

REAL ACTION PHOTO OF "FANNY" WALDEN FREE IN THIS ISSUE.

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Every Wednesday.

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"FANNY" WALDEN (Spurs F.C.)



WILDRAKE TO THE RESCUE!

(An Exciting Incident from the Grand Long Complete School Story Inside.)



THERE are quite good reasons for including Fred Walden, the Tottenham Hotspur outside-right, high up in a list of wonder-men of sport. First and foremost, of course, is the fact that he is the smallest fellow now playing in first-class football, and, so far as is known, there never has been a player of so few inches who has risen to such heights of brilliance that he was considered good enough to play for his country in an international match. Think of it—5 ft. 2½ ins., and weighing only a pound or two over 10 stone.

No wonder, as Walden himself says, his friends laughed at him when he expressed a determination to play football with a first-class professional side. But Walden has done it, and in doing it has proved once more that there are exceptions to every rule. Also he has proved that where there is a will there is a way, and the experience of Walden should certainly do much to put heart into every youngster who finds obstacles in his way of progress in any walk of life.

Not only has Walden played for a first-class football club despite his lack of inches, but he is a regular member of the Northamptonshire cricket side, bowling a very deceptive slow ball, and being capable of getting centuries on occasion, while his agility in the field earns for him applause in every cricket match in which he takes part.

Yes, a wonder-man of sport is "Fanny," though why everybody calls him by this pet name he does not even know himself. But the popularity of a man is often reflected in the use of a pet name by his admirers, and it is scarcely going too far to say that everywhere, he goes he is welcome, for on the foot-

ball field he never fails to provide an entertainment with his trickery, or to gain the good wishes of the onlookers with his good-natured smile through success or failure.

"The midget with the twinkling feet" is perhaps the best description which could be given of this footballer, and to-day, at the age of 32, he is playing just as well as ever he did, as shown by the fact that during the present season he has played for England in an international match. And in appearance he still resembles a boy in his teens—the same boy who was once refused admission to a football ground because the man at the gate simply would not believe that such a midget could be a first-class footballer.

Born at Wellingborough, Walden was for some time the outside-right of Northampton Town, but in 1913 he was transferred to Tottenham Hotspur for a fee of £1,500. He still lives in the town of boots, and actually supervises the making of football boots of his own patent during the week. But he is as conscientious as they make them with his football training, and cares nothing about his personal success so long as the side does well.

He had a great disappointment last season, for a knee injury laid him aside just when his team was on the verge of winning the Cup, and "Fanny" did not get a medal. But he did get a memento watch. "He's little, but he's wise, and he's a terror for his size"—that's "Fanny."

(Another splendid article next week dealing with Robert Kelly of Burnley F.C., and Alec Donaldson of Sunderland.)

Merry himself remains the frank, fine fellow just as we all know him, but though as a rule able to fight his way through a maze of difficulties, it is pretty evident that this time T. M. has been overmastered by a crowd of circumstances over which he has no control.

One word more, and about something which is very important. The "Popular" railway engine plates have scored a phenomenal success, and every post brings me letters concerning the fine coloured picture series. I should be glad if you would bear in mind that this feature is being extended, and that for some weeks yet our Companion Paper, the "Popular," will carry on with this notable attraction.

YOUR EDITOR.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER."

A Splendid Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck is awarded to the sender of what the Editor considers the most interesting paragraph. Half-a-crown is awarded for each other contribution accepted.

(If your name is not here this week it may be next.)

This Wins Our Tuck-Hamper. POULTRY-KEEPING.

Buy a dozen day-old chicks and give them to a borrowed, broody hen to mother. If you put the chicks under the hen at night when she is on the nest she will take them readily enough. The best egg layers are the White Leghorn, the White Wyandotte, the Buff Orpington, and the Rhode Island Red. The Ancona, the Sussex, and the Plymouth Rock are also popular, but these are not very consistent layers. A good average pullet should lay two hundred eggs during her first laying year. She will cost you about threepence a week to feed, and only a few minutes of your time each day. Poultry business is rather a profitable one. A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Gilbert Palmer, Post Office Chambers, New Dock Road, Llanelly, South Wales.

New Zealand.

A class of boys were having a lesson on the hippopotamus, and they were very inattentive, so the master rapped the desk sharply. "Now, boys," he said, "if you want to know what a hideous and ferocious reptile the hippopotamus is, you must sit still and look at me."—A. H. Hands, 17, Stracey Road, Forest Gate, E. 7.

DERBYSHIRE CAVES.

At Matlock, Derbyshire, there are caves that are known as petrifying wells, the limestone of this district turning objects to stone. A wooden model of a human figure placed in one of these caves will, after a comparatively short time, become like a stone statue. There are not many places of this kind in the country.—G. Bamber, 16, Dingley Avenue, Liverpool.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON

The GEM LIBRARY,
No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

EDITORIAL CHAT.

The Editor would like to hear from his reader chums. Address all letters to Editor, "The Gem Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

My Dear Chums,—

There will be a rush for next week's GEM. That's no news, for there always is a rush for every GEM which appears, but the demand this time will be extra brisk, so please don't be left minus your copy through not taking the wise precaution to order in advance. Have a chat with the newsagent on the matter. Speak to him seriously, and tell him you won't be happy unless you get next week's number. He will do the rest.

These fine photos of the hefty champions who are making big names, thanks to their dexterity with the leather sphere all through the footer season, will make up the finest gallery that ever was.

Make a note of it that next week's GEM—the issue dated for May 13th—will contain two splendid photographs, one of Robert Kelly of the Burnley Football Club, the other showing Alec Donaldson of Sunderland.

The "Magnet" for next week will give away a magnificent real action photograph of John Crosbie of Birmingham, while the "Boys' Friend" will contain a remarkably fine portrait of the

Scottish boxer, a coming light-weight, Johnny Brown.

I am not going to insist further on the value of these photographs. It is enough for me to point out that they will form as fine a gallery of likenesses of sporting champions as could be imagined. It is just the sort of record which every fellow likes to have by him in an album, for easy reference, with a few notes in the margin to show just what each original of the picture has to his name.

You can get a splendid photo album for the portraits now being given away, if you send 6d. in stamps, or a Postal Order to the GEM Album Office, 7-9, Pilgrim Street, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C. 4. Orders will be executed as swiftly as possible. Make sure you write your address plainly. Don't send a coin. The Post Office surcharges a letter with a coin in it, and such letter is refused. If a photo has been missed, send 2½d. for a copy of the paper. I want you to bear all these points in mind so as to save delay. My staff dealing with orders for albums is doing its best to cope with the rush of orders. You can help it if you remember to send full address, and either a P.O., or 2d. stamps.

Absolutely great—that's the only term for the new mystery of St. Jim's. In this week's GEM Mr. Martin Clifford carries on the thread. The plot thickens, and we are left in a state of intense curiosity as to what can possibly happen next. The author has left his past triumphs far behind. I am positive he has never done anything finer than the new series of dramatic stories. Tom



The MYSTERY of TOM MERRY

A Grand Long Complete Story of St. Jim's, telling of a series of amazing events which thrills and mystifies the whole school. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Rival Riders.

"TOSH!" said Tom Merry.
"Same to you, dear boy, and many of them!" said Monty Lowther affably.
"Well, I agree with Tommy, to some extent," said Manners thoughtfully. "It's tosh going to a cinema on an afternoon like this. Look at the sun! There never was a finer afternoon for taking photographs."

"Bosh!" said Lowther.
"Bosh and tosh!" said Tom Merry. "It's tosh going to a cinema, and bosh going out with a camera. Better wheel out your bikes. We can have a ripping spin and get back for tea."

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the spring afternoon was a delightful one. The Terrible Three of the Shell were discussing what was to be done with that afternoon—a most important question.

Bosom pals as the three were, they had many tastes that were not in common. On several points they agreed to disagree, as it were.

Tom Merry and Lowther bore manfully with Manners' camera. Sometimes they even took a walk with it and Manners. And Tom Merry and Manners resigned themselves patiently to Monty Lowther's enthusiasm for the pictures, and often allowed him to march them off to Wayland Picture Palace. While Manners and Lowther joined in Tom's enthusiasm for football and cricket, though not to the same extent—and bore cheerfully with the rest. But it happened sometimes that different tastes led different ways.

On this especial sunny, spring afternoon, Tom Merry was bent upon a really good, long spin on his bike—which had lately been furnished with brand-new tyres and a topping new change-speed gear. So cinemas and cameras seemed to him tosh and bosh and he stated his opinion with the frankness that was customary in the Shell.

"Sticking in a blessed picture-palace on a sunny afternoon!" said Tom, more in sorrow than in anger. "What a fat-headed wheeze!"

"They've got a new picture——"
"They can keep it, for me!" said Tom. "Chuck it up and come out on your bike."

"Chuck up the bike and come to the pictures," suggested Lowther.

"Tosh!"
"Why not chuck up both and come out with me?" said Manners. "You can watch me taking photographs——"

"Gorgeous!", said Monty Lowther, with sarcasm. "What a real treat for a half-holiday!"

"I'm going to get some views of that old mill on the moor," said Manners. "I can tell you——"

"Don't, old chap!"
"Ass!" said Manners.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, we shall never agree at this rate, and the time's going," he said. "You buzz off to the pictures, Monty, and stew indoors; you take your ghastly old camera out for an airing, Manners. I'll get my bike. Meet again at five for tea in the study."

"Half-past five," said Lowther. "I want to see the whole show."

"Right-ho!"

And the Terrible Three separated for the afternoon. Monty Lowther started to walk through the wood towards Wayland Town; Harry Manners loaded his camera with

films, with loving care, and stacked it carefully in its leather case, and slung it over his shoulder, and started for the moor; while Tom Merry, whistling cheerily, went round to the bike-shed for his machine.

There were other juniors thinking of a spin that fine afternoon. Tom found Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, of the Fourth, at the bike-shed.

The chums of Study No. 6 were in Norfolks. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was inflating a tyre, slowly but surely. Blake and Herries and Digby were watching him, with growing impatience.

"Hallo, you kids! Going out?" asked Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus looked up.
"Are you addressin' us as kids, Tom Mewwy?"
"Well, goats, if you like that better," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Weally, you ass——"
"Buck up with that tyre, Gussy!" bawled Herries. "Are you going to keep us waiting all the afternoon?"

"Weally, Hewwies——"
"For goodness' sake get a move on, Gussy!" implored Blake.

"I am movin' as fast as I can, dear boy; but my beastly eyeglass keeps gettin' in the way of the beastly pump, and I have vewy neahly bwoke it once——"

"Let's sit down somewhere," said Digby resignedly.
"Wake us up when you're ready, Gussy!"

"Weally, Dig——"
Tom Merry took his machine off the stand. Arthur Augustus jammed his celebrated monocle into his eye again, and resumed pumping.

"Where are the twins?" asked Blake, looking at the captain of the Shell. "Not detention, is it?"

"Oh, no—cinema and camera," said Tom, with a smile. "I'd take you little boys for a run, only you couldn't stay the distance——"

"You cheeky ass!" exclaimed Blake warmly. "I'd stay a bigger distance than you could cover!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, looking up again. "I weally think I could undahtake to wide you off your legs, Tom Mewwy!"

"Get on with that pump, fathead!" roared Blake.
"Weally, Biake——"

Tom Merry paused as he was wheeling out his bike, and considered the Fourth-Formers thoughtfully.

"It's a go!" he said. "I'm going to ride as far as Abbotsford, and back round the moor. If you little ones——"

"Cheese it!" snorted Herries.

"If you little ones," continued Tom imperturbably—"if you little ones think you could do the distance——"

"I could do it on my head!" snapped Blake. "We should have to carry you home, though."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Well, it's a go!" said Tom, smiling. "Give me five minutes' start, and then come after me. I'll put in at the bun-shop at Abbotsford, and stay there a quarter of an hour for buns and tea. If you happen in before the quarter of an hour is up——"

"We shall happen in before five minutes is up!" growled Herries. "Or, rather, we shall pass you on the road."

"Half-way!" said Dig, with a nod.

"Done!" said Tom. "If you're on time, I stand tea for five; if you're late, you stand tea for one. What?"

"Done!" agreed Blake. "Don't forget to take your purse. You'll want it; we shall be hungry."

Tom nodded and grinned, and wheeled out his machine. Blake glanced at his watch.

"Five minutes' start!" he said. "You've got five minutes more to play with that bike-pump, Gussy. If you haven't finished by then, I'll ram it down the back of your silly neck! That's a tip!"

"Wats! I should uttably wefuse to have it wammed down the back of my sillay neck—I mean my neck—"

"Buck up!" hooted Herries.

"How can I buck up when you fellows keep on intewwup-in' me with asinine wemarks?"

"Three minutes more!" said Jack Blake, in a tone of deep menace.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus pumped, and his eyeglass jerked out and clinked on the pump, and there was another pause while he readjusted it.

"Two minutes!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"One minute!"

"Wats!"

Jack Blake shoved his watch back into his pocket.

"Time's up!" he said. "Collar that duffer, and—"

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

"All wight, deah boys—finished."

"Just in time to save your silly neck!" said Blake, darkly. "Now wheel out, if you haven't got to change your tie, and put on your special silk socks, and a new collar, and—"

"You are wastin' time, with these fwivolous wemarks," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I am waitin' for you."

"Oh, come on, fathead!" said Blake.

Study No. 6 wheeled out their machines together. Outside the gates of St. Jim's, there was no sign of Tom Merry on the road. He was already well on his way to Abbotsford. Blake & Co. mounted their machines and started.

"Keep to the road?" asked Digby.

"Through Rylcombe," said Blake. "After that, the short cut—Tommy's bound to take the short cut, to dish us."

"That short cut is wathah wuff widin', Blake."

"Go back and wrap yourself and your jigger in cotton-wool, old scout," suggested Blake sarcastically.

