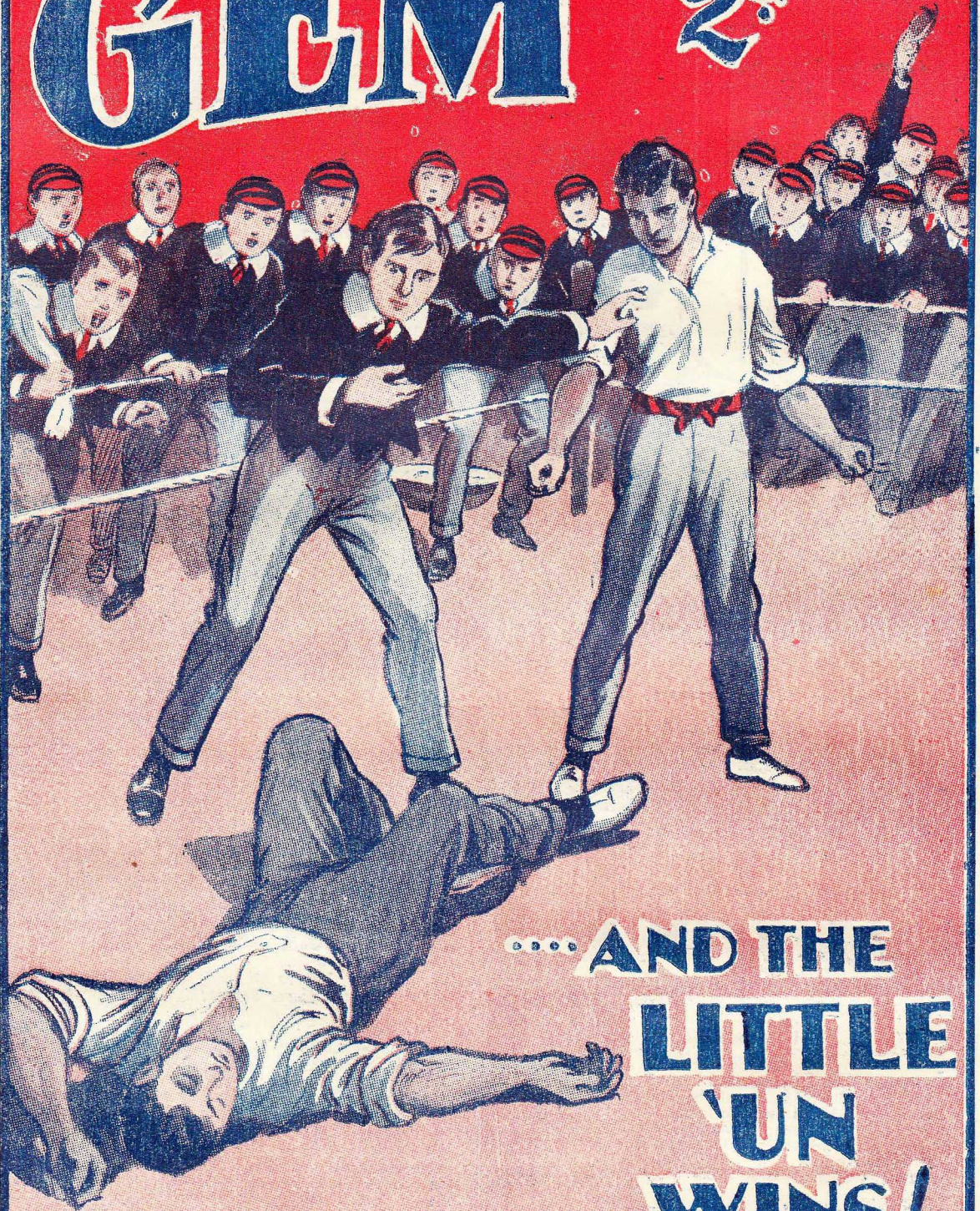


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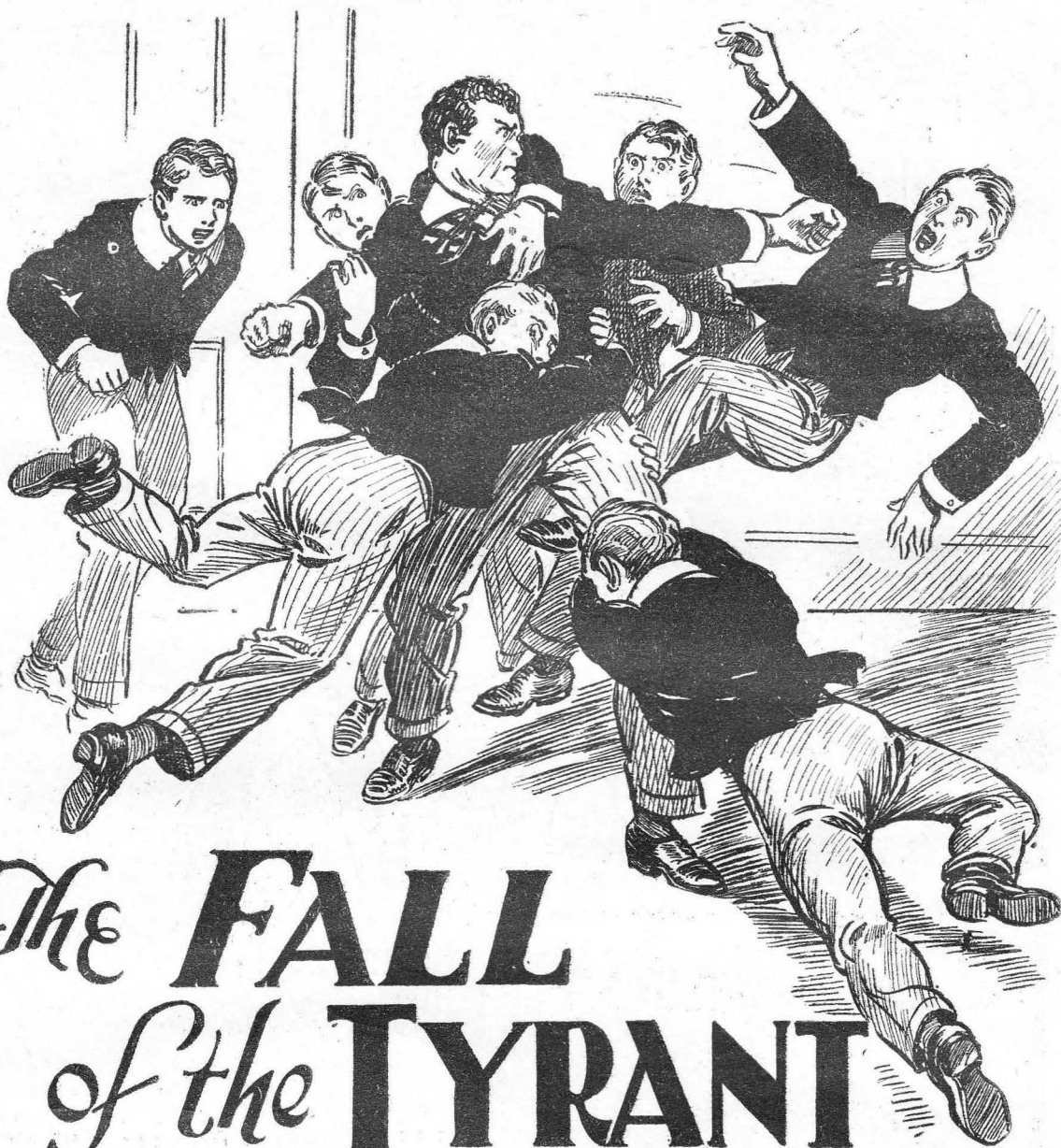
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EVERY WEDNESDAY.



...AND THE
LITTLE
'UN
WINS!

HERE YOU ARE, BOYS! A LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE—



The FALL of the TYRANT

Who wants a black eye, likewise a "prize" nose, and a cauliflower ear? They're all ready for any fellow who dares to stand up to "Bully" Burkett, the Terror of the Lower School!

CHAPTER 1.

Meeting Levison!

"DO I look all right, you chaps?" Frank Levison of the Third Form at St. Jim's asked that question in an anxious tone.

His three bosom pals of the Third—Wally D'Arcy, Reggie Manners, and Curly Gibson—surveyed him with critical stares.

"Yes, you'll do," said Wally at last. "Won't he, you chaps?"

"Oh, rather!" nodded Reggie Manners.

"Good!" murmured Frank, greatly relieved. "Is my hair all right?"

"Just right," said Curly Gibson.

