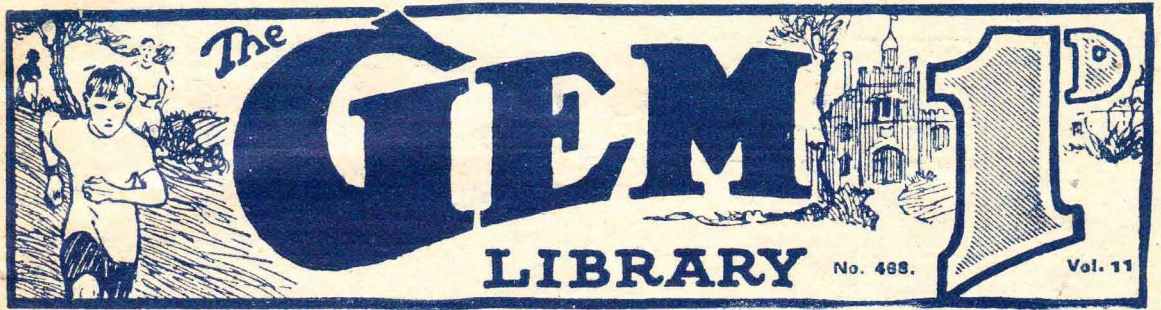
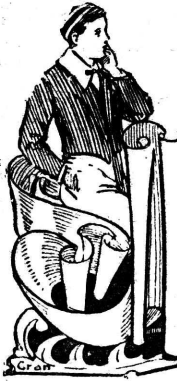


Levison for St. Jim's!



LEVISON IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY!

(A Dramatic Scene in the Grand Long Complete Story in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to — — — — —
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For Next Wednesday :

"PASSING IT ON!"

By Martin Clifford.

Arthur Augustus is Spoofed—with a capital "S" for emphasis! It is not by any means the first time, of course. But Gussy's objections to being spoofed remain as strong as ever. He wants revenge, and he goes to Ernest Levison for help in getting it. Levison evolves a really great scheme—such a scheme as Gussy himself could never have thought out in a week of Sundays. But the plot turns out even better than Levison had expected. The Terrible Three were to have been its victims, but not only they fall to it. Julian, Reilly, Hammond, and Kerruish are seized with the ambition to cut out Tom Merry & Co. They do it. Then Piggins & Co. cut out them. The upshot of it all is that ten juniors have the very doubtful pleasure of being completely taken in, all through

"PASSING IT ON!"

"ACCUSER" AGAIN!

On the morning of the day upon which this Chat is written I have received from the person signing himself "Accuser" a long letter, in reply to my remarks on his former one, published in the last number of the Old Year. As "Accuser" thinks he has not had justice, I am giving his letter in full:

"Somewhere in London,
 December 28th, 1916.

"Dear Sir,—Many thanks for publishing my letter in this week's GEM, and also for pointing out spelling errors. You will, no doubt, understand that although 'comparitively' was a genuine spelling mistake, 'some' was only a slip. Enclosed please find the twopence promised. I am quite ready to admit that it is a 'paltry' trick to send a letter without stamping it, but you know as well as I that my object was not to save a penny. I was quite certain that you would publish it if it arrived unstamped, for the sake of pointing out that only a 'miserable worm' would venture to make a complaint.

"I must congratulate you on your choice flow of complimentary language; but why all that unnecessary rot? Why not explain, for the benefit of your readers, and then sum up what you think of me in a few words? I am surprised at the childishness of your remarks. You speak of being above my fighting weight. I shall be seventeen in February. What your age is I don't know; but as you now know mine you will be in a position to judge whether you ought to be above my fighting weight. However, you could, most probably, with the aid of half-a-crown, induce the office-boy to undertake the licking bizney.

"I notice that you have omitted to print the examples of poor jokes I gave. The reason is, of course, obvious. As you remark, it is a most ridiculous thing to think that the Amalgamated Press should want to swindle for the sake of a few shillings; yet the facts point that way.

"Well, sir, I am sorry to have to write in this way, as my former correspondence with you—and there has been a fair amount—has been most friendly. I have been an enthusiastic reader of the 'Magnet' and GEM for years. I used to take in the halfpenny numbers of the 'Maenct' This will show you that I have been a fairly loyal reader. It is not with any pleasure that I make these assertions, but because it has frequently been suggested to me that the competitions are a swindle, and I think it up to you, as Editor, to explain.

"In self-defence, I should like to say that you would have great difficulty in finding anyone that knows me well that considers I am either a worm, a cad, or a funk. I am not funky of interviewing you, and should I have reason to pass near your offices within the next month or so I shall be pleased to give you a call. In that case I hope and trust

that you would not find it quite such an unpleasant task as you imagine to shake hands with me. Should I not turn up before the end of February it will be useless to expect me, as I intend, if possible, to join the wireless branch of the R.N.A.S. as soon as possible after my seventeenth birthday. "You must excuse me for worrying you with such a long letter, but I wish you to fully understand my view of the matter. Trusting, therefore, that you will regard my first letter as a request, not a demand, and that you will, without prejudice, give me a reasonable answer through the columns of the GEM,

"I am, yours faithfully,

"ACCUSER.

"P.S.—I sincerely trust you will give me the opportunity of changing that hideous nom-de-plume."

I do not knowingly shake hands with anonymous slanderers. How do such creatures justify themselves in demanding proofs that their absurd suspicions are unfounded? If this particular specimen had had the courage to give his name and address, he could have had proofs by the hundred, for a notice asking the prize-winners to write and tell him that they had duly received their prizes would have brought him many letters. I know the loyalty of the great majority of my readers too well to doubt that. This course is still open to him if he has the manhood to take it.

He says that the facts point to our swindling. What facts? He, has offered nothing in the shape of facts. Now he attempts to shield himself behind other unbelievers. I have offered him conclusive proofs; but it is not really necessary for me to do anything of the sort.

It is for the accuser to bring forward his supposed proofs—not mere empty surmises, born of a meanly-suspicious mind—but evidence!

"Accuser" seems to have been quite surprised that his letter annoyed me. Evidently he has no notion of what a man's feelings are—I mean a man's, not an anonymous letter-writer's! A direct insult to the firm by which I have the honour to be employed in the first place, and to myself personally in the second, is not the sort of thing I should ever take, either lying down or with the weak smile of the man who has a bad case and knows it. A hideous nom-de-plume his, he says. True; but it is not unfitting because it is hideous—only because it has no shadow of justification!

CORRESPONDENCE WANTED BY:

Sea-Scout Doig, War Signal Station, Usan, Montrose—With Glasgow or Lanarkshire readers.

Ray Harvey, Angle Vale, South Australia—With readers of about 15 in London or Birmingham.

Howard Bellman, 29, Mangie Street, Abbot-ford, Melbourne, Australia—With readers of 17-18 in United Kingdom.

Miss R. M. Lawrence, 22, Maldon Terrace, New Street, Avlesbury—With girl readers of 22 or more.

Frank Ogglesby, 129, East Barnet Road, New Barnet, asks Claude H. Tomlin to send his address.

Norman C. Doveton, 29, Aberdeen Street, Woodstock, Cape Town, South Africa—With readers of 16-17 interested in stamp collecting.

P. McDonald, 1, Stewart Street, Brunswick, Melbourne, Australia—With readers of 14 in any country.

J. Johnson, 1, Queen Street, Nelson, Lancs—With readers of 15-18 interested in coins, butterflies, fossils, and curios.

Miss Wilma Buzzard Leighton, The Avenue, Windsor, Melbourne, Australia, would like to hear from Miss Isobelle Hasley.

Your Editor

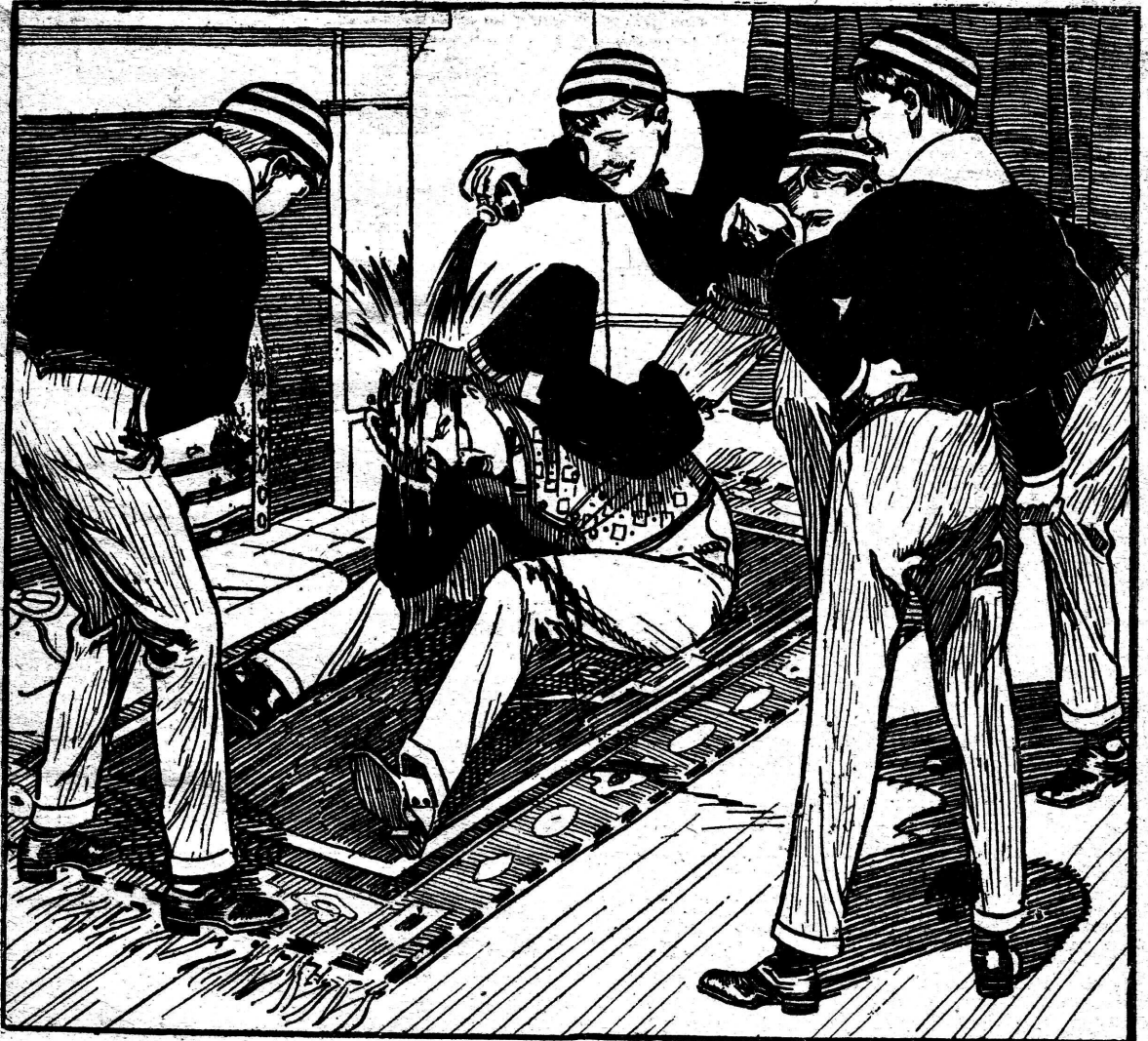
Published in Town
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Wednesday Morning.



Complete Stories
For All, and Every
Story a Gem!

LEVISON FOR ST. JIM'S!

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



Lowther added the contents of the inkpot to the ashes, as Racke sat clawing them out of his hair. (See Chapter 9.)

CHAPTER 1.

A Dog with a Bad Name.

TOM MERRY sniffed. The captain of the Shell had looked into Levison's study in the Fourth Form passage, and the first thing that struck him was a scent of tobacco in the study.

Tom Merry sniffed emphatically. Levison of the Fourth was standing at the open window, looking out into the quad, where a crowd of fags—among

them Levison minor—were punting a footer about under the elms.

He looked round as he heard Tom's emphatic sniff.

"Hallo!" he said cheerily.

"I looked in to tell you that we kick-off in the House match in a quarter of an hour," said Tom.

"Right-ho! I'll get changed now—if you haven't changed your mind about playing me against the New House," said Levison.

Next Wednesday:

"PASSING IT ON!" AND "FOES OF FORTUNE!"

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"I haven't changed my mind, of course," said Tom Merry slowly; "but—"

"But what?" Levison of the Fourth smiled sarcastically. "Have the fellows been jawing you about putting me in the School House team?"

"No. It isn't that."

"Then what is it? What's the matter?"

"I may as well speak out plainly," said Tom Merry curtly. "Since you've become a regular member of the junior club, and you play in the matches, it's understood that you've given up playing the giddy goat, Levison. There's no room for a giddy goat in the School House Eleven. I don't want to interfere with any fellow's private concerns, but a football skipper has to see that his men keep fit. The fellows haven't been jawing me, but they would jaw me fast enough if you cracked up in the match and gave the game away to Figgins & Co."

"I'm not going to crack up."

"Is it your idea of keeping fit for the match to smoke a quarter of an hour before kick-off?" asked Tom Merry sharply.

"But I haven't been smoking."

"Oh!"

Levison laughed, rather unpleasantly.

"Look here, if the fellows are against my being in the team, you're at liberty to drop me out," he said. "I sha'n't complain. We've never pulled together, and I was surprised when you offered me a place. I'm glad enough to play for the House, but if I'm going to be suspected and called over the coals—"

"If you haven't been smoking here, somebody has," said Tom Merry curtly. "The study is reeking with it."

"Yes; I noticed that," agreed Levison. "I've only just come in. I told you I'd given up that rot when I got into the team."

Tom Merry looked at him hard. The reform of the black sheep of St. Jim's had surprised most of the fellows, but Tom Merry was quite willing to take Levison at his word. Still, it was a little difficult to forget his old reputation.

"It's going to be a tough match," said Tom. "Figgins & Co. are at the top of their form. One rotter in our eleven might mean giving the match away. If you should crack up, you know what it means."

"I tell you I'm not going to crack up!" growled Levison. "It looks to me as if you're looking for an excuse to leave me out."

"That's rot, and you know it! I—"

"Hallo! Coming along?" asked Monty Lowther, looking into the study with Manners. "My hat! What a giddy atmosphere!"

"Same old game!" said Manners, with a sniff.

Levison flushed angrily.

"Look here, I'm getting fed up with this!" he exclaimed. "I tell you I haven't been smoking, and that's enough. I suppose I'm not responsible for what the other fellows in this study do."

"Lumley-Lumley doesn't smoke," said Tom Merry drily, "and Trimble and Mellish went out together after dinner. I saw them go. They haven't been smoking here."

Levison started.

"Sure of that?" he asked.

"Quite sure."

"Then it's jolly odd!" said Levison, looking puzzled. "I don't see why any smoky beast should come into my study to smoke."

"I don't, either."

"Same here," said Monty Lowther. "Really, Levison, you might chuck up that silly rot just before a House match!"

Levison set his teeth.

"Isn't my word good enough for you?" he asked savagely.

"Not quite," said Lowther calmly. "You're a good bit of a Prussian, you know. You've been found out telling whoppers rather too often, Levison."

"I suppose that kind of thing is going to be raked up against me for ever and ever?" said Levison bitterly. He fixed his eyes on Tom Merry. "Look here! If you can't take my word, Tom Merry, you can leave me out of the match! There's a good many fellows would jump at my place."

"If you give me your word, Levison, I'll take it," said Tom. "You can't be surprised if you're not quite trusted. It's your own fault. You can't expect me to take chances with a House match. But I take your word, and there's an end of it. You'd better get changed."

The Terrible Three left the study, and went down the passage to the stairs. Tom Merry's face was a little clouded. He could not refuse to take Levison's word, but he knew of old the character of the black sheep of St. Jim's. It was quite possible that Levison had lied—unless he had altered very much indeed. And the chances of a forward player cracking up in the House match was not agreeable to a keen football skipper.

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NOW ON SALE.

"LINLEY MINOR!"

"Weady, deah boys?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth joined the chums of the Shell on the landing, with his coat and muffler on over his football rig. "We are goin' to lick the New House boundahs this time, Tom Mewwy!"

"We are—we is!" agreed Monty Lowther. "As Horace very nearly said, 'Gusso duce, et auspice Gusso—'"

"Wats!"

"We've been waiting for you slackers," said Jack Blake, coming out of Study No. 6. "Figgins & Co. are on the ground now."

"You've been hanging about here?" said Tom Merry, struck by a sudden thought. "Have you seen anybody go into Levison's study?"

"Yes; Levison, a few minutes ago," said Blake.

"Anybody else?"

"Wacke of the Shell went there about a quarter of an hour ago," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking at Tom in surprise. "What does it mattah? I happened to see Wacke go in. Anythin' happened in Levison's study?"

Tom Merry looked relieved.

"Oh! Then it was Racke!"

"What was Wacke, deah boy?"

"Somebody had been smoking in the study, that's all."

"And Levison told us the truth!" said Monty Lowther, in a tone of wonder. "Somebody said once that the age of miracles was past. He was off-side!"

"Come on!" said Tom.

The School House fellows left the House, and joined the other footballers going down to Little Side. Figgins & Co. of the New House were already there, punting a ball about to keep themselves warm in the keen, frosty air. Levison minor of the Third Form spotted them from the elms.

"Come on, Wally!" he called out.

"Where are you off to, fathead?" demanded D'Arcy minor.

"I'm going to watch the House match."

"Blow the House match! Nobody in the Third is playing!" said Wally.

"My major's playing for the School House!" said Frank Levison loftily.

"Well, blow your major!"

"Bow-wow!" said Frank cheerily, and he followed Tom Merry & Co. to Little Side.