"Wats!"

The four cyclists came with a rush through the village of Rylcombe, and out on the high road beyond. A couple of miles farther on, they turned from the high road into a rutty lane—where the riding was not nearly so agreeable, but which saved two or three miles on the way to Abbotsford. Strung out in a line, the four riders pedalled manfully over hardened mud, keeping their eyes alert for a sight of Tom Merry ahead.

CHAPTER 2.

The Kidnappers.

"MY hat! Already!" ejaculated Tom Merry, in surprise.

There was a whirr of a cycle behind the Shell fellow of St. Jim's, as he rode rapidly and cheerily over the muddy ridges in the short cut to Abbotsford. It was a rugged lane not much used by cyclists; so when Tom heard the sound of a machine behind him, he concluded at once that Study No. 6 were in the offing.

Without slackening speed—for he was keenly bent on winning the race to Abbotsford—Tom Merry glanced over his shoulder, to note the distance of his pursuers.

Then he burst into a laugh.

Two cyclists were riding after him; but they were not St. Jim's fellows. Blake & Co. were nowhere to be seen.

Tom's glance dwelt on the two riders only for a moment—it was a rough road, and not safe for glancing over one's shoulder. But in that moment he noticed that the two men were dressed in brown Norfolk, and that they were both bearded and wore spectacles.

He was not interested in them, however; he was relieved to find that they were strangers, and that Study No. 6 were not overhauling him as he had supposed.

Tom Merry pedalled on cheerily; going at a good rate, though not now at racing speed. Once or twice he thought he heard a voice calling behind, but in the rush and the wind he was not sure. But a loud shout came to his ears clearly at last.

"Stop!"

One of the bearded cyclists was shouting to him.

Tom free-wheeled for a moment or two, and looked back. One of the riders freed a hand and waved to him.

Evidently the man wanted him to stop; though why, Tom could not guess. But for the fact that he was racing Study No. 6, Tom would have pulled up. But he was not likely to lose a race because a stranger called on him to stop and waved a hand at him.

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He drove at the pedals again, and the bike shot on. Tom Merry smiled as he heard the man shouting loudly and angrily.

"What the thump can he want?" murmured the captain of the Shell. "Anyhow, he can tell me at Abbotsford, if he likes to keep on so far. Blessed if I'm going to stop, anyhow."

The next moment, he gave a violent start. From behind him sounded a loud, sharp report.

For an instant he thought it was the bursting of a tyre. But something that knocked up the dust a few yards ahead of his machine undeceived him. It was a bullet that pinged in the rutty lane ahead.

Tom Merry's brain almost whirled, as he realised it.

One of the riders behind had fired at his machine, evidently with the intention of disabling it and stopping him.

What kind of ruffian, or madman, was it that he had to deal with? He was taken utterly by surprise.

The lane at this point was lonely enough—high red banks of earth closed it in on either side to a height of six feet, with thick hedges at the top. It was like a deep channel through the surrounding fields, quite out of sight from anyone in the fields. If the two cyclists were a pair of desperate footpads, the spot was favourable enough for them. Yet that was scarcely possible; for that lonely lane was hardly ever traversed by anyone that could be considered worth "holding up." Tom Merry had little about him of value but a silver watch and ten or twelve shillings. He was puzzled as well as alarmed; and he drove desperately at his pedals now, to get out of the solitary spot as quickly as possible. Loud shouting behind him sounded again, indistinctly.

Crack!

Again a sound like the popping of a tyre, and again a bullet knocked up the mud, this time only a foot from his front wheel. It seemed like some strange nightmare to Tom Merry. Was the man behind him mad? Yet there were two of them—they could not both be mad. What did it mean?

Crack!

Whatever it meant, the pursuers were evidently in deadly earnest. At the third shot, Tom Merry felt a shock to his machine, and a few seconds later it began to drag heavily. The third shot, by luck or by skill, had struck the rear wheel, and the tyre was cut through.

With a punctured tyre on a rough road, the race was up. Tom rode on hard, but the dragging wheel acted like a brake on him. He could hear the two riders coming up hand over hand now.

They passed him at last, separating, one on either side of the junior. A few yards ahead of him they jumped off their machines.

Tom Merry sprang down at once, letting his machine reel against the red earth bank beside the lane. He faced the two men with his fists clenched, and his eyes gleaming.

Footpads, or lunatics, or reckless practical jokers—he could not guess what they were. But there was no escape, and he faced them dauntlessly. They were coming quickly towards him, and there was no time to climb the steep bank to the fields above.

"You young fool!" growled one of them, as he came gasping up. "You've given us a lot of trouble."

"Keep your distance!" panted Tom Merry. "What do you want?"

"You, you young fool."

Tom Merry backed closer to the earth bank by the roadside, his eyes on the enemy. He was more perplexed than alarmed, even now. He noticed that both the cyclists looked at him over their glasses, which had slid down their noses, and it occurred to him that the spectacles were only worn as a kind of disguise. Who were they—what were they? It was an amazing puzzle.

"You needn't be afraid." The man's tone was rough and savage. "We're not going to hurt you, Tom Merry. But you've got to come with us."

"You know my name?" ejaculated Tom, in amazement. So far as he knew, he had never seen either of the rascals before.

"Drop your fists," said the man impatiently. "If you resist, you will get hurt."

"What do you want?" panted Tom.

"You!"

The two men closed in on him without further words. Tom Merry cast a desperate look back along the lane. Somewhere behind Blake & Co. must be riding—little dreaming of the strange scene that was being enacted ahead of them on the lonely road. Tom Merry prayed for a sight of the rival riders in the distance. But there was no sign yet of Study No. 6.

A strong hand fell on his shoulders, and Tom set his teeth and hit out, with all his strength.

His knuckles landed with a heavy jar on a bearded chin,



Tom Merry backed closer to the earth bank by the roadside as the two ruffians approached him. "You needn't be afraid," said one of them in a rough and savage tone. "We're not going to hurt you, Tom Merry. But you've got to come with us!" "What do you want?" panted Tom. "You!" came the answer. (See page 4.)

and the kidnapper went reeling backwards into the road. He crashed down there, with a loud yell.

The other man's grasp was on Tom Merry almost at the same moment, and he had no time for another blow. Struggling manfully with the ruffian, Tom exerted all his strength, and they reeled to and fro. It was boy against man, and the man was a muscular fellow; but Tom was sturdy, and he was fighting his hardest.

"Dusty, you fool—quick—lend a hand!" he gasped.

The fallen man had struck his head as he fell, and he seemed dazed for some minutes. But he scrambled up, at last, with a furious face, and ran to his comrade's assistance.

Tom Merry was grasped from behind now, and his struggles were futile. He was borne to the ground, and a heavy knee was planted on him.

"Hang him!" panted Dusty. "I'll pay him for this! You young fool! Chuck it! Do you hear?"

Tom was still resisting. Dusty was pinning him down with his knee and the other rascal was dragging his wrists together to tie them. Suddenly from the distance came the loud ringing of bicycle bells. It was a glad sound to Tom Merry's ears at that terrible moment. He shouted with all his strength.

"Help! Rescue, St. Jim's! Help!"

There was a rush and a whirr as four bicycles came tearing up at racing speed.

CHAPTER 3.

Study No. 6 to the Rescue.

"GO for 'em!" yelled Jack Blake.

"Pile in!" panted Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake & Co. had been watching for a sight of Tom Merry ahead—little dreaming in what manner they could see him at last. The four juniors could scarcely believe their eyes when they beheld the captain of the Shell sprawling

in the dust, struggling in the grasp of the two ruffians. They did not hesitate a second. The race to Abbotsford was off; but something much more serious was "on." Blake & Co. came up with a terrific spurt, jumped off their machines, and rushed to the rescue breathlessly.

The arrival of the Fourth-Formers was so sudden that Dusty and his comrade had no time to prepare for it. Dusty was still kneeling on Tom Merry, uncertain what to do, when Jack Blake's clenched fist reached him, landing on his ear. Dusty went over sideways, yelling, and the Shell fellow was left free.

Tom tore his wrists from the other rascal, and drove an upward blow at his face, knocking him backwards. The next moment he was on his feet, panting.

"Help, you fellows—" he gasped.

"What-ho!" chuckled Digby. "Give 'em beans!"

"Wag the wottahs, deah boys!" roared Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Wush them!"

The two kidnappers sprang away, with savage faces. There were five sturdy juniors for them to tackle now, and the odds were against them.

They backed towards their machines, and the juniors followed them up.

"Collar them!" exclaimed Blake. "We'll jolly well march them to the police-station, and give them in charge."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Stand back!" exclaimed Dusty hoarsely.

He whipped the revolver from his pocket and raised it.

"Oh, my hat!"

The juniors jumped back.

Blake & Co. had supposed that they had to do with a couple of tramps who had attempted to rob a solitary cyclist. But they were not prepared to deal with firearms.

"Why, you—you villain!" gasped Blake. "You—"

"Stand back!"

"Come on!" growled Herries. "It's only bluff; he won't dare to shoot."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom, catching Herries by the arm. Dusty's face was desperate, and his finger was on the trigger. With his free hand, he lifted his bicycle. His companion jumped on his machine and started. The two rascals were thinking only of escape now; and it was very probable that Dusty would have used his revolver, rather than have submitted to a march to the police-station. He made a threatening motion with the weapon.

"Stand back, or, by heavens, I'll shoot!" he muttered between his teeth.

And the juniors stood still, in doubt. Dusty, still holding the revolver in his hand, put his leg over the machine and mounted. He drove at the pedals, and rode away after his comrade.

"Bai Jove! Are we lettin' those wuffians go?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hotly.

"Follow on!" exclaimed Blake. "We'll keep them in sight, anyhow, and at the next village—"

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The juniors rushed for their bicycles. Dusty, as if guessing their intention, glanced back and discharged the revolver, and the bullet hummed over their heads. Then he vanished round a turning in the lane.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "My tyre's punctured, anyhow. Don't you fellows follow them. That man is desperate; and you can't argue with a bullet. Let them rip!"

Blake paused and nodded thoughtfully. "We'll give their description to the police," he said. "The bobbies can look after them. Did they get anything from you?"

"No; they weren't robbing me," said Tom.

"What did they want, then?" asked Blake, in surprise.

"They wanted me," said Tom grimly.

Blake stared.

"You!" he ejaculated. "No accounting for tastes, by Jove!"

"Fathead! They were trying to kidnap me!" said Tom.

"K-k-kidnap you!" stuttered Blake.

"Yes."

Jack Blake grinned.

"Draw it mild, old chap! What the thump should they want to kidnap you for?"

"They said so, anyway," said Tom quietly.

"But—why—"

"I don't know."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "The feahful wot-tahs! Wathah lucky that we came up, deah boy!"

"Jolly lucky!" said Tom Merry. "Never been so glad in my life to see your old chivvy, Gussy! They would have had me."

Blake shook his head.

"Beats me nollow!" he said. "If they wanted your watch or your boblets, I could understand it. But kidnapping! Sure you ain't thinking of something you saw on the pictures, old chap?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "It does weally sound wathah thick, deah boy. Kidnappin's not weally done, you know."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Tcm Mewwv—"

"Look at my back wheel," said Tom. "They stopped me by puncturing the tyre with a bullet."

"Great Scott!"

"They wanted your watch and your loose change," said Blake. "You've dreamed the rest, old bean."

"Look here, you ass—"

Blake shook his head again; he was not convinced. Indeed, now that the strange happening was over, it seemed amazing enough to Tom Merry himself. Why two perfect strangers should have attempted to kidnap him was a mystery—a mystery he could not fathom. Yet there was no doubt about it; it was certain that mere robbery had not been their object. But for the opportune arrival of Study No. 6, Tom Merry would have been a prisoner in the hands of the kidnappers.

"They knew my name," said Tom. "One of them spoke to me by name. They must have been on the look-out for me, and saw me ride through Rylcombe, and followed, to catch me on the road."

"Sounds jolly thick!" remarked Herries.

"Well, what about that race to Abbotsford?" demanded Blake. "If you're punctured, you can't go on."

"The wheel's damaged, too," said Tom. "I can't go on, that's a cert. I don't want to, either. I'm going to the police at once."

"Study No. 6 wins the race," said Blake argumentatively. Tom Merry laughed.

"Just as yo. like," he said. "You did overtake me, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 743.

that's a cert. I'm jolly glad you did, as it turned out. I shall have to take this blessed bike back."

"I suppose we'd better walk with you," said Blake. "There goes our spin! But you won't be safe without us."

"Rats!" said Tom at once. "I shall be all right. You fellows ride along; those rascals are far enough off by now."

"Oh, we'll stick to you!" said Blake. "It's all in the day's work."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The five juniors wheeled their machines back the way they had come. At a turning which led towards the town of Wayland Tom Merry stopped.

"That isn't the way home," said Blake.

"I'm going to Wayland to report this to Inspector Skeat," said Tom quietly.

"Oh, come on to Rylcombe!" urged Blake. "You can tell old Crump. He can look for a couple of tramps all right."

"It's too serious a matter for a village bobby, Blake. I want to see the inspector."

Blake yawned.

"My dear chap, take my word for it that they weren't kidnappers," he said soothingly. "Only a couple of tramps, you know, after your watch."

"Yaas, I wegard that as extwemely pwob."

"You see," explained Herries, "if you spin old Skeat a yarn about kidnapping, he will think you have got the films on the brain."

"Haven't you, Tommy?" asked Dig blandly.

Tom Merry coloured. Study No. 6 were not to be blamed, perhaps, for taking that view of the occurrence; but it was rather exasperating to Tom. He had no explanation to offer of the incident; but he knew for a certainty that the two ruffians had planned to kidnap him.

"Come on!" urged Blake. "You've got to get your bike mended, too. Let's tell Crump, and give him a chance to distinguish himself hunting for the tramps—what?"