"What about my collar?"

"Oh, that's all right now!" Wally assured him. "I chalked over the ink-blots on it. Why, it almost looks clean now, seen from a bit of a distance—"

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"Oh, good!"

It was seldom—very seldom—that Wally & Co. paid much attention, if any attention at all, to their personal appearance.

But on this particular Saturday afternoon, for some mysterious reason, Levison minor seemed anxious to appear neat and clean and tidy, for once in a way.

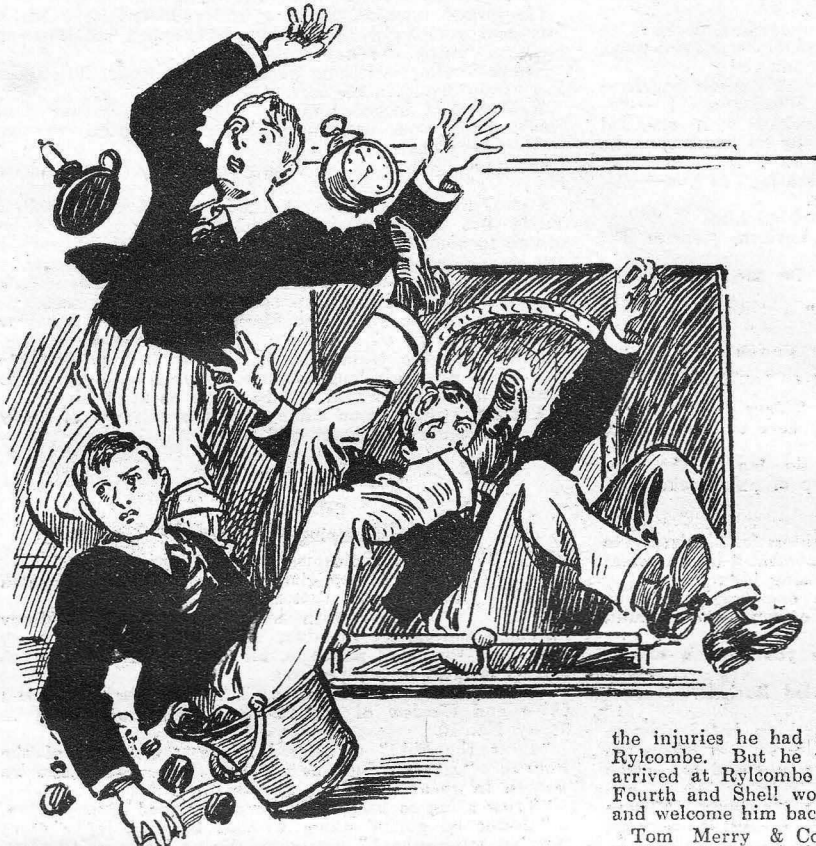
It was amazing—but it was true!

Surrounded by his chums, whose grave faces alone showed that it was some occasion of tremendous importance that had induced him to woo soap and water that afternoon, Frank Levison stood before a cracked mirror that was propped up on one of the desks in the Third Form-room and surveyed his reflection with a good deal of hard-earned satisfaction.

For a Third-Former, there was no doubt that he was looking astonishingly spick and span.

His hair was brushed, his hands were washed, and his face was clean. It was true that his hair, despite ten

—STARRING YOUR FAVOURITES, TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIM'S!



BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

minutes' dogged brushing, had declined to lie down quite as smoothly as Frank could have wished, and that there were lingering remains of ink-smudges behind his ears. But, on the whole, Levison minor looked as clean as a new penny.

Even his collar looked white—astonishingly enough, thanks to a liberal application of chalk by Wally, to hide the ink-stains upon it. And his shoes, for the first time that term, were actually polished. They shone with a wonderful lustre, thanks to an extra-special shoe-polish, the property of Wally's major—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's—which Wally had "borrowed" for Frank's benefit from Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, during the absence from that study of Arthur Augustus.

No wonder there was an air of pride about Wally, Reggie, and Curly as they surveyed young Levison in all his glory!

"You look posh, old man!" observed Reggie in an almost awed voice.

Frank grinned. "I shouldn't have known you, old chap!" declared Curly Gibson. "You look so clean!"

"Why, you—you cheeky ass!" roared Frank, his grin dying away abruptly, as he glared at Curly.