Wally, with a grunt, followed him.

CHAPTER 2. Levison's Reply.

LEVISON of the Fourth stood with a clouded brow in his study.

He had been looking very cheerful when Tom Merry came in, but the interview with his football captain had not had an agreeable effect upon him.

It was only since his minor had come to St. Jim's that Ernest Levison had turned over a new leaf, and he had found his new path far from an easy one to follow. His backslidings had been many and serious, as was natural enough with a fellow of his character and habits.

But the former backguard and slacker of the Fourth was honestly trying to do his best now, and it made him feel bitter to think that his old reputation, which he was trying to live down, should be always rising up against him like an unquiet ghost.

"What's the good?" he muttered to himself, as he paced the study restlessly. "I've a dashed good mind not to play at all. Racke would be glad enough to have me with him for the afternoon, only—I can't stand Racke. I—"

"Hallo, Levison!"

Racke of the Shell sauntered into the study, interrupting Levison's muttered reflections.

The Fourth-Former gave him a sour look.

"Have you been here before?" he asked.

Racke nodded.

"Yes. I looked in for you about twenty minutes ago. You weren't here."

"And I suppose you smoked here?" growled Levison.

"I put on a fag while I waited," said Racke, with a stare of surprise. "I waited five minutes or so for you. Why shouldn't I? 'Tain't the first time a chap has smoked in this study, I suppose?"

"Tom Merry's just been here. He thought I had been smoking—just before the match, too!"

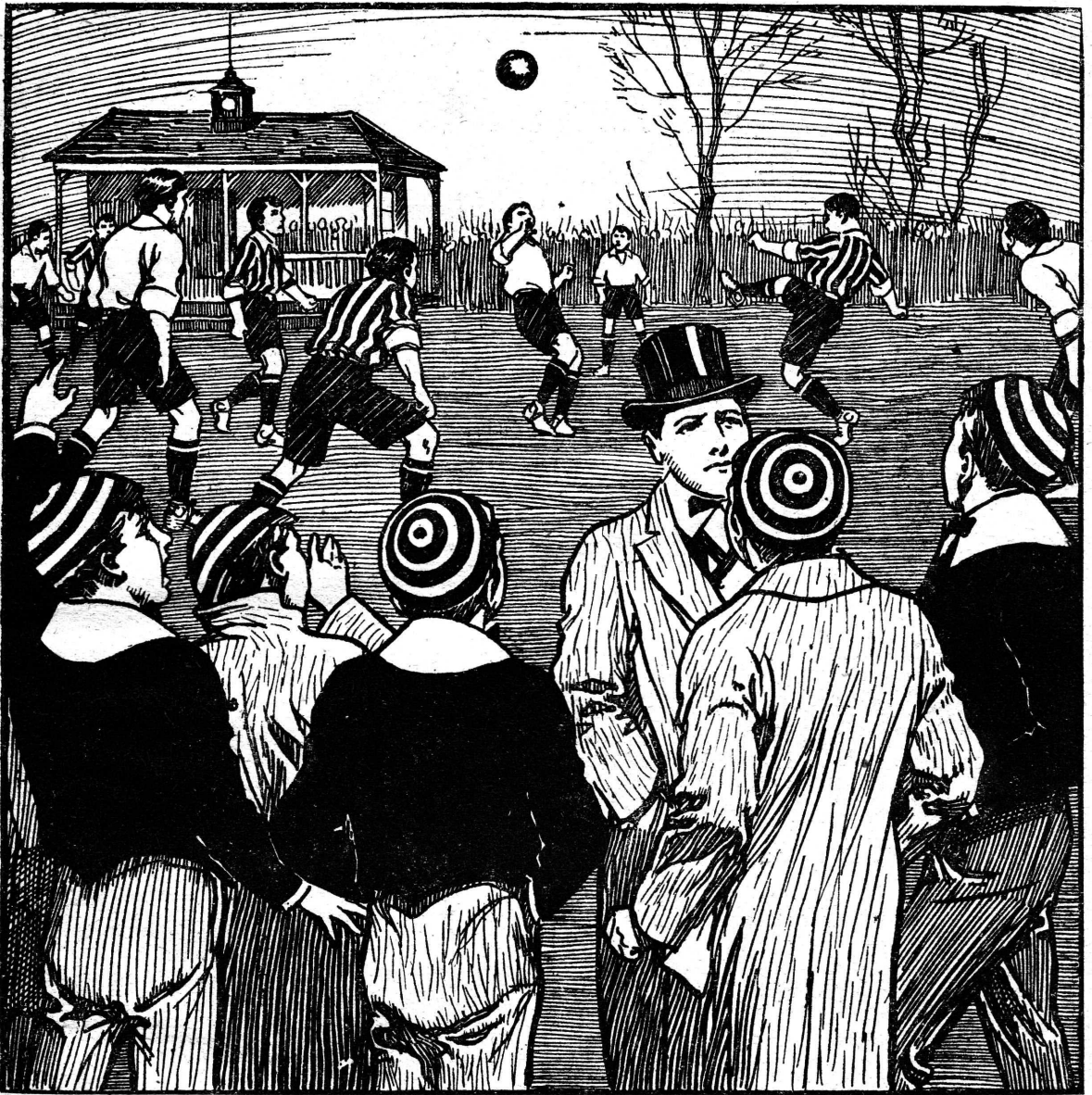
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what is there to cackle at in that?" demanded Levison angrily.

Racke chuckled.

"I suppose he hauled you over the coals and gave you a sermon?" he remarked. "Blessed if I know how you stand that kind of thing, Levison!"

A Splendid Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. in THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Price 1d.



There was a crowd round the ropes to watch the House match. (See Chapter 3.)

"I sha'n't stand much more of it!" growled Levison.

"I wouldn't!" said Racke, with a nod. "I'd tell the meddlin' cad to mind his own bizney fast enough!"

"You mean you'd be glad to put my back up against Tom Merry," said Levison sourly. "That game's no good with me, Racke! I'm not a fool, to be twisted round your finger. I'm not going to cut off my nose to spite my face."

"You're in the House team this afternoon?" said Racke, changing the subject, though his eyes glittered with anger.

Racke of the Shell, the heir of the huge war profits of Racke & Hacke, was a person of great importance in his own eyes. Levison had been one of his devoted followers only a short time ago. Since his reform Levison had little to do with him, and the bare idea of being dropped by his one-time toady made the wealthy parvenu furious. More than once he had striven to draw Levison back into the old ways, and more than once he had succeeded.

"Yes; and I've got to get changed now," said Levison, moving to the door.

"Hold on a minute!"

"I can't stop now. They'll be kicking off soon."

"It's important," said Racke. "I won't keep you a minute. You're in the School House team?"

"You know I am!" said Levison impatiently.

"I don't know what your game is," said Racke, eyeing him. "I don't know how long this kind of thing will last with you—not long, I fancy. But as you're in the House team, it may be a good thing for both of us. I suppose you're hard up, as usual?"

"My father isn't a contractor," said Levison, with a sneer. "War profits don't come our way."

"You'd be jolly glad if they did!" said Racke coolly. "You've had a whack in my share of the war profits, anyway. But I didn't come here to row with you, Levison. There's a jolly good thing on, and it will mean a couple of quid for you if you take it on. You know Stanton of the Sixth—New House chap? Well, he's offered me a bet on the junior House match."

"Oh, hang your rotten betting!"

"He thinks Figgins & Co. will get licked," continued Racke, unheeding. "I think so myself, for that matter. The School House team is in great form. He's offered me five to three against Figgins' team—in quids."

"Well, you're a fool if you take him on! School House will win!"

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: **"PASSING IT ON!"**

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

"Not if you go in with me in this," said Racke eagerly. "You're playing forward—inside or outside left—"

"Inside-left. D'Arcy's outside."
 "Well, inside-left has lots of chances of helping the other side to win," said Racke. "You're next to Tom Merry, and you could muck up his play, and see that D'Arcy doesn't get any chance. It would be as easy as falling off a form for you to make it a New House win."

Levison's eyes glittered.
 He really had no right to feel insulted by Racke's rascally suggestion. There had been a time when he would have listened to it. He had changed, and Racke had not changed. That was all.

"You mean you want me to give the match away?" he said very quietly.

"And take half Stanton's fiver when I bag it," said Racke coolly. "You needn't worry about Stanton. He would play the same kind of trick if he had brains enough."

"Oh, I'm not worrying about Stanton!"

"Then you'll do it? It's a go?"

"No," said Levison between his teeth, "it isn't a go! Do you think everybody's got the same sense of honour as a war-profiteer? You confounded rascal!"

"Eh?"

"Are you ready, Levison?" Talbot of the Shell looked in.

"Come on, old chap! Hallo! What's the row?"

"Racke's just made me a good offer," said Levison, breathing hard—"half-profits in a swindle if I give away the House match."

"Why, you rotter, Racke!" exclaimed Talbot.

"Now I'm going to give him my answer," said Levison. He pushed back his cuffs, and advanced upon the scowling Racke. "Put up your hands, you cad!"

Racke backed away. He was not a fighting man when he could help it.

"Hands off, you fool!" he snarled.

Levison's knuckles came home on his nose, and Racke gave a yell of pain. He put up his hands fast enough then, and in a moment the two were fighting furiously.

Talbot looked on with a grim brow.

Levison and Racke were trampling about the study, fighting savagely. Racke was bigger and older than the Fourth-Former. But Levison's new way of life had made him very fit, and Racke was the same seedy, ill-conditioned slacker as of old. He was knocked right and left, and in three minutes he collapsed on the hearthrug, and lay there, gasping spasmodically.

Levison glowered down at him.

"Do you want any more, you cad?"

"Yow-ow-ow!" groaned Racke.

Racke did not want any more. He sat on the rug and gasped for breath, and dabbed at his streaming nose.

Levison turned his back on him.

"I'm ready, Talbot."

"Come on," said Talbot.

"I'll make you sorry for this, Levison!" said Racke between his teeth. "I'll make you sorry you've laid hands on me, you poverty-stricken cad!"

Levison left the study without replying. He hurried to the dormitory to change into his football clothes, and then hastened down to Little Side with Talbot.

The footballers were ready to begin, and they were waiting.

"You're late!" growled Tom Merry.

"Sorry!"

"What's the matter with your face?"

Levison passed his hand across his face. Several of Racke's vicious blows had got home, and they had left their mark.

"Scrapping," he said laconically.

"You might have left your scrapping till after the match!" said Tom tartly. "Never mind. Line up!"

Levison went into the field with the footballers.

CHAPTER 3.
 The House Match.

"PLAY up, School House!"

"On the ball!"

There was a crowd round the ropes to watch the House match. Fellows of the Fourth and the Shell had turned up in force to cheer their respective Houses. Levison minor was prominent with a crowd of the Third Form. Even Racke and Crooke and Mellish, the slackers of the School House, came down to the ground soon after the kick-off.

Racke & Co. weren't much interested in football, as football. But Crooke and Mellish had bets on the game with Clampe of the New House—strictly under the rose, of course. Racke was wondering whether the scrap in the study would have

any effect upon Levison's form in the match. He charitably hoped that it would.

Racke's nose was swollen, and one of his eyes persisted in winking in a most uncomfortable manner. The scrap had had an effect upon him, at least. Mellish and Crooke noted the signs of damage with covert grins. They were very friendly with Racke, and they were irritated with Levison for abandoning their select circle. But a famous cynical philosopher has declared that there is always something gratifying in the misfortunes of our friends, and that dictum was true of Crooke and Mellish, at least. They derived considerable amusement from Racke's swollen nose and winking eye.

"Levison's going strong," remarked Crooke, with an amiable desire to rub it in. "He seems in topping form. Did you see that pass?"

"No, I didn't!" growled Racke.

"Look at him!" chimed in Mellish. "He'll get the ball away from Lawrence! There, I told you so! Pass, you beggar—pass!"

"Bravo!" chortled Crooke.

Levison passed out to D'Arcy as he was rushed down by Owen, the New House back, and Arthur Augustus ran the ball along the touchline unattacked, and centred to Tom Merry. But Fatty Wynn, in goal, stopped Tom Merry's shot, and Thompson cleared to midfield.

Racke looked on with lowering brows.

Levison was evidently not off his form. He had done a smart piece of work, which would have materialised in a goal, but for the quality of Fatty Wynn between the posts.

"Bravo!" Levison minor was shouting, clapping his hands with glee; and Wally and Jameson and Joe Frayne of the Third joined in heartily.

So long as Levison of the Fourth was playing, there was no dragging Levison minor away from the ground, and Wally & Co. made up their minds to see it through.

"Levison's doing his level best, of course," remarked Crooke. "The team for the Greyfriars match is going to be selected soon. Levison's got a chance of playing against Greyfriars, in my opinion!"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Mellish. "Rather a queer experience for Levison to play against Greyfriars, if he does. He used to be a Greyfriars chap before he came here!"

"I've heard that he was sacked from Greyfriars!" said Racke, with a sneer.

"I don't know about sacked, but he had to leave," said Crooke. "I never heard the whole story. He was certainly turned out!"

"Perhaps the Head at Greyfriars knew more about him than Dr. Holmes knows!" remarked Mellish, with a chuckle.

"He's had some jolly narrow escapes here!" grinned Crooke. "He's had wonderful luck! It was about time he turned over a new leaf!"

"Spoof!" said Racke.

"Yes, it's spoof, I suppose; but he seems to be keeping it up. Blessed if I can quite see what his game is! Swank, I dare say. He wants to show Tom Merry and the rest that he can play footer if he chooses!"

"And he does play first-rate when he likes," said Mellish, with a sidelong glance at Racke's scowling face. "He's as good a man as they've got in the front line!"

Racke was sullenly silent.

There was no doubt that Levison was playing up remarkably well. He was not so sturdy as most of the footballers, but he was wonderfully quick, and his judgment was never at fault.

And he was not playing a selfish game, which was a surprise to those who knew him best. His play was all for the side, and when Tom Merry's chance came at last, and he put the leather in, it was from a pass from Levison.

School House were one up at the interval.

Figgins & Co. put their beef into it in the second half, and the game was hard and fast. But the School House held them well. Herries, in the School House goal, was a steady defender, and Figgy's best shots were fisted out.

It was not till within ten minutes of time that Kerr scored with a long shot from the wing, which beat Herries to the wide.

"One all!" said Clampe of the New House, joining Crooke & Co. "Looks like a draw. That means bets off, Crooke!"

"Wait and see!" said Crooke.

"Play up, School House!"

"Go it, New House!"

It was a close finish, and the crowd shouted encouragement to their champions of either House. Figgins & Co. were making a hot attack again, but this time Herries proved equal to the strain. The game swung away to the half-way line, and Lefevre of the Fifth, who was referee, looked at his watch.

Suddenly the School House forward line got away, bringing

NOW ON SALE.

"LINLEY MINOR!"

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the leather down to Fatty Wynn's goal in great style. The Welsh junior drove it out with a fat fist; and it came in again, to meet his head, and shoot forth like a pip from an orange.

There was a struggle before the goal, with keen exertion on both sides. Seconds were precious now. The ball came out to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the wing, and Owen charged him down; but Levison was there, and he toed the ball neatly away. With two New House men almost upon him, Levison kicked for goal.

It was a splendid shot, that would have beaten anybody but Fatty Wynn; but the goalkeeper sprawled through the air, and headed it out. But Tom Merry's head was ready, and it came in again, and this time Fatty was not so lucky. There was a roar as the ball landed in the net.

"Goal!"

"Hooray! School House wins! Hooray!"

School House had won! The leather had got home on the stroke of time!

"Time for you to settle up, Clampey!" grinned Croke. "I'll trouble you for five bob!"

"Same here!" grinned Mellish.

And Clampey grunted discontentedly.

Racke of the Shell walked away from the field with lowering brows. Levison had played up unusually well in that game; he had shown form that could not be overlooked when the selection was made for the team to meet Harry Wharton & Co. of Greystriars.

It was very probable now that Levison would play for the School, in one of the biggest junior matches of the season. It was a reward that Levison had fairly earned; but the thought of it made Racke grit his teeth with rage. His one-time humble follower had dropped him, had done with him, and had licked him ignominiously. Levison had no need of him now; Levison was gaining distinction in his new way of life. Racke, wealthy as he was, did not matter to him now.

What did Racke's friendship or enmity matter to a fellow who was winning his way to the esteem of the best set in the school?

And the blackguard of the School House vowed inwardly that, somehow or other, his enmity should be made to matter, and that Levison should yet regret having broken with him, and cast back his friendship in his teeth!

CHAPTER 4.

Skimpole is Not Taken Seriously.

SKIMPOLE of the Shell looked into Study No. 6.

That celebrated apartment was crowded.

After the House match, Tom Merry & Co. had gathered there for a high tea. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was doing the honours. Arthur Augustus had received a fiver from his noble pater. Fivers had become rather uncommon since the war—an exercise of war-time economy on the part of Lord Eastwood which was not wholly approved by the Hon. Arthur Augustus. However, a fiver had come along at last, and it had come right at the right time.

Cash could not be better spent than in celebrating a football victory over the rival House; all the School House fellows agreed upon that. So Study No. 6 was a land flowing with milk and honey, and every fellow who could be crammed into it had been asked to the festive board.

Junior studies were not intended for large parties, but it was surprising the number of fellows who could get into a study upon such an occasion. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, of course, were there, and the Terrible Three, and Talbot of the Shell. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House were there, too, and Kangaroo of the Shell, and Levison of the Fourth. So when Skimpole looked in through his big spectacles, that was all he was able to do; he couldn't enter.

Skimpole blinked at the merry party, who were mostly talking at once, with a result like unto that achieved at the Tower of Babel.

"My dear fellows——" said Skimpole, in his benevolent way.