"I'm going to Wayland," said Tom quietly. "If you want to make yourself useful, you can wheel my bike into Rylcombe and leave it at the shop for repair."

"Oh, all right."

Blake took the damaged bicycle, and the chums of Study No. 6 followed the lane, while Tom Merry turned into the footpath. He was not thinking of danger from Dusty and his confederate now—the scene of the attack had been left a couple of miles behind, and the two rascals had fled towards Abbotsford. Tom Merry crossed a couple of fields, and then followed a footpath through the wood towards the Wayland highroad. In spite of Blake & Co.'s scepticism, Tom realised that the matter was serious, and that the sooner he gave information at the police-station the better.

There was no thought of danger in his mind as he tramped along the footpath, through trees and thickets bursting into the green of spring. That the two kidnappers were miles away he knew, and of other danger he did not think. He did not even glance round as he heard a rustle in the thickets, attributing it to a rabbit or a stoat. But he started, as there was a quick footstep behind him, and whirled round, suddenly alarmed. As he turned, a swift grasp fell upon him, and he went to the earth with a crash, with a dark, threatening face looming over him.

CHAPTER 4. A Wild Ride.

"HELP!"

Kit Wildrake, of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, gave a jump as that cry came ringing to his ears.

Wildrake of the Fourth was enjoying his half-holiday in his own way. Wayland Wood was a favourite haunt of the Canadian junior; it was reminiscent of the "timber" of his native land. When the funds run to it, it was Wildrake's way to drop into the livery-stables at Rylcombe on a half-holiday to take out a horse—the most spirited animal he could find there—and enjoy a gallop over the moor and by the bride-paths in the woods. The Canadian junior had been in the saddle a couple of hours, enjoying himself to the full, and now he was trotting easily on a path in the wood on his homeward way. Suddenly, through the still silence of the woods, came that ringing cry.

Wildrake had been thinking, as he trotted, of his old home in British Columbia, and the wide stretches of grass-land on the Boot Leg Ranch—perhaps wishing himself back at the ranch by the Thompson River, where life was a good deal more exciting than in the Old Country. There was excitement at hand, however, as he was about to learn. He looked up and round with quick, alert eyes, as he heard the cry ringing through the trees.

"Help!"

"That's Tom Merry's toot, I guess!" muttered Wildrake, in wonder.

Ahead of him the bride-path turned into a footpath, and it was from the footpath that the ringing cry came.

Kit Wildrake gave his horse a touch, and it leaped into



The double-laden horse was trotting on, when from out of the trees a man with a thick beard suddenly appeared. He stared at the riders fixedly as they came trotting up, and then stepped into the middle of the path and held up his hand. "Stop!" he called out. Tom caught Wildrake's arm. "Don't stop!" he said. "It's another of the gang, I think!" (See page 8.)

a gallop. The hoofs made hardly a sound on the thick grass of the bridle-path as he raced on.

In a few seconds he came into the wider footpath, and a startling scene burst upon his gaze.

Scarcely a dozen yards from him a junior of St. Jim's was down in the grass.

A burly man was bending over him, and two others were emerging from the thickets, evidently the ruffian's companions.

It was Tom Merry who was struggling in the grass, shouting for help as a heavy knee ground upon his chest.

It was by instinct that Tom shouted; he had little hope of being heard, or helped, in the lonely wood. But there was a chance that some St. Jim's fellow might be within hearing, and he shouted with all the strength of his lungs as he struggled.

"Help! Help!"

"Quiet, you young fool!" growled the man who was gripping him. "Here, lend a hand! The rope, sharp!"

"Help!"

A savage hand clutched at Tom Merry's mouth and silenced him, choking back his cry.

Kit Wildrake saw it all in a flash, and he did not check for a second the speed of his horse. He did not require an instant to decide what he was going to do.

He came on to the scene at full speed.

His arrival was utterly unexpected. Before the three rascals knew that he was there, Wildrake's riding-whip was slashing fiercely on all sides.

Slash, slash, slash!

There were loud yells from the trio as the fierce cuts reached them, and they leaped back out of the way of the prancing horse.

Tom Merry staggered to his feet.

"Quick!" shouted Wildrake. "Here, jump! Quick!"

The three ruffians made a forward movement, and Wildrake made the horse prance again, and they backed away from it swiftly enough. For a second he stopped close to Tom Merry, and that second was enough for Tom. With a quick helping hand from the Canadian, he scrambled on to the horse's back behind Kit Wildrake.

"Stop them!" shouted one of the gang hoarsely.

There was a desperate rush from the three, and Wildrake slashed fiercely with his whip. One of the ruffians reeled back, nearly blinded by the lash across his face; and a second man staggered as Wildrake, releasing a foot from the stirrup, drove a heavy boot at his throat; the third man grasped the bridle of the horse, holding the animal with difficulty as it pranced and reared.

"Hold on, Tom Merry!"

"I'm holding on!" panted Tom. "All serene!"

The riding-whip swept up, and the metal butt came down with a crash on the head of the man at the bridle.

He gave a gasping yell, and dropped in the footpath as if he had been shot.

The next second the horse was put to the gallop.

One of the rascals made a desperate jump at it, and was hurled aside by the galloping animal, and went down yelling.

Gallop, gallop!

It was a breathless rush, the juniors ducking their heads to elude the overhanging branches above.

Behind them they could hear shouting and yelling, and the sound of pursuing footsteps. Wildrake grinned, and gave the horse a flick with the whip, and tore on. All sounds of pursuit had died away in a few moments more.

"I guess we're all O.K. now, old pard!" grinned Wildrake. "By gum! This is a bit like old times—like handling the rustlers on the ranch. I guess all those three hoboes have got something to remember me by!"

Tom Merry panted for breath.

His brain was in a whirl, from the startling suddenness of the happening. He held on to Wildrake's shoulders as the horse galloped on.

"Feel safe?" asked Wildrake.

"Oh, yes—quite!" gasped Tom.

"I guess I can pull in a bit now. Those galoots won't get near us again," said the Canadian junior. And he slackened speed. He turned the horse into the footpath that led to the school.

"Going back to St. Jim's, I suppose?" he asked.

"I—I was going to Wayland," panted Tom Merry. "But

I think I'd better get back to the school. I can see Inspector Skeat afterwards. Blessed if I want to keep out of gates any longer to-day—it's a bit too exciting!"

"I guess I'll give you a lift home, then," said Wildrake. "The old hoss can carry double as far as Rylcombe."

"Thanks!"

"I guess those fellows were hoboes—what?" said the Canadian junior as they trotted on. "What you call tramps over here."

"Worse than that," said Tom. "I can't understand it—it beats me hollow—but they were trying to kidnap me."

"What?"

"It's the second time it's happened this afternoon," said Tom. He glanced back, but there was no sign of pursuit now. "Two cyclists collared me in the Abbotsford lane, and Blake and some other fellows came up in time. Then these three brutes dropped on me in the wood. They're the same gang, of course—the whole lot must have been watching for me this afternoon. It beats me hollow."

Wildrake whistled. He turned his head, and took a very curious look at the junior mounted behind him.

"Sounds rather tall, doesn't it?" he murmured.

"I know it does," said Tom ruefully. "But it's true all the same, worse luck. For some reason that gang of rascals want to get hold of me—and I suppose they know it's a half-holiday at St. Jim's this afternoon, and they were scattered about looking for me. There may be others for all I know. They want me, for some reason—it's a giddy mystery."

"I guess it's got me beat," said Wildrake. "Why should they want you?"

"I give that up."

The double-laden horse trotted on, in the direction of the Rylcombe road. From the trees by the path, a figure suddenly detached itself—a man with a thick beard, who stared at the two riders. He stared at them fixedly as they came trotting up, and stepped into the middle of the path and held up his hand.

"Stop!" he called out.

Wildrake was about to draw rein, but Tom caught his arm.

"Don't stop! It's another of them, I think——"

"Great gum!"

"Keep on!" exclaimed Tom hurriedly.

"Sure!"

Wildrake put on speed, and the horse swept down on the man in the path.

"Stop!" he shouted again.

"Stand aside!" shouted back Wildrake.

"Stop— Oh!"

The man leaped aside in time, as the horse came thundering down on him. Wildrake swept by at a gallop, and he heard a loud and furious curse as he passed. A few minutes later the riders were in Rylcombe Lane, and heading for the village.

CHAPTER 5.

Doubting Thomases!

TOM MERRY walked back from Rylcombe to the school, in company with half-a-dozen St. Jim's juniors. There was not much nervousness in Tom's disposition; but the events of the afternoon had startled him, and he was both puzzled and alarmed; and he preferred company on his way back to the school. As soon as he arrived at St. Jim's, he went to his Housemaster's study, to report what had occurred, to Mr. Railton. He found Mr. Railton in his study; and the Housemaster listened to his story with astonished attention. He eyed the Shell fellow very curiously as he related the amazing events of the afternoon.

"This is very extraordinary," said Mr. Railton. "You are sure, Merry, that the object of these rascals was not merely to rob you?"

"I am quite certain of it, sir," answered Tom. "They must have been watching for me—at least five of them. They knew me by sight—and one spoke to me by name."

"It is amazing," said the Housemaster. "Of course, the police must be informed at once. After what has happened, it would be best for you not to leave the school alone—in fact, I must ask you to remain within gates until this matter is cleared up, Merry."

"Oh!" said Tom, his face falling.

"We must consider your safety, my boy," said the Housemaster kindly. "If it is really the case that a gang of kidnapers are at work, every precaution must be taken. You will come with me to the Head, and tell him what you have told me—and then I will drive you over to Wayland to report the matter to Inspector Skeat. In my company you will be secure enough."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom.

An interview with the Head followed, and Dr. Holmes listened to the story in great astonishment. Then Tom was driven over to Wayland Town, and the matter reported to the police. Tom could not help noticing that Inspector Skeat eyed him very dubiously all the time. He could guess that the inspector, like Blake & Co., was a little sceptical. However, the portly gentleman promised that the "tramps" should be looked for at once, and took down Tom's description of them. Tom was feeling a little worried as he drove back to St. Jim's. The affair was so startling, so amazing, that he could not understand it himself; but he knew the facts. Amazing as it was, there was no doubt that a gang of kidnapers were at work. But the inspector's impression was that the schoolboy had been molested by a gang of tramps; and Tom wondered whether his Housemaster had the same impression. Tom was rather late to tea in Study No. 10 in the Shell, and he found Manners and Lowther there when he arrived.

Both Manners and Lowther smiled when their chum came in. Evidently they had heard the story from Blake & Co.

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed Lowther, with an exaggerated air of relief. "They didn't bag you along with Railton?"

"No!" growled Tom.

"What a stroke of luck," said Manners. "Might have bagged Railton, too—and we should miss our giddy Housemaster."

Tom Merry set his lips a little. It was really too bad to meet with scepticism like this in his own study. St. Jim's seemed to be full of doubting Thomases.

"Perhaps I'd better tell you fellows exactly what happened, and then you will see that it's not quite a joke," he said quietly.

"Go ahead!" said Lowther encouragingly. "I've kept your tea warm. Likewise the muffins. Pile in and expound unto us."

Manners and Lowther listened to the tale—which Tom told briefly.

"Good old Wildrake," said Lowther. "You've had two lucky escapes in one afternoon, Tom. That silver watch of yours was nearly a goner, twice."

"They were not after my watch, Monty. They were after me."

"But why?" asked Manners.

Tom shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"I don't know! How should I know? I've never seen any of the gang before. But the first lot told me plainly they wanted me, and were trying to tie me up when Blake and the rest bumped along on their bikes. The second lot never tried to rob me—though they hadn't time for anything before Wildrake galloped up. But it was kidnapping."

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"Well, it's jolly queer!" said Monty Lowther. "Reminds me a bit of what I've seen on the pictures this afternoon."

"Oh, blow the pictures!" growled Tom.

"What rotten luck that I wasn't on the scene with my camera," remarked Manners thoughtfully. "I'd have liked a snap of poor old Tommy and the horrid kidnappers."

Tom knitted his brows.

"If you fellows don't believe me, the less we say about it the better," he said abruptly.

"Keep your wool on, old scout," said Monty Lowther soothingly. "Of course we believe every word. Don't be an ass. But—but you may have made a little mistake in some of the details, you know."

"I haven't, you ass."

"Well, you haven't, then," said Lowther tolerantly. "After this, we sha'n't let you take your little walks abroad on your lonely own."

"We'll watch over you, old chap," smiled Manners.

"I'm afraid there won't be any walks abroad at present—I'm gated, till this clears up," said Tom.

"My hat! I think I'd rather have kept it dark," said Lowther. "No joke to be gated while the peelers are looking for the tramps—I mean the kidnappers."

"I couldn't keep it dark, you fathead!" exclaimed Tom Merry almost angrily. "It was too serious for that."

"Right-ho, old top—keep your top-knot on!" smiled Lowther.

"Oh, you're a pair of silly owls," said Tom Merry impatiently. "Pass the butter, and give me a rest."

Lowther and Manners smiled at one another, and the subject dropped. Tom Merry could not help feeling rather sore. He had been in danger, and he knew it; though the whole experience was so amazing that he could hardly blame other fellows for supposing that there was some little exaggeration somewhere.

When Tom Merry came down into the Common-room later he found Study No. 6 there, and they all smiled.

"Hallo, still here?" exclaimed Blake.

"Not kidnapped yet?" asked Herries.

"Hardly thought we should ever see you again!" said Digby with great gravity. "Quite expected to hear that a kidnapper had come down the study chimney after you."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry did not reply to the chipping from Study No. 6; he was feeling too annoyed for that. There came a fat cachinnation from Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

"He, he, he! I say, Merry, you are an awful funk, you know! Fancy taking an old tramp for a kidnapper! He, he, he!"

"You fat rotter!" roared Tom Merry, losing his temper at last.

"Shut up, Twimble!" admonished Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It is not a question of funk at all—only a twiffin' exaggeration—"

"You silly ass!" exclaimed the exasperated captain of the Shell.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"All rot, in my opinion," said Grundy of the Shell.

"And what's your opinion worth? The biggest idiot at St. Jim's!" snapped Tom Merry.

"Calling a fellow names won't make black white," said Grundy. "You were frightened by a tramp, and thought that—Here, keep off, you owl!"

Tom Merry was advancing on George Alfred Grundy with his hands up; his patience had quite run out. But Manners and Lowther closed in on him and drew him away.

"Keep its ickle temper!" murmured Lowther soothingly.

"Oh, rats!" snapped Tom.

He jerked himself away from his chums and went to an armchair and picked up a book. Kit Wildrake came along and joined him, and Tom gave him a rather sour look, expecting more chipping. But the Canadian junior was looking quite serious.

"Don't let those asses get your rag out, old scout," said Wildrake. "It's a queer affair, and it's no wonder they think it sounds tall. It does, you know."

"I know that!" grunted Tom.

"But I guess it's the straight goods, all the same," said Wildrake quietly. "You've had two narrow escapes, old man, and you'll do well to keep your eyes peeled. Those galoots wanted you—and wanted you bad. Have you got any rich relations?"

Tom smiled faintly.

"Yes," he answered. "My uncle's rich."

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"Much attached to you?"

"I believe so."

"Likely to shell out the dollars for you, if it was necessary—what?"

"I suppose so."

"That's most likely the explanation, then," said Wildrake quietly. "These galoots are not in the kidnapping business for their health. They are after the dust."

"The what?"

"Money," said Wildrake. "They don't want you to use as a parlour ornament in their little grey home in the West, you know. If they want you, it's for what you'll fetch. Kidnapping for ransom is quite a common game on the other side of the Atlantic, though I haven't heard of it in this Old Country. But I calculate that that is the game; and you want to keep your eyes peeled."

Tom Merry nodded. It was a relief to him to find one fellow, at least, taking the matter seriously.

"Are you telling your people about this?" asked Wildrake.

"I'm leaving it to the Head. I don't want to alarm my old guardian if it can be helped; I'd rather she didn't know," said Tom. "I hope the police will lay those rascals by the heels."

"He, he, he!"

Tom turned his head angrily as he heard that cachinnation behind his chair. Baggy Trimble grinned at him.

"Try Pink Phosphates for the Nerves!" he chortled.

Tom Merry grasped a cushion and smote. There was a wild yell from Baggy Trimble as he rolled on the carpet. And for a considerable time the fat chortles of Trimble were heard no more.

CHAPTER 6.

Monty Lowther is Too Funny.

ON Saturday afternoon Tom Merry wore a very thoughtful expression. It was three days since his adventure, and during that time nothing had been heard of Dusty and the gang of kidnappers.

Inspector Skeat had answered telephonic inquiries by Dr. Holmes several times, but he had nothing to report.

The footpads were being searched for; but no trace of them had been discovered, and the inspector revealed plainly enough his opinion that they were ordinary tramps, who had attempted to rob a schoolboy, and who had made themselves scarce after the affair.

Possibly the Head was not wholly inclined to agree with him in that view.

Three days is quite a long time to a schoolboy; already the effect on Tom Merry's mind was wearing off, and he was inclined to hope, if not to believe, that the kidnappers, discouraged by their failure, had cleared off, and that

no more would be heard from them.

At all events, Tom did not feel disposed to spend his Saturday half-holiday within gates.

The general scepticism as to the seriousness of the matter also had its influence on him. Tom certainly had plenty of courage and plenty of nerve, and chipping from fellows like Trimble was hard to bear.

To remain within gates on account of the danger, or the supposed danger, was to draw the general attention on himself, and to renew the fire of chaff which had by this time almost died away.

So, after thinking the matter out, Tom Merry sought Mr. Railton, with a request that he would rescind the gating.

The Housemaster thought it out.

"Nothing has been learned of these men, Merry," he said at last. "It is very probable, I think, that they are no longer in the neighbourhood. Inspector Skeat seems positive on that point. It would be hard on you to be gated for an indefinite period. On the other hand, you cannot be allowed to take undue risks. You are not thinking of going out alone?"

"With Manners and Lowther, sir."

"In company with your two friends you should be safe enough," said Mr. Railton. "On those terms you may go out as usual, Merry; but you will be very careful to return before dusk."

"Certainly, sir."

Tom Merry left the Housemaster's study and joined his chums in the quadrangle. Manners and Lowther looked at him inquiringly.

"All serene!" said Tom cheerily. "Let's get out."

"Right-ho!" said Lowther. "We'll watch over you like the apple of our jolly old eye!"

(Continued on page 12.)

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The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

Hitting and Hitting Back.

A CHATTY HEALTH TALK.

By the Sporting Doctor.

IF you hit a fellow he may hit you back. But it all depends on the kind of chap he is.

That is, at least, if you give him an ordinary sort of blow. But what if you give him a "knock-out blow"? He won't hit you back then.

So there are really two things that happen when a boy is hit—he goes down and he comes up again. But if the blow is a knock-out he can't come up.

"Knock-out," in fact, is all the way to smithereens, so to speak. After that there's nothing doing at all. Sometimes, though, you can half knock a chap out. You can hit him so that he won't hit you back.

In that case he'll be knocked silly or else he'll just be afraid of you—it comes to pretty much the same thing in the end. The fight will be over.

Get those ideas in your head and then think of your body as the boy who gets hit. Think of the world you live in as the puncher. You can see that if the world punches you hard it may knock you out, and if it punches you fairly hard it may "knock the stuffing out of you" so that you're afraid to hit back. Last of all it may just hit you in the ordinary way and you may hit back in the ordinary way. That's what makes a man of you.

In the war when a big shell burst, the people near it got knocked right out. The people a little farther away got knocked silly and frightened. But the men who were a good way off fought all the harder for the danger they were in.

That is the world hitting its very hardest. And only hard, fit men can stand it. If you are not fit quite small punches will knock you silly; real big punches will just flatten you.

You can see that at any swimming bath. The cold water in the bath "hits" you when you get in. But you hit back if you are cold. You glow all over and don't feel the cold any more. If you shiver it means that you are not hitting back, and that means that you are not fit. You will be afraid of the cold water.

Last week I told you how to measure a funk. Here is another way of measuring him. Because you will find that when you are afraid, when you have "the blues" on you, you'll not like your bath at all. You'll shiver in it.

Put those two ideas together—the idea of hitting back and the idea of glowing—because they are very, very like one another. Fit boys do both, and unfit boys can't do either. When you are unfit your body has got no punch in it.

Last week I told you about getting your chest to work and taking exercise. All that helps to bring back "punch." In your bath in the morning you can test yourself to see how you are getting on with your cure. The more you glow when you come out the better you are.

(There will be another interesting Health Talk by the Sporting Doctor next week.)

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The St. Jim's Junior Eleven at the Final.

LORD EASTWOOD STANDS TREAT.

By Harry Noble, one of the party.

IT was the day of the big football match at St. Jim's, a report of which appears elsewhere. The Junior Eleven, under the captaincy of Tom Merry, had played the Grammarians in the final round of the Schoolboys' Cup, and, after a hard tussle, had beaten them by the only goal of the match.

Most of the masters, being interested in the doings of the junior club, had been down to witness the match, and were thoroughly pleased with the display given by both contestants. Even the old Head had honoured the match with his presence.

The conclusion of the game was met with loud hand-clapping, and there was a shout of applause when Tom Merry, the skipper of the winning side, was seen to rush over and shake hands with the opposing skipper.

"A real good game!" said Gordon Gay, gripping Tom Merry's hand. "And you rightly deserved to win. Mind you, though, we shall beat you at some future date."

Tom Merry smiled. "Any day, and any time," he said, "we hope to give you as good a game as we've given you to-day. Perhaps next time you may win—perhaps."

A storm of cheering greeted the victorious juniors as they trooped off the field of play. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy also let out a ringing cheer for the losers.

Tom Merry and his gallant band of leather chasers had won a real hard match, and felt thoroughly tired in consequence.

Now, to honour the occasion Dr. Holmes had given permission for the team to have a holiday the following day.

The good news was received with much acclamation, and suggestions as to how to spend the day were mooted on all sides by the team when they met in Study No. 10 that same evening.

"What price spending the day at Brighton?" cried Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Wippin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "Just imagine a nice walk along the front together with the—"

"Dashing damsels," broke in Monty Lowther humorously. "They would be really charmed with the splendour of our elegant chum's clobber."

"Weally, deah boy," remonstrated D'Arcy, "your remark may be humorous, to say the least; but I distinctly disagree with its taste, and I must ask you to wewain frowm such gwoos mewmiment. Wemember, Lowther, I am—"

"The biggest dressed-up dude a-going," finished Lowther jokingly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy advanced upon the humorist of the Shell, and would have administered a severe thrashing there and then had not Manners-interposed.

"Enough of that!" he said meaningly. "We've got more important business to consider than an argument between two silly asses. What say you, Tommy boy?"

"Sure," answered Tom Merry smilingly. "Now, look here, chaps. We've got the time off. Gussy's whispered in my ear that he's got a fiver. Surely we other chaps can raise a little more between us! Now, think!"

There came a sudden tap on the door of Study No. 10 which broke upon the junior's meditations.

"Come in, fathead!" shouted Blake. The door opened gently, and the fathead thus addressed popped his head into the study. It was Toby, the page at St. Jim's.

"Hallo, Tobay, deah boy!" cried Arthur Augustus. "What's wong?"

Toby smiled before speaking. "The 'ead has sent me along to look for you, Master D'Arcy," he said. "'E told me to tell you as 'ow 'e would like to see you in 'is study."

"What's the matter now?" asked Jack Blake, as he saw the surprised look come over the face of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Have you committed a murder, or any other such thing, and won't tell your pals?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the others. "Weally, Blake," said D'Arcy, rising, "don't be so wide! Fway excuse me, you fellows," he said, addressing the others. "I'll just pop along and see what the old chap wants."

JOYFUL NEWS!

D'Arcy walked out of the study and followed in the wake of Toby towards the Head's study. On reaching it, Toby tapped gently on the door. His knock was answered with a kindly "Come in!" Toby pushed open the door, and beckoned D'Arcy to enter.

The Head looked up from the papers he had been perusing.

"Oh, D'Arcy," he said, "I sent for you to tell you that I have just received a note from your father, enclosing twelve tickets for admission to the Cup Final, which, I presume, is to be played to-morrow, and asking my permission to grant you and your friends leave to see the match."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy excitedly. "How wippin' of the patah! I—I mean we should all vevy much like to go, sir. I was only sayin' to Tom Mewwy the other day how nice it would be if we could go and see the match. If you would only be so kind, sir, as to grant us the necessary permission—"

"That just reminds me," interrupted the Head. "You were one of the members of the team that beat the Grammarians yesterday, and I have already granted you leave for to-morrow. As the tickets allow for twelve, why not take the remainder of the team with you?"

"That's just what I would like to do, sir," answered D'Arcy, "if only you will say the word, I will go and tell the fellows wight now."

"Very well," said the Head kindly, "you may do so; but first of all tell Kildare I would like to see him, and if he's no special engagement on, I will ask him to accompany you, in charge of the party."

D'Arcy hurriedly left the Head's study. He found Kildare talking to Gray just outside the latter's study. He delivered the message from the Head, and then hurried off to impart the good news to his chums.

He reached Study No. 10 in a somewhat

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

breathless state, and pushed open the door without knocking.

"Oooh!" shouted Manners, who, by the force of the fast opening door, had been completely knocked off his feet. "You fathead! Why didn't you give us warning before barging into the study like that!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would have received assault and battery there and then had not he fluttered the letter he held above his head for all to see.

"Just a minute, deah boys!" he shouted joyfully. "I've got some good news for you. We have all been wackin' our bwains as to what to do to-morrow, with no result. Now, to solve the giddy puzzle, my patah has come to the wescue."

"What—who—which!" shouted Tom Merry jubilantly, jumping up from his chair and sending it flying backwards. "Explain yourself, clump!"

"Weally, Mewwy," expostulated D'Arcy, "I will deal with your insult later. Meanwhile, you fellahs, I want to tell you that the patah has weally turned up twumps this time." He inserted finger and thumb into the envelope he held. "See heah for yourselves, deah boys! Tickets for the Cup Final, and enough to supply all the giddy team, and then one to spare!"

"Yes, but—" interrupted Clive.

"The jolly old Head suggests that Kildare should make use of the spare ticket by coming with us," continued D'Arcy. "Of course, I gave the old chap to understand that I would look after you fellahs, but he couldn't have heard me."

"Go on!" chimed in Levison.

Arthur Augustus buckled to with a will, and selected a tie which had been knitted by Ethel Cleveland's gentle hands. He was not far behind the others, who had now gone down to breakfast.

The meal was soon over, and the juniors, carrying their greatcoats, trooped down the corridor and out into the Close, where they were to meet Kildare.

A kindly word from the Sixth Form prefect, and the happy band started for the station in the best of spirits.

It only necessitated two changes before the St. Jim's party joined a fast train bound for Victoria. Once there, they mounted a bus which carried them straight to the Chelsea ground, staged ready for the great battle which was to decide which of the two teams should carry off the grand silver trophy.

Owing to the immense crowd already waiting to gain admission into the ground, it was some time before Kildare and his party fled through the turnstiles. Their seats reserved, they were soon seated in the grand-stand, where they had a fine view of the ground.

A band, standing in the centre of the field, played the tune of "The Conquering Hero," and a number of the spectators added, with voices crescendo, to the strains of the music.

Even the noble swell of St. Jim's forgot himself for the moment, and started to hum.

"Will you shut up?" demanded Lowther, who, sitting on the other side of D'Arcy, gave a gentle shove, pinning the son of Lord Eastwood between himself and Manners.

D'Arcy turned round on Lowther to wreak his vengeance upon that worthy, when the band stopped suddenly, a hush followed, and

St. Jim's V. The Grammarians.

THE LAST MATCH OF THE SEASON.

By Richard Redfern, Reporter.

THE Grammarians won the toss, and Tom Merry, the skipper of the St. Jim's Junior Eleven, kicked off. St. Jim's initiated two spirited attacks, but were unable to penetrate the Grammarians' defence. After five minutes' play, Talbot centred into the goal-mouth, and in the ensuing scrimmage Merry gave to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who beat the Rylcombe goalie with a fast ground shot. The Grams had a chance to equalise when their left wing, Monk and Carboy, broke away, but the effort proved fruitless, the latter putting well over the bar with a wild, erratic shot. Play continued fairly even, but eventually Monk raced down the wing and crossed to Gay, the Grams centre-forward. Gay would have assuredly equalised had not his shot been luckily diverted behind by the stout defender, Fatty Wynn. The play following was rather of a tame character, and chiefly confined to midfield. St. Jim's were still leading at "lemon time" by a goal to love.

In the second half the Grams opened exceedingly well, and attacked in spirited fashion, showing vastly improved form. They



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"Now, would you chaps like to come?" asked the noble Gussy.

"Yes!" came the unanimous response. "We would—we would!"

Kildare found a happy party that night when he looked into the dormitory to turn out the light and bid the juniors a cheery good-night.

"Are you coming to-morrow?" asked Tom Merry of the school captain, as he was about to leave the dorm.

"Yes," answered Kildare cheerily.

There was a loud "Hooray!" after which the juniors, one by one, turned into bed.

THE GREAT DAY.

The next morning they were early astir. "Grand morning!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he glanced out of the window into the Close below. "Buck up, you fellows; we can't afford to waste much time!"

"Bai Jove, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I feel in quite a fluttah. Which tie do you think is the best out of these few?" He removed the lid of a box which brought to view something like two hundred ties of various hues.

"Any one, you ass!" answered Talbot jocularly. "Use that golden-edged one, and take about a dozen spare ones in your wallet, so as to allow for a few changes en route."

"Don't be widic, Talbot! A fellah can't—"

"You chaps ready?" yelled Tom Merry, as he laid the comb and brush down after completing his toilet. "I'm going down."

"So am I," said Manners. "Half a mo', while I strap my camera over my shoulder."

then "God Save the King" rent the air. The King had arrived to see the match.

Arthur Augustus stood up to attention at once, forgetting all about the chastisement he was going to give Lowther.

His Majesty took his seat, and the St. Jim's juniors were able to get a good glance at him.

Not two minutes after the Royal ovation had ceased than another tremendous cheer came.

The referee was taking the field, and following him came the robust-looking players from Huddersfield Town. They were shortly followed by the Preston team, also looking fit and well.

The formal introduction in midfield took place, the two captains shook hands, and a coin went spinning in the air.

It was under a steady wind that the game was set into motion.

"May the best team win!" came from all sides.

"How splendid this is," remarked Gussy, looking round. "Weally, I must w'ite and tell the patah what a weal bwick he is! What say you, you fellahs?"

There was a united cry of "Yes!"

"He's a jolly old stick, and so say all of us!" chimed in Manners.

Suffice it to say that the juniors saw a real good match that afternoon, and at the termination of the game fled out with the crowd in the best of spirits.

D'Arcy emphatically stated on the journey back to the school that the winners rightly deserved to win, but the losers were a "twife unlucky."

Just like a D'Arcy version this, too!

immediately forced a couple of corners, the first of which the wind carried the ball over the crossbar out of play. The second dropped well in play, and Wynn saved a long shot, a real beauty, from Lane, the Grams' half-back. St. Jim's made several spasmodic raids after this, but failed to again test the goalie. Levison made a clever run down the wing, and looked very much like adding to the St. Jim's lead, but he was robbed of the ball by Goggs when just on the verge of getting in a beauty. Several good runs were then followed up by the Grams' forwards, but they failed to materialise, and the final whistle blew, leaving St. Jim's the victors by one goal to nil.

D'Arcy, Merry, and Talbot played well for the winners, whilst Goggs and the two backs proved a sound defence for the losers. The result, one may add, speaks well for the run of the play.

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THE MYSTERY OF TOM MERRY!

(Continued from page 9.)

"Fathead!"

The Terrible Three sauntered out of gates together, and there was a yell from Baggy Trimble as they went.

"Look out for tramps, Tommy!"

Tom Merry did not heed, but his colour deepened as he walked on with his comrades, and deepened still more as he caught lurking smiles on the faces of Manners and Lowther.

Monty Lowther especially never was able to restrain his sense of humour. On his way to execution Lowther certainly would have jested, and the kidnapping incident seemed to afford him a little more room for humour.

On the footpath through the wood, on the way to Wayland, an ancient tramp came in sight, and he stopped to beg of the schoolboys. Tom Merry dropped a sixpence into his battered hat. As the mendicant walked on, mumbling thanks, Monty Lowther caught Tom by the arm with a sudden dramatic start.

"On guard!" he hissed.

Tom gave a jump.

"What—what's the row?"

"Don't you think that old Johnny is very likely a kidnapper in disguise?"

Manners gave a chuckle.

There are times when humour seemed misplaced to all but the humorist. Tom Merry did not laugh; he frowned. He was so utterly fed up on the subject that Lowther's little joke was the last straw.

"That's the limit!" said Tom, with a flash in his eyes.

"You're a funny ass, Lowther, and Manners seems to enjoy your funny foolery—so I'll leave you to it!"

And with that Tom Merry swung out of the footpath and walked off by a track in the wood.

"Here, hold on, Tommy!" shouted Lowther. "Come back, you ass! I—I didn't mean to upset your apple-cart, you duffer!"

"Tommy!" shouted Manners.

Tom Merry did not reply. He was angry—and perhaps, like the prophet of old, he felt that he did well to be angry. He tramped on and disappeared into the wood.

Manners and Lowther looked at one another; and Monty whistled softly.

"Poor old Tommy! He's got his back up!" he murmured.

"Looks like it!" agreed Manners.

"Dash it all, why shouldn't a fellow pull a fellow's leg a little, if the fellow gives him a reason?" said Lowther argumentatively.

"You always butt in too much, old chap!" said Manners judiciously. "You haven't much tact, have you?"

Lowther grunted.

"You've been chipping him as much as I have," he answered.

"Not so much. Still, I don't see why Tommy should get his back up like this," said Manners. "When he comes back, give him a rest, for goodness sake. After all, we ought to keep together, in case—"

"In case they were real kidnappers, and still looking for dear old Tommy!" grinned Lowther.

"Well, it's possible."

"All things are possible," yawned Lowther. "It's possible that the moon's made of green cheese, but I don't believe it."

"I wish he hadn't left us," said Manners a little uneasily.

"It isn't like Tom to be ratty. I suppose he was fed up."

"Oh rot," said Lowther. "Fellow ought to be able to take a joke. Let's get on or we shall be late for the pictures."

"But Tom—"

"He'll come on—his little tempers never last long. We shall find him in Wayland."

"I suppose we shall," agreed Manners.

"Of course."

The two Shell fellows walked on together and arrived in Wayland. They were going to see the picture which had drawn Lowther thither the previous Wednesday—all three in company this time. But only two arrived at the picture-palace—and they looked round for their chum without seeing him.

"Inside, perhaps," said Lowther.

They went in. In the crowded auditorium it was not easy to see whether Tom Merry had arrived or not, and the show was over before Manners and Lowther were able to look for their chum. They came out rather early, and waited outside for Tom to emerge—but he did not emerge. Monty Lowther had an impatient look.

"He didn't come, after all," he said. "Bother! After all, he's not gone on pictures! He might have come, though!"

"No good hanging about," said Manners; "we want to
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get in before lock-up. Let's hope that Tom will have tea ready."

And Manners and Lowther walked back to St. Jim's, both of them feeling a little sore at the desertion of their chum.

CHAPTER 7.

Absent.

"NOT in!" grunted Lowther.

"Bother!" said Manners.

Study No. 10 in the Shell was empty and deserted—the fire was out, and there was no sign of tea as Manners and Lowther looked in. As Tom Merry had not gone to the pictures after all, they had fully expected him to return to the school before they did; and they had walked up the Shell passage without a doubt that they would find Tom in the study, and a cheery fire going and tea nearly ready. It was not like Tom to nurse wrath—almost incredible that his annoyance could have lasted through the afternoon. Manners and Lowther fully expected to see a smiling face over a ready tea-table—and they were naturally disappointed.

"Bless him!" said Lowther. "Dash it all, it's silly to make a fuss like this! He ought to know I didn't mean anything by a little joke."

"Tain't like Tom to keep it up," said Manners. "I dare say he's dropped in with some other fellows, that's all. Perhaps he's gone to Study No. 6 to tea."

"Well, we can soon see," assented Lowther more cheerily.

"I thought we should find him here."

The Shell fellow went to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, where he found Blake & Co. at tea. But Tom Merry was not there.

"Hallo, you Shell bounders, back?" grinned Blake. "I hope you haven't mislaid Tommy, with so many naughty kidnappers about."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Study No. 6 chuckled.

"Oh, rot!" said Lowther crossly. "I looked in to see if he was here."

"Then you have mislaid him?" grinned Digby.

"We went different ways, as it happened," said Lowther, not caring to enter into details regarding the little breeze of the afternoon. "I thought he would be back before us. Haven't you seen him?"

"Not since you started out."

"Oh, blow!" said Lowther.

He turned away from the study, with a frowning brow. Of course, it was only a coincidence that Tom was absent—but somehow it made him think more seriously of the happenings of the previous Wednesday afternoon. He wished from the bottom of his heart that he had not parted with his chum in the wood. And yet—it was all right, there was nothing in it. Tom was bound to be in by lock-up, which was very close at hand now. Indeed, was it possible that he was intentionally remaining out till the latest possible moment, in order to give his chums some qualms of uneasiness, as a punishment for their disbelief? The thought made Lowther angry instead of anxious—and he went back to Study No. 10 frowning.

Manners gave him an inquiring look.

"Can't hear anything of him," said Lowther gruffly. "He might have turned up. It's rather rotten, in the circles, to stay out like this. Anyway, let's have tea."

"Bound to be in before long," said Manners comfortingly. Then he started a little. "You surely don't think—"

"Of course not," said Lowther irritably. "We don't believe in that silly kidnapping fancy of his, do we?"

"Well, no; but—"

"He may drop in any minute," said Lowther, "and I shall jolly well tell him what I think of him for making us anxious like this."

"Then you're getting anxious?"

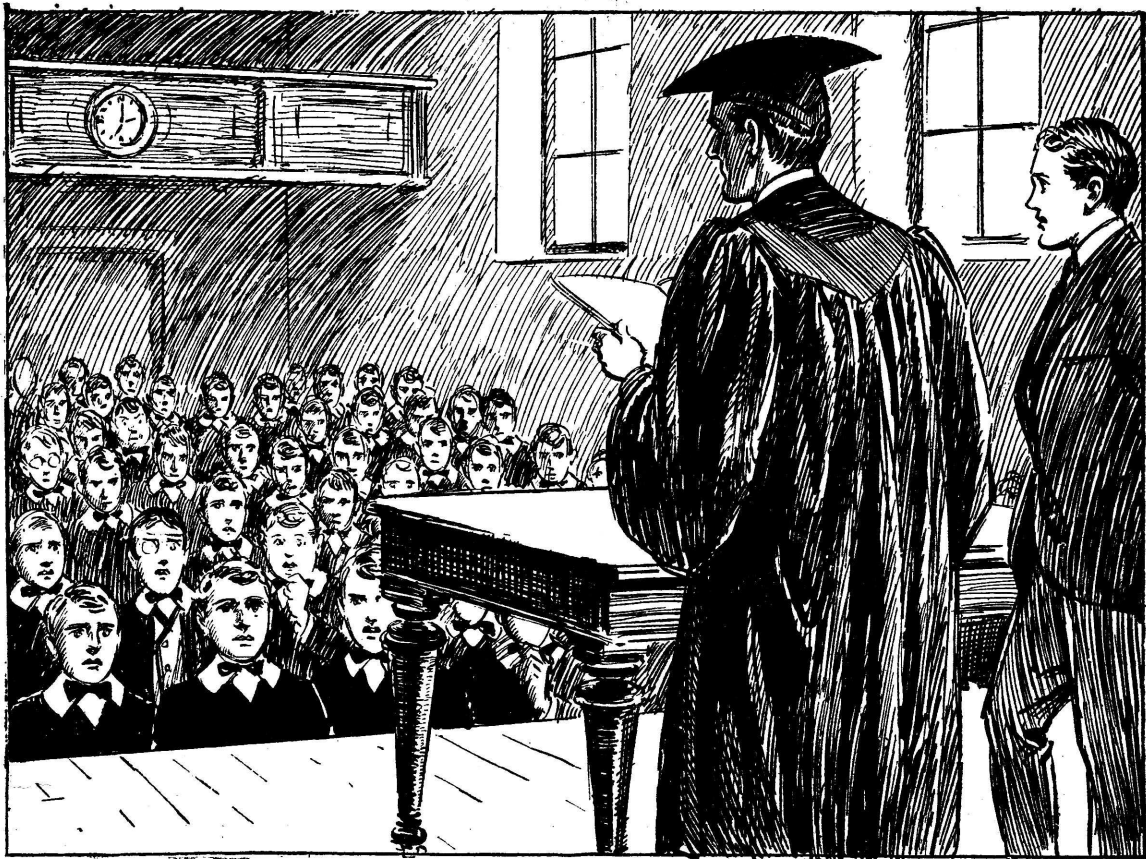
"No, I'm not," snapped Lowther, rather inconsistently; "I think he ought to have come in, that's all."

Not in a very cheery mood the chums of the Shell had their tea. The spring dusk was thickening, and it was close on lock-up now; but Tom Merry did not appear during tea. In spite of themselves, Manners and Lowther could not help feeling a growing uneasiness.

After all, suppose that Tom had not been mistaken—suppose that the tramps, or footpads, or whatever they were, had really been kidnappers, as he believed? If they had been watching for him on Wednesday, they might be watching again on Saturday—they would know which days were half-holidays at St. Jim's, when the juniors would be likely to be out of gates. Was it possible, after all—had they, in their thoughtlessness, allowed their chum to walk alone into danger?

It was a disturbing thought—and yet it was accompanied by irritation, from the possibility that Tom Merry was even then probably in the school—perhaps talking to Levison & Co. in Study No. 9, or perhaps chatting with Figgins & Co. over in the New House.

After making game of the kidnapping danger, as they had done, neither of the juniors felt disposed to walk up and



The Housemaster was calling the roll, and "Adsum" came from every fellow, until Tom Merry's name was called. "Merry!" repeated Mr. Railton, raising his voice. Still there was silence. Mr. Railton frowned. "Has any boy seen Tom Merry since three o'clock?" he called out, looking round. (See this page.)

down and round the house, inquiring after Tom Merry from every fellow they met. It would have been ridiculous, if the view that they had hitherto taken was the just one. But was it?

If Tom Merry had entered Study No. 10, then, certainly he would have found two very angry fellows to greet him. But he did not enter—and Manners and Lowther remained in doubt, not knowing whether to be angry or anxious—rather a painful frame of mind.

They were relieved when it was time for evening call-over; the matter would be settled now beyond a doubt. It would not have been like their sunny-natured chum to cause them anxiety, annoyed as he was by their doubts; but if that was so, he would have to turn up in Hall to answer to his name. Manners and Lowther went downstairs together, and joined the crowd of fellows heading for Big Hall, looking round rather eagerly for their chum, but without seeing him.

"Tom Mewwy turned up yet, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a smile.

"Haven't seen him yet," said Lowther curtly.

Kit Wildrake, who was passing, looked quickly round.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "Is Tom Merry out of gates alone?"

"He was, this afternoon," grunted Lowther.

"I guess he was asking for trouble, then," said the Canadian junior. "You fellows shouldn't have left him."

"What rot!" said Lowther testily. "Do you believe those tramps the other day were really trying to kidnap him, as he fancied?"

"Sure!"

"Then you're as big an ass as he is," said Lowther gruffly. And he went on into Hall with Manners.

Wildrake made no rejoinder to that rather discourteous remark; he could read the anxiety under Lowther's gruffness. His own face was dark with thought as he went into Hall with the Fourth-Formers. Mr. Railton was already there to take the roll. Manners and Lowther looked anxiously among the Shell fellows for their chum; but he was not to be seen. Yet it was certain that he must have returned to the school by this time, for the school-gates were now locked. Unless—unless something had happened—

With sinking hearts the two juniors realised the possibility, at least, that something had happened.

They watched the doorway, hoping to see Tom hurry in at the last minute. Baggy Trimble dodged in, late as usual, as did Racke of the Shell. Then Kildare of the Sixth closed the door; any that remained out had to stay out till the roll was called, after that, and to take the consequences of not answering to their names.

Mr. Railton was calling the roll; and "Adsum!" came from every fellow until Tom Merry's name was called.

"Merry!"

No answer.

"Merry!" repeated Mr. Railton, raising his voice.

Silence.

In ordinary circumstances the School House master would have marked T. Merry as absent, and gone on with the roll-call. But the circumstances were not ordinary now. After his injunction to Tom to be very careful indeed to return before dusk, the junior's absence was a serious matter. Certainly, in the circumstances, the captain of the Shell would not have allowed any trifling matter to make him late for call over. Mr. Railton frowned, and fixed his eyes on the group of Shell fellows.

"Lowther!"

"Yes, sir."

"Is not Merry present?"

"No, sir!"

"Is he in the school?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Were you not with him this afternoon?"

Monty Lowther reddened.

"We parted during the afternoon, sir," he stammered. "I— I haven't seen him since three o'clock."

"And you, Manners?"

"I haven't seen him, either, sir."

There was a low buzz in Hall now; it was quite unusual to suspend the calling of the roll like this, and all the fellows were interested. Mr. Railton's brows were knitted.

"Has any boy present seen Merry of the Shell since three o'clock?" he called out, looking round.

There was no reply. Apparently no one had seen Tom Merry since he had parted with his chums. The silence in Hall was deep, almost ominous; Monty Lowther had a queer feeling in his throat. No one had seen Tom Merry since he had gone into the wood from the footpath, hours ago. He could not have remained in the wood; yet he had not returned to the school, or some of the fellows must have seen him. Where was he? What had happened to keep him away?

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, after a long pause. "Kidnare, will you oblige me by taking the rest of the roll?"

"Certainly, sir!" said the St. Jim's captain. Mr. Railton left the hall, signing to Manners and Lowther to accompany him. All eyes were turned on the two Shell fellows as they followed the Housemaster out. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave his chums a startled look.

"Wailton seems to think that somethin' has happened to old Tom Mewwy!" he murmured.

"What rot!" said Blake uneasily.

"What could have happened?" asked Levison.

"Those kidnappahs—"

"Oh, rot!" grunted Herries.

"Pewwaps it was not wot, after all, Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "Now I come to think of it, you fellows will wemembah that I was not at all suah that it was all wot."

"I don't remember anything of the kind," grunted Blake. "Weally, Blake—"

"Silence!" called out Darrell of the Sixth, and the whispered discussion died away.

Kildare finished calling the roll; there were no more absentees. The assembly broke up, most of the juniors discussing the absence of Tom Merry, and some of the seniors deigning to take an interest in it. There was a growing feeling of anxiety among Tom Merry's friends.

"Of course, it's plain enough!" Baggy Trimble told the other fellows. "I see it all, you know."

"Well, what's so jolly plain?" grunted Blake.

"He's pulling our leg," said Trimble. "Staying out on purpose to make us believe there was something in the kidnapping yarn."

Blake started a little.

"He wouldn't!" he said.

"Wubbish!" said Arthur Augustus decidedly. "Twimble might play a sillay twick like that—not Tom Mewwy. I gweatly feah, deah boys, that somethin' has happened to old Tommay. Now, if you fellows had only taken the mattah sewiously, you know—"

"Did you take it seriously?" grunted Dig.

"Now I come to think of it, I wathah had a feelin' all along—"

"Rats!"

"Weally, you know—"

Arthur Augustus was wise after the event: though his powerful brain was veering round to the belief that he had been wise before the event. A good many fellows were feeling anxiety now, tempered by a sort of exasperated feeling that at any minute the missing junior might walk in safe and sound and smiling, which would make anxiety ridiculous. But minute followed minute, and Tom Merry did not walk in!

CHAPTER 8.

Where is Tom Merry?

MR. RAILTON had gone to his study, and Manners and Lowther followed him there with dismal faces. They were heavy of heart now; filled with uneasiness, all the more because they could see that the Housemaster was taking Tom Merry's absence very seriously indeed. If Mr. Railton thought that there was cause for anxiety, undoubtedly cause existed; the two juniors realised that. They asked themselves miserably what unhappy consequences were to follow from that idle, thoughtless dispute in the wood.

Mr. Railton regarded the two Shell fellows thoughtfully. "I gave Merry leave to go out of gates this afternoon, on the implied condition that he did not go alone," said the Housemaster. "I understood that he was to be with you. I am very much surprised to hear that you separated, in the circumstances. Why did you do so?"

Lowther crimsoned.

"We—we had a bit of an argument, sir," he said falteringly. "Do you mean that you quarrelled?" exclaimed the Housemaster, raising his eyebrows.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Lowther hastily. "We never quarrel! It was only a little huff, because—because I was pulling his leg—I mean chipping him."

"Where did you separate?"

"In the wood."

"Where did you go after that?"

"We went on to Wayland, to the pictures."

"And where did Merry go?"

"By a path through the wood, from the main footpath. He couldn't be lost in the wood," added Lowther. "He knew every yard of it."

"Do you know what his intentions were when he left you?"

"We thought we'd see him again in Wayland," faltered Lowther. "As he didn't turn up there, we expected to find him here when we came back. But we haven't seen him."

Mr. Railton pursed his lips.

"Do you—do you think something may have happened, sir?" muttered Lowther.

"I fear it."

"Not—not kidnapping—"

"It is only too possible, I fear," said the Housemaster quietly.

"We—we didn't take much stock, sir—I—I mean we didn't take it seriously about—about what Tom told us about the kidnappers," stammered Lowther. "We—we thought he was letting his imagination run a bit, and—and we chipped him about it—"

"That was why you parted?"

"Ye-es!"

"It is very unfortunate," said the Housemaster. "However, we must hope that nothing has happened. I must consult the Head now; you may go."

Manners and Lowther left the study, feeling miserable enough. They went up to their own quarters; Study No. 10 in the Shell seemed dreary and dismal without Tom Merry's sunny face there.

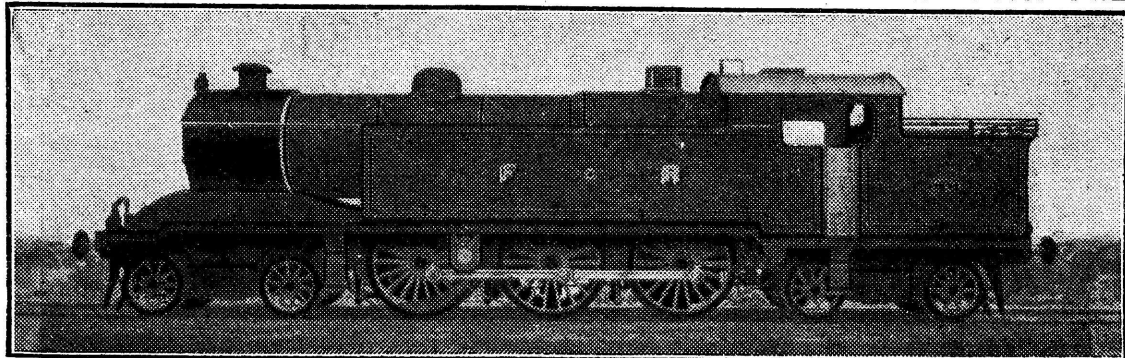
"Thank goodness there's no prep this evening!" muttered Lowther. "Only mugging up Milton—and we can cut that. I don't think I could do any rotten prep!"

Manners nodded.

"Where the thump is Tom?" he said.

"Have we been a pair of fools?" asked Lowther

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wretchedly. "Was it all the straight goods, as Wildrake would say, all the time? After all, Tom was positive about it, and he's no fool. If—if anything's happened to him—after we parted like—like that—"

Lowther choked. He walked restlessly about the study, unable to keep still.

"What wouldn't I give to hear him tramping up the passage this minute?" said Manners feelingly.

"Lots of things may have kept him out," argued Lowther. "Might have gone off somewhere and lost the train back."

"He might," said Manners dubiously. "Not likely, though."

"Might have gone to the second house at the pictures," added Lowther.

"Um!"

"I—I suppose it's not likely."

"He's not very keen on pictures, and he wouldn't cut call-over for that. Blessed if I can make it out at all! If—if those rotters have really got him—" muttered Manners.

Lowther gave a groan.

"Poor old Tom! Why, if—if it's so, they may have been watching us in the wood, and Tom walked fairly into their claws. They might have collared him a few minutes after he left us, while we were going on to those silly pictures like a pair of silly fools!"

The minutes passed on leaden wings to Tom Merry's chums. They did not feel inclined to go down and face the crowd in the Common-room; but it was a dismal business waiting in the quiet study for the fellow to return who might never return. There was tap at the door, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in.

"Not come back yet?" he asked.

"No."

"Bai Jove! It's half-past eight," said D'Arcy. "Something must weally have happened to him."

Talbot of the Shell looked in. His handsome face was clouded.

"No news of Tom yet?" he asked.

"No!" groaned Lowther.

"It's rotten!"

Other fellows dropped into Study No. 10 to ask for news, and to hear none. Manners and Lowther went downstairs at last, to seek their Housemaster, and inquire of him. They found that Mr. Railton had gone out; and after some hesitation, they determined to seek the Head. Dr. Holmes received them kindly enough; but he could only tell them that Mr. Railton had gone over to Wayland to see Inspector Skeat. The police were to be asked to look into the matter without delay. That was not much comfort to the two juniors; it only impressed more clearly on their minds the fact that their chum was in danger.

Where was Tom Merry?

That question was being asked, in hushed tones, in both Houses at St. Jim's as bedtime drew nearer.

The faint hope that he would return was fading away now. To stay out till bedtime, and after it, was a serious matter; no ordinary circumstance could cause it. If Tom Merry did not return by bedtime, it would be because he could not return—because he was prevented. In Heaven's name, where was Tom Merry—what had happened to him? Monty Lowther felt a pang at his heart when the clock indicated half-past nine, and Kildare of the Sixth came to shepherd the juniors off to their dormitories.

Sleep was not much in the thoughts of Tom Merry's chums; but they had to go to their dormitory. There were subdued voices among the Shell; even Grundy looked thoughtful. Manners and Lowther turned in with the rest—but not to sleep.

It was heavy upon their hearts and upon their consciences that they had parted with their chum when danger threatened—a danger they had not believed in until it was too late. They did not join in the buzz of discussion that ran from bed to bed; but they did not close their eyes. Long after the rest of the Shell were asleep, Tom Merry's chums lay with wide, wakeful eyes, staring into the darkness, listening feverishly for some sound that might indicate that the missing junior had returned.

Midnight tolled over St. Jim's at last. Manners fell into an uneasy slumber, haunted by dreams.

Monty Lowther turned from side to side, unable to sleep, tormented by his thoughts. He had parted from his chum in anger. And now where was Tom Merry? In the silence of the dormitory, Lowther groaned aloud. When the half-hour chimed, Lowther felt that he could endure it no longer; he must know if there was news. He slipped from bed, hurried on trousers and jacket over his pyjamas, and left the dormitory. All was darkness outside; but there was a gleam of light from below as he crept towards the staircase. Even at that late hour someone was still up. The light burned low in the hall as Lowther crept down the staircase. And there was a glimmer under Mr. Railton's study door.

Lowther crept to that door and hesitated. But he took

his courage in both hands, as it were, and at last raised his hand and tapped. There was a low, startled exclamation within. The door opened, and Mr. Railton looked out in astonishment at the half-dressed junior.

"Lowther, what are you doing here?"

Monty Lowther caught his breath.

"I—I'm sorry, sir! I—I couldn't sleep. Haven't you heard anything of Tom yet?"

Mr. Railton had frowned; but his brow cleared as he read the bitter anxiety in the boy's pale face.

"Nothing yet," he said kindly. "You should not have come down, Lowther. We hope for news in the morning. The police will do everything they can; and to-morrow there will be a general search. Nothing can be done until then. Go back to bed, my boy, and sleep."

"Yes, sir," muttered Lowther.

He crept back to his dormitory. He crept into bed; but it was not so easy to sleep. Long, long he lay, watching the high window, and the stars that glimmered and gleamed in the vault of heaven without—long, with tired but sleepless eyes. The spring dawn was creeping over the sky when Monty Lowther closed his eyes at last and slept.

CHAPTER 9.

Mystery on Mystery.

WHERE was Tom Merry?

On Sunday morning there was no answer to the question that the whole school was asking.

There was no news—no word had come of the missing junior.

There were grave faces on all sides—even Trimble looked serious now. Where was Tom Merry?

Even fellows who had not liked him, fellows like Racke and Crooke, missed his sunny face about the school, and hoped that no mischance had befallen him. And among the fellows who liked him—and their name was legion—there was deep anxiety and gloom.

The theory of an accident had to be dismissed. News of any accident would have been received before now. But if no accident had kept Tom away, what had kept him? The kidnapers! But who and where were they? What was their object? What was the cause of their enmity towards a fellow who might have been supposed to have no enemy in the world? Was Tom Merry a prisoner in some deep, dark den, or— The blacker thought the juniors tried to dismiss from their minds; but it would not be dismissed. In Monty Lowther's heart there was a chill terror lest he had looked for the last time on the living face of his chum.

After morning service in the school chapel the search began. The whole school was called upon to join in it; and, with very few exceptions, they were glad enough to join. Every Form made up a party to search; even the fags of the Third Form joined it with great energy. The police were undertaking a search of the old quarries on Wayland Moor; the possibility of a grim discovery there was remote, but it existed. Tom Merry had been a couple of miles from the quarries when he parted with his chums, and he had not gone in that direction. But he might have filled in the afternoon with a ramble on the moor—there was no telling. From the moment when he had quitted Manners and Lowther on the footpath in Wayland Wood, all was mystery—as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

Manners and Lowther joined eagerly in the search; and with them went Kit Wildrake of the Fourth and Talbot of the Shell. Talbot, though he said little, probably felt the more; his handsome face was very set. In Wildrake the juniors placed some faith; they knew of old the Canadian junior's great skill in picking up tracks. From the spot where Tom Merry had left his chums the previous day the quest began; but even Wildrake skilled in woodcraft as he was, was beaten.

In the early morning there had been a heavy fall of rain, and the woods were still dripping with it. Whatever "sign" Tom Merry might have left behind him—whatever sign his enemies might have left—had been washed away. In the wet, dripping grass there was nothing for even the Canadian's keen eyes to read.

But the search went on, on all sides. The woods were beaten far and wide, and Tom Merry's name rang and echoed in shouts among the old trees. The old castle on the hill, with its underground passage, was searched—the ruined monk's cell in the heart of the wood—the island in the river—the woods, the moor, the lonely lanes. The day wore on, and there was no discovery. On the morrow, it was understood, the police were to drag the river—and that news went like a knell to the hearts of Tom Merry's chums. The last and blackest possibility was already being considered!

Late in the day, the searchers began to drop in at the school, dusty and tired and unsuccessful. Manners and Lowther did not return until dusk, and then it was rather

the hope of hearing possible news, than anything else, that brought them back to St. Jim's.

But there was no news.

Mr. Railton had strictly ordered all juniors to be within gates again before dusk; and the roll was called for the Lower School. But the prefects remained longer on the search. There was a bright moon that evening, and Manners and Lowther looked out of the School House into the moonlit quad, with tired eyes and heavy hearts. They were utterly weary from the day's hopeless tramping, but they would have been glad to join further in the search—but that was not possible. And they felt wretchedly that it was useless, too—two hundred fellows, as well as the police, had searched far and wide, and scarcely a nook or recess in the whole vicinity had been left unexplored. Where could they look again—if they did search—? It was useless, and they knew it—but they longed to be doing something—anything—even fatigue was welcome, rather than idleness while their chum was in danger.

One by one the prefects came dropping in, or in twos. Darrell came in with Rushton and Langton, all three of them looking dusty and weary. Darrell called to the juniors in the doorway as he came in.

"Kildare back yet?"

"Not yet!" answered Lowther.

Other fellows came in—it was long past the usual hour for lock-up—and the gates were closed; but Taggles had not locked them yet. The stragglers of the search-party arrived one by one. Lowther and Manners gave each fellow an eager look of inquiry as he came—but there was no news. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy joined the chums of the Shell in the doorway. His noble face was dismal in expression.

"It's wotten, you fellows," he muttered. "Poor old Tom Mewwy! I am feelin' simply beastly, you know."

Manners nodded without speaking. Lowther did not heed.

"If it's kidnappin', they've got him safe away by this time," continued the swell of St. Jim's. "P'robably a motor-car, you know—they would wush him wight away—

case Kildare can't have wun into them. Why doesn't he come back?"

"Good heavens!" breathed Lowther.

He stared into the moonlight towards the gates. All the rest of the searchers had returned—the latest one an hour ago. And Kildare of the Sixth was still absent.

What did it mean? What could it mean?

"Has he found out anything—and have they—?" Lowther muttered, but he did not finish the surmise. If it was a case of kidnapping, surely the scoundrels were far enough away by this time with their prisoner—and in that case Kildare could not have encountered them. But if it was not kidnapping—what had become of Tom Merry? What had become of Kildare?

A crowd of fellows gathered in the massive old doorway of the School House, staring into the quadrangle. Mr. Railton came back into the House at last, his face dark and troubled. The glimmer of a lantern at the gates showed that Taggles was locking up. Locking up—and Kildare of the Sixth still out of gates. What had happened?

What could have happened? What hideous mystery was it that was falling like a black shadow on the old school?

Clang!

The rising-bell rang out in the clear spring morning. Manners and Lowther turned out with the rest of the Shell, with pale faces; they had slept little. The second night of Tom Merry's absence had passed—and the first of Kildare's—if Kildare truly was missing. He had not returned when the juniors went to their dormitories on Sunday night. If he had not come in later—

Manners and Lowther were first down of the Shell. They found Blake and Wildrake of the Fourth already down.

"Any news?" asked Lowther eagerly.

Blake shook his head.

"I guess not," said Wildrake. "We're hanging about to catch sight of Railton to ask him—"

"Did Kildare come back?"

"I don't know."

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pewwaps into the next county—not much good lookin' for him about heah, if he has been kidnapped. I say, it's wathah odd that Kildare doesn't come in. I wondah if he's found out anythin'."

Lowther looked up quickly.

"They're all in now but old Kildare," said Arthur Augustus. "Mr. Wailton ordahed them all to be back by eight at latest—the p'fects, you know. It's close on nine now. Pewwaps old Kildare has found somethin' out—he wouldn't stay so late for nothin'."

"It—it's possible!" muttered Lowther with a faint hope. Mr. Railton came to the doorway, and took a long look into the quadrangle. His face was set and serious.

After a pause, he went down the steps, and disappeared in the direction of the porter's lodge. He came back in a few minutes, and his face was darker. He called to Darrell of the Sixth in the hall.

"Where did you leave Kildare, Darrell?"

"On the moor, sir," answered Darrell. "We all separated there, to go different ways and search the whole place."

"Kildare cannot have remained there so long," said the Housemaster. "It is odd that he does not return."

"If he has found out anything, sir, he might go to the police-station—"

"In that case he would surely telephone." The Housemaster knitted his brows. "It is very odd."

Mr. Railton went to his study, and a few minutes later he was heard at the telephone. He came out of the study, and Darrell, who was waiting for him, gave him an inquiring look.

"Kildare has not been heard of at Wayland Police Station," said the house-master. "Surely—surely it is not possible—" He broke off, and went out into the quad, to the gates.

"Bai Jove!" marmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a hushed voice. "Is—is Kildare goin' to be missin', like poor old Tom Mewwy?"

Lowther and Manners exchanged a startled look.

"If it's kidnappin', the wottahs are fah enough away now, with Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus. "In that

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"I'm going to see," said Lowther.

He hurried to the Sixth Form passage, and tapped at Kildare's door and opened it. The blinds were still drawn, the room was dusky—and empty. The bed had not been slept in.

Monty Lowther caught his breath. Then Kildare had not returned—the captain of St. Jim's had been absent during the night. Lowther rejoined the juniors with a sombre face.

"Kildare never came back!" he said.

"Then, where is he?" muttered Blake. "What can it all mean?"

Lowther shook his head. His face was white. Tom Merry and Kildare had vanished from the sight of all that knew them—vanished without leaving a trace behind—and their fate was wrapped in the darkness of a torfuring mystery.

THE END.

(What has happened to Tom Merry and Kildare? Read the further developments in this great mystery in next week's splendid story entitled: "HELD TO RANSOM!" by Martin Clifford. You should make sure of your copy by ordering early.)

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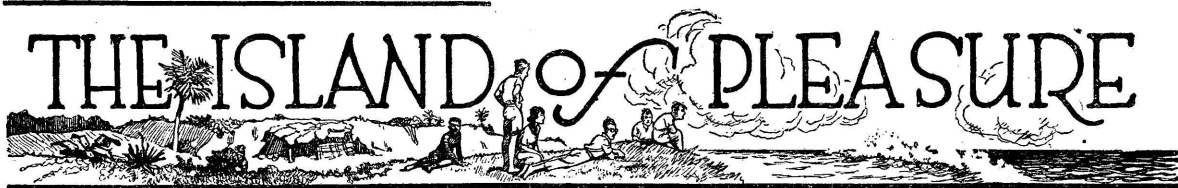
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The Break of Dawn.

DONALD GORDON and his brother Val, together with Tommy Binks and Septimus Todd, leave St. Christopher's School on an expedition to the Solomon Islands to join Hector Gordon, an uncle of the two brothers, who is on a big plantation there.

Captain Targe, captain of the Wittywake, and a scoundrel at heart, heard of the party's quest. He planned to abandon the boat, and leave the party to their fate—this, in order that he might carry out his plans, and more easily overthrow the wealthy plantation owner, and obtain hold of his land. His dastardly scheme proved futile, however, Taga, the black cabin-boy, warning the party, and assisting them in making their escape. They were about to leave in one of the ship's small boats, when Anna, anxious to get away from the harsh treatment of her father, joined them.

Not long after they started on their perilous sea journey a severe storm arose, and the party got washed up on the Island of Pleasure.

They prepared their new home, living on the products the island offered. Shortly afterwards the happy party were startled by the reappearance of the Wittywake out at sea. Don kept watch, and, to his surprise, saw Targe, together with Ralph, land, carrying with them a metal box, which they deposited in the bed of a pool, to be guarded by a slimy, tentacled monster of the deep. Don wisely decided to keep the grim secret to himself.

It was some time afterwards, when the party were returning from a picnic, that a severe storm broke over the island. The chums were only just able to escape from their hut, which, with the combined forces of wind and waves, was brought crashing to the ground. The party underwent a terrible time that night, the angry waves carrying them hither and thither in their fury.

The storm subsided with the break of dawn, and of the separated party, Don, Anna, and Scot were reunited, but of the others there was no sign. Taga and Anna, tired after their night of terror, fell asleep, but the ever-watchful Don kept on the alert. Suddenly he rose to his feet, and, glancing to his right, saw Turtle Bay. A sudden gasp broke from his lips. Midway across the bay, where the sands ended, a solid wedge had been cut out of the heart of the jungle.

It was as though a giant plough had been driven straight through the thick growth, clearing everything from its path.

This grim fact in itself was sufficient to prove to Don that the little island had been directly in the track of the hurricane, and would bear marks of that grim encounter for many years to come.

In the bay there floated dozens of trees, which had been uprooted and cast headlong into the sea by the mad fury of the whirling wind.

It was a scene of desolation which made Don stand mute for a long moment.

The difference between the smiling island as he and his chums had known it and this great, cloud-encircled place made him realise the dread power of the elements.

It was a sober and subdued youth who finally turned and began to move along towards the edge of the cliff.

When he came to within a yard or so of it he halted, his heart fluttering in his breast.

He was almost afraid to look over the edge; but, mastering his emotion at last, he took a few paces forward. Then, kneeling down, he leaned forward and peered below.

A scene of desolation and wreckage met his eyes.

That cleared space, which had once been

so carefully laid out and tended, was now a mere rubble heap.

Along the foot of the cliff, in among the thick boulders, and down to the edge of the beach, were strewn the timbers and beams which had formed the little hut.

The fireplace, the cook-house, and Anna's shelter—all had vanished; nor was there any trace of the little fence or the rough structure which had formed the goat-pen.

Tommy's fowl-run was a mere twisted mass of vine-leaves, and there was no trace of its long-necked, squawking inmates.

By leaning forward and looking down the face of the cliff Don could see that the waves had actually reached to nearly half-way up it, and he knew that all the stores, which had been carefully packed away in the hollows of the cliff, had been reached by the sea.

For the best part of five minutes the eyes of the youngster searched to and fro in the hollow below, seeking for something live and moving; but there was no stir in this desolate place, and, drawing back, Don covered his face with his hands for a moment.

"Gone," he said—"all gone!"

Until this moment he had been buoyed up by a hope that, by some incredible means, his chums would be saved.

That they should be utterly destroyed, swept away by the fury of the storm, had seemed impossible. But now, after that long survey of the wreckage, this hope began to die, and just for a moment a feeling of despair came over the youngster.

All their toil for many months, their stores and carefully-arranged plans, their food and poor belongings, had been swept away by relentless Fate.

"It wasn't worth while—it wasn't worth while!" Don muttered to himself. "It doesn't seem fair! Why should they have been wiped out like this? What harm have we done to anyone? It is a shame—it is a shame!"

As he stood there, full of bitter thoughts, he heard footfalls, and, as he lifted his head, Anna came running across the ground towards him, and he rose slowly to his feet.

Anna caught him by the arm, looking up with red-rimmed eyes into his haggard young face.

"Where are they, Don? Have you found any traces of them?"

She looked at him eagerly.

Don waved his hand towards the edge of the cliff.

"They are all gone, Anna!" he said, in a low, grim voice. "It doesn't seem worth while looking for them!"

He gulped painfully, then went on.

"They have vanished!"

Don Gordon was in the despair which comes to the best of us at times, and he had to admit afterwards that it was Anna who played the better part then.

The girl's eyes flashed angrily.

She sprang away, with a stamp of her tiny foot on the wet, sodden ground.

"I am ashamed of you—ashamed of you!" she said. "Why should you think they are all dead? Of course they would not be down there!"

Again she stamped her foot.

"You are alive, but you would not be alive if you were down there now!"

Then her mood changed quickly, and she reached forward, catching him by the hand.

"Come on, Don!" she said. "We are going to find them! They must be somewhere, and we've got to look for them!"

She turned, and dragged him along the cliff towards the sloping ground, and, as they turned to descend to the beach, a shout followed them.

Taga appeared from among the trees.

He was carrying a handful of dried wood, and he hurried to them, following them down the slope.

When he came within earshot he called to them.

"We go light fire, first thing!" Taga cried. "Make smoke signal!"

The black face widened into a grin.

"That fella Tommy see smoke, him know breakfast somewhere! Him come along, sure!"

In his humble way, Taga was revealing a confidence which made Don almost ashamed of his own doubts.

"That's right, Taga!" he said. "You make a fire. No doubt they have got scattered all over the place, but when they see the smoke they will come back."

Taga grinned.

Yet when Taga and Anna finally cleared the boulders, and beheld for the first time that terrible scene of wreckage, they halted and stared at each other for a moment.

And it was Don who made the first move towards lighting the fire-signal.

He cleared the space of baked earth which had been their fire, and called to Taga.

"It is up to you to make fire now, Taga," he said. "I am afraid my burning-glass is no good without the sun. Come along, old chap! Get to work!"

Taga came running up to where the young leader stood, and nodded to his friend.

"That all right, Master Don," he said. "Taga make fire all right—you watch!"

The dried pieces of bamboo cane, which the native had found in the shelter of the trees, were placed in position, and Taga set to work.

He used a hard strip of wood, which he proceeded to rub to and fro on the centre of the bamboo.

Don and Anna watched him with breathless interest.

It was the first time that Taga had made fire, and to Don the process was a bewildering one, for he himself had often essayed it in his old scouting days in England.

Perhaps it was the turn of the wrist, or the pressure which Taga exerted, which brought about triumph.

In ten minutes a little curl of smoke was arising from the centre of the pile of bamboo; then Taga, taking some of the powdered pith, blew gently on to the tiny flame, which presently brightened, and a fire was started.

A hunt was made for dried brushwood then,

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a difficult task, but sufficient was found at last to make a real blaze.

Anna, routing about among the debris, had managed to find an unbroken cup.

This she filled from the gushing spring. A further search produced some soddened fruit and one or two yams; but, as far as Anna could see, the rest of her precious, laboriously-gathered larder had vanished.

"Oh, Don, it's dreadful! To think that only yesterday we were so happy together here in our beautiful hut!" Anna wailed.

And it took all Don's powers of persuasion to cheer the weeping girl.

Don and Taga had moved off after the meal to a pile of boulders on the left, when the former heard a faint cry coming from a heap of rocks.

With a shout, Don darted up the boulders, and when Taga reached his side he found the leader kneeling in a revce amidst the rocks, with a Nanny resting across his knees.

The poor animal was almost dead, but Don, lifting it in his arms, carried the wet, shaggy beast back across the boulders and up to the fire.

"Anna—quick! Come here!" he called to Some Girl, who had moved off up the beach.

Anna, coming up, gave a cry of delight, and ran towards Don, dropping on her knees beside the goat.

The poor creature opened its eyes, and gave a faint grunt.

"It's a good sign—a good sign. Don!" she said.

She looked up and smiled at the white-faced youngster.

"If Nanny is alive—has been saved, then the others will have been saved as well!"

She began to attend to the beast, Taga lending a hand.

Then, after her gentle administrations, Nanny revived, and finally was able to stand up.

"Her do all right, Miss Anna," Taga said. "She no worse for dat wash."

Anna smiled at him, but when the native had moved off she put her arms round the neck of the animal and gave it a warm hug.

"The sea didn't take you, after all, dear," she said; "and we've got to find the others now."

Captain Targe Again!

WHEN the fury of the breaker smote the hut into atoms the solid roof fell inward, and the surge of the returning wave, which had carried Don away with it, with one hump drove the laced lattice-work of bamboo cane and palm-leaves with it.

Tommy had been standing under the roof as it fell, and his head and shoulders had come through an intersect of the cane.

That first blind rush had seen him clinging like a limpet to the bamboo fronds, and, smothered though he was in the foam, he managed to draw himself forward until he was lying flat on his face on the creaking, crazy platform.

The raft was carried straight down the beach, and, thanks to its buoyancy, was sucked on in the heart of the wave, to float over the hollow between the breakers.

An eddy of wind, which had cleared the protection headland, smote the crazy raft and drove it forward, so that when the next breaker broke on the reef, and came rushing up, the raft just escaped the mad stampede of foam and water, although the tail-end of the wave tilted it at a dangerous angle, and drove it sideways for fifteen or twenty yards.

Tommy was clinging with toes and hands like a limpet as the light raft was swept away like a leaf, and when it righted itself again the youngster gave vent to the first sound he had uttered since the catastrophe had happened.

"Where—where the deuce are we?"

His thin, piping voice was drowned in the roar of the wind, but, to his relief, he heard a reply.

There was a rustle among the wet strips of bamboo, and a hand crossed his, which he clutched at.

"Who is that? Who's that?" Tommy bawled.

"All right, old chap—it's me! And I've got hold of Scat!"

It was Val's voice that sounded, a weak, thin tone, and Tommy tightened his grip on the hand.

"Quick—help me! I—I am holding on to Scat!"

Val had come out of that maelstrom clinging to Scat, and the two locked shapes had been hurled bodily into the heart of the wave, to be thrown about like so much flotsam.

They had come to the surface for a moment close to where the raft was floating, and it had been pure chance which had made Val grip at one of the slender bamboo fronds and hold on there.

They came onward, driven by the wind, which had thrust the raft away from the track of the wave, and had drawn Val with it. As the raft had tilted it had slipped under the youngster, almost scooping him out of the sea.

Now, Tommy, going to Val's assistance, found Don's brother's arm tight round the limp shoulders of Scat, and, with Tommy's aid, the long body of the tutor was dragged on to the creaking mass of lattice-work which was their refuge from the waves.

A miracle of providence had taken place.

Had it been another kind of craft which had given them shelter, it would have been smashed to pieces a hundred times; but this light mass of bamboo cane and leaves offered no resistance to wind or rain.

They were in the full track of the hurricane, and the wind drove them along like a storm-tossed leaf.

Val lay on one side of Scat, his arm still round the shoulders, his other hand and feet twisted into the network of leaves and canes; while Tommy hung on from the other side.

And so the three wet, unfortunate cast-aways went driving down the full length of Turtle Bay.

Now and again, through the vivid flashes of lightning, Val could see the wet, glistening shapes of Tommy and Scat.

The rain pouring down on them made it almost impossible to breathe, and a numbed stupor fell on Val, in which all sensation and time and action vanished.

Just where they went to, and how they were drifting, was a mere tangled outline of a nightmare.

Once he remembered raising his head as another flash of lightning sped through the darkness, and he saw close to them a great beetling crag of black cliff.

For a moment he thought the raft would be tossed against the cliff and torn to pieces, but they were swirled on again.

He knew afterwards that it was the entrance to Dugong Cave which they had passed then; but at the moment it seemed to Val that it was

the mouth of an awesome pit which they were driving towards.

A few moments later, when the next flash came, the black cliff had vanished, and there was nothing round him, so far as he could see, but seething, white-flecked waves.

His arms became numbed, and he felt that at any moment the overtaxed muscles would relax; but he hung on like grim death, knowing that without his help Tommy would not have the strength to hold the body of the tutor on the crazy raft.

How long that terrible journey lasted, Val never knew, but, suddenly, with a swiftness which seemed incredible, the buffeting, blustering wind ceased.

A few minutes later the raft was floating without tilt or sway, and only the steady downpour of the rain remained to remind them of the storm out of which they had passed, as a man passes from darkness into a lighted room.

A long-drawn sigh sounded; then Tommy's voice was raised in a quavering inquiry.

"Now, what the deuce has happened to us, Val?" he asked.

Cold, and nearly exhausted as he was, Val could not help grinning at the note of aggrieved annoyance in Tommy's voice.

"W—where are we going to—d—down a slide or something?"

Val moved his numbed limbs, and managed to raise himself to a sitting position.

"I think we are round on the leeward side of the island, old chap," he said. "We've been blown into some bay which is sheltered from the storm."

"Then, for goodness' sake let's keep in here!" said Tommy, a thankful break coming in his voice.

"I am afraid we cannot help ourselves very much, old man," Val returned. "We've just got to trust to luck."

A long silence fell.

Val could feel that the raft was floating on slowly. Then suddenly there was a tremor, and he heard the soft grind of sand under the forepart of the leafy structure.

"Quick, Tommy—I think we've got ashore! Look out, old chap!"

Val rolled his cold, numbed figure over the edge of the raft, and lowered himself cautiously into the sea.

To his relief, his feet touched bottom—a soft, firm, sandy bottom.

"All right, Tommy! Come along and help me with Scat!"

In the darkness the two chums groped for their unfortunate companion, and Scat was dragged off the raft. Then Tommy and Val, carrying him between them, waded into the darkness, until at last they found themselves pacing over hard sand.

Tommy's strength gave way then, and Val felt him totter and fall.

"I—I have had enough of it, old chap!" the fat youngster said. "I don't think we can go any farther!"

Val drew Scat round, and seated himself beside Tommy in the darkness.

Then Val, leaning over the tutor, placed his ear to his friend's wet chest and listened for a moment.

The quiet beating of the heart came to his ears, and he drew a breath of relief.

"Scat's all right, Tommy!" he said. "He hasn't gone; but I—I was half-afraid he had!"

Some time later the rain ceased, and Val found himself sinking into a troubled slumber.

A number of dreams haunted him, in which Captain Targe and Ralph were hopelessly involved; then presently his confused dreams

(Continued on next page.)



Val Gordon stared for a long moment at the tall, threatening figure which stood between him and the sky. Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the light, he recognized Targe.

crystallised, and they reached a point where he heard quite clearly the voice of Targe, threatening him with some dire penalty.

In his sleep he felt a cold terror sweep over him, and he tried to cry out.

So clear and distinct did the voice sound that Val suddenly started up to a sitting position.

He found himself looking into the face of the very man who had haunted his dreams! Val Gordon stared for a long moment at the tall, threatening figure which stood between him and the sky. Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the light, recognition came into them, and, with a startled cry, the youngster drew himself to his feet.

A harsh laugh broke from Targe's lips, and, leaning forward, he gripped Val by the shoulder.

"Oh-ho!" the deep voice boomed. "So you are not so dead as I thought you were! Here you, Ralph, come along—quick!"

Under that powerful grip Val was helpless, and Targe, swinging him round, brought Val face to face with Ralph.

Behind Targe's associate were a couple of the native crew armed with rifles.

It was only then that Val saw the Witty-wake lying at anchor close to the shore.

By this time Tommy and Scat had been roused by the deep voice of their ancient enemy, and at a command from Targe the armed natives covered the youngsters with their weapons.

Tommy and Scat were forced to rise, and Targe, releasing his grip on Val's shoulder, stepped back, and his deep, harsh laugh arose again.

"You don't seem very pleased to see me!" he commented. "But I've got a bone to pick with you!"

Ralph placed himself beside Targe, and

his face was twisted into an ugly sneer as he looked at the trio of chums.

"I told you they'd turn up again," he said over his shoulder to Targe; "but you never would believe me."

He nodded to Val.

"Where are the others?" he demanded.

"Where's that confounded brother of yours?"

Trapped though they were, Val's caution did not desert him, and he managed to

exchange a warning look with Tomm, and Scat.

There was no need for them to be told they were in danger. Targe and Ralph had already revealed themselves as their enemies, and under no circumstances would Val play into their hands.

(Another splendid instalment of this grand serial next week.)

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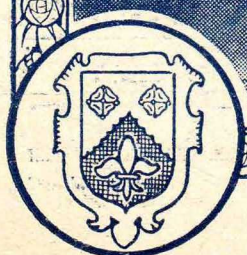
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