"Eh?" Curly Gibson stared at him. "What are you waxy about? I only said you looked so clean I shouldn't have known you—"

"Do you want a biff on the nose?" hooted Frank.

Curly was still utterly innocent of any intention of giving offence by his tactless remark. But he, too, began to grow indignant.

"It would take more than you to give me a biff on the nose, young Levison!"

"Oh, it would, would it?"

"Yes, it jolly well would!"

"I don't think!"

"No, you haven't anything to think with!"

"Look here, you burbling dummy—"

"Look here, you silly blitherer—"

Frank Levison and Curly Gibson glared at one another in a very warlike way. But Wally, with a frown, pushed his way between the two.

"Chuck rowing, you asses," grunted Wally. "I'm jolly well not going to let you start scrapping, young Levison, after I've spent nearly a giddy hour helping you clean yourself up!" He glanced at his watch. "Time you buzzed along, anyway."

Levison minor's ire died away promptly.

"Yes, I'd better scoot! Ta-ta, you chaps!"

And Frank hurried from the Third Form-room.

It was with an eager, excited face that he turned towards the stairs.

What was, to Levison minor, the most important event of the term was taking place that afternoon.

His major, Ernest Levison of the Fourth, was returning to St. Jim's.

Ernest Levison had been away from the school for some while, recovering from

the injuries he had sustained in a railway accident near Rylcombe. But he was coming back at last. His train arrived at Rylcombe at two-thirty, and his friends of the Fourth and Shell would be there in a body to meet him and welcome him back.

Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell, Blake & Co. of the Fourth, and Reginald Talbot of the Shell were all going, with Ernest Levison's particular chums—Sidney Clive, the South African junior, and Ralph Reckness Cardew, the dandy of the Fourth—to the railway station. Levison minor was going, too.

Hence his amazing cleanliness!

For no one in the world, perhaps, save his beloved major, would Levison minor have spent a solid hour washing and cleaning himself. The fact that he had done so spoke volumes for his affection and admiration for his brother.

Frank went up the stairs two at a time on his way to the Shell passage.

The party that was to meet Levison at the station was gathering in Tom Merry's study—Study No. 10—to set off together.

Levison minor was breathless as he turned into the Shell passage and hurried along towards Study No. 10.

"Hi, you kid!"

A growling voice caused Frank suddenly to turn his head. In passing the door of Study No. 7, the door had opened, to reveal the huge, muscular figure of Frederick Burkett, the captain of the junior school.

The huge bully of the Shell, with his tawny frame and beetling brows, was not a very charming-looking individual. Levison's face took on an uneasy look as Burkett stepped out into the passage, barring his way.

"Half a minute, kid!" growled Burkett. "I want you!"

"What do you mean?" retorted the fag defiantly. "I—"

Burkett's great fist closed upon his collar.

"You're going to buzz across to the New House for me, with a note for Chowle," said Burkett in a bullying tone.

"See?"

"Rats!" gasped Levison. "Lemme go! You can't make me fag for you! You're not in the Sixth, you rotter! Hands off—"

"No cheek!" roared Burkett.

With a swing of his arm he sent Frank Levison staggering breathlessly into the study through the open doorway. He lurched in after him and closed the door, putting his back to it, as the fag jumped forward to escape.

"Not so quick!" grinned Burkett. "You're going to take that note to Chowle for me—"

"I'm not!" panted Frank Levison.

He was already late for joining Tom Merry & Co. and the others. Besides, in any case, Burkett had not the

lightest right to order anyone to fag for him. Only the Sixth had fags at St. Jim's—certainly not juniors in the Shell!

But Frederick Burkett had often succeeded in bullying Third-Formers into fagging for him, and he did not mean to take a refusal from Frank Levison now.

"Listen to me, you little cub," growled Burkett angrily—"you'll get hurt if you don't do as I tell you! I—"

"Rats!" Levison minor faced Burkett with clenched fists and blazing eyes. Though inwardly he was scared, he was not the youngster to show the white feather. "Let me go, blow you! You can't make me fag for you—"

"Can't I?" grinned Burkett evilly.

He snapped the key in the lock behind him.

"Let me out," breathed Frank Levison, "or—I'll yell!"

"Will you go to the New House for me, hang you?" demanded Burkett, with a scowl.

"No! Jolly well go yourself—"

"You'll be sorry for it!"

"I won't! I've got to go to the station to meet my major!" A pleading note had crept into Levison minor's voice. "I—I shall be late—"

"Think I care?" jeered Burkett. "Very well, then, if you won't go you can jolly well stay here till you change your silly little mind!"

He jumped forward and grasped the fag by the arm, in a vice-like grip. A breathless gasp of pain broke from Levison.

"Oh, you brute! Help—help!"

But the Third-Former was too breathless for his desperate cries to be very loud. And the next moment a handkerchief had been thrust into his mouth, silencing him.

Burkett held the fag easily with one hand while he twisted a second handkerchief round Levison minor's mouth, fastening the gag in place.

With a heavy hand he dealt the youngster a savage blow on the side of the head.

"So you'd yell, would you?" growled Burkett. "Well, you won't yell now!"

An evil grin appeared on his anything but handsome countenance. Jerking the gagged Third-Former across the room he took a length of cord from the cupboard and lashed Frank's arms behind him.

Frank Levison glared helplessly at the bully. There was fear in his eyes, and Burkett, seeing it, laughed harshly.

"I'm going to lick you for cheek, young Levison!" growled Burkett. "And when I've licked you, to teach you to do as you're told in future, I'm going to keep you locked in this study till tea-time! You won't get a chance of meeting your precious major, and you can make up your mind to that!"

There was an incoherent sound from behind the fag's gag—a groan of utter dismay.

He was utterly in Burkett's power, and it was just like the new captain of the Shell to torment him by keeping his victim from meeting his brother, knowing how much he had been looking forward to doing so.

With an evil grin, Burkett picked up an old cricket stump that was lying in one corner of the study.

He turned to the fag, standing helplessly in the centre of the room, his arms fastened behind him, and effectively prevented from shouting for help by the cruelly tight gag that was tied round his mouth.

But even so, Frank Levison made a stumbling movement towards the door—evidently with the intention of kicking upon it, in the hope of attracting the attention of someone outside. Burkett, however, was too quick for him. With a big stride the tyrant of the Shell put himself between his victim and the door.

"Now I'm going to lick you black and blue," growled Burkett maliciously. "Just by way of a beginning, you little cad!"

He jumped forward and caught hold of the helpless fag by the collar, twisting him round.

Thwack!

The cricket stump descended with cruel force, and from the writhing figure of the fag there came a stifled cry, choked back by the gag.

Again and again the stump rose and fell.

Burkett was enjoying himself.

Every writhing movement of his helpless victim brought a grin to his face, every groan of pain delighted him. But he threw aside the stump at last and jerked his captive across to a chair.

A minute later Frank Levison, still bound and gagged, was seated tied to the chair his eyes blazing, sobs of fury and pain shaking his helpless figure.

Burkett gave a guffaw of laughter.

"I'm going to leave you to think over the error of your ways," jeered Burkett. "I dare say I'll let you go at

tea-time—if you're good! 'Fraid you won't meet your brother at the station, will you? Ha, ha, ha!"

He turned towards the door and unlocked it. With a last grin over his burly shoulder he stepped out into the passage, taking the key with him.

Frank Levison, writhing vainly in his bonds, heard the key turned again in the lock.

Burkett had locked him in! But escape in any case would have been impossible so securely bound was he to the heavy chair.

He gave up his useless struggles. Hot, dry sobs shook him.

It was not the thrashing he had received at the bully's hands, but the despairing knowledge that he would be unable to meet his brother, Ernest Levison, that brought the tears flowing down the wretched fag's white cheeks.

Across the quad outside the window he heard two o'clock begin to strike, in the deep notes of the school clock.

At any minute now Tom Merry & Co. and the others would be setting off for the station without him.

And when the train bearing Ernest Levison back to St. Jim's, after his long absence, steamed into Rylcombe Station his minor would not be there to meet him!

A faint, stifled groan came from the prisoner of Study No. 7 as the clock struck the hour.

CHAPTER 2.

A Bumping for Burkett!

"W HERE the dickens is young Levison?"

Tom Merry glanced impatiently at his watch as he asked that question.

Together with his two study-mates, Harry Manners and Monty Lowther, Tom was waiting in Study No. 10 of the Shell passage, all ready to set off for the station to meet Ernest Levison.

Blake & Co. of the Fourth, Talbot of the Shell, and Clive and Cardew of the Fourth, were also waiting in Study No. 10.

"Blow the kid!" ejaculated