"We've beaten them, Skimmy!" said Kangaroo.

"Eh? You have beaten somebody?" asked Skimpole, in mild surprise.

"Yes, rather! The New House bounders, fathead!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I hope you did not hurt them, Noble. Was it not rather brutal to beat them?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the whole study.

Skimpole of the Shell passed his life upon a higher plane than most of the juniors. What Skimmy didn't know about Socialism and Determinism and evolution and the descent of

man, and other weird things of that kind, really wasn't worth knowing. And what he didn't know about football would have filled large volumes!

"At footer, you ass, I mean!" said Kangaroo.

"Oh! Has there been a football-match?" asked Skimpole innocently.

The footballers glared at the sublime Skimpole. The great Skimmy did not even know there had been a House match!

"Didn't you know there was a House match to-day?" roared Tom Merry.

Skimpole shook his head.

"I have little time to think of such trifling matters, my dear Merry!"

"Oh, boil him in oil!" growled Figgins.

"Bai Jove! I do not wish to be personal, Skimmy, but I must remark that I regard you as a howlin' ass, deah boy!"

"My dear D'Arcy, a truly great mind accustoms itself to the scorn of inferior intellects," said Skimpole benevolently.

"Bai Jove!"

"However, I did not come here to talk football," said Skimpole. "I know little of the game——"

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"It is true, Lowther. I have no doubt that I could master the subject, as it is so simple, in ten minutes or so——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But I really could not spare ten minutes for such frivolity. I have looked in to remind you fellows that there is a meeting of the Junior Debating Society this evening!"

"Oh, blow the Junior Debating Society!" yawned Blake.

"My dear Blake, a very important matter is down for discussion, in my name."

"Are you going to debate?"

"Certainly!"

"Thanks for the tip. I won't come!"

"Ha, ha! Same here!"

"The samefulness is terrific, as that inky chap at Greyfriars would remark," said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You can run away and hold the meeting on your own, Skimmy," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Then there won't be any interruptions. You can pass all the resolutions yourself, and second all your own proposals, and carry everything unanimously."

"I sincerely hope you will all come," said Skimpole, blinking at the merry juniors in his solemn way. "There is a very important matter to be discussed—a matter that is occupying a great deal of space in the newspapers—the question of demobilisation after the war."

"The which?" ejaculated Manners.

"Demobilisation."

"Well, that's a good word, anyway," remarked Figgins.

"Can a fellow back it both ways?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Figgins, if you are unacquainted with the word I will elucidate its meaning for you. It means the breaking-up of the Army after the war, and the dismissal of the soldiers."

"Go hon!" said Figgins.

"Is the war over?" asked Monty Lowther meekly.

"I think not, Lowther. According to the latest papers, it is still proceeding," said Skimpole, in surprise.

"Then we needn't worry about the demobilisation this evening. It might be put off for a year or two."

"Important matters have to be grappled with in time, Lowther. The Government is always too late. 'Too late,' is the natural result of 'wait and see.' I am not at all satisfied with the Government," said Skimpole, shaking his head seriously.

"Poor old Asquith!" said Lowther sadly. "I suppose he will resign at once when he hears this!"

"I fear that he will not, Lowther. But I intend to discuss the question of demobilisation at the meeting, and I think a report of the debate should be sent to Mr. Asquith. It would probably have an enlightening effect upon him."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove! You are a feahful ass, Skimmy!"

"Please come to the meeting now," said Skimpole. "It is past time. Gore and Dane and Glyn and Clive and Kerruish are ready."

Blake pointed to the door.

"Buzz off, Skimmy!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway make twacks, deah boy. You are intewwuptin' us."

"But you are coming——"

"No, we're not coming!" roared Blake. "Buzz off!"

"I should very much like you to hear my speech," said Skimpole. "It would enlighten your somewhat obtuse minds, my dear fellows."

"Our what?" demanded Figgins.

"Your somewhat obtuse mind, my dear Figgins— Yaroooooh!"

An eggshell—fortunately empty—caught the great Skimpole upon the nose, and interrupted his remarks. It was followed by a cushion, which bowled Skimmy over, and landed him in the passage. Kangaroo kicked the door shut.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole, as he picked himself up. "Dear me! I regard that as very—yow-ow!—unfeeling. I shall not—grooh!—ask them again to attend the meeting!"

And Skimpole made his way to the Hooby Club-room, leaving Study No. 6 to go their own wilful way.

The celebration in Study No. 6 lasted till it was time for prep, and then the merry party broke up. As Tom Merry & Co. came back to their own study they encountered Skimpole in the passage.

Tom clapped the genius of the Shell on the shoulder. "Well, how did the debate go, Skimmy?" he asked. "Have you settled about the merry demobilisation?" Skimpole blinked at him sorrowfully.

"It was very extraordinary, Merry, Gore and Glyn and Dane and Kerruish and Clive and Reilly and Hammond came to the meeting, and I explained to them the great importance of the matter to be discussed, and for some totally unaccountable reason, they all produced pea-shooters—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "It is not a laughing matter, my dear Merry," said Skimpole reproachfully. "I was considerably incommoded by showers of peas impinging upon my person with a violent impact. I was not able to deliver my speech at all."

"Now, I wonder why they did that!" said Monty Lowther, with great solemnity.

"I have been cogitating upon the subject, my dear Lowther, and their amazing conduct remains totally inexplicable," said Skimpole. "However, I have my speech here, and if you like, I will read it to you personally—"

"Help!" "It will not take more than two hours," said Skimpole, beaming. "I will come into your study, and— Yooooop!"

Skimpole, to his astonishment, found himself lifted into the air, and placed on the linoleum with a bump. The Terrible Three went into their study, and left him there, in a state of great astonishment.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, as he scrambled up. "I really fear that some of the fellows are developing a tendency to irrational irresponsibility!"

Skimpole went into his own study, where Gore and Talbot were settling down to work. Gore grinned at the sight of him.

"My dear Talbot," said Skimpole, "you would probably care to hear the speech I intended to deliver to the debating society—"

"Another time, old chap," said Talbot, with a smile. "Prep, you know."

"There is no time like the present, Talbot. I can read it out by bed-time, if I am not interrupted." Skimpole unrolled a wad of manuscript. "The subject is the demobilisation of the troops after the war—"

"Shut up!" roared Gore.

"My dear Gore—"

"Yes, dry up!" said Talbot, laughing. "We get enough gas on the subject in the papers, Skimmy, without you beginning."

"I know he'll jolly well get this inkpot if he begins!" growled Gore.

Skimpole blinked at Gore, and blinked at the inkpot. Then he laid aside his bulky manuscript with a sigh. It was said of old that wisdom cries out in the street and no man regards it. It was the same in Skimpole's study. Skimmy decided to do his prep instead—which was all the better for him, as it happened, when he met Mr. Linton in the Form-room in the morning.

CHAPTER 5. Levison's Chance.

"LEVISON!" said Tom Merry.

"H'm!"

It was a meeting of the junior football committee, a few days after the House match.

The matter under discussion was the selection of the team to meet the Greyfriars eleven in the forthcoming match.

The Greyfriars match loomed very large upon the horizon. St. Jim's juniors needed their best men in the field to meet Harry Wharton & Co. They knew the form of the Greyfriars players—forwards like Wharton, Field, Vernon-Smith; halves like Bob Cherry and Tom Brown; backs like

THE GEM.—No. 468.

Johnny Bull. Harry Wharton's team was certain to come over in great form.

St. Jim's needed the best junior players that could be picked from both Houses. There were some players, of course, about whom there could be no question for a big match—Tom Merry, the skipper and centre-forward; Figgins at inside-right, Kangaroo at centre-half, Redfern right half-back, Fatty Wynn in goal, Talbot at outside-right. Jack Blake had to be in the forward line, and D'Arcy couldn't be left out—at least, according to Arthur Augustus himself. Blake was down as inside-left—the place Levison had taken in the House match.

Monty Lowther, it was agreed, was the right man to complete the half-way line. Herries and Lawrence were as good backs as could be found.

The committee fully agreed with Tom Merry's selection so far.

"That wathah settles it," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "You have not left a place for Levison, deah boy."

"Ahem!"

"Outside-left?" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass on Blake.

"I am wathah undah the impresson, Blake, that I am goin' to play outside-left, as usual," he remarked.

Tom Merry coughed.

"You see, Gussy—" began the captain of the Shell.

"Bai Jove! You are thinkin' of givin' Levison my place!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's.

"I'd rather play you, personally, of course," said Tom. "But it isn't a matter of personal taste, you know. Levison showed his form in the House match—"

"Did I not show form in the House match, Tom Mewwy?" inquired Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner.

"Tip-top," said Tom. "But Levison—"

"Of course, I shall not even dream of entahin' into an argument with my footah skippah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "If you weally considah Levison a bettah playah than I am, of course, he goes in!"

"Not exactly a better player," said Tom, "but just now he certainly is in topping form. Now that he's sticking to footer he's entitled to a show in a school match. Fair play all round, you know. When you've got more than eleven first-class players, you can't give them all a show."

"It's an embarras de richesse," grinned Lowther.

"Yaas, I quite agwee. But Levison is wippin' at inside-left. Pcwapps Blake would like to make way for him."

"Bow-wow!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake, for the good of the team—"

"I think Levison's better outside," said Tom. "And we can't spare Blake, Gussy. Blake doesn't know so much about neckties as you do, but—"

"But a little more about footer," grinned Blake.

"Wats!"

"I think Levison ought to have a chance," said Tom. "But I don't say he's any better than Gussy, taken all round. Look here, if the committee agree, I'll leave it to Gussy to decide."

"Agreed!" said the committee solemnly. They knew their Gussy.

"If you put it like that, deah boys, of course the place goes to Levison," said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "I will twot along and give him the good news."

"Good old Gussy! Always Vere de Vere, and right up to concert-pitch!" said Monty Lowther.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus left the study and sauntered gracefully along to Levison's quarters. The noble Gussy was disappointed, but he manfully overcame his disappointment. He had a secret misgiving as to the result of the match, with his noble self left out of the St. Jim's team. But he hoped for the best.

He tapped at Levison's door and entered.

Levison of the Fourth was at the table with his minor. Frank had brought his books to the study, as he often did, and his major was helping him with some knotty points in the first book of the Gallic War—knotty points to the fag, but child's play to Levison. Arthur Augustus smiled benevolently as he saw them; he could not help thinking what a change it was. The Levison of old had been accustomed to scamping his prep and hurrying away to Racke's study in the evening to play Nap or Banker for more money than he could afford to lose.

"I've got some wathah good news for you, Levison," said Arthur Augustus.

"Go it!" said Levison.

"You are goin' to play in the Gweyfwhals match."

"My hat!"

"Hurrah!" yelled Frank.

"Blessed if I expected it!" said Levison, with a whistle.



"By Jove!" exclaimed Kildare. From Levison's pocket, as he turned it out, a packet of cigarettes had dropped. (See Chapter 8.)

"Some chap will be feeling rather sore at giving me the place, I fancy."

"I twust, Levison, that ewevy chap in the club is thinkin' only of beatin' Gweyfwiahs, and not of personal glowy."

Levison grinned.

"You might think differently if I had your place," he remarked.

"As a mattah of fact, Levison, you have my place," said Arthur Augustus, with quiet dignity.

Levison coloured a little.

"Oh!" he said.

"And I am certainly not feelin' sore about it, Levison."

"I'm sorry!" said Levison frankly. "But—but look here, I don't like to feel like squeezin' you out of the team, D'Arcy."

"Oh, wats!"

"I suppose you think that's spoo?" said Levison. "But I mean it. If you like, I'll go to Tom Merry now and tell him I decline the place."

"Notlin' of the sort, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy left it to me to decide, and I decided on you for the place, deah boy. You are vewy welcome, and I hope you will play a great game for St. Jim's."

And Arthur Augustus, with a friendly nod, strolled out of the study.

"I say, what ripping luck, Ernie!" said Frank, looking at his major gleefully. "You're in the School Eleven at last, and against Greyfriars, too!"

Levison grinned.

"Rather a surprise for Wharton and his lot when they see me," he remarked. "I wasn't much at games when I was there. I fancy Wharton will feel like fainting when he sees me in the team."

"Hallo! You're looking very chirpy," remarked Lumley-Lumley, coming into the study. "Somebody left you a fortune?"

"Ernie's playing against Greyfriars on Saturday," said Frank proudly.

"Oh, crumbs! What a giddy change for Ernie!" grinned Lumley-Lumley. "You'll surprise us to death if you keep on like this, Levison. Fancy you staggering humanity as a footballer!"

"Only fancy!" said Levison calmly.

"Levison in the School Eleven!" exclaimed Mellish, who followed Lumley-Lumley in. "My hat! That's news! I must tell Racke that; he will be pleased."

And the amiable Mellish scudded off to Racke's study to impart the pleasing news. Racke and Crooke were supposed to be at work on their preparation. As a matter of fact, they were playing Nap.

"Heard the news?" chortled Mellish. "Levison's in the eleven for the Greyfriars match."

"Not surprised," yawned Crooke. "Your deal, Racke."

But Racke did not deal.

"Levison's in the team?" he repeated.

"Yes. Quite a good little boy now," grinned Mellish. "Nothing like naughty us. No good offerin' him a fag now." Racke's teeth set.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"PASSING IT ON!"

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"What is he going to play for?" he asked. "Bets on the game?"

"I think not. Tom Merry would boot him out of the eleven sharp enough if he had bets on the game."

"He wants to give the Greyfriars chaps a surprise," chuckled Crooke. "Well, it will surprise them right enough."

"Tom Merry's a duffer to rely on him," said Racke quietly. "Levison is rather an unreliable chap. He might leave the team in the lurch at the last moment."

"No jolly fear!" said Mellish. "He's too pleased to get into the eleven—pleased as Punch."

"He might, all the same," said Racke. "That would rather change his new friends' opinion of him, I think."

Mellish and Crooke looked very curiously at the heir of the Racke & Hacke war profits.

"What have you got in your head, Racke?" asked Crooke. "Levison isn't likely to fail them. As for joining us on Saturday afternoon, he simply won't do it; you couldn't induce him to do it. You've tried that game."

"But if he did, it would let them down, and they'd be pretty wild with Levison. He wouldn't get a second chance."

"But he won't, you ass!"

"That wants thinking out," said Racke grimly. "Levison's got to pay for throwing us over, and for some other things, too."

"Oh, if you've got some game on—" said Crooke.

"I'm your man," said Mellish at once. "I'd like to see the rotter booted out of the team. He hardly takes any notice of my existence now, though we're in the same study. I'd like to take him down a peg or two. But what's the game?"

"I'm going to think it out," said Racke. "I fancy I shall be able to put a spoke in his wheel, and there will be trouble in the happy family afterwards. And when Tom Merry kicks him out of the team, Levison may be glad to come back to his old pals—and get the cold shoulder."

To which Mellish and Crooke responded heartily:

"Hear, hear!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Debating Society Meets.

"SKIMPOLE is wathah an ass—"

"Just found that out?" yawned Jack Blake.

"How does Gussy find out these things?" asked Digby, in a tone of wonder.

"It's the aristocratic brain that does it," opined Herries. "That's where you get the benefit of belonging to the merry old nobility."

"Weally, you know—"

"Levison was playing up jolly well at footer this afternoon," remarked Blake. "He's sticking to the practice like glue."

"Like the Crown Prince of Prussia to the silver spoons," said Dig.

"Blessed if I don't think he will make a footballer, after all," said Blake. "Who'd have thought it of Levison?"

"I was speakin' about Skimpole, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass wrathfully upon his chums.

"And I was speaking about Levison."

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Blake! As I was wemarkin', Skimpole is wathah an ass, but he does have wathah good ideals sometimes. I have been thinkin' about the subject he pposed for the debatin' society—the pproblem of the demobilisation of the twoops, you know."

"Can't that be left till the war's over?" asked Blake. "And it won't be over for ten years or so, if Racke & Hacke can help it."

"Questions like that ought to be settled in advance, Blake."

"By the Fourth Form of St. Jim's?" grinned Herries.

"There is more bwains in the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, Hewwies, than in the House of Commons, I am quite assuahed."

"Right on the wicket!" said Blake heartily. "Gussy does get a bullseye sometimes. There couldn't be less, anyway."

"I wathah think that it is a good idea to thwash a mattah out, you know, in the debatin' society, and I want you fellows to wally wound the meetin' aftah tea."

"If you think we're going to hear Skimpole gas—"

"Not at all, deah boy! I pvopose that somebody sits on Skimmy whenever he gets up to speak."

"Well, that's a good idea, too!"

"The fact is, I am goin' to speak myself—" explained Arthur Augustus.

"And is somebody to sit on you?"

"Pway don't make fwivolous wemarks on a sewious subject, Blake! I have weffected a wreat deal on the mattah of the demobilisation of the twoops aftah the war, and I have settled how it ought to be done. I twust you are goin' to wally wound and back me up at the debatin' society."

"The Gem.—No. 468.

"Hear hear!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"On the ball, Gussy!" said Blake encouragingly. "We

"Oh, we'll come!" said Blake. "I've got a peashooter. I don't know about wasting peas in war-time, though."

"If anybody shoots peas at me, Blake, I shall give the wottah a feahful thwashin'! I am goin' to express some wathah owiginal and valuable views, and I want my pals to back me up."

A bony face, adorned by a pair of large spectacles, was inserted in the doorway of Study No. 6.

"You fellows coming?" asked Skimpole. "You are aware that my question is down for debate to-night. I shall, if possible, leave some short time for discussion after I have finished my address."

"I dare say you'll finish your address in time to leave lots of time for discussion," grinned Blake.

"I fear not, Blake. It will take me two hours, at least."

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"Two minutes is nearer the mark!" said Blake. "Buzz along, Skimmy! I'm coming as soon as I've got some peas for my shooter."

Skimpole shook his head solemnly in reproof of this frivolity, and ambled away. Skimpole was under the impression that the Junior Debating Society were going to listen to a long address. Nobody else shared that impression.

The Hobby Club-room was pretty full when Blake & Co. arrived on the scene. The Terrible Three were there, with Figgins & Co., and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, of the New House. Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn came in, followed by Levison and Lumley-Lumley, and Gore, and Kerruish and Julian, Reilly and Clive, Hammond and Smith minor. It was quite a full meeting.

Skimpole had been allowed to put down his question for discussion. Nobody intended to hear Skimpole on the subject, however. Skimpole was too portentous a bore to be listened to if anybody could help it. Manners was president of the society, and Manners' opening remarks were listened to impatiently by Skimpole.

Then the genius of the Shell rose, with a sheaf of impot-paper in his bony hand. His very spectacles gleamed with determination.

"Gentlemen—"

"Sit down! Shut up!"

"Order!"

"Please do not interrupt me, my dear fellows. Upon the subject of the demobilisation of the army after the war—"

"Ring off!"

"I have a few remarks to make. I propose to nationalise the land—"

"Dry up!"

"All large estates must be cut up into small holdings, to be handed over to the soldiers and sailors, without charge. The landowners can be indemnified by means of a scheme I have elaborated, without cost."

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther. "I'd like to know how that could be done!"

"It is quite simple, my dear Lowther. Any Socialist could tell you," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "I propose that every landowner should be taught a trade at the national expense, so that he can earn his own living—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They would lose their rents, it is true, but consider what an immense gain in self-respect they would have—"

"Bai Jove! I weward you as a feahful ass, Skimmy!"

"I expect opposition from members of the bloated aristocracy," said Skimpole.

"I wefuse to be called a bloated awistocwacy—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!"

"Gentlemen," said Monty Lowther, "I rise to a point of order, to suggest that Skimpole be forthwith taken by the neck, and ejected from the meeting, unless he undertakes at once to put on a new record."

"Hear hear!"

"My dear fellows—pray, do not seize my hair in that brutal manner, Gore—ow!—I assure you—yaroooh! please let go my ear, Julian—yow! Under the circumstances, I must say—yaroooh! Yooop! Oh, dear!"

The genius of the Shell was deposited in the passage, and the door closed upon him. Blake thoughtfully turned the key in the lock. The great question of the nationalisation of the land was put off indefinitely.

"Now, gentlemen," said Manners, "the question down for discussion is the demobilisation of the troops after the war, and the Honourable Gussy Adolphus de Vere D'Arcy has a few remarks to make. If there are more than a few, the said D'Arcy will go out on his neck!"

"Hear hear!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"On the ball, Gussy!" said Blake encouragingly. "We

"Hear hear!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"On the ball, Gussy!" said Blake encouragingly. "We

"Hear hear!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"On the ball, Gussy!" said Blake encouragingly. "We

"Hear hear!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"On the ball, Gussy!" said Blake encouragingly. "We

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"LINLEY MINOR!"

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give you five minutes for your gas-attack, before we begin with the peashooters!"

"I wufuse to have my remarks chwactewised as a gas-attack, you uttah ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On the ball!"

"Order!"

Arthur Augustus sniffed, looked over his notes—which were very copious—jammed his monocle a little more tightly into his noble eye, and proceeded to make a few remarks.

CHAPTER 7.

Gussy's Great Idea!

GENTLEMEN—

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen—"

"We have had that!"

"Pway do not intewwupt me, Kewwuish! This

is a meeting of the Juniah Debatin' Society, not a session of the House of Commons, and wude intewwuptions are quite out of place."

"Hear hear!"

"Gentlemen, I have a few wemarks to make upon the subject of the demobilisation of the twoops aftah the wah. Vawious schemes have been pwoposed for pwovidin' for the bwave fellows in khaki when they have finished lickin' the Huns. But I wathah think that the politicians have missed the main point. Politicians are wathah fatheaded, you know—in the House of Commons, at least. The House of Lords is wathah more bwainy."

"Ha, ha!"

"There is no occasion whatevah for fwivolous laughtah! Gentlemen, when the wah is over, some millions of chaps will come home—some of them fellows who have been at the Fwont all the time, facin' the Huns. What is goin' to be done with them? I beg to submit that the question is easily answahed. It is the chaps of military age who have been out in Flandahs, and Mesopotamia, and Salonika, and on the wild and woawin' waves—"

"Hear hear!"

"The fellows ovah military age have stayed at home. That is nothin' against them, of course—we all know how cagah they are to join the chaps at the Fwont, if they only could—"

"We do—we does!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Unfortunately, the age-limit bahs them off fwom takin' an active part in the wah, and they have to kill time instead of killin' Huns, by hangin' wound clubs, or goin' to the waces, or talkin' nonsense in the House of Commons. But aftah the wah, their great opportunity will come."

"Oh!"

"I pwopose, therefore, that when the boys come home, the old johnnies ovah military age take their turn of dutay. They shall place their houses and estates at the service of the weturned hewoes—"

"Eh!"

"Which they will be quite willin' to do, because they would not have any houses or estates if the Tommies had not saved them fwom the Huns. Every weturned Tommy will be able to dwell in marble halls, figuwatively speakin'—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And the patwiotic old johnnies will be able to weward them for their hewoic defence, by lookin' aftah them, waitin' on them, an' givin' them a good time genewally."

The juniors blinked at Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's was in deadly earnest. Evidently he was greatly taken with his nobby idea for solving the great problem of the demobilisation of the troops.

"Just considah it, deah boys!" went on Arthur Augustus eloquently. "Take the case of a nobleman, with a large estate and a tiptop wesinde, who is ovah militawy age. Thirstin' to take his turn in the twenches with the Tommies and to wuff it at the Fwont, he is, debarred fwom doin' so by the age-limit. Think of his pleasuah when his turn comes aftah the wah to do his dutay! He weweives, say, a hundred weturned hewoes in his mansion, and shares a woom with his own butlah in ordah to give them the vewy best—"

"Great pip!"

"He helps to take up their bwakfast in the mornin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And in case of a shortage of labah, he cleans their boots, and bwushes their clothes."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Think of his glow of pwide and satisfaction!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can see Gussy helping to clean the boots," chuckled Levison.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Levison.

"I should weward it as an honah, Levison, to perform any service for a man who has fought the Huns," he said frigidly. "Gentlemen, you see the ideah? There will no longah be any problem of demobilisation. Ewewy weturned soldiah will be welcomed into the best houses and mansions in the countwy, and will be able to take a long west aftah his hewoic labahs, waited on hand and foot by the men who have not been able to take part in the fightin', and who will weward themselves as honahed by this great opportunity."

Monty Lowther rose.

"May I ask the honourable speaker a question?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"Good. I should like to know whether I am at liberty to use the honourable speaker's suggestion in the comic column of the 'Weekly'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weward the question as fwivolous, and in the worst of taste, Lowthah! Gentlemen, I invite you to discuss my pwoposition, and to make suggestions. I do not think any wasonable person can find fault with it."

"How long does the honourable speaker think it will be before Messrs. Racke and Hacke ask the weturned hewoes into their noble mansions?" inquired Manners.

"Bai Jove! My pwoposition does not apply to war-pwofiteers, of course. I should wufuse to allow them to hav' anythin' to do with it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"May I make a suggestion?" came from Levison.

"Certainly."

"I suggest that the honourable speaker writes to Lord Eastwood, and suggests turning Eastwood House into a home of rest for weturned hewoes, asking him specially whether he has any objection to the boot-cleaning part of the bizney?"

"Weally, Levison—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall immediately w'ite to my patah on the subject," said Arthur Augustus. "I have not the slightest doubt that he will welcome the suggestion, and will waise the question in the House of Lords."

The juniors yelled.

"I see no cause whatevah for wibald laughtah. I am surprised, Blake, to see you cacklin'!"

"My deah, born idiot," said Blake affectionately. "It's a ripping idea, and every chap who has been to the Front is welcome to a whack in Study No. 6. It's a ripping wheeze, and there will be a terrific rush to back it up—I don't think!"

"I can just see the war-pwofiteers shelling out their ill-gotten gains that way," said Monty Lowther, wiping his eyes. "Gussy, old son, you're too good for this world! Your proper place is in the British Museum."

"I weward you as an ass, Lowthah! I firmly believe that the suggestion has only to be made for ewery man to jump at it. Unless the oldah men are willin' to adopt my ideah, they have no wight to ask the youngah men to do their fightin' for them. I believe the suggestion has not been made in the House of Commons, simply because the membahs are not bwainy enough to think of it."

There was a sound of the window opening, and Skimpole of the Shell clambered in. Skimpole was not to be baffled by a locked door.

"Gentlemen," said Skimpole, "I will now proceed to deliver my address—Yaroooh! Leggo!"

A dozen hands grasped Skimpole, and rushed him back to the window. He was dropped gently into the quadrangle. There was a thump at the locked door.

"Open this door, you young asses!"

"Hallo, that's Kildare!"

Tom Merry opened the door

"Do you know you're showing a big light at the window?" demanded the captain of St. Jim's. "Do you want a prosecution under the lighting regulations? Clear off!"

"It's that ass Skimpole!"

Kildare turned off the light.

"Bai Jove! Hold on, Kildah, deah boy, the meetin' isn't finished!"

"Yes, it is," said Kildare. "Clear off, the lot of you!"

"But we haven't finished discussin' the question of demobilisation of the twoops aftah the wah!"

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NEXT
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"Ha, ha! You can leave that to Asquith, and such small fry," said Kildare. "You'd better get off to your prep. Get off, anyway!"

"Weally, Kildah, I object. In fact, I wefuse——"

"And take fifty lines, D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Come on, fathead!" said Blake. "You got out of the pea-shooters, ar'yway."

And the meeting broke up.

CHAPTER 8. Under Suspicion!

"LEIVISON!"

Several fellows looked round as Kildare rapped out the name. It was the following day, and Leivison was in the quadrangle chatting with Julian, after morning lessons, when the captain of St. Jim's came up.

There was a grim expression on Kildare's face.

Leivison regarded him coolly. He had nothing to fear—his conscience was not burdened with a dozen shady secrets now, as it had once been. That was one of the advantages of his new way of life.

"Adsum!" said the Fourth Former calmly.

"Turn out your pockets!"

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said!"

"Yes, I heard what you said," replied Leivison, cool as ever, and with a glitter in his eyes. "But I want to know what's the matter. What am I to turn out my pockets for, please?"

The juniors began to gather round. It was evident that trouble was brewing.

"Anythin' the mattah, Kildah, deah boy?" ventured Arthur Augustus.

"Anybody missed anything?" chortled Mellish.

Kildare did not heed.

"Mr. Lathom has found a cigarette under your desk in the Form-room, Leivison," he said. "I suppose you dropped it there. You have been punished a dozen times, at least, for smoking. I want to know whether you have any more about you!"

Leivison smiled bitterly.

"I didn't drop it there," he said. "If I had cigarettes about me, I shouldn't be fool enough to drop them in the Form-room!"

"I'm sorry I can't take your word," said Kildare curtly. "You got a bad name, Leivison."

"Yes; give a dog a bad name, and hang him," said Leivison, shrugging his shoulders. "I suppose it's no good my telling you that I haven't touched a cigarette for weeks, and don't intend to?"

"What's the good of your telling me so, when you have told me lies a dozen times?" said the prefect. "I'm sorry I can't take your word, as I'd take Tom Merry's or D'Arcy's or Julian's. It's your own fault. Turn out your pockets!"

Leivison, with a burning face, obeyed.

It was a part of the punishment for the past, that he found it so difficult and lengthy a task to live down his old reputation. He was a dog with a bad name, as he had said, and the bad name was easier to acquire than to get rid of.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Kildare suddenly.

From Leivison's pocket, as he turned it out savagely, a packet had dropped.

The Sixth Former stopped, and picked it up.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry.

It was a packet of cigarettes. The rule at St. Jim's on the subject of fellows smoking was very strict, and Leivison was an old offender.

Leivison stared at the packet in the prefect's hand.

"Did—did that come out of my pocket?" he ejaculated.

"You know it did, you young rotter!"

"Bai Jove! I should not have thought this of you, Leivison," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, more in sorrow than in anger. "You agreed to chuck up that kind of wot when you came into the football team. You are quite awah that it spoils the wind and wendahs you liable to cwack up in a match!"

Tom Merry knitted his brows. Leivison's private concerns were nothing to him; but as football skipper it was his duty to see that a member of his team kept himself fit. He had accepted Leivison's assurance that the foolish tricks of the past were over and done with.

Leivison's face was a study.

"You will come to Mr. Railton, Leivison," said Kildare curtly.

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"Hold on a minute!" said Leivison. "That packet doesn't belong to me, Kildare."

"It doesn't matter much whom it belongs to, as it was in your possession. Follow me!"

Kildare went into the house, and Leivison followed him.

He was taken at once into the Housemaster's study, where the prefect made his report, as in duty bound.

Mr. Railton fixed his eyes upon Leivison.

"I am sorry to see this, Leivison," he said quietly. "I have observed you of late, and it seemed to me that there was an improvement in your conduct."

"That packet doesn't belong to me, sir," said Leivison steadily. "It was put in my pocket by somebody."

"Nonsense, Leivison!"

"I suppose you won't believe me," said Leivison bitterly.

"I don't expect that. But it's the truth."

"Whom do you accuse of playing such a trick upon you, Leivison?"

"How should I know? The same fellow who dropped a cigarette under my desk in the Form-room for Mr. Lathom to see, I suppose. One of the chaps who's bitter about my getting into the junior eleven."

"Are you a member of the junior eleven now, Leivison?"

"Yes; for the Greyfriars match on Saturday."

"I am glad to hear it. You have great capabilities, if you chose to put them to a good use," said Mr. Railton. "Do you seriously say that a trick has been played upon you by some boy desirous of getting you into trouble?"

"It's plain enough, sir."

Mr. Railton hesitated.

"I should be sorry to do you an injustice, Leivison," he said at last. "Your record does not lead me to place faith in your statements, but your explanation is a possible one, and I shall let the matter drop. I can only trust that you have spoken sincerely."

"Thank you, sir!"

Leivison left the Housemaster's study with a moody brow. He had told Mr. Railton the truth, and he wondered who had played that trick upon him. Racke, perhaps, or Crooke, or Mellish—one of his old associates, annoyed by his desertion. Yet he could not be sure of that.

There had been a time when Leivison had played such tricks, and worse. But such things were rather different from the victim's point of view; and Leivison was the victim now.

He went to his study in a gloomy mood. He could guess the intention of that trick. It was not to get him caned by the Housemaster, but to cause trouble with Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell was not likely to pass the matter over.

Tom had felt it his duty to give Leivison his chance in a School match; and with the new recruit at the top of his form there was no doubt that he would be an acquisition to the side. But Leivison, seedy from reckless habits, was quite another proposition, and the bare idea of the forward cracking up and failing the team in a pinch was enough to make Tom angry.

The path of reform was not an easy one to tread. Leivison had reckoned without the enmity of his old associates. He felt, too, that it would not end here—that this was probably only the first move in the game. His enemy's object was to discredit him with his new friends, and he had little doubt that the enemy was Racke of the Shell. But there was no shadow of proof.

He was pacing the study restlessly in angry thought when a pair of big spectacles glimmered in at the door.

"Dear me, I thought you were out of doors, Leivison," said Skimpole.

"Cut off!" growled Leivison.

"The fact is, I should like to use your study," said the genius of the Shell, blinking at him. "Gore refuses to allow me to work in peace in my own study. You would scarcely believe it, Leivison, but Gore was actually brutal enough to stuff my manuscripts down my back!"

Leivison grinned.

"I'll stuff them down your throat if you don't clear off!" he said.

"My dear Leivison, I trust you will allow me to use your study. I must write somewhere. I am compiling my speech afresh for the debating society. For some inexplicable reason, they would not listen to me last night, but at the next meeting——"

"Fathead!"

"I have asked Racke to let me use his study, though I should be considerably incommoded by the smell of smoke," said Skimpole. "Racke received my proposal in a manner that I can only describe as ill-bred. Racke is a suspicious person, and he actually suspected me of spying upon him, because they were talking when I entered his study. As if I should take any interest in his absurd affairs! I am



"There is some boy shut up there!" said Kildare. "Goodness gracious!" replied Skimpole.
(See Chapter 13.)

engaged upon the important problem of the demobilisation of the troops after the war, my dear Levison, and I certainly should not be likely to take any interest in what became of a packet of cigarettes—"

"A packet of cigarettes!" repeated Levison, with a start.

"Yes. Racke and Mellish were discussing a packet of cigarettes when I went into his study last night."

Levison gave the sublime Skimpole a very curious look.

"What were they saying about a packet of cigarettes, Skimmy?" he asked.

"I forget, Levison. Something of not the slightest importance—something about Mellish doing something with the packet, as he would be seated next to you in class."

Levison grasped Skimpole by the arm.

"Come along with me!" he said.

"But I came here to write out my speech—"

"Blow your silly speech! Come on!"

"But, my dear Levison—"

"Come on, fathead!"

And Skimpole had to go.

CHAPTER 9.

Skimpole to the Rescue!

THE Terrible Three were in the quadrangle when Levison came up, still gripping the astonished Skimpole by the arm. Skimpole was raising vain objections. Levison did not heed him. Skimpole wanted to improve the shining hour by adding to the perfections of the great speech which had not been delivered, but

which Skimmy fondly hoped would be delivered at the next meeting of the debating society.

Tom Merry gave him a grim look.

"I wanted to see you, Levison," he remarked.

"About those smokes, of course," said Levison sarcastically.

"Yes," said Tom directly. "You're in the School junior eleven on the understanding that you're fit for the Greyfriars match when it comes off. If you play the fool and crack up in that match, you'll never play for St. Jim's again so long as I'm skipper! And I don't know whether to trust you. That's plain!"

"Quite plain," said Levison calmly. "Is it any good telling you that those smokes were planted on me specially to make you get your back up about it?"

"Well, that sounds rather a tall story!"

"I know it does."

"If you say that's the case—" began Tom doubtfully.

"I do!"

"Well, I suppose I shall have to believe you, Levison."

"As it happens, there's a proof turned up—this silly idiot, Skimpole, heard Racke arranging it with Mellish."

"By Jove! Is that so, Skimmy?"

"I really do not know anything about the matter, my dear Merry. I am at present very busy improving my speech on the demob—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Levison. "Tell him what you heard Racke say to Mellish."

"I do not remember, Levison. It is a matter of no moment. If you will kindly release my arm, I will—"

"The silly idiot went into Racke's study last evening."

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explained Levison. "Gore had turned him out, and he went to Racke's study to get on with his fatheaded speech, if Racke would let him. He found Racke and Mellish talking, and Racke told him he was spying."

"A most unjustifiable accusation!" said Skimpole, more in sorrow than in anger. "I was not in the least interested in what they were saying. Indeed, I failed to understand the drift of their remarks. I did not see any connection between a packet of cigarettes, and the fact that Mellish would be seated next to Levison in class this morning."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. "There are lots of things you don't see, Skimmy," remarked Lowther.

"My dear Lowther——"
"Did you hear anything else?" asked Tom Merry, knitting his brows.

"I do not remember, my dear Merry. I was not interested——"

"Did Racke give Mellish a packet of smokes?"

"Yes; he certainly was doing so when I entered the study."

"And mentioned that Mellish would be next to Levison in class——"

"Yes. He said that that would make it quite easy, but I have not the slightest idea what he was referring to."

"My hat!" said Manners. "That looks pretty clear."

"Racke was extremely ill-bred," said Skimpole. "As if I should spy upon him. What was there to spy upon, indeed? I asked him that question, and he only replied with an opprobrious epithet."

"Well, what do you think now?" asked Levison.

"I think we'd better see Racke and Mellish," said Tom Merry grimly.

"Just what I was thinking," said Lowther. "Anybody know where the cads are?"

"We'll jolly soon find them."

Skimpole was allowed to depart at last, much to his satisfaction. He had already wasted many precious minutes that might have been devoted to his great speech. Mellish was soon discovered, lounging outside the tuckshop. He looked a little uneasy as the Terrible Three and Levison bore down upon him.

"You slipped a packet of cigarettes into Levison's pocket in class this morning, and dropped one under his desk," said Tom directly.

Mellish started.

"I—I didn't——"

"Racke put you up to it."

"I—I——"

"You dropped your grammar, and pushed against me picking it up," said Levison. "I know now what you did it for."

"I did nothing of the sort!"

"Skimpole heard you arranging it with Racke," said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"The rotter was spying, after all!" exclaimed Mellish furiously.

"He wasn't. And he hasn't sense enough to know what you were planning; but we know," said Tom Merry. "I suppose this dirty trick is because Levison will have nothing more to do with your rotten games. Well, it's the last time you'll play a trick of that sort, Mellish. It's not good enough. Collar him!"

"Leggo!" yelled Mellish. "It—it was only a joke——"

"Well, this is only a joke, too," grinned Monty Lowther.

"You haven't taken out a monopoly of jokes, Mellish. We're rather funny merchants ourselves. Bump him!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Now put his head in the fountain!"

"Good egg!"
"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Mellish. "I shall catch cold—guggggg—yurrggg—leggo—grooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Mellish tore himself away from the Terrible Three, streaming with water. He dashed off to the School House for a towel, gasping and spluttering.

"That will do for Mellish," said Tom. "Now we'd better go and see Racke."

"Hear, hear!"
Racke was found in his study, studying the columns of a pink paper. He stared as the Terrible Three came in.

"What the dickens do you want?" he demanded.

"You!" said Monty Lowther.

"We've found out the trick you and Mellish played on Levison, with that packet of smokes," explained Tom Merry.

"It's a lie!"

"Mellish has owned up."

"The sneaking rotter!" hissed Racke.

"Collar him!"

Racke sprang to his feet.

"Touch me, and I'll yell for a prefect!" he exclaimed savagely.

"Yell away; we don't mind. I dare say Kildare would be glad to hear the truth of the matter."

On second thoughts, Racke did not yell. But he had plenty of cause for yelling. Four pairs of hands were laid upon him, and he was bumped on his own expensive carpet, and his head was well rubbed in the ashes in the grate. Monty Lowther added the contents of the inkpot to the ashes, as Racke sat clawing them out of his hair.

"That's a warning," said Tom Merry sternly. "Any more tricks of that kind, Racke, and you'll get it in the neck!"

And the avengers left the study, leaving Racke of the Shell in a mood that could not be described in words.

The first move in Racke's little game had been a failure, owing to the sublime Skimmy. Skimpole was quite unconscious of the good he had done; his powerful brain was occupied with more weighty matters. After lessons that day Tom Merry found him in his study, with the table covered with written sheets; and Tom forbore to stuff them down his back as Gore had done. Skimpole blinked at him impatiently as he came in.

"I trust you do not want to use your study now, Merry?" he said. "I am rather busy. As a Socialist, of course, I have as much right to your study as you have."

"As a howling idiot, you can travel along," said Tom.

"We want that table for tea."

"I wish you would have tea in hall, Merry. Pray do not move any of those papers, Lowther. I have not yet numbered the pages, and they may get mixed."

"I rather think they will," assented Lowther, gathering up the precious manuscript with an utterly reckless hand.

"But that won't matter; they'll do rippingly to light the fire with."

"My dear Lowther——"

Skimpole snatched the precious sheets away.

"It was ever thus," he said sadly. "Genius is never understood by the common herd. I am sorry to see that you fellows belong to the common herd. However, I do not bear malice; and, if you like, I will read out my speech to you while you have tea. It is not yet finished. I have written, so far, only about fifteen thousand words. Pray let go my ear, Manners!"

Manners did not let go Skimpole's ear till the genius of

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St. Jim's was in the passage. Then he released him, and slammed the door after him.

Skimpole shook his head sadly, and looked into his own study. Gore was frying sausages there for tea.

Gore turned a red face round from the fire.

"Get out!" he snapped.

"My dear Gore, I have been treated with frigid inhospitality in every study I have entered," said Skimpole. "I have no resource but to do my important work here. I trust you will not mind having your tea on a chair, or the sofa."

Gore did not reply, but he picked up a cushion and charged at Skimpole. Skimpole had just time to dodge into the passage.

Gore glared after him from the doorway.

"I'm fed-up with your rot!" he roared. "You bring any of that piffle into this study again, and I'll make you eat it!"

"My dear Gore——"

Slam!

Skimpole ambled sorrowfully away. He tried Study No. 6 as a last resource. At the sight of Skimpole with his bundle of manuscripts, Blake jumped up and seized the poker.

"Travel!" he roared.

"My dear Blake, I should like to work here, as Gore——"

"Pway wun away, Skimmay! You are a feaful ass, you know."

"I am compiling my speech on the demobilisation of——"

"I have already settled that mattah, Skimmay! Pway cut off!"

"Try the Hobby Club-room," said Blake, with a grin. "Nobody will be there; you can be monarch of all you survey."

"There is no fire there, Blake, and it is somewhat chilly——"

Skimpole had no time to finish, as Blake introduced the end of the poker into the conversation. The genius of the Shell hastily retired, and he decided to do his literary work in the Hobby Club-room; heroically enduring cold feet and a blue nose while he added some thousands of words to his great speech.

CHAPTER 10.

Racke's Scheme!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was looking somewhat thoughtful on Saturday morning. It was the day of the Greyfriars match, and Harry Wharton & Co. were expected at St. Jim's early in the afternoon. Blake tapped his noble chum on the shoulder as the Fourth Form came out after morning lessons.

"Worrying about the match, old son?" he asked. "Counting up the goals you would have taken—perhaps?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I was not thinkin' of the match, Blake. I feah that there may be wathah deplowable results fwom my standin' out of the team; but I have agweed to submit to the voice of the majowity. I was thinkin' of that wippin' ideah of mine——"

"Eh? Which?"

"About the demobilisation of the twoops atfah the wah, you-know. Levison suggested that I should w'ite to my patah and put it to him——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any weason for mewwiment, Blake. I adopted Levison's suggestion, and w'ote to my patah, and asked him to waise the question in the House of Lords."

"Oh, my hat! And he's going to do it?" grinned Blake.

"For some incomprehensible weason, Blake, he is not goin' to do it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In fact, Lord Eastwood has w'ritten me a vevy extwawordinawy lettah," said Arthur Augustus, looking perplexed. "Instead of statin' his opinion of my great ideah, he simply tells me not to be a widulicous young donkey. He must have misundalstood me somehow."

"He must!" chuckled Blake.

"I shall wefuse to twouble my head about the mattah any furthah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Latah on, my ideah will occur to some politician, and he will get all the credit of it. I shall wefuse to mention the mattah to Lord Eastwood again, as he wefuses to take me sewiously. And I uttably fail to see, Blake, why you should persist in cacklin' like a hyenah!"

And Arthur Augustus walked on with his noble nose very high in the air. The swell of St. Jim's was on his dignity; and he had quite decided to leave the powers that be to

solve the problem of the demobilisation of the troops, with-out his valuable assistance.

The St. Jim's footballers punted the ball about on Little Side before dinner. Levison of the Fourth was in great form, and as fit as a fiddle.

Racke's attempt to discredit him with his new associates had failed completely, and the cad of the Shell seemed to have taken his defeat as final. Any new trick of the same kind would have been suspected at once, and it would have been useless. Racke had intended it to be the first of a series, but a stopper had been put very effectually upon his plans.

Racke came down with a moody brow to watch the footballers. His defeat had only made him more bitter and more determined, but he was very wary now. His fertile brain had hatched a more effectual scheme, and this time he was leaving nothing to chance.

After dinner Tom Merry and half a dozen fellows started for the station to meet the Greyfriars team on their arrival. Racke went to his study with Crooke and Mellish. Crooke was looking curious, and Mellish very uneasy. The latter had a strong objection to having his head put in the fountain again.

"Well, what's the game?" said Crooke. "You made a muck of it last time, Racke, and your precious plans haven't been carried out!"

Racke's eyes glittered.

"One swallow doesn't make a summer," he said. "That fool Skimpole happened to hear us talking last time; but this time——"

There was a tap at the door, and Skimpole blinked in.

"Is there a fire in your study, Racke? Yes, I see there is. If you do not mind, I will use your study this afternoon, as Gore—— Yaroooh! Yoop! Yah! Help!"

Skimpole fled, with a cricket-stump prodding him behind. Racke closed the door.

"That idiot won't come back again!" he grinned.

"Well, what's the game?" asked Crooke.

"Levison's squared it with Tom Merry," said Racke. "They're as thick as thieves now, and he won't easily believe anything against Levison. But suppose Levison deliberately stays away from the match——"

"He won't!"

"He will!" said Racke.

"What rot! Why should he?"

"Because we're going to make him," said Racke coolly. "He can say afterwards that he was collared, and kept away by force, and the fellows can believe it if they like. My opinion is that they won't, when Levison turns up smelling of smoke and spirits, and we three let out that he's had a merry afternoon with us—same old game, you know!"

"My hat!" murmured Mellish.

Crooke chuckled.

"Well, that would serve the cad right for deserting us, and turning up his precious nose at us!" he said. "But I jolly well don't see how you're going to work it, Racke! I'm on if there's anything in it!"

"Same here," said Mellish. "But——"

"It's as easy as falling off a form. He's going to be collared!"

"But everybody would see us, you ass!"

"I'm not thinking of collaring him in the middle of the quadrangle!" said Racke contemptuously. "Don't be an idiot! You know that big cupboard in the Hobby Club-room? It's never used, and there's a key to it!"

"But what——"

"Nobody goes into that room before the evening, and all the fellows will be out of doors on a half-holiday. We get Levison into that room somehow, and collar him there—shove a rope round him, and a handkerchief into his mouth, and stuff him into that big cupboard and lock the door. He stays there till after the match!"

"Great Scott!"

"He don't turn up for the match," grinned Racke. "You can imagine Tom Merry's feelings, when he's depending on him. He will put in another chap, of course. And I fancy he'll never play Levison again, after being left in the lurch by him like that at the last minute!"

"But Levison will explain——"

"Let him! Nobody will believe it! It will be known we had a party in this study, and we shall say Levison was with us. He will be smelling of smoke and spirits when they see him; I'll take care of that. They'll believe that he couldn't resist the temptation, and joined us, and left the team in the lurch, and told thumping lies afterwards as an excuse!"

"I shouldn't wonder!" grinned Crooke. "They don't trust Levison. His past is a bit too thick!"

"Anyway, he will be done out of the Greyfriars match, and that's the chief point," said Racke. "He's particularly

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keen on playing against Greyfriars. He used to be at that school, and Wharton and his friends knew him as a smoky slacker. He wants them to see him play the game. Well, they won't! All they'll learn about him is that he was given a chance for the match, and left his skipper in the lurch at the last minute!"

"By gum! It sounds rather thick, but I dare say it will work!" grinned Crooke. "But how are you going to get Levison into the Hobby Club-room? He's not likely to go to that out-of-the-way place of his own accord!"

"I've settled that with Piggott of the Third. Levison will come all right, and we three are going to be there to handle him!" said Racke.

"Well, I'm on! It serves him right!"

The three young rascals left the study, and slipped quietly into the Hobby Club-room on the ground floor. They were not likely to be disturbed there. Ten minutes later Skimpole blinked into the empty study. The weary Skimmy had nowhere to lay his head; and Gore, who was doing lines in his study that afternoon, was too Hunnish in temper to be approached.

Skimpole blinked round the study with great satisfaction at finding it vacated.

"How very fortunate!" murmured Skimpole. "They will be watching the match, and I shall be quite undisturbed. Probably I shall be able to finish my speech by tea-time!"

And the great Skimmy settled down to work at Racke's table.

CHAPTER 11. In the Toils!

"LEVISON!"

"What do you want?" snapped Levison.

He regarded Piggott of the Third with great disfavour. They had been pals once, in a way, but Levison was no longer on good terms with that youthful imitator of Racke & Co.

"Nothing," said Piggott carelessly. "Nothing to do with me, anyway; but I thought I'd tell you about your minor——"

Levison was attentive at once.

"About Frank? What about him?"

"Don't tell Racke I told you," said Piggott hastily.

"Racke!" Levison's brows darkened. "Out with it, sharp!"

"Well, they've got him in the Hobby Club-room," said Piggott, lowering his voice. "Racke's going to make him smoke a cigarette. No business of mine, but the poor little beast is yelling. Crooke's twisting his arm——"

Levison did not stay to hear more. He ran towards the School House. Piggott looked after him with a peculiar grin.

Levison ran into the House, and down the passage that led to the room on the ground floor used for the meetings of the Hobby Club.

It was quite deserted in the daytime, and if the cads of the School House had inveigled Levison minor there, it was quite a safe quarter for uninterrupted bullying. Levison threw the door open, and dashed into the room with flushed face and gleaming eyes.

Racke and Crooke and Mellish were there.

"Where's my minor?" demanded Levison savagely.

Racke put his back to the door of the big wall-cupboard at the end of the room.

"Your minor!" he repeated.

"Is he there, you cad?" asked Levison, advancing upon him with blazing eyes. "Stand aside from that door!"

"He's not there," said Racke.

"I'll see for myself!"

Racke shrugged his shoulders, and stood aside, and Levison dragged the big cupboard open. Crooke, meanwhile, had turned the key in the lock of the door to the Hobby Club-room.

Levison glanced into the big cupboard. It was empty.

"That young rotter was spoofing me, then!" he exclaimed.

"He told me you had my minor here!"

"Your minor's in the Third Form-room," grinned Racke, "safe enough, dear boy! And you're here, and you're going to stay here!"

The three rascals closed up round Levison.

"Let me pass!" exclaimed Levison savagely; and, putting up his hands, he strode straight towards the door.

"At him!" said Racke.

Racke & Co. were not heroes, but they were courageous enough three to one. They hurled themselves upon Levison. The Fourth-Former hit out furiously, but he was grasped on all sides, and he went to the floor with a crash, Racke & Co. sprawling over him.

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"Pin him down!" gasped Crooke.

Levison struggled furiously.

But the three of them were too much for him. Racke watched his opportunity, and as Levison opened his mouth to shout for help, Racke thrust a folded handkerchief between his teeth.

"No, you don't!" grinned Racke.

Levison spluttered, and he still struggled, but he was firmly held. He expected a ragging.

But he soon discovered that it was not a ragging he had to expect. Racke's plans were deeper than that.

"The rope!" muttered Crooke.

With Racke kneeling on his chest, and Mellish grasping his wrists, Levison was helpless. Crooke caught the coil of cord from Racke, and began to bind his legs together with it, in spite of Levison's wild kicks. One kick caught Crooke on the chin, and made him yell; but the rope was looped round and knotted, and Levison's limbs were reduced to helplessness.

"Now his paws!" grinned Racke.

Mellish held Levison's hands together while they were tied. Then Racke wound a length of twine several times round his head, tying the gag firmly in place in his mouth.

The three rascals rose to contemplate their handiwork, Levison lying helpless at their feet. They were breathless, and they had received some hard knocks in the struggle, but they were grinning. The scheme had worked like a charm.

"Got him!" said Racke. "Awfully obliging of you to walk into the trap like that, Levison!"

"He, he, he!" chortled Mellish.

"Shove him into the cupboard!"

Levison's eyes burned. He could not speak. He could not move a limb. He understood now that it was a trick to make him miss the Greyfriars match. And he was helpless. No one knew he was there except Piggott, who was in league with Racke & Co. He knew that now. He had walked into the trap as simply as a baby—he, who had always prided himself upon his cunning and astuteness!

Racke & Co. dragged him into the large cupboard, which was empty save for some old lumber stacked there out of the way.

"We're going to leave you here, dear boy," grinned Racke. "But don't worry; I'm coming back for you presently. I'm going to spill whisky over you, and smoke a cigar over you, to give you a nice fragrant scent, that Tom Merry will know you have been keeping it up in the old style, instead of turning out for the match. We're coming back for you after the match, you see, and we'll all walk out of this room together; and you can tell them any whoopers you like about having been tied up here. They won't believe you."

Levison's eyes blazed.

"You may be sorry for turning your back on your old pals," continued Racke agreeably. "You may be willing to come back into the fold, what, when your dear new pals won't have anything more to do with you—after you've left them in the lurch like this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke closed the heavy door, turned the key in the lock, and put it into his pocket.

"Safe enough, I think," he remarked.

"Safe as houses!" grinned Mellish. "I say, I suppose he won't suffocate in there?"

"Rot! There's plenty of air—half an inch under the door, and there's a ventilator. He's all right."

There was a faint sound from the locked cupboard. Levison was wriggling feebly in his bonds.

"Nobody ever comes to this room in the daytime," said Racke. "That's all right. He can't be heard. Come on!"

The three young rascals quitted the Hobby Club-room, and closed the door behind them. They sauntered out into the quadrangle. Levison had not been missed. It was still a good time to the match. The Greyfriars team had not yet put in an appearance.

Study No. 6 came out a little later.

"Coming to see the match?" asked Blake, with a grin, as they passed the three black sheep of the School House.

"Rats!" said Racke. "I'll lay you two to one against St. Jim's if you like."

"Rotter!" said Blake politely.

"I wegard that as a wotten pwoosition, Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "I wondah you are not ashamed to bet on a football match! It is persons like you who are twyin' to weduce the game to the wotten level of wacin'!"

"Bow-wow!" said Racke.

"Seen Levison anywhere?" asked Blake.

"Levison? No. I was going to ask him to come out with us this afternoon," said Racke carelessly.

"Fathead! He's playing in the match!"

"Might change his mind about that."

"He'd better not!" growled Blake. "Do you mean to say

that you've got any arrangement with Levison for this afternoon, Raacke?"

"I don't mean to say anythin'," said Raacke coolly, and he walked away with his confederates.

"About time we got to our little game," yawned Crooke. "It's cold out here."

"Right-ho!"

Piggott joined the precious trio, and the four of them proceeded to Raacke's study. The study was already occupied. Skimpole of the Shell was seated at the table, pen in hand, with a smudge of ink on his nose, writing away at great speed. He gave Raacke & Co. an annoyed blink as they came in.

"Dear me! I hope you are not going to interrupt me," said Skimpole. "Cannot you go and watch the football match?"

Raacke & Co. grinned, but did not trouble to reply. They collared Skimpole, ejected him forcibly from the study, and hurled his precious manuscripts after him in a shower. Then Raacke locked the door, took a pack of cards from a secret recess, and the blades of the School House settled down to a little game.

Skimpole disconsolately gathered up his valuable manuscripts and drifted away.

**CHAPTER 12.
Man Missing.**

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry of the Greyfriars Remove greeted the St. Jim's fellows as the Greyfriars party poured out of the train at Rylcombe Station.

Tom Merry, and Manners and Lowther, Kangaroo and Talbot and Figgins, were on the platform waiting for them.

The Greyfriars team looked in fine fettle. The eleven was composed of Bulstrode; Johnny Bull and Mark Linley; Tom Brown, Peter Todd, and Bob Cherry; Hurree Singh, Frank Nugent, Harry Wharton, Field, and Vernon-Smith.

Tom Merry & Co. greeted them cordially. They marched out of the station to the brake that was in readiness. The footballers piled into the brake, and started for St. Jim's.

"You chaps remember Levison, who used to be at your school?" asked Tom Merry, as they chatted on the way.

"Yes, rather!" said Harry Wharton. And Hurree Singh remarked that the ratherfulness was terrific.

"You'll see him to-day."

"Not in the team?" asked Wharton, with a smile

"Yes."

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"He must have changed a good bit if he's any good for a footer team," said Frank Nugent, with a whistle.

"He has changed," said Tom Merry. "He's turned out a ripping footballer. I thought it would be a surprise for you."

"It is," confessed Wharton. "I never thought he'd turn out like that. I remember he was always a clever sort of chap, but he never put his cleverness to much use. I'm jolly glad to hear it!"

The news was indeed a surprise to Harry Wharton & Co. They were curious enough to see Ernest Levison in the ranks of the St. Jim's footballers, and to see what kind of a game he would play.

The brake arrived at the school, and the visitors proceeded to Little Side with Tom Merry & Co.

The rest of Tom Merry's team were already on the ground, with the exception of outside-left. Levison was not to be seen.

"Bai Jove! Heah you are, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus cordially. "We've got a new weewuit who will watah surprise you."

"Yes; Levison," said Wharton, with a smile. "We're rather keen to see him playing up for St. Jim's, as he's an old Greyfriars chap."

"Where is he?" asked Tom. "It's time to get ready."

"I haven't seen him since dinner," said Blake. "Cut off and look for him, Gussy, as you're only a merry linesman to-day."

"Certainly, deah boy!"

The footballers were soon changed. Tom Merry & Co. into the red-and-white of St. Jim's, Harry Wharton and his men into the blue-and-white of Greyfriars.

Langton of the Sixth, who had kindly consented to referee the great match, came down to the ground, and found the footballers ready, with the exception of one of the St. Jim's team. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came back looking puzzled.

"Has Levison turned up?" he asked.

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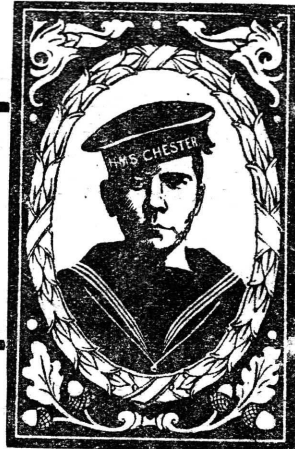
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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "PASSING IT ON!"

"No," said Tom, frowning. "Can't you find him?"
 "He doesn't seem to be anyhow about the House, deah boy. I have hunted for him wright and left and wound about."

"Silly ass!" ejaculated Blake. "Where has he got to? He—he can't have gone out with Racke after all!"

"Impossible!" said Tom Merry.
 "Well, he must know the Greyfriars chaps are here if he's in the school," said Blake. "Why doesn't he come?"

Harry Wharton & Co. made no remark. Tom Merry gave Wharton a rather worried look.

"Do you mind waiting a few minutes? One of my men hasn't turned up, for some reason. He can't be far off."

"Not at all," said Wharton politely.
 "Some of you chaps go and look for Levison!" called out Tom Merry. "Tell him we're waiting to kick-off."

Levison minor was already on the ground, with Wally and Joe Frayne. He had been looking round for his major among the footballers, but in vain.

"Your precious major playing the giddy goat again!" growled Wally.

"It's jolly queer," said Frank. "Come and help look for him!"

"Oh, rats! Why can't he come?"
 "I suppose he don't know the Greyfriars chaps are here. Don't jaw, but come along!" said Levison minor.

A dozen fellows were already looking for Levison. They looked in the tuckshop, and the gym, and round about the quadrangle—they looked in his study in the School House, and several other studies—in the library and the Common-room, and everywhere they could think of.

But Levison was not to be discovered.
 The searchers returned to Little Side with the report that Levison was nowhere about the school. Frank was still hunting for him, in a very perplexed frame of mind.

"He doesn't seem to be in the school at all," said Digby. "Must have gone out. You'll want Gussy, after all, Tommy."

Tom Merry's brow was dark. He had had some secret misgivings about putting Levison into the eleven. His misgivings seemed to be justified now.

"The blessed rotter has cleared off and left us in the lurch!" growled Horries. "Might have expected it of Levison!"

"When are you kids going to begin?" asked Langton good-humouredly.

"Sorry," said Tom. "Levison's disappeared at the last moment. I'll play another man. Get your clobber, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hesitated.
 "I should be vey glad to play, Tom Mewwy, but—"

"Well, get changed!"
 "If these chaps don't mind waitin' a few minutes, you might give Levison another chance, deah boy. He can't be stayin' out on purpose."

"Don't mind us," said Harry Wharton at once. "The chap may have been detained somewhere. We'll wait, with pleasure."

"It's no good!" growled Tom. "I was an ass to trust him! You can go and have another look round, if you like, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 Arthur Augustus dashed away once more to the School House. He was really concerned, in the kindness of his heart, about Levison missing this great chance. The School House was almost deserted on this fine half-holiday; but he met Skimpole of the Shell on the stairs.

"Have you seen Levison, Skimmay?" asked Arthur Augustus, catching him by the arm.

Skimpole shook his head.
 "I have not, my dear D'Arcy. Perhaps you will be kind enough to help me light a fire in the Hobby Club-room—"

"Oh, wats!"
 "It is vey cold there, and I am obliged to adjourn to that apartment in order to proceed with my literary labours undisturbed," said Skimpole sorrowfully. "You would hardly credit, D'Arcy, the exceeding brutality with which Gore has treated me in my own study, because I accidentally upset an inkpot over the lines he is doing for Mr. Linton—"

"Dear me, I wonder why D'Arcy is rushing away in that abrupt manner before I have finished speaking!"
 And Skimpole blinked after Arthur Augustus, and then went on his way.

D'Arcy hurried upstairs, and knocked at Racke's door. The door was locked.

"Hallo!" came Racke's voice from within.
 "Pway let me in, Wacke!"

"Rats!"
 "Is Levison there?"

There was a chuckle in the study.
 "Bai Jove! The feahful boundah must be there, playin' wotten cards, aftah all!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

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Crooke's voice was audible from within the study.

"Your deal, Levison!"
 And there was another chuckle.
 "You uttah wottah, Levison!" yelled Arthur Augustus through the keyhole. "They are waitin' for you on the g'round!"

There was no reply, and Arthur Augustus hurried away. He had no doubt now as to where Levison was, or why he was missing the match. The black sheep of the Fourth was at the old game again!

"Well?" said Tom Merry grimly, as the swell of St. Jim's arrived, breathless, on Little Side.

"I—I haven't seen him, Tom Mewwy."

"Get into your clobber, then, and buck up!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 And Arthur Augustus went in to change.

CHAPTER 13.

Levison for St. Jim's!

"DEAR me!" said Skimpole, in surprise.
 The genius of the Shell had settled down in the Hobby Club-room. It was certainly cold there; but there, at least, he was sure of being undisturbed, and could proceed uninterruptedly with his precious lucubrations, which were to be inflicted upon the Junior Debating Society at the next meeting—perhaps!

Skimpole was an absent-minded youth, and as he settled down to scribble he did not notice for some time a peculiar sound that proceeded from the big cupboard at the end of the room. But he observed it at last, and blinked round in surprise.

From the cupboard came a heavy, dragging sound, that was incessant.

"Dear me! Some animal is shut up in the cupboard!" said Skimpole peevishly. "Some thoughtless person has been playing a trick on Herries' bulldog, perhaps—very likely Levison."

It really seemed as if there was to be no rest for the genius of the Shell. Skimmay was a good-hearted fellow, and he laid down his pen with a sigh, and ambled along to the cupboard.

"Dear me, the door is locked!" he murmured.
 The dragging sound inside the cupboard continued, and there was a faint gasping and spluttering, which surprised Skimpole very much.

"A cruel trick," murmured Skimpole. "The poor animal is perhaps suffering from want of air. It must be released."

Skimpole contemplated the locked door thoughtfully for some moments. Evidently it could not be opened without a key.

After some cogitation, Skimpole regretfully quitted the Hobby Club-room in search of someone who could help him solve the problem of the locked door.

"Kildare!" he exclaimed, as he met the captain of St. Jim's coming from his study. "Pray excuse me—"

"Oh, cut off!" said Kildare.

"I am sorry to incommode you in any way, Kildare, but there is an animal, probably a dog, locked in the cupboard in the Hobby Club-room," explained Skimpole. "It does not appear to me humane to leave it there, and the key has been taken away. What would you advise me to do, Kildare?"

Kildare stared at him for a moment, and then, without replying, he hurried into the room.

"That is the cupboard, my dear Kildare. If you listen, you can hear the poor dog moving about. It is vey odd that he does not bark. Probably the atmospheric conditions obtaining within that confined space have a deterrent effect—"

"Dry up, you young ass!" growled Kildare. "That isn't an animal. There is some boy shut up there!"

"Goodness gracious!"
 "Who is there?" called out Kildare.

There was no reply, save for the sound of a heavy body bumping against the inner side of the door.

Kildare's brow was dark. He supposed that he had chanced upon a very bad case of bullying.

"Is there another key to this cupboard, Skimpole?" he demanded.

"I do not know of any, Kildare."

Kildare crossed to the grate, picked up the heavy, iron poker. He crashed it on the lock, and the door burst open.

Kildare stared into the dusky cupboard.
 A figure lay at his feet—a junior, in flannel, bound hand and foot, with a handkerchief fastened in his mouth.

"Levison!" ejaculated Kildare.
 "Groooh!" came faintly from the gagged junior.

"Good gracious!" murmured Skimpole. "How very remarkable! I wonder why Levison has tied himself up in that

NOW ON SALE.

"LINLEY MINOR!"

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hidden?"

manner, and locked himself in the cupboard? It is really very odd—very odd indeed!"

Kildare opened a penknife, and cut Levison loose.

The Fourth-Former sat up, gasping for breath.

"What does this mean, Levison?" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's. "Who played this rotten trick?"

Levison panted.

"Has the match started yet?"

"Eh! I think they're starting. But who—"

Levison staggered to his feet.

"There may be time yet, then! It's a trick to make me miss the Greyfriars match!"

"Who did it?" shouted Kildare.

Levison looked dogged.

"I'm not going to sneak, Kildare! I can settle with the cads who did it, myself!"

Kildare gave him a very curious look. That was not the sort of reply he had expected from Levison of the Fourth.

"Well, cut off!" he said.

Levison ran out of the room.

Owing to the great Skimmy, he had escaped. But was he in time for the match? He dashed breathlessly out of the School House. But in the quad he reeled, and caught at a tree for support. There was cramp in his limbs, and for a moment or two the pain was intense.

"Ernie!" Levison minor came dashing up. "Ernie, where have you been? They're going to begin without you!"

"Have they started?" panted Levison.

"No. D'Arcy's changing."

"Cut off and tell Tom Merry I'm coming!"

"Right ho!"

Frank tore away to the football-ground. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was just coming out of the dressing-room, in all the glory of the St. Jim's colours. Levison minor dashed up, breathless.

"He's coming!" he shouted.

"Bai Jove!"

"Who's coming?" growled Tom Merry.

"Ernie—my major!"

"Tell him it's too late, and he can go and eat coke! Come on, D'Arcy!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's old Levison!" murmured Bob Cherry, as the Fourth-Former of St. Jim's came limping down to the ground.

"What the merry thunder's the matter with him?" muttered Blake. "Looks as if he's been through something."

Tom Merry glanced sharply at the new-comer. He could see that something had happened to Levison, and he hurried off the field to meet him. Levison was deady pale.

"You haven't started?" he panted

"No. But—"

"I couldn't come. I'm ready—in a minute—when this dashed cramp has passed off!"

"Cramp!" repeated Tom Merry.

"I've been tied up!"

"Wha-a-at!"

Levison hurriedly explained, in breathless accents.

"You needn't take my word!" he added bitterly, as he saw the amazement in Tom Merry's face. "Kildare found me there, and let me loose. Kildare will tell you. Skimpole somehow happened to come into the room, and must have heard me moving, and he fetched Kildare—"

"All serene!" said Tom. "We'll deal with Racke for this later! Of course, I never suspected anything like this!"

"Wathah not!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus wrathfully.

"And those wottahs in Wacke's studay made me believe Levison was there! Cwooke said distinctly, 'Your deal, Levison! The uttah spoofin' wottah!'"

Levison smiled bitterly.

"If I hadn't got away, you'd all have believed that I'd spent the afternoon in Racke's study," he said. "The rotter told me he was going to make me smell of smoke and spirits when he let me loose, and they were going to march me out so that you could all see me, and swear that I'd been with them all the time!"

"Bai Jove! Will you put off the match for a quartah of an hour, Tom Mewwy, while I go and give Wacke a feahful thwashin'?"

"No, I won't, fathead! Go in and help Levison to change, instead!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You feel fit for the game, Levison?" asked Tom dubiously. "I don't want to leave you out, of course; but—"

"I'm fit enough now."

"Then get into your things."

Arthur Augustus hurried Levison into the dressing-room, and helped him to change. It was another disappointment for D'Arcy, but he did not seem to mind in the least. He helped Levison with great good-nature.

Tom Merry went back into the field.

"My man's turned up, after all," he said. "He won't be a minute now. He was kept away."

"Right ho!" said Harry Wharton.

Levison came out in red-and-white, with D'Arcy, who was to be a humble linesman, after all, in the great match.

The Greyfriars fellows looked very curiously at Levison as he came into the field. He certainly looked very fit.

"Jolly glad to see you, Levison!" said Harry Wharton, and he shook hands with the one-time Removite of Greyfriars.

"Same to you," grinned Levison. "Rather a surprise to see me like this—what?"

And Levison lined up with Tom Merry & Co.

The kick-off fell to St. Jim's, and the game was soon going. Harry Wharton & Co. fully expected to find a weak spot on the St. Jim's left wing; but their attempts in that quarter soon undeceived them. Levison was all there. In a very short time his former schoolfellows realised that this was not the Levison they had once known at Greyfriars. Tom Brown, who faced Blake and Levison on that wing, soon discovered that he had to deal with two first-class forwards there, and if there was anything to choose between the two, the comparison was rather in Levison's favour.

Levison, in fact, was playing the game of his life.

Frank watched from the ropes in great delight. To Levison minor there was only one player of importance on the field, and that was his brother. And Wally and Joe Frayne were kept in a continual chortle by Frank's excited comments on the game.

"Look at him—just look!" exclaimed Frank gleefully.

"Who—Tom Merry?" asked Wally.

"No, you fathead! Ernie!"

"What's Ernie doing?"

"Going over on his back," chuckled Joe Frayne, as Levison was fairly bowled over by Johnny Bull of Greyfriars.

"He's up again!" yelled Frank. "He's got the ball, too! Look at him! Go it! Centre—centre! Hurrah!"

Levison centred to Tom Merry, who drove the ball in, beating Bulstrode in goal to the wide. There was a roar round the crowded field.

"Goal, goal, goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Tommy!"

"Well passed, Levison! Bravo!"

"What do you think of that?" chortled Frank. "Did you see that, Wally?"

"No; I was just getting out this toffee," said Wally calmly. "Did your major do anything?"

"You—you—you Hun!" gasped Frank in utter disgust, and Wally chuckled serenely.

It was first blood to St. Jim's. Harry Wharton glanced at Levison as the players went back to the centre of the field. Levison met his glance, and smiled. He knew what was in the Greyfriars skipper's mind.

"What a giddy change!" Nugent murmured to Wharton.

"Terrific, as Inky would say," said Wharton, laughing. "Keep an eye on that winger. He's dangerous."

And from the resumption of play the Greyfriars fellows paid Levison the compliment of marking him very keenly indeed.

There was a hot attack on the home goal, but Fatty Wynn was found fully equal to the task of defence. It was not till close on the interval that Harry Wharton succeeded in potting the leather, and the scores tied when the whistle went.

In the second half the play was fast and furious; but it was good play all the time, and never degenerated into mere kick and rush. There were hot attacks on both sides, but the defence was sound. Bulstrode was hardly the equal of Fatty Wynn in goal, but Johnny Bull and Mark Linley seemed a little ahead of the St. Jim's backs in form. The second half had worn away forty minutes when the Saints closed in with deadly intent on the visitors' goal, and red-and-white drove down the defence of white-and-blue.

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"On the ball!"

"Go it, Ernie!" shrieked Levison minor.

Tom Merry had the ball, but no chance of a kick. He sent it out to Blake, right up to goal; but Johnny Bull was down

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on Blake like a charging Tank, and Blake back-heeled the ball out to Levison. Levison had it in the flash of an eye, and three Greyfriars men were fairly jumping at Levison as he kicked—a long shot from the wing, that was the only chance left, but it looked a very slim chance indeed.

"Rot!" Wally began sagely, as he watched. "He ought to have centred and chanced it— My only Aunt Jane!"

"Goal!" yelled Frank.

"Goal!" stuttered Blake, as he picked himself up.

"Oh, my hat!"

Goal it was—the goal of the season. The leather touched Bulstrode's finger-tips as it shot in—it touched them, but did not stop. The goalie was a fraction of a second too late, and the ball was in the net!

"Goal! Goal! Bravo, Levison!"

"Well kicked, sir!"

"Levison! Levison! Levison!"

It was a deafening roar. It rang over the footer ground—it rang over the quad—it echoed in Dr. Holmes' study, and made the good old Head start—it rang into a study where four seedy young blackguards were playing bridge, and made them jump. Racke of the Shell ran to his window.

"Levison!" he gasped, unable to believe his ears.

"Goal! Goal!" The roar came more clearly as Racke opened the window. "Goal! Levison! Levison! Bravo, bravo!"

"Ho—he—he's playing!" stuttered Racke.

"And winning!" grinned Crooke. "My hat! You'd better give up plotting your merry plots, Racke. Blessed if you're fit to be anywhere outside a home for idiots or the Foreign Office! You've mucked it up again, and there will be the dickens to pay!"

Racke did not answer. He stared moodily out of the window towards the distant footer ground, where Levison's name was still shouted.

The Greyfriars players looked rather grim as they lined up again. There were only five minutes to go. For that five minutes, Harry Wharton & Co. fought hard to equalise at least, and for a moment fortune seemed to smile upon them; but Fatty Wynn, in goal, dashed their last hope, and the whistle went at last. St. Jim's came off the field winners by two goals to one.

Bob Cherry clapped Levison on the back as the players came off, breathing very hard.

"Good man!" said Bob. "We'll tell 'em about this at Greyfriars."

Levison chuckled.

"It will surprise them," he remarked.

"The surprisefulness will be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the congratulatefulness is also great, my esteemed and ludicrous Levison!"

"Bai Jove! I am not sowwy I stood out, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Levison, old chap, I weward you as a ccredit to the Fourth Form."

"Than which," said Monty Lowther, "there is no higher praise."

To which Arthur Augustus cheerfully responded: "Wats!"

There was a great celebration after the football victory. But before that celebration took place there was something else to be attended to—a little affair in which Racke and Mellish and Crooke figured prominently, though unwillingly. For Racke's scheme, which might have been successful if Levison had not been rescued from durance, was exposed now in all its rascality; and Racke & Co. had to pay the penalty. And when the indignant footballers had done with them, the shady trio felt that the life of a scheming rascal was really not worth living, and they were certain to think twice, if not thrice, before they entered into another scheme against their former pal.

And at the joyous celebration that followed there were two guests of honour—one of them the great Skimmy, who had all unconsciously been the means of frustrating Racke & Co.'s knavish tricks, and the other Levison of the Fourth, who had played up so splendidly for St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"PASSING IT ON!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

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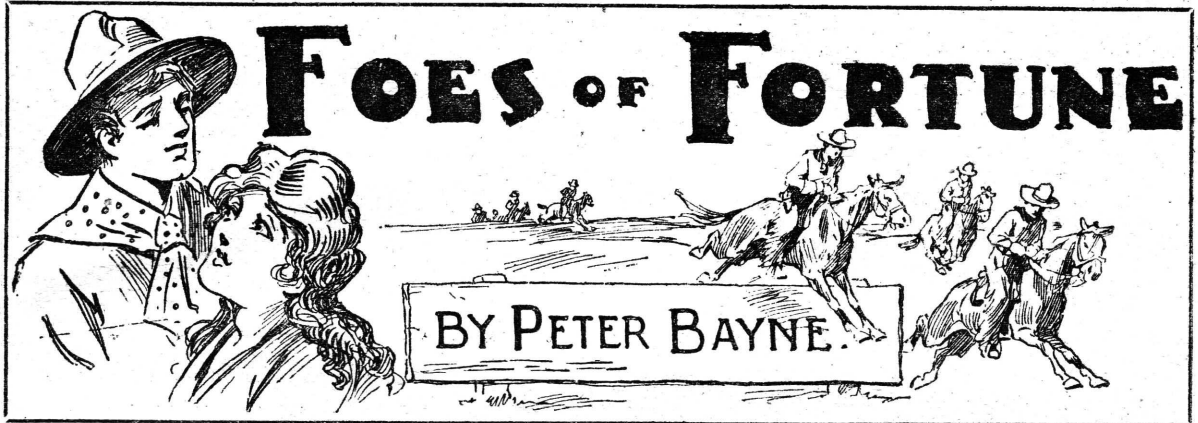
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OUR GREAT ADVENTURE SERIAL. START TO-DAY!

**The First Chapters.**

CARTON ROSS, a lonely and friendless youth, sole heir to a great fortune, though unaware of it, is hunted by a party of outlaws led by DIRK RALWIN. He is befriended by HARVEY MILBURNE and his daughter LORNA, who lose their home and are separated in an attempt to defend him from his pursuers.

Ross is captured by the brigands, but, with Lorna's help, recovers his wallet—containing papers which prove his identity—and escapes. Later they fall in with RODDY GARRIN, an Englishman, and his companion AH CHING, a Chinaman. The outlaws continue the chase, together with HUXTON FENNER, a Yankee, who had previously been a companion of Garrin and Ah Ching, but had deserted them.

They are all captured and taken aboard a Mexican cruiser, from which they escape, the cruiser afterwards being blown up during a mutiny aboard her. Eventually Lorna is captured, and taken to Dirk Ralwin, at Quito, a settlement on the banks of the Amazon, where she sees her father. Ross, who is outside the room, hears Dirk Ralwin offer a reward of ten thousand dollars to the man who captures him, and returns to his friends Garrin and Ah Ching, who are hidden in a hollow covered by foliage close to the river. Later, CAPTAIN ESHMAN, of the cruiser which had been blown up, is captured by them. Ah Ching, by a clever plan, obtains the ten thousand dollars reward, and returns with it to the hollow. While they are talking, Harvey Milburne, who has been released by Ralwin, appears, weak and ill. Ross and his friends go with him to San Ramo, where he dies. Lorna is taken to the mountain stronghold of the outlaws, but succeeds in escaping. Entering a dense forest to rest, she falls in with a race of pigmies, who hail her as the great white queen. She is taken before the leader, who claims her as his bride. Looking out of the window of her hut next morning, she sees Ah Ching's face through the bushes. Then she is carried away from the hut in a palanquin.

*(Now read on.)***An Anxious Moment.**

It was in a state of mingled curiosity and suspense that Lorna Milburne looked forward to whatever it might be that was immediately before her. She, a young English girl, was the chosen bride of a king. True it might be that he was the ruler of a wild tribe of forest dwellers who had no place nor power in the world. Nevertheless, he was a man who exercised unquestioned power of life and death over his subjects, who, in turn, held sway over vast tracts of virgin forest wherein the foot of no white man had ever trodden.

"What will he do when I refuse to marry him?" thought Lorna, as she was being borne along in the palanquin. "Have me executed, perhaps, or cast into some hideous cavern, and left there to starve. But I'm forgetting Ah Ching and his friends. They'll do their best to aid me, in however awkward a position I may be placed."

Turning her head, she glanced round in search of the comrades, but could see no sign of them. Evidently, if they were in the vicinity, they were carefully guarding themselves from hostile observation.

The journey ended outside a reed-built structure, in shape almost exactly similar to a bee-hive, of huge size. The strange humming sound that came from the interior told Lorna that the dwarfs had gathered there in anticipation of witnessing her marriage to their king.

As she entered the building a deep silence immediately fell upon the pigmy folk, who, bending their heads, remained perfectly mute and motionless. Owing to the dim, uncertain light, Lorna saw little of anything with distinctness as, escorted by her maidens, she walked between the rows of silent people to a stone altar at which an old man, with a long, white beard and a wizened face the colour of walnut-juice, was standing alone.

A drum was beaten, and the king, clad in the same picturesque attire that Lorna had first seen him in, stepped forward to the girl's side.

At this moment of crisis Lorna experienced a sensation of dread and aversion that temporarily robbed her of the calm courage that had upborne her since she was made a captive by the pigmies. The realisation of her helplessness amongst these strange dwellers of the forest came home to her with heartfelt force.

She trembled, turned pale, and her footsteps faltered as she neared the altar. The king, a dark smile on his lips, put his hand lightly on her arm. Lorna knew that it would be too late for her to act in another moment. She must act now.

Stepping to one side with a quick, impulsive movement, she stepped back. The king turned his head and looked at her, with a frown of stern displeasure on his face.

He raised his hand with an imperative gesture of command, but before Lorna could make any response to it either in one way or the other a startling interruption occurred to take away all attention from the girl.

A murmuring hum of angry alarm and amazement suddenly swept through the place. All eyes were turned upwards in a straining gaze. Looking in the same direction herself, Lorna could not suppress the cry of wild surprise that involuntarily rushed to her lips.

For there, peering down through a hole in the roof high above, was Ah Ching, a flaming torch in his hand.

A Race Against Death—The Alligators—Over the Stream.

The little Chinaman looked more like a carved figure than a living human being. His yellow face was perfectly expressionless, and his lack-lustre eyes stared unwinkingly at the amazed and infuriated pigmies.

Suddenly he dashed the flaming torch he carried against the dry, matted reeds that formed the roof of the building. The inflammable material instantly burst into fire and smoke. The wind caught the conflagration, which at once spread in every direction with extraordinary velocity.

A great uproar broke out amongst the pigmies. Panic and confusion took hold of everyone. There was a general stampede for the doorway, which was the only exit, and scores of people were thrown down and trampled on in the rush for safety.

Left alone, Lorna had time to think of how she might best profit by the incident and effect her own escape. Of the fire that was now raging in uncontrollable fury she had no fear. She knew that Ah Ching had started it with the first object of distracting attention from herself. In this he had succeeded, far better than even he could have anticipated doing.

The excited, fear-stricken pigmies were fleeing madly from the burning structure, carrying their king with them; and Lorna, in her bridal array, was deserted by one and all.

There was no sign at all of Ah Ching. He had vanished.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:**"PASSING IT ON!"**A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale
of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

after setting fire to the roof, and Lorna anxiously wondered whether he would be able to avoid the pigmies, who, if they saw him, would show him no mercy, but put him to a horrible death.

The loud snapping and crackling of the reed-built wall near her caused the girl to look round in startled apprehension. She expected to see some of the little people whom she had come to dread so actively during the past few hours.

Instead of the pigmies, she was confronted by the faces of Carton Ross and Roddy Garrin. The two comrades, using long, broad-bladed knives, had hacked a way through the wall into the building.

"This way!" cried Ross, seizing Lorna by the hand and hurrying her to the exit. "Keep close to me; you'll be safe then!"

Like one in a dream the girl found herself outside in the open. As she stepped away from the doomed temple of the forest-dwellers the roof collapsed, and fell with a tremendous crash, millions of sparks and huge clouds of smoke rising high into the air and obscuring the blue sky from sight.

Across an open space, where not a soul was to be seen, the three comrades hurried, running swiftly, and looking neither to right nor left. Darting between some bushes, they reached the forest, whose dark shadows and towering trees, centuries old, seemed to silently promise them shelter and refuge from all their foes.

Near at hand Ah Ching was waiting for them with a smile of intense delight on his face. Rubbing his hands together, and nodding his head, he stepped forward to welcome them.

"That was velly well done," he said, with an air of the most unctuous self-complacency. "My have never seen anything carried through more better, and that is saying a lot. Everything was as it should be."

"Of course it was, seeing that you were the prime mover in it," laughed Roddy Garrin. "Without your fine brain to plot and organise, Ah Ching, we shouldn't have been able to make a success of it. What did it feel like to be sitting on the edge of that hole in the roof that you made with a blazing brand in your hand?"

Ah Ching smiled and winked his eye. "It felt velly good," he remarked, "specially when no man shoot a dart at me. My set fire to the roof jolly quick, though, for my no want to be potted and brought down like a shot bird. Allee same, it was a pity to destroy such a fine house, but it was the only thing to do in the circumstances. Missee Lorna would never have got away suppose we had used other means."

"We're not out of it yet," Roddy Garrin remarked. "Those people, once they've got over their panic and surprise, will start looking for us, and we shall have to be mighty spry to elude them."

The truth of this remark was realised by all. The pigmies, familiar as they were with the forests and everything connected with life in the wild, would have no difficulty in picking up and following the slightest track made by man or beast.

Against the trained faculties of these queer people the comrades could only rely on instinct, quickness, and intelligence, with which qualities they were fortunately endowed to the highest extent. They also possessed courage and endurance of no common order.

Their journey into the heart of the forest in search of Lorna, whom they had found more by chance than anything else, and her rescue from the pigmies had demanded the exercise of a resolute bravery that no peril could intimidate.

They had succeeded in their daring attempt, and the beautiful, high-spirited girl, whom they all three admired, was again at liberty. How to keep that liberty—not only for Lorna, but for themselves as well—was the difficult problem they had to solve in the immediate future.

Following the same way they had come by, the fugitives made all possible haste to increase the distance between them and their foes. As the day lengthened, and there was no sound or sight of pursuit, they were inclined to believe that the dangers threatening them earlier on had passed away.

"You'll see no more of your intended bridegroom," said Roddy Garrin slyly to Lorna. "Poor chap! He'll be inconsolable over his loss. Shouldn't wonder if he dies of a broken heart."

"Nonsense!" the girl laughingly remarked. "He will forget all about me in a few days, and come to the conclusion that I'm not the bride he has been looking for so long. But it was an unpleasant experience. Let us talk of something more agreeable. Did you see anything more of my father before you left Quito?"

The question put the three comrades in a state of painful uneasiness and discomfiture. They were not prepared for it. In the excitement of the past few days it had not occurred to them that when they did meet her it was inevitable that Lorna would inquire of them concerning her father, who, although a prisoner, she had last seen alive and hopeful for a speedy release from captivity.

They looked at each other with wavering, uneasy glances, the significance of which Lorna immediately seized upon. Her face turned pale, and an anxious look of terrified apprehension showed in her dark eyes.

"You know something about him that you would rather not tell me," she said. "I can see it in your looks. Tell me! What has happened to him?"

Her questioning gaze alighted on Ah Ching, who sighed deeply and shook his head. There was genuine grief and compassion in the expression of the little Chinaman's yellow face.

"Missie Lorna," he said, "more better you ask me any question but that one. But your father is more happy now than he ever was before. He is at rest."

The girl uttered an agonised cry. "He is dead!" she exclaimed. "It's what I feared. Oh, my poor, dear father, who never wronged anyone in his life! I shall never see him again!"

Before her grief the three comrades were silent. Then Carton Ross told Lorna of how her father had passed away, and she listened to him with an outward show of calm composure that was but a mask to the deep emotion she was experiencing.

"Thank you for all you did to make his last moments peaceful," she said at last. "I shall never, never forget your kindness. But this I am determined on," she added, her eyes flashing with sudden fire. "My father owed his death to the cruel treatment he received while he was in prison, and for that Dirk Ralwin shall one day pay a heavy price!"

She bent her head for a moment, and her lips moved as if she were murmuring some vow of revenge to be exacted on the man whose brutal harshness was responsible for making her an orphan. When she looked up again her face wore its natural expression, and she spoke no more of the bereavement that had befallen her in such a tragic and unexpected manner.

Travelling on, the fugitives made quick progress through the tangled undergrowth of the forest. They became more and more confident that they had successfully outwitted their foes. Danger seemed to be a thing of the past.

But though they were blissfully ignorant of the fact, it had been drawing nearer and nearer to them all the morning. The pigmies had quickly found the trail, and were fast following it up with the ardour born of a burning desire for vengeance on those who had cast insult and humiliation on their king.

The first intimation that the comrades received of the chase after them was a poisoned dart that, shot at them from behind a bush some twenty yards to the rear, pinned Ah Ching to the trunk of a great tree by his pigtail.

The little Chinaman uttered a startled yell, and sprang high into the air, only to be pulled back by his stuck queue, and thrown heavily against the tree.

"My golly!" he exclaimed, quickly extricating himself from his unfortunate position. "This no suit me! Those little folks are coming up behind more quick than we are going ahead. We must move faster, suppose we no wantee to be taken back and have our heads chopped off!"

"Come on, then!" said Roddy Garrin. "We'll give them a run for their money, whatever else we may do!"

The comrades, wisely leaving the open track, plunged into the dense undergrowth. More darts followed them, hissing amongst the leaves and grass, but they escaped being hit by the deadly missiles.

Except for the ping-pong crash of the darts against the trees, there was no sound indicative of an active vendetta that was being carried out to the grim death. The pigmies maintained an unnerving quiet in the pursuance of their purpose.

They knew instinctively the course taken by the fugitives, whose deviously winding tracks were plain as a railway line to the diminutive people. So confident were they of achieving their object that they ceased making use of their blowpipes, and set all their energies to the task of capturing the comrades.

It was a losing game that Lorna and her devoted companions were taking part in, and they slowly realised it; but never once did they lose heart, or give way to despair. Freedom was before them, and they meant to reach it, or lose their lives fighting to the last in the attempt.

Breaking through the undergrowth, they suddenly reached a wide swamp, across which flowed a deep, sluggish stream, whose banks were lined by short, green reeds, that, with the sunlight shining on them, wore a peculiarly sinister aspect.

It seemed as if these green patches hid some malignant secret that at a touch would reveal itself in all its hideousness.

The comrades did not think of this at the moment. They saw the stream, a barrier, but not an impassable one, to their progress. Changing their walk into a quick run, they

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

FOES OF FORTUNE!

(Continued from page 20.)

headed straight across the marsh. Before they had gone many yards, they were in difficulties again.

"My golly!" Ah Ching exclaimed, as he sank into the mud above his knees. "This is more worse than pasty pudding! Whoop! What for we come this way?"

"Because we had to," Roddy Garrin answered, he himself struggling desperately to keep his waist above the mud line. "And though it's bad for us, the fellows behind us are in the same boat. They can't go any faster than ourselves!"

Herein Garrin was mistaken. The pigmies, being small and light, had little difficulty in keeping an even footing on the soft, treacherous soil. Uttering low, guttural cries of malicious delight, they hastened on over the swamp, gaining ground at every step on the fugitives.

Looking back, Carton Ross caught a swift glimpse of his foes spread out across the marsh in the form of a slowly-closing fan.

The lad perceived the danger in an instant. The object of the pigmies was to catch him and his friends before they reached the stream.

"Come on, boys!" he shouted to Garrin and Ah Ching, at the same time redoubling his efforts to assist Lorna. "The chaps behind us want this business settled and done with this side of the river. They don't like the water. We've got to disappoint them!"

It now became a hard, desperate race between pursued and pursuers. The thought that did they succeed in first reaching the stream they would be able to shake off their enemies was a great incentive to the comrades, who managed to keep the pigmies from overtaking them, much to the anger and surprise of the little people.

Still, no more darts were fired, and the fugitives, shoeless, plastered with black, treacly mud from head to foot, and painfully out of breath, reached the reed-covered banks of the river.

"Hurrah!" cried Carton Ross gleefully. "We've beaten them in the first lap, anyhow! Now, then, into the stream and across it!"

Side by side the comrades dived into the dark water, and, rising to the surface a few feet out from the bank, swam strongly for the opposite shore.

Suddenly a piercing scream, of such shrill terror as to make all who heard it shudder, came from the near bank. Glancing back, the comrades beheld an amazing and terrifying spectacle.

Checked in their pursuit by the river, the pigmies had drawn up on the edge, amongst the reeds, and prepared to use their blowpipes, and shoot darts at the fugitives as the latter were swimming in the water. But Fate intervened to balk them.

From the reedy coverts near by rushed a number of alligators, fierce, ugly creatures, whose desire for human flesh was only equalled by savage fury, aroused through being disturbed in their torpid state.

Attacking the pigmies with extreme ferocity, the repulsive creatures seized the luckless creatures between their huge jaws, and dragged them into the water. Those who escaped the fate of their unfortunate companions turned and fled in a mad panic of fear.

Not daring to hesitate, and yet fearfully apprehensive of what might be in store for them once they set foot on land again, the comrades swam on, with the cries of the doomed pigmies ringing death-knells in their ears.

The first to reach the bank was Ah Ching. Clambering up the slippery soil, the little Chinaman made a quick but cautious reconnoitre of the immediate locality. That he was satisfied with the result of it was shown by the cheerful expression of his face as he turned his head to survey his companions.

"More better this side," he said. "No alligators have got. That velly lucky for us. All luck come quick to us now. Me think them pigmy chaps go home velly much sharper than they came away from it. You agree with me, Mista Ross?"

"Most certainly, Ah Ching," Carton Ross replied. "Thanks mainly to the alligators, we've shaken off the pursuit, and can now push forward without fear of a second repetition of what we've experienced up to now!"

Shaken by the strain of the ordeal they had been subjected to, but otherwise in good spirits, and full of hope and courage, the comrades continued their arduous march.

Soon the forest stretches became less dense and impenetrable, and it was possible to advance with greater ease and freedom. Flowers of brilliantly varied tints and fantastic shapes charmed the eye, and birds that none had seen or

heard of before perched on the branches of the trees, or fled overhead, uttering strange, musical cries.

After the perils and hardships of the previous day, it was a delightful change for the comrades, who enjoyed it to the fullest measure. None appeared brighter and more vivacious than Lorna; but Carton Ross, watching her with a pitying, sympathetic glance, more than once perceived the sad look that, in spite of herself, every now and then chased the smile from her lips, and the bright light from her eyes.

After the perils and hardships of the previous day, it was an ideal place for camping in. Huge rocks, thickly covered with dry moss, lay scattered in every direction. Carpets of white-petalled flowers mantled the ground. Foliage hung from above in graceful festoons, that reminded one of the decorative effects of some gigantic ball-room.

"How lovely!" cried Lorna admiringly, clasping her hands together in a transport of enthusiastic delight. "I could live in such a place as this for ever and ever! How beautiful the flowers are, too!"

Plucking one, she lifted it to her face, and then looked at Carton Ross in mild regret and surprise.

"But there's no scent to them!" she exclaimed. "What a pity! I never did like flowers that had no perfume."

Acting on the knowledge and experience they had gained at such hard cost, the comrades foraged about, and quickly provided themselves with the necessities for a bountiful repast. The food was cooked over a wood fire, and served up by Ah Ching with his usual deftness and skill.

"It's the best supper we've had for many a long day," said Roddy Garrin, lounging back against a tree, with an air of the most delighted satisfaction. "You've surpassed yourself, Ah Ching, as a cook, and if ever I get the ordering of the appointment in my hands, I'll make you head chef to the Emperor of China."

Ah Ching gazed at the speaker with a look of lofty reproof in his eyes.

"You makee mistake," he said. "No emperor has got China-side now. China belong to one Republic, allee same France and Amelica. You remember that, Mista Garrin!"

Roddy Garrin laughed.

"I stand corrected," he said. "Instead of being the lackey cook of an emperor, you shall be the personal friend of a president who likes good living, Ah Ching. In the meantime I'm going to doss down for the night. All this running about to-day has made me dreadfully tired and sleepy, and I want to be in dreamland."

The same feeling of fatigue was shared in by all the comrades. One by one they closed their eyes, and were quickly forgetful of all that had befallen them. The only member of the little party to remain awake was Ah Ching, the little Chinaman, who had some tobacco to smoke.

Tobacco was more desirable to Ah Ching than anything else, and to smoke it he would have kept awake, though his eyes had not closed for a week.

The Poison Flowers—Ah Ching to the Front—Missing.

Puff, puff, puff!

Ah Ching smoked fast and furiously. He was feeling irritated and surprised with himself, for an overpowering desire to lie down and sleep had overtaken him, in spite of the obstinate resistance he had offered to it.

"My no can savee this silly pidgin," he muttered, rubbing his finger knuckles hard into his eyes. "What thing can have come over me?"

Sitting up, stiff and straight as a ramrod, Ah Ching stared across the glade. The moon was still low in the sky, but a silvery opalescent light diffused itself over the open ground between the great trees.

To Ah Ching it seemed as if this light must be some marshy exhalation that had in it death and desolation. He caught himself wondering as to why he should have such a queer fancy stirring in his brain. The next moment he was falling forward with a heavy, lurching movement that would have thrown him off his balance had he not, by a supreme effort of his fast-failing strength, dug his hands into the soil and kept his body erect.

"This can no do any longer!" he said, thickly and hoarsely. "My run fast away, else I makee die!"

Springing to his feet with as much alacrity as he could draw upon, Ah Ching ran across the glade and into the thick forest beyond at a staggering, stumbling trot, that would have caused a stranger who witnessed it to imagine that the little Chinaman was under the influence of inebriating liquor.

Directly he was out of the glade, Ah Ching recovered from the state of dazed stupefaction that had so unaccountably crept over him and interfered with his enjoyment of the nicotine herb.

"My golly!" he exclaimed, thinking deep and earnestly. "How does it come about that I was velly near dead back

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FOES OF FORTUNE !

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there, while now I am velly much alive again? My no can save it one littee bit."

Ah Ching rubbed his head and looked across the glade, seeking inspiration. And he found that for which he sought—the white flowers! They were the cause of his sudden illness.

From their beautiful chalice, so lovely to the eye, was exhaled a deadly poison, that robbed all those who breathed its baneful air of strength of life. As if by the special intervention of an overwatching Providence, Ah Ching had been spared from a dreadful doom.

"That is all thanks to my smokee smokee," he said, aloud. "Suppose my no likee that, then my go to sleep for always velly quick, you bet!"

The next moment the little Chinaman, swinging round with a start, raced back to the glade. The memory of his comrades had flashed across his temporarily-dazed and bewildered brain. They were sleeping in that poisonous atmosphere, from which he had escaped with his life, and at any and every cost of suffering and danger to himself he must return to their assistance.

Had anyone told Ah Ching that he was doing a noble deed he would have smiled blandly, and shaken his head. But it was nothing less than heroic to venture back into the death-zone he had fled from a few moments before.

The comrades he had left there might be dead; the probability was that they had died before the poisonous fumes from the white flowers had affected him.

The little Chinaman, however, did not reason with himself on these disputations and problematical points. He went straight to the path of duty with all the ardour of a soldier out to win the V.C. by some deathless act of glory.

As soon as he reached the glade, Ah Ching again experienced the same dizzying sensations as before. He staggered, breathing short and hard, but pressed on without thought for himself.

The first one he came to was Lorna. Stooping down, Ah Ching lifted the girl in his arms, and carried her out into the forest. It was a terrible journey, short though it was, and Ah Ching was spent and prostrated by it for several minutes.

As soon as ever he had recovered from the weakening effects of his gallant effort, the little Chinaman made a fresh start. The second one to be rescued by him was Carton Ross. Then there remained Roddy Garrin, and as he was accomplishing his third and last rescue, Ah Ching believed that he was fated never to see the end of it.

Like one in the thralldom of a horrible nightmare, he blundered and crashed through the grass and undergrowth with Garrin lying like a sack across his shoulders. The glade ended, and the dark, cool depths of the forest opened to receive the plucky, little yellow man.

"This is where I tumble," said Ah Ching. "No can do do any more to-night. My golly!"

Then Ah Ching dropped, falling in one direction as Garrin fell in the other, and lost all consciousness of time, and space, and personality.

When he recovered from insensibility, Ah Ching was startled and amazed to see Roddy Garrin kneeling at his side and peering down into his face.

"You there, Mista Garrin?" exclaimed the little Chinaman, as soon as he could open his lips to speak. "That velly good indeed! My was velly much afraid you makee die."

Garrin, pale and anxious, did not seem to hear the words.

"Thank goodness, you're all serene again, Ah Ching!" he said hurriedly. "I'm worried about Carton Ross and Lorna. Do you know where they are?"

Ah Ching looked round. Ross and Lorna were not where he had left them.

A Vain Search—The Trail—Carried Off.

Roddy Garrin, anxious and perplexed, stared at his companion with a look of troubled inquiry in his eyes.

"Gone!" he said. "But where can they have gone to?"

Ah Ching shook his head.

"My no tell any more than you," he answered. "All my savee is that they no stop this side. Either they go away of their own accord, or someone take them."

"They wouldn't go away," said Garrin decidedly. "There is no reason for them to. Something has happened to account for their absence. Most probably the pigmies—or a small party of them—have been on the scene!"

It seemed an extremely likely possibility that Carton Ross and Lorna had been surprised and captured by some of their inveterate little foes. In the weak and exhausted state that they were in resistance would be out of the question.

Both Garrin and Ah Ching were of the same opinion. They believed that their missing comrades were prisoners once more of the forest dwellers, from whom they had escaped with such infinite trouble and difficulty not many hours before.

As there was a chance, however, that Lorna and her friend had attempted to find them, and in doing so lost their way, they set out to search.

Rushing through the thick, tangled masses of shrub, they searched closely for a trail which might lead them to their comrades, but all in vain, so they decided to return to the water-side.

The narrow path was overgrown with tall grasses, and they had great difficulty in getting along. At last, weary and footsore, they came upon a clear space of short grass, which looked so tempting for a resting-place that they sank down from sheer weariness.

"I vote we stay here for the night," said Roddy Garrin. "The darkness is falling, and we should not be able to get much further on. In the morning, as soon as dawn breaks in the sky, we shall be able to renew our search with renewed vigour."

"Velly good!" exclaimed Ah Ching. "We velly, velly tired, but first ting that I do I search for any more white, deadly flowers. Me no risk being poisoned. What do you say, Mista Garrin?"

"A fine idea," assented Garrin. "And while you are doing so, I will collect some dry twigs to make a little fire. It may keep us from being molested by prowling animals!"

Ah Ching darted lightly through the overgrown masses of grass and shrub, returning a little later with a wild fowl in his hand.

"Look here, Mista Garrin!" he said. "While you makes fire, I prepare this nice dinner. I come upon him feeding in a clear space, and I look at him, and he look at me. He no move, so I pick him up, and here he is!"

Roddy Garrin looked at Ah Ching, then threw back his head, and a loud peal of laughter re-echoed in the stillness of the forest.

"Ah, my dear fellow," he said, "your face must be very fascinating to lure that poor bird to its death! We shall always be sure of a cooked fowl if you use your face as you must have done in this case. Still, now we will have a royal feed, and prepare ourselves for the search, which must commence early!"

Ah Ching looked very serious. "We have no poisonous flowers to send us to sleep to-night," he said. "I shake when I tink how we all nearly die last night!"

Roddy Garrin soon found some dry twigs, and in a few moments the fire was burning merrily, and the fowl fizzling in the heat.

Supper over, Garrin, who was quite exhausted with the heavy tramping they had had that day, laid down on the soft grass, and was soon sound asleep.

Not so Ah Ching. He sat on, smoking his pipe, his little eyes gleaming angrily in the firelight, that foretold evil to the outlaws who had captured his comrades. Eyes flaming, hands clenched, and his lips quivering, his face was enough to drive fear into the strongest man, could he have been there to witness it. But all was silent, save for the rustle of sticks as he rekindled the fire.

The night wore on, and the sun was now rising in the sky. Ah Ching rose and gently shook Roddy Garrin.

"Mista Garrin," he said, "we rise now, and search for our comrades. The days are not long at the most, and we do not know what journey we may have to make before reaching them."

Retracing their steps, they walked on in silence for a long distance, but found no trace of their lost comrades; yet they would not give way to the despairing thoughts that would rise in their minds, although each tried to be cheerful and hopeful.

Suddenly Ah Ching rushed forward with a glad cry.

"Look, Mista Garrin!" he said. "A trail at last! May it be theirs! If so, we shall soon be meeting with them again!"

Both comrades ran to the spot, but the trail belonged to a body of horsemen. They were soon to find out who were the captors of their comrades.

Keeping in the track, they hurried on, hoping to overtake the horsemen resting.

Roddy Garrin, his eyes fixed on the ground, was busy with his own thoughts. Fear for Lorna and Carton Ross possessed him.

The sun was shining through the thick foliage of the tall trees, and, seeing something glistening in the grass, he stooped down, and found a leather belt which he knew belonged to Ross.

(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Wednesday's issue of THE "GEM" LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance.)