and parcel of the team. But they were agreeably disappointed. Levison showed no desire to swank and no wish to keep the

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ball to himself. He played the game all the time, and there was no doubt that he was extremely useful to the side.

As the second half wore away Figgins & Co. made almost desperate efforts to reach the School House goal. But paid was put to all their attempts. They simply could not get through.

Fatty Wynn was equal to all emergencies in goal, and the School House score remained stationary, but the New House did not succeed in breaking their duck.

The final whistle went at last, and the players, some of them gasping from the gruelling match, came off.

School House had won by one goal to nil, and that goal was Levison's goal. His comrades congratulated him heartily. It was a new sensation to the slacker of the Fourth to be congratulated by Tom Merry & Co. for good play in a good game, and it was pleasant enough to him.

Frank met him with a joyous look as he came off.

"It's ripping, Ernie!" he said. "I knew you'd play up first-rate. Your name will always be on the list now."

"What about your sweep?" asked Levison. "The Lynwood race is run this afternoon. It's over before this."

"The sweep? Oh, I'd forgotten that!"

Levison laughed.

"Piggott's going to get an evening paper with the result," said Frank. "I don't care what the result is."

"Piggott does!" grinned Levison. "He'll be in a pretty pickle if Grey Deer isn't the winner."

"I don't see why. Piggy only took two chances—that's only two bobs' worth of stamps—and one of them was a blank. Some of the fellows took six or eight chances," said Frank. "Young Reggie had ten bobs' worth, I think. There's about four pounds for the winner."

"And where's the money?"

"It isn't money; it's stamps."

"Well, the stamps, then, you young ass!"

"They're locked up in Piggott's desk. It's all in Piggott's hands, you know. He got up the whole thing."

"Locked up in Piggott's desk, are they?" grinned Levison. "So if Grey Deer doesn't win, Piggott can produce them?"

"Yes, of course!" said Frank, in wonder.

Levison laughed again, and walked on. He knew where the stamps were, and that the ambitious disciple of Cutts of the Fifth would be in an extremely awkward position if the favourite did not win.

Tom Merry & Co. were not the only fellows who rejoiced in the victory over the rival House. Crooke and Racke were also considerably elated. Not that they cared anything for football or for House matches. But they had won their rascally bets on the match, and they repaired to Gilmore's study to claim the stakes.

Gilmore of the Fifth handed out their winnings, and Cutts received his also—all in stamps—from St. Leger.

"Where the dickens did Piggy get all those stamps from?" Crooke remarked to his crony as they came away from Gilmore's quarters.

"Some swindle among the fags, I think," said Racke, laughing. "It was all rot about Levison, after all. He didn't give the match away—he won it, in fact."

"I suppose he had a bet on it himself," surmised Crooke charitably.

"Very likely. Hallo, here's Piggy! He's not looking cheerful."

Piggott of the Third was looking anything but cheerful.

He gave the two grinning Shell fellows a dark look.

"Buck up!" said Crooke encouragingly. "Better luck next time, you know. Can you change some stamps for me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Racke. "Can you change some for me, Piggy?"

"Don't jaw about those stamps!" said Piggott sulkily.

"You've got your stakes, and you needn't jaw. They'll change them at the post-office. Don't hawk them about the school."

"Why not?" demanded Crooke.

"Well, I don't want you to," muttered Piggott uneasily.

"I don't see why not. I'm not going down to the post-office for nothing," said Crooke. "I can get them changed by somebody here. I suppose they were yours, weren't they?"

"Yes, of course! But—but—"

"I'm going to put a notice on the board that anybody who wants stamps can buy 'em in my study," said Crooke coolly.

"I shall get rid of 'em in the long run, at that rate."

Piggott started.

"Don't do anything of the sort!" he exclaimed shrilly.

"Why not?"

"Because—because if you do, you mayn't be able to keep them," said Piggott desperately. "I got those stamps in a sweep."

"Well, if you got 'em in a sweep, they were yours, I suppose?" said Crooke, puzzled.

"The sweep hasn't come off yet!" muttered Piggott.

"Great Scott!"

"Well, of all the swindling young rascals!" ejaculated Racke, staring blankly at the fag.

"It will be all right soon," said Piggott. "I drew the favourite, and no other horse has a chance. But—but until after the race I'm not supposed to dispose of the money, you see."

"And suppose the favourite doesn't win? They don't always."

"He's bound to."

"If he doesn't we shall have a gang of fags clamouring after these stamps that we've won fair and square!" exclaimed Crooke.

"Well, I've warned you not to jaw about them," said Piggott sulkily.

"We'll get down to the post-office and change them," said Racke. "The sooner the quicker. Come on, Crooke! I don't envy you, Piggy, if the favourite doesn't win."

"I—I say, suppose you let me have the stamps?"

"Eh?"

"I'll settle up later—"

"A good deal later, I should say!" chuckled Crooke.

"Come on, Racke!"

The two Shell fellows walked away, grinning, and they lost no time in getting to the village post-office and converting the stamps into cash. Piggott looked after them with a gloomy brow. He had no real doubts that the favourite would win in the Lynwood race—all the bookies thought so, as was evidenced by the odds on Grey Deer. But suppose he didn't? There was a chance, at least, that he wouldn't, and if he didn't Piggott would be called upon to produce the four pounds that were supposed to be locked up in his desk—in stamps. It was some time yet before the evening paper could get to St. Jim's, and the interval was not likely to be enjoyable to the rascal of the Third.

CHAPTER 11.

Levison Minor's Luck.

CUTTS of the Fifth looked into the Third Form-room with a good-humoured smile.

Wally & Co. of the Third were holding a little celebration of the School House football victory.

Cutts came in, looking very good-humoured—so extremely good-humoured that a suspicious fellow might have surmised that he had an axe to grind. Gerald Cutts did not often take the trouble to be good-humoured with the fags of the Third, and it was probably his first visit to their Form-room.

"Hallo!" said D'Arcy minor, in astonishment, as he saw the dandy of the Fifth. "Have you come to tea, Cutts?"

"There's a jam-tart left!" grinned Joe Frayne. "You're welcome to it, Cutts!"

"And some toffee!" said Frank Levison.

Cutts laughed.

"No, I haven't come to tea," he remarked. "I heard some news about you young scamps. You're going in for sweepstakes, or somethin'—what?"

Some of the fags looked alarmed, but Wally nodded coolly.

"Suppose we are?" he said. "You're not a prefect."

"Quite so," assented Cutts. "I'm not on your track. Don't be scared."

"I'm not scared."

"It was Piggott got it up, I understand?" said Cutts.

"Suppose it was?" said Wally guardedly.

"Well, I know it was," said Cutts. "I understood from him that it was over, and that he had won the stakes."

"No fear! He's pretty sure to win, as he drew the favourite, but we don't know the result yet," said Jameson.

"Yes, I've been talking to Trimble, and I learned from him that it wasn't over yet," said Cutts. "Quite a big little sum of money, I believe?"

"It isn't money," said Levison minor. "We couldn't do it for money."

"Eh? What is it for, then?" exclaimed Cutts, with a stare.

"Stamps!"

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"Ha, ha! What's the difference?"

"If you haven't sense enough to see the difference, 'tain't much good pointing it out to you," said Wally tartly.

"Well, stamps, then!" said Cutts, with undiminished good-humour. "How much did it come to?"

"Four pounds!" said Wally proudly. "Of course, some of the fellows took a good many chances. Reggie got about eight blanks, didn't you, Reggie?"

"Yes, I did!" growled Manners minor.

"Four pounds?" said Cutts. "Piggott's holding the stakes?"

"Yes."

"Then there's two pounds left," remarked Cutts thoughtfully. He was thinking of the fact that Piggott had placed two pounds' worth of stamps with St. Leger for the bet on the House match. Cutts was not aware that the other two pounds had also been put up for further bets with Racke and Crooke of the Shell.

The fags stared at him.

"Two pounds?" said Wally. "There's four! What do you mean by two pounds?"

"Nothing!" said Cutts hastily. "I—I mean four!"

"Piggy hasn't been getting rid of the tin, has he?" exclaimed Hobbs suspiciously.

"He'd better not, unless the favourite comes in!" said Wally warmly. "If my horse wins, I'm going to have those stamps, I know that!"

"Well, the favourite's bound to win!" said Cutts. "I understand that Piggott had the luck to get the favourite."

"Yes, that's so."

"Your Housemaster would be down on you if he knew about this," said Cutts, with a shake of his head.

"Well, you're not going to sneak, I suppose?" said Jameson.

"Not at all. The fact is, I feel inclined to take a whack in your little sweep, just for luck," said Cutts carelessly.

"Oh!" said the fags, in surprise.

The idea of the high and mighty Cutts of the Fifth taking a whack in a Third Form sweep was very flattering.

"Too late, I think," said Wally. "Piggy's gone down to Rylcombe for the evening paper. Besides, the draw was yesterday."

"I mean, I'm willing to buy a chance from some kid who wants to part with one," explained Cutts. "I suppose Piggot wouldn't part with the favourite?"

"No fear!"

"Still, I'm a sporting chap, and every geegee has a chance till he's beaten," said Cutts. "Anybody got any outsiders to dispose of?"

"Yes, rather," said Hobbs. Frayne'll let you have Pinch of Snuff, Cutts."

"Well, he's a rank outsider," said Cutts. "Any more?"

"Levison minor's got Blue Bonnet; he's no good."

Cutts' eyes glistened for a moment.

"I'll take the pair of them," he said, taking two shillings from his pocket. "Here you are—a bob each for Pinch of Snuff and Blue Bonnet!"

"Done!" exclaimed Frayne, and he handed over his slip at once, and received a shilling.

Levison minor did not move.

"Well?" said Cutts impatiently.

"I'm not selling Blue Bonnet," said Levison minor. "I'm staying in the sweep."

"What rot! You ought to be glad of a chance of getting your bob back."

"Sell out while you've got the chance, you duffer!" said Hobbs. "Everybody knows that Blue Bonnet's no good. Very likely he never ran at all."

"I'm staying in if the other fellows do," said Levison minor.

"Good for you!" said Wally. "After all, there's a millionth part of a chance that your rotten outsider may get home."

"Not much chance, I think," said Cutts, laughing. "You'd better take my offer, young Levison."

"Thanks; but I'll keep my gee-gee," said Levison minor.

The good-humour faded from Cutts' face. A very ugly look came into his eyes.

"Look here, I want you to sell me that outsider!" he said. "I've a fancy for it; not that he's got any chance of winning. I'll give you two bob."

Levison minor looked at him squarely.

He was by no means well versed in matters appertaining to racing, and he did not know much about Cutts and his unscrupulous ways. But he was no fool, and he wondered why Cutts should be willing to give two shillings for a horse he declared had no chance of winning.

"Here's your money!" said Cutts.

The fag shook his head.

"I'm keeping him," he said.

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"I'll make it half-a-crown."

"Look here, Cutts, if you think the horse is no good, what do you want to give half-a-crown for him for?" demanded Levison minor bluntly.

Wally whistled. He was getting suspicious, too.

"Merely as a sporting chance," said Cutts, finding great difficulty in concealing his rage at being read so easily by a fag of the Third Form.

"Well, if you want to take sporting chances, lots of the fellows will let you have their outsiders at half-a-crown each."

There was a chorus of laughter from the fags. Cutts' face grew red with anger.

"Look here, have you seen the evening paper, Cutts?" demanded Jameson, very suspiciously. "Has Blue Bonnet won, after all?"

"You cheeky young rascal!" said Cutts angrily. "You know the evening papers don't get here as early as this!"

"No, that's so," agreed Wally. "But what are you so keen after Blue Bonnet for?"

"There's such a thing as a tip by telephone," said Jameson shrewdly. "Have you had a telephone-call from some bookie pal, Cutts? And has he told you Blue Bonnet's won?"

The look on Cutts' face made the fags exchange curious glances. Jameson's sharp surmise was probably very near the truth.

D'Arcy whistled expressively.

"You hang on to Blue Bonnet, young Levison!" he said.

"I'm going to," said Frank.

"Look here, I want that horse!" said Cutts, between his teeth. "Hand me that paper, Levison minor, and you take your half-crown!"

"Nothing doing!"

"Do you want me to go to the Housemaster and tell him the whole game?" asked Cutts threateningly.

"If you do, we'll tell him that you tried to get Levison's geegee from him for half-a-crown!" retorted Wally.

Cutts paused. He had given himself away too completely to think of carrying out his threat.

"You'd better clear off!" added Wally. "It looks as if Blue Bonnet's won, and you know it, and you're trying to diddle Levison minor."

Gerald Cutts drew a deep breath. He was not likely to take a defeat tamely at the hands of the fags.

"Will you do as I ask, Levison minor?" he said.

"No, I won't!"

"Then I'll give you a thumping good lickin'!" exclaimed Cutts, losing all control of his temper at last.

"Yaroooh! Rescue!" yelled Frank, as the dandy of the Fifth seized him, and dragged him to his feet.

"Hands off!" roared Wally.

"Let him alone, you bully!"

Cutts was cuffing the struggling fag right and left. But the Third-Formers were not likely to stand that. There was a rush of the fags at Cutts, and the dandy of the Fifth was fairly wrenched away from his victim, and bundled to the door.

"Kick him out!" roared Wally.

"Hurrah!"

"You young scoundrels!" yelled Cutts, struggling frantically in the grasp of the crowd of fags. "I'll smash you! I'll—I'll— Oh, my hat! Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha! Kick him out!"

"Outside, you rotter!"

The scuffling crowd surged through the doorway, and the dandy of the Fifth—looking less like a dandy now—was dumped down in the passage.

Cutts sat up and gasped for breath.

"You—you— Grooh—hoooh—groogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come in and have some more!" chuckled Wally invitingly. "We don't allow Fifth Form cads to come swanking in our Form-room!"

"Not 'arf!" chortled Joe Frayne.

"Come on, Cutts!" yelled the fags.

But Cutts did not come on. It was pretty clear that he would not get Blue Bonnet now, or anything else, but a ragging. He shook his fist at the crowded doorway of the Form-room, and limped away, followed by a triumphant yell of derision from the Third.

"What an awful rotter!" said Jameson. "He must have heard that Blue Bonnet's won, and he came here to bamboozle Levison minor."

"It jolly well looks like it," said Wally. "You've had the luck, Franky."

Frank nodded. He could have no doubt on the point himself. Gerald Cutts' action had no other explanation.

"We'll have the stamps out, when Piggy comes in," said Wally. "What's the little beast staying out so long for? You'll have to stand a feed to the Third out of it, young Levison."

"Yes, rather!" said Frank.

"The whole Form," said Wally. "We'll have a regular celebration. And you can send a quid to the Red Cross, if you like."

"Good idea!"

"Let's go and look for Piggy," said Wally. "It's time he was in. Come on!"

And the fags, in great spirits, sallied out of the Form-room and made their way to the gates, to watch for Piggott's return from the village. They had no doubt now that Levison minor was the winner, and his success was very popular. And when the four pound's-worth of stamps came to be disposed of there was no doubt that the Third Form would rally round Levison minor to the last fag.

CHAPTER 12.

Welshed!

"WALLY, you young wascal!"

"Bow-wow!" said Wally cheerfully.

"You uttab young wascallion!" said

Arthur Augustus sternly. "I am goin' to speak vewy sewfously to you!"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" implored Wally.

But the swell of the Fourth was evidently determined to begin. He planted himself directly in the path of the Third-Form fags as they were going down to the gates.

The Terrible Three were with him, and they were looking unusually grave. Even Monty Lowther was serious for once.

"Oh, buzz off!" said Wally impatiently.

"I am goin' to speak sewfously to you, Wally."

"Rats!"

"And I'm going to do the same for you, Joe," said Tom Merry to Frayne.

"Oh, Master Tom," said Joe, in dismay. "What 'ave I done?"

"And you, Reggie, you young rascal!" said Manners.

"Hallo!" said Manners minor. "What's the trouble with you, old scout?"

"My only Aunt Jane! It's a regular preaching match," said Wally. "Haven't you got a sermon to deliver, Lowther?"

"You young rascal!" said Lowther.

"Look here, what's the fuss about?" demanded Wally.

"If you don't want thick ears all round, you'd better explain."

"We've heard it from Levison major," said Tom sharply.

"We know what you all wanted stamps for now. You've been gambling!"

"Off-side!" said Wally.

"You've had a sweepstake on the Lynwood race in the Third," said Manners. "Piggott got it up, and we know all about it now."

"Not for money, Master Tom," said Joe Frayne.

"No; for stamps," said Tom. "It comes to the same thing."

"Piggott said—"

"Piggott would say anything—he's a thorough little Hun!" said Tom. "Joe, you young rascal, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Joe Frayne hung his head.

"I wouldn't have done it if I'd knowed, Master Tom," he said shamefacedly. "It was only for stamps, you know, and—and—"

"Rot!" exclaimed Wally angrily. "If you say we're gambling, Tom, we'll jolly well bump you!"

"You feahful young wascal!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus wrathfully. "What do you call it, then?"

"Well, it's only gambling if it's for money," said Wally obstinately.

"Any rotten excuse is better than none, I suppose," said Manners bitterly. "I shouldn't have thought you'd go in for it, Reggie."

Manners minor flushed uncomfortably.

"Well, I didn't think much about it," he said, "as—as it was for stamps, you know!"

"Oh, don't talk rot!"

"Tell him to go and eat coke, Reggie!" advised Wally. "I don't stand any preaching from my major, I can tell you. Go and eat coke, Gussy!"

"You young wagamuffin—"

"Come on, kids," said Wally. "Piggy may come in any minute now—"

"Look here," said Tom Merry quietly. "this can't be allowed to go on. I dare say Piggott led you by the nose, with his lying rot about stamps instead of money. But you know jolly well it's a shady business, and you ought to chuck it up!"

"Rats!" said Wally independently.

"If you win, and keep the winnings, you're keeping money won in gambling," said Tom. "I expect you not to do it, Joe."

"I—I've sold my boss to Cutts, Master Tom!"

"What about you, Reggie?" asked Manners.

Reggie hesitated.

"I'll chuck it up if you like," he said at last. "I don't care twopence either way. Besides, Levison minor's won!"

"And you've got the plunder, you young scamp?" asked Tom Merry, looking at the fag.

"I'm not sure I've won yet," said Frank. "Only—only Cutts was so keen to get Blue Bonnet, I thought so. I didn't see any harm in it at first, anyway, till my major jawed to me about it."

"Let 'em go and eat coke!" said Wally. "'Tain't their business. We're going to have a spread in the Third with the prize!"

"Here's Piggy!" shouted Hobbs.

Piggott of the Third came in at the gates, with a downcast face. He spotted the fags, and came towards them.

"Got the paper?" exclaimed Wally eagerly.

Piggott shook his head, with a very furtive look.

"N-no. They're not in yet."

"What are you looking down in the mouth about, then?" asked Frayne.

"Was I?" stammered Piggott.

"Yes, rather!"

"Look here, I believe Blue Bonnet's won!" said Wally.

Piggott started.

"You—you think so?" he muttered. "What rot! He's a rank outsider! In fact I—I was going to offer Levison minor to take the geegee off his hands."

"Oh, were you?" said Wally suspiciously.

"I'll let you have your bob back for it, if you like, Levison minor. I—I told your major I would, in fact!"

"I don't want it," said Frank drily.

Piggott bit his lip restlessly.

"Look here, I know you'd rather be out of the sweep," he muttered. "I—I'm sorry I let you into it really. I'll stand you two bob for Blue Bonnet, and you're clear. Your major doesn't like you having a hand in it."

"It's the last sweep I shall ever have a hand in," said Frank contemptuously. "But you needn't try to get Blue Bonnet away from me; I've had some of that from Cutts of the Fifth already. I believe Blue Bonnet's won, and that Cutts knows it. And I believe you know it, too!"

"Yes, rather," said Wally emphatically. "Why haven't they got the papers in yet, eh? They always have 'em at this time. You're keeping the paper dark because you want to dish Levison minor, you young Hun!"

"I—I—"

"Blessed if I don't believe he's got the paper about him all the time!" exclaimed Wally, exasperated. "Collar him, and see!"

The angry fags surrounded Piggott.

"Bai Jove, did you ever see such a gang of uttab young sweeps?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in disgust. "Wally, I am uttably ashamed of you!"

"Precious gang of gambling young scoundrels!" said Lowther.

Indeed, the scene was not edifying.

Wally & Co. were surrounding the unhappy Piggott, demanding the paper which they were pretty sure he had about him. His offer to buy Blue Bonnet from Levison minor, coming after Cutts' similar offer, convinced them that the outsider had won, and that Frank was entitled to the stakes. There were angry looks and angry voices on all sides.

"Here it is!" yelled Frayne.

He dragged a crumpled paper out from under Piggott's waistcoat, where it had been hidden.

"Look for the winner!" panted Hobbs.

Piggott reeled away with a gasp. The utter misery in his face might have touched a heart of stone. But the eager fags did not even look at him. All eyes were fixed hungrily on the paper as Hobbs unfolded it.

"Where's the blessed racing reports?" exclaimed Hobbs.

"Where do you look for 'em?"

"Here they are—stop-press."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"HERRIES' ORCHESTRA!"

"Lynwood race," read out Hobbs.
 "That's it. Who's the winner?"
 "Buck up!"
 "Blue Bonnet!"
 "Hurrah!"
 "Pair of Spectacles and Dinky Duff placed," said Hobbs,
 "Blue Bonnet's first—he's the winner!"
 "Bravo!"
 "You win, Franky!"
 Frank Levison did not look very elated. The prize was his; but there was no pleasure in it now that he had had leisure to think the matter out.

"Shell out, Piggott, you cad!"
 "That's why you wanted Levison minor's ticket, you rotter!"
 "Make him shell out!"
 "Where's the dibs, Piggott?"
 Piggott gasped. Wally grabbed him by the arm.
 "Is it in your desk?" he demanded. "Come on, then, and shell out! Do you hear? What are you hanging about for?"
 "I—I—I—I can't shell out," stammered Piggott, pale as death, with a hunted look in his eyes. "I—I haven't the money!"
 "Money! The stamps, you mean! What have you done with the stamps?" roared Wally.
 "I—I've spent them!"
 "My only Aunt Jane!"
 The fags glared at Piggott as if they would eat him. There was no doubt that he was telling the truth. The money was gone!

"Swindler!" yelled Hobbs.
 "Thief!"
 "Welsher!"
 "I—I thought the favourite was sure to win," groaned the wretched sportsman of the Third. "I—I lost the money on the House match. I—I haven't a penny left!"
 "It wasn't your money!" roared Wally. "It was Levison minor's money!"
 "I—I know—as it turns out—but—but—"
 "Yah! Welsher!"
 "Never mind," broke in Levison minor hurriedly. "I don't care! I—I shouldn't have wanted to take the money, anyway!"

Tom Merry strode forward as the angry fags seized Piggott. The wretched swindler was yelling with terror now.
 "Chuck that!" said Tom curtly. "If you bring a prefect here, you'll have to explain the matter to the Housemaster!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 Wally drew a deep breath.
 "You bounders can mind your own business," he said.
 "But—but, all the same, it was a rotten game, you kids! It was gambling, and—and it serves us right to be welshed, and we might have expected it from Piggott, too. Give the rotten cad the frog's march, and let him go!"

It was some minutes before Piggott escaped from the hands of the fags, and then he was feeling as if he had paid in full for all his sins.

"I wathah think there won't be any more sweeps in the Third," remarked Arthur Augustus, as he walked away with the Terrible Three.

Tom Merry laughed.
 "I think so, too."

Arthur Augustus was right. Piggott of the Third was not likely to suggest another little speculation like that to his Form-fellows. He was sent to Coventry by the Third, and it was a long time before he was allowed to emerge from that cold and comfortless resort. And the general contempt with which he was regarded was perhaps a sufficient punishment for his rascality.

"So you drew the winner," Levison of the Fourth said to his minor when they met that evening. "Rolling in guilty gold now—what?"

"No," said Frank, flushing. "Piggott spent the money. It was a swindle!"

"Ha, ha! I knew that!"
 "And I didn't get anything!"

"Which was as much as you deserved," remarked Levison.

"I know! And I'm jolly glad," said Frank. "And—and there's not going to be anything more of that kind."

"Not even for stamps?" grinned Levison.

"Not even for stamps," said Frank.
 Which was one satisfactory result, at least, of the Third-Form Sweepstake!

THE END.

Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"HERRIES' ORCHESTRA!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 459.

COMING SHORTLY! THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY, PRICE 2^d.

NOTICES.

Football.

Matches Wanted by:

- WESTEND ROVERS F.C. (15)—6 mile r.—R. Fenwick, 14 Belmont Rd., Frome.
 VICTORIA UNITED F.C. (15-16)—5-mile r.—A. B. West, Victoria Mills, Chorley.
 PORT SUNLIGHT ATHLETIC F.C. (10-13)—5-mile r.—Maurice Rixom, 31, Lower Rd., Port Sunlight.
 ALBERT UNITED F.C. (14½)—3-mile r. of Kensington.—A. Buckland, 3, Marmaduke St., Liverpool.
 NORFOLK JUNIORS (14)—5-mile r.—F. Boland, 54, Tylney Rd., Park, Sheffield.
 EAST SURREY F.C. (16-17).—C. H. Dixon, 155, Cronin Rd., Peckham, S.E.
 WHEELER STREET CONGREGATIONAL F.C. (15-16).—G. C. Banks, 46, Whitehead Rd., Aston, Birmingham.
 KENSAL GREEN F.C. (16)—10-mile r.—W. J. Quinnell, 32, College Rd., Kensal Rise, N.W.
 BLACKHEATH INVICTA F.C. (15); two or three good players also wanted.—W. E. Chapman, 5, Elmira St., Lewisham, S.E.
 98TH LONDON COMPANY BOYS' BRIGADE (13-14)—5-mile r.—A. Robb, 7, Ling Rd., Plaistow, Essex.
 PARK CELTIC F.C. (16-17)—4-mile r.—J. Southworth, 16, Lord Derby St., Blackburn.
 DOVEDALE F.C. (14½)—4-mile r.—G. Cahill, 69, Barndale Rd., Mossley Hill, Liverpool.
 MILTON ROAD F.C. (16½)—5-mile r.—A. Holmes, 98, Milton Rd., Croydon.
 ROATH RAMBLERS A.F.C. (15)—5-mile r.—C. J. Bass, 15, Pearcefield Place, Cardiff.
 An Ebbw Vale Team (15)—7-mile r.—H. Gunter, 56, Alexandra St., Ebbw Vale, Mon.
 2ND DEPTFORD BOY SCOUTS F.C. (16)—1½-mile r.—F. Stanton, 18, Boscawen St., Deptford, S.E.
 BEESTON SCHOOL OLD BOYS F.C. (14-15)—3-mile r.—T. Halmonroyd, 5, Cross Flatts Crescent, Beeston, Leeds.
 BARKING ARGYLE F.C. (15-16).—R. Fudge, 150, Glenny Rd., Barking, E.
 BELMONT INSTITUTE F.C. (15)—4-mile r.—J. Scott, 7, Harroway Rd., Battersea, S.W.
 MOUNT VILLA F.C. (15½)—6-mile r.—S. Wylie, 43, Bebington Rd., Birkenhead.
 ST. JAMES' F.C. (17).—S. C. Ball, 18, Victoria Parade, Muswell Hill, N.

Other Footer Notices.

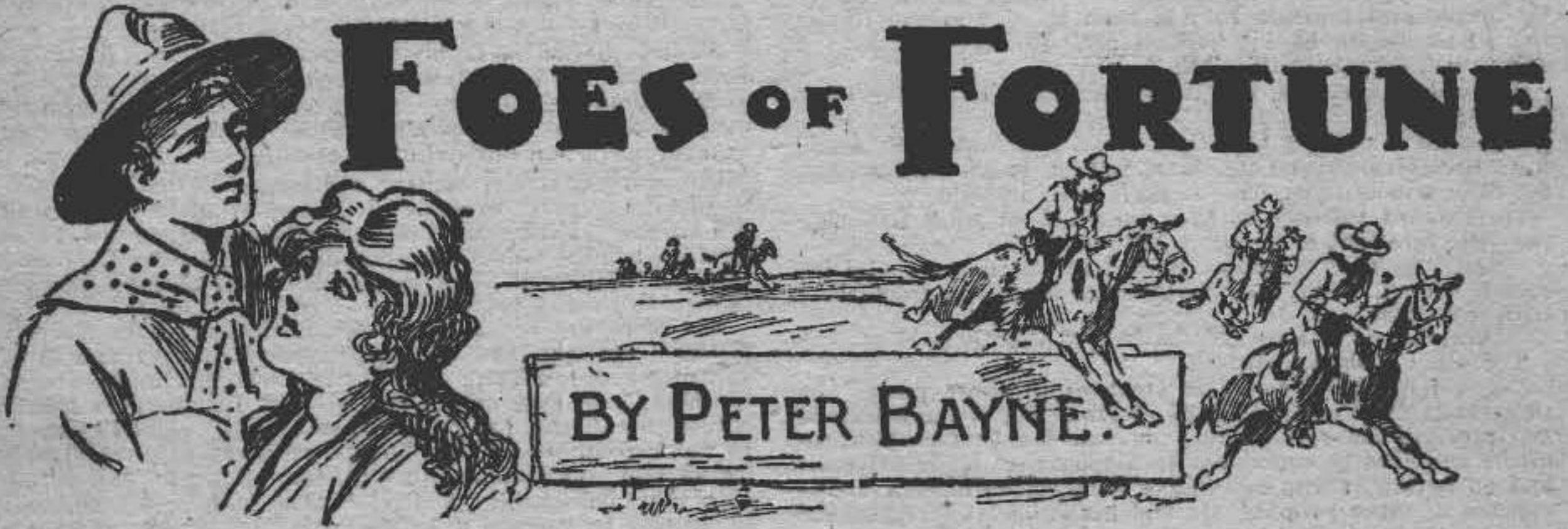
- J. Robertson (16) and R. Mackay (14) want to join a club in or near Edinburgh.—J. Robertson, c/o Mr. Falconer, 39, Woodburn Terr., Edinburgh.
 T. Egan, 104, Commercial St., Batley, wants to join a club within 2 miles; goalkeeper.
 C. Meldrum, 136, Hampstead Rd., Benwell Grove, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wants to form a club (14-15) in his district.
 CLIFFORD RANGERS F.C. want half a dozen players (13½-16½).—R. French, 9, Shirland Mews, Shirland Rd., Paddington, W.
 W. H. Spring, 51, Caddington Rd., Cricklewood, N.W. (17½), outside or inside-left, or left-half, wants to join a club.
 Leslie Parsons (16), plays anywhere, wants to join a team.—Address, 37, Tennyson Avenue, East Ham.
 Walter C. Stubbs, 153, Drummond Rd., Bermondsey, S.E., wants to form a team (15-16).—Apply personally, if possible, please.
 A. E. Lombard (14, goalkeeper) and J. Singleton (14, right-inside) want to join a team in Manchester or Salford.—Address, A. E. Lombard, c/o Messrs. Dimmock Bros., 2t, Spring Gardens, Manchester.

Back Numbers, &c., Wanted.

- By Miss Bertha Wells, 11, Park Avenue, Northfleet—"Rivals and Chums," "Through Thick and Thin," "Hurree Singh's Peril," "Tom Merry's Find," and "Gems" in which Talbot first appeared.
 By J. E. Payne, 44, Queen's Rd., Plaistow, E.—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "Against His Father's Wish," "By Order of the Form," "Tempted But True," "The Punishment Policies," "Figgins' Folly," "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "Ashamed of His Father," "Through Thick and Thin," and "The Boy Without a Name."
 By G. Hastings, Signaman, 2 Mess, H.M.S. Grampus, c/o G.P.O., London—Back numbers of companion papers, if readers will oblige. Would also like to correspond with London readers.
 By A. Burgess, 234, St. James' Rd., Bermondsey, S.E.—1-30 "Gem"; offers 2d. each.

A NEW ADVENTURE SERIAL.

START TO-DAY!



Friendless and Alone—Surprised by Bandits— Down the River.

Dawn was breaking over the trackless forest.

The waters of the mighty Amazon, rolling swiftly along between far-divided banks, faintly caught the reflection of the dim, uncertain light that heralded the advent of another day.

Unheeding the passage of time, a youth lay sleeping at the foot of a ceiba-tree, in whose high branches birds without number were awakening to renewed life and activity. Quite undisturbed by the increasing clamour of the feathered host, the lad slumbered on. He was tall and well-made, and his handsome, sunburnt face expressed, even in repose, strong character and resolute, unchanging purpose. His clothes, shabby and travel-stained, were of coarse but serviceable make. In the broad leather belt round his waist were a Browning revolver and a long knife, such as foresters use. A brown canvas bag, which he used as a pillow, contained his other belongings. With it on his back, he had tramped thirty miles through terribly bad country the day before, and it had been his intention to resume his journey at the first sign of daylight.

But his sleep was the sleep of utter fatigue, and the sun rose in the eastern sky without disturbing his protracted rest. Presently a little band of four or five horsemen, riding in single file between the trees, appeared in sight. They were fierce and swarthy of countenance, of mixed Spanish and native breed, and their arms and uniform proclaimed the fact that they belonged to one of the many troops of irregular cavalry frequently to be met with in the South American wilds, where, acting independently of one another, or under the command of some bold and desperate leader, they are a law unto themselves.

"Hola!" said one, catching a glimpse of the sleeper, and at once drawing rein. "Who is this? An Englishman, by the look of him. Peste! The race is everywhere! One can never be sure of not meeting them. What can he be doing here?"

"It matters not," remarked another, dismounting and throwing the reins to a companion. "But, at any rate, he must pay for being here. There may be something in that bag worth the taking."

Stepping up to the youth, he took possession of the canvas bag, and also removed the knife and revolver from the belt that held them. The rough movement he was subjected to aroused the sleeper. Opening his eyes, he looked up, and speedily became aware of what was taking place.

Uttering an indignant cry, he sprang to his feet, and, with a single blow of his fist, struck the robber to the ground. The savage imprecation of the surprised man was drowned by the yells of rage and astonishment given vent to by his associates.

Moved by a common impulse, they furiously spurred their horses, and rode hard at the lad, with the intention that he should be knocked down and trampled to death. But, quick as they were, Carton Ross was quicker still. A leap to one side saved him from the danger that rushed upon him like a whirlwind.

Next moment he sprang behind a tree, a bullet whistling past his head as he did so. The shot was fired by the man

who had robbed him, and it was fired from his own revolver, a fact that he realised with a feeling of angry amusement.

A quick glance round convinced him that his position was a desperate one. His enemies, spreading out, were following him fast. Armed and mounted as they were, they held him at an overwhelming disadvantage.

"My faith!" he muttered. "But this is a ticklish situation for a fellow to be in! I'm afraid it's all up with me; but, none the less, I'll make a fight for it. Here goes!"

Darting from tree to tree in a tortuous course that he hoped would baffle his pursuers, Ross made for the river, which was no more than sixty yards away. His tactics met with better success than he had dared to hope for, and he reached the edge of a glade opening on to the banks of the stream, still unscathed by the shots that were fired in his direction.

From here to the river was a stretch of about fifteen yards of perfectly open ground, and Ross, hesitating not a moment, dashed across it. His foes, riding their horses at full gallop, endeavoured to overtake him, but in vain. Gaining the top of the bank, he plunged headlong into the dark, turbid current, and was immediately lost to sight.

Coming to the surface to draw breath a few moments later, Ross was instantly seen and fired at by his baffled foes, but not a bullet touched him. Diving again, he swam under water, going with the stream, and when he rose a second time those from whom he had escaped were nowhere to be seen. This was because, in following the river, they had been compelled to make a wide detour in order to avoid a thick belt of timber and tropical vegetation that came right down to the water's edge.

"They'll have to go a long way to get round it," said Ross, noticing that the belt stretched away in an apparently endless perspective. "And before they've ridden much farther I ought to be in a safe place on land again."

Upon setting out to reach the bank once more, however, he soon discovered that it was no easy matter to make any headway against the current. Fine swimmer though he was, his progress was slow and toilsome. His strength weakened, and at last he was forced to realise that he was farther away from the shore than when he had started swimming back to it.

This discovery alarmed, but did not dishearten, him. Seizing hold of a large piece of drift-wood as it was floating by, he threw his arms over it. Buoyed up by the support, he was able to rest and regain his lost strength, and he was about to make a fresh effort to reach land when something that caught his eye gave him a new purpose.

This was a canoe coming down the stream, and he saw that it must soon pass between him and the shore. Giving a lusty shout, he abandoned his piece of drift-wood, and struck out for the strange craft.

His call was heard by the three people in the canoe, which was turned and paddled towards him. As he came alongside, Ross laid his hand lightly on the gunwale, and guided himself to the square stern, where it was possible for him to board the vessel without endangering the safety of its occupants.

One of these was a girl of about seventeen, of slim, graceful figure, and with a strikingly-beautiful face. The other two were an old man of proud yet benevolent aspect, and a young one who was evidently of the native servant class.

They stared curiously at Ross, who, with the water dripping

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 459.

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

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"HERRIES' ORCHESTRA!"

from his saturated clothes, met their looks with a frank, fearless gaze. That they were disposed to be friendly to him was shown by their attitude.

"Thank you!" he said, feeling heartily glad to be out of the unpleasant position he had been in. "I'm greatly indebted to you for having rescued me. But for your help, I might well have been drowned."

The old man smiled, and bowed his head with a courteous inclination.

"You have nothing to thank us for," he said. "It would have been strange and inhuman, indeed, had we passed you by. But how did you come to be in such a plight?"

He listened intently as Ross told him of what had happened to him that morning.

"Ah!" he said. "Those must have been some of Dirk Ralwin's men. You were very lucky to escape from them with your life."

"Dirk Ralwin!" returned the lad. "Who is he?"

The other looked surprised.

"You must be a complete stranger in these parts," he remarked, "not to have heard of him. He is the leader of an insurrectionary movement against the present Government, and that is equivalent to saying that he is a bandit and an outlaw, whose sole object is to enrich himself at the expense of other people. He and his followers terrorise the whole country, and live by robbery and plunder."

"They didn't get much out of me," said Ross, with a light laugh of care-free youth that quickly forgets its troubles. "The only thing of real value I lost was a Browning revolver that my father bought for me."

"And where is he?"

"Dead!" answered Carton Ross, a sad look flitting across his face. "He died three months ago at Parana, the little trading station a hundred miles up the river. He was a trader there, but never did well at the business, and after his death I set out to reach one of the large towns near the coast. To get even so far has taken all my money, and I must manage the rest of the journey in the best way I am able to."

"As to that," said the other smilingly, "do not worry, for you shall remain as my guest at San Ramo, which is a few miles farther down, until the next steamer calls there. That will be in a week or two. The captain is a friend of mine, and will give you a passage on board at my request. Do not thank me. I am English myself, although it is more than forty years since I last saw the old homeland, and I regard it as a great privilege to be able to do any friendly service to one of my own race."

His new acquaintance, Ross discovered, was a retired trader named Harvey Milburne, and the girl was his daughter Lorna. The day before they had gone in the canoe to a small settlement higher up the river, and were now on their return home.

Helped by the tide, the canoe cut swiftly through the water. The sun mounted high in the sky, and the mighty stream shone and glistened like a rippling sea of liquid silver, while the dense foliage crowning the near shore gleamed with a thousand gorgeous tints of leaf and flower.

In the peace and beauty that surrounded him Carton Ross ceased to think of the future. Out of black danger he had passed into security. He was amongst friends, those of his own race, and this knowledge was worth all the risk and hardship he had gone through to gain it.

The shore opened in a wide bay, into which the canoe turned, and, coming alongside a wooden jetty, the voyagers stepped on land. San Ramo, a little settlement of not more than twenty houses, was built in straggling fashion on a hillside at the back of the inlet. The home of Harvey Milburne stood alone on the crest of the height.

It was a picturesque old house, built long before by the Spaniards, who at that time ruled the whole country. Carton Ross received the welcome of an honoured guest to it. The friendship with those he lived among, started in such strange circumstances, grew and strengthened, and he had no cause for regret when Harvey Milburne informed him one morning that the steamer he had expected to leave by was wrecked, and that the next one was not due for several weeks.

Fate, although he never suspected it, was intervening to change the whole course of his existence. He was to be caught up by the web of circumstance and hurled into the midst of such danger and excitement as he had never even dreamed of before!

The Gathering of the Clan—Sucked down by the Sea—The Missing Heir.

Off the southern coast of England, several miles out at sea, a great yacht was steaming through the calm water. She was the Emerald, a veritable floating pleasure palace, belonging to Cyrus Ross, the most famous and talked-of money magnate of the day.

It was the eightieth anniversary of his birthday, which, as had been his custom for years past, he was keeping on board his splendid vessel. There was a large and distinguished company on board, every member of which was related to Cyrus Ross, for it was a purely private gathering.

All branches of the family were assembled there. They had been summoned home from all parts of the world, and none able to come had failed to respond to the call, for amongst his own people the word of Cyrus Ross was a command that exacted quick and unquestioning obedience.

In coming to render homage and honour to the head of the family they were also actuated by the strongest impulses of self-interest. Each and all of them hoped to share in his vast wealth when the famous financier died, and, hale and vigorous though he still was, his advanced age made it impossible for him to live many years more.

Yet there was one missing who should have been there, a younger son who had quarrelled with his father and gone abroad, never to return. The thought of him who was absent troubled Cyrus Ross on this special day. He could not banish it from his mind. Like some proud, mighty chieftain of old he was surrounded by none but those who loved, revered, and feared him, yet memories of that son whom he had parted from years before threw a cloud over his happiness. As never in the past he yearned to look into the face, to hear the voice of the bearer of his name whom instinct told him he would never see again.

There were other sons of his around him who had grown up to become pillars of the world-renowned house which wielded a power greater than that of any emperor; but their presence only reminded him more forcibly of their missing brother.

"Carton!" he murmured, lost in mournful reverie. "Come back to me, my boy, and all shall be forgiven. You were rash and headstrong, but you were not entirely to blame, for in my pride and obstinacy I would make no excuses for your conduct, as I now realise I ought to have done."

Too late! It was too late for Cyrus Ross to regret the past and hope against hope that before his death he would once more be reunited to his lost son. That night, as she was returning to port, the Emerald encountered a dense fog, and an hour later a great battleship crashed into her with terrible force.

The splendid yacht was cut sheer in half, and sank at once like a stone, carrying every soul on board her to the bottom of the sea. Not one was rescued. All went headlong to their doom!

And the next day the whole wide world thrilled to the news. Nothing like it had ever happened before. It was a catastrophe that stunned the imagination. For not only had Cyrus Ross gone, but all those who were related to him, and this wholesale wiping out of a family who controlled the money markets of Europe caused such a panic as none living had ever known.

When the public excitement began to abate it was given a fresh stimulus by the report that there was a son of Cyrus Ross who was not on board the Emerald when the yacht sank for ever into the ocean depths. This member of the family had disappeared several years before, and no news had been heard of him since; but as his death had never been reported, it was only natural to presume that he was still alive.

Where was Carton Ross?

All over the civilised world people asked each other this question, and none could answer it!

The Night Raiders—When the Dawn Came—Made Prisoner.

In a deep, wide glade of the mighty forest the camp-fires of Dirk Ralwin, the outlaw chief, and his followers, flamed in the night darkness.

The men were asleep for the most part, but some were playing cards, or smoking and talking with one another over the events of the past day. Their horses, saddled and bridled for instant use, were picketed close to the camp, for there was always the danger of a sudden attack by Government troops to be guarded against.

The chief of the band, Dirk Ralwin, was alone in his tent, opening a packet of newspapers that he had received that day from one of his agents. He was a man of medium height, sparely but strongly built, and with a dark, gipsylike face that expressed cunning and cruelty in an equal degree.

At one time Ralwin had been the captain of a river steamer that regularly voyaged up and down the Amazon, and had so gained an extensive acquaintance with the native population. He was bold, ambitious, and utterly unscrupulous, and when at last circumstances pointed the way to his becoming the leader of a rebel movement that promised to be successful, he did not hesitate to accept the post that was offered to him.

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

FOES OF FORTUNE!

(Continued from page 20.)

by men who were not slow to realise that he was in every way fitted for it.

The wisdom of their choice had been vindicated time after time. The organisation was growing in power and numbers, and it had set up a reign of terror that could not be broken. This success was mainly due to Dirk Ralwin's skill and capability, and his name was feared near and far by friend and foe alike.

Unfolding one of his newspapers, Ralwin glanced at it with a careless air that speedily changed to one of the deepest interest. The news that excited his curiosity, and that occupied the whole of the front page, related to the sensational sinking of the Emerald and the death of Cyrus Ross and all his relatives. Quickly Ralwin scanned the details of the great catastrophe. When he read the part referring to the missing son of the famous financier he gave a violent start.

"Carton Ross!" he exclaimed. "That name is a familiar one to me. When have I heard it before?"

Putting down the paper he stared musingly before him. His gaze alighted on a brown canvas bag lying in a corner of the tent, and instantly a look of recollection flashed across his face. Rising to his feet, he crossed over to the bag and opened it.

Throwing its miscellaneous contents on one side, he found what he was looking for—a thin roll of papers wrapped in a covering of deerskin. Unrolling them, he carefully but eagerly read the papers one by one. He had read them before, but then they had meant little to him. Now they placed him in possession of a secret that the whole world was anxious to know.

The flap of the tent was pulled aside, and a man entered, to draw back as he perceived that his chief was engaged with what was apparently some private correspondence. But the other beckoned him forward.

"Come here, Aylman," said Ralwin. "I want your assistance. These"—and he pointed to the papers—"are from that bag you took from the British stranger, who escaped from you some little time ago. You will be surprised to hear that they are of the very greatest importance."

"In what way?"

"Read that," Ralwin answered, pointing to the newspaper account of the sinking of the Emerald, "and then perhaps you will understand my meaning."

When Aylman had finished reading the account he looked up at Ralwin with an excited glitter in his eyes.

"It's more important news than even you think it is," he remarked, "for Carton Ross the elder is dead. He died at Parana, as I was informed only recently, several months ago. And at the same time I heard that his son, to whom you are indebted for coming into possession of those valuable papers, is now at San Ramo."

Dirk Ralwin gave vent to an exclamation of fierce delight.

"Splendid!" he said. "Nothing could be better except having him a prisoner in our hands, and that he soon will be. Is he with friends?"

"He's staying at the house of an Englishman named Milburne," Aylman replied, "who picked him up in a canoe when he escaped from us by taking to the river. As no steamer will call at San Ramo for some time to come, he would not be able to leave the place even if he wished to, and for the same reason it isn't in the least likely that he will have had news of what has happened to Cyrus Ross and the other members of the family."

Ralwin darted an approving glance at his subordinate.

"You've done well to discover the whereabouts of the lad," he said, "and I shall not forget it."

Turning once more to the papers, he gave his close attention to them for several minutes.

"Yes," he said at last, more to himself than to his companion, "this youth, Carton Ross, is the heir to the greatest fortune in the world! With these papers in his possession, he could make his claim good in any court of law to-morrow. What a stroke of luck it was that has placed him at my mercy! The unlimited wealth he will inherit shall be at my command, and then all that I desire will come to me. Nothing can stand in my path. Every obstacle shall be swept away."

Visions of a brilliant future such as he had scarcely dreamed of passed before his mind's eye. He saw himself seated in a place of supreme and unrivalled power, rebel and outlaw no longer, but a man whose word was law to millions of his fellow-creatures!

"We will start at once," he said, in answer to a question from Aylman. "It is no more than fifty miles to San Ramo. We should be there before dawn."

Ten minutes later, Dirk Ralwin rode away from the camp with forty of his troopers. Mounted on fresh horses, the members of the little band set out at a long, easy gallop,

which seldom varied in its pace. Through the winding forest aisles they went, silent and shadowy as phantoms of the night, the tiny lamps of myriads of fireflies illuminating the path with a pale, unearthly glow.

Towards morning they reached their destination. The little settlement was still and silent as the grave, until the noise of hoof-beats awakened some of the inhabitants from their sleep. Then windows were opened, only to be hastily closed again as the terrified spectators saw and recognised the outlaws whom they hated and feared.

Aroused by the sound of the approaching cavalcade, Milburne looked out to see a long line of horsemen ascending the steep path which led from the settlement to his house on the summit of the hill overlooking the bay.

He was immediately suspicious and on the alert. Living for years past in the midst of danger, he was ever expecting it. The outlaws who infested the neighbourhood had never molested him, but he knew that there was no reason why they should not do so, and their sudden appearance in front of his house told him that they were there with no friendly purpose.

Leaving his post of observation, he went below and quickly summoned the members of his household. These included the outdoor servants, who, as a measure of protection, always slept under the same roof as their master. Under his direction they barricaded the heavy doors that, in the past, had successfully withstood many a furious siege. Arms were served out, and as each man knew his work and what was expected of him, the task of preparing to guard against a possible attack did not occupy many minutes.

"Who are these men?" asked Carton Ross, thrilling with excitement at the prospect of a hard struggle. "They may be your friends."

Milburne smiled and shook his head.

"I wish I could think so," he said; "but I shall soon know. Ha!"—as a loud hammering sounded on the hall door. "Here they are seeking admittance!"

Returning to the window of his private room, which was in the front part of the house, he looked down at the horsemen on the ground below. He was seen, and a moment later his glance was intercepted by that of a man whom, with a thrill of mingled apprehension and surprise, he recognised as Dirk Ralwin, the leader of the insurrectionary movement that had for so long troubled the peace and prosperity of the country.

"You, there!" said Ralwin brusquely, reining back his horse so that he could see the other more plainly. "Come down and open your door!"

"Tell me the nature of your business here first," Milburne answered calmly. "and then I may do so. Have you called on me as a friend, or an enemy?"

"As a friend, if you will, or as the opposite," said Ralwin, with meaning emphasis. "Listen! There is a young Englishman in your house, Carton Ross. Deliver him over to me, and no harm will befall you. Refuse to do so, and your home shall be destroyed, and you and everyone in it made to suffer the worst!"

The words were uttered with the savage peremptoriness of one who was in grim and deadly earnest, and Milburne clearly realised that he must choose either the one or the other alternative. He did not hesitate in making his choice.

"The lad is my guest," he declared, "and to hand him over to you, who are his enemies, would bring lasting shame and disgrace upon me."

Ralwin frowned with angry impatience.

"He will be in no danger from us," he said. "I can assure you on that point."

"He was in danger from your men not many days ago," Milburne replied. "Had it not been for the help I was able to give him then, he would have met with his death. What do you want with him?"

"That is my business!" cried Ralwin angrily. "Are you going to obey my order? I ask you for the last time."

"You have already had my answer," said Milburne in a cool, even voice. "Now you must do your worst!"

As he drew back and closed the window, a rifle-shot smashed the glass and missed his head by the fraction of an inch. Next moment he had drawn the thick iron shutters across the casement and thrust the bolting rod across them. The shot fired was the signal for a swift and determined attack to be made on the house.

At first the bandits attempted to break open the windows, but these were protected by iron shutters of such strength and thickness as to resist every effort made to force them. Next they endeavoured to smash a way in through the doors, meeting, however, with no better results than before.

"They are drawing off," said Ross, as the sound of battle suddenly ceased. "Your house, sir, is too strong a place for them to take."

Milburne shook his head.

"They'll return soon," he said calmly. "We've not seen the last of them yet."

(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Wednesday's issue of THE "GEM" LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

A NEW KIND.

A wealthy old gentleman, who was getting very grumpy and miserable, was advised by his friends to take up some hobby which would interest him, and employ his time in a manner which would make life more cheerful for him. He thought over the suggestions for some time, and at last decided that he would go in for fishing. He forthwith purchased fishing-rods and a quantity of tackle, and started out early one morning to fish in the stream.

He sat on the bank for some hours without even getting a bite, and was becoming somewhat impatient. Soon, a small boy coming home from school, pulled from his pocket a piece of string and a bent pin. After tying the string to a branch, which he had broken from a tree close by, he threw out his line, and sat down on the bank, not far from the old gentleman. Five minutes later he landed quite a fine fish, which the gentleman stared at in amazement. The youngster turned to make his way homewards with his catch, but a short distance away met his aunt, who exclaimed:

"What a nice fish! What is it called?"

"I can't tell you, aunty, what it is called," replied the boy; "but the old man along there says it's the 'blooming limit.'"—Sent in by J. Atkinson, Slaithwaite.

A CUE-RIOUS REMARK.

A local football team was being outclassed in a match during a very disastrous season. None of the players seemed able to do anything right, and even their most ardent supporters were getting exasperated, and a gloom seemed to be cast over them. At length, one of the "Home" backs, who was very baldheaded, jumped up to head the ball, but, alas! it skidded off his cranium and past his own goalkeeper. The players were disgusted, and one fellow shouted to the unfortunate culprit:

"Hi, Jimmy, why didn't yer chalk yer cue?"—Sent in by F. Carder, Brixton.

AN AWKWARD QUESTION.

Willie's uncle was a tall, fine-looking man, while his father was rather small. Willie admired his uncle very much, and wished to grow up like him. One day he said to his mother:

"Mamma, how did uncle grow up so big and tall?"

"Well," replied his mother, "when uncle was a little boy he was always good, and tried to do what was right, and so he grew up to be tall and big."

Willie thought it over for some time rather seriously, then suddenly asked:

"Mamma, what kind of a boy was papa?"—Sent in by J. J. Earle, Lancs.

HE MISUNDERSTOOD.

Fussy Old Gent (to barber's apprentice): "My hair is falling out at an alarming rate. Can you give me anything to keep it in?"

Apprentice (diving under the counter): "Yes, sir! Here's a nice little box!"—Sent in by D. F. Walsh, co. Cork.

UNNECESSARY.

Farmer Turnipson had brought his young son David to London to see the sights, and towards the end of a long day was dragging his fourteen stone up the steps of the great Monument. Long before they reached the top, the father was regretting that he had allowed his son to persuade him to undertake such a tiring journey.

"Look, father!" exclaimed the boy, when they had at last reached the top. "Isn't it a grand sight down there?"

"Well," puffed the elder Turnipson, "if it's so grand down there, what in the name of all that's wonderful did you bring me up here for?"—Sent in by C. Rowe, Wimbledon.

WOODN'T WRITE!

Little Tommy was endeavouring to write with a lead-pencil which badly needed sharpening. At last, in desperation, he exclaimed:

"Mamma, the wood has slipped over the lead, and the marks can't come out!"—Sent in by A. Hampson, Manchester.

A NASTY KNOCK.

A young gent who had left his native village some time previously to live in London, one day returned for a short visit. He felt very proud of himself, and talked to all his old chums of the village in a very patronising way.

"Hallo, Smikes," he exclaimed, "how are you getting on?"

"Foine, lad!" replied Smikes. "How are yer getting on yerself?"

"I'm getting on all right," replied the other. "I wonder you stop here. Why don't you come to London to live? There's life there! Here, they do nothing but grow potatoes and breed pigs!"

"Eh, lad," replied Smikes; "but ye were bred here yerself, ye know."—Sent in by R. Gough, Bristol.

STARTLED HIM.

It was a proud moment for Farmer Dale when, dressed in his Sunday best, he went to see his sailor son on board his ship at Portsmouth. He had never been so close to a vessel before, and marvelled at its size. Just as he had caught hold of the ropes which hung over the side of the boat to assist sailors to the deck, he was startled to hear a clanging of bells—the eight bells of seaman's time.

As he stepped on deck, he met the officer of the watch. He saluted him, and said timidly:

"I beg your pardon, sir. I've come to see my son Jack. But, 'pon my word, I didn't mean to ring so loud!"—Sent in by B. G. Hordle, Bourne-mouth.

A TERRIBLE DISASTER.

A country-woman and her husband were travelling for the first time by rail. Having seated themselves comfortably in the carriage, the old lady was terrified at hearing the engine give a shrill whistle.

"Goodness gracious!" she exclaimed to her husband. "We have only just this minute started, and now we have run over a pig!"—Sent in by W. Hart, Nunhead.

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,

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Look out for YOUR Prize Storyette in next week's GEM or BOYS' FRIEND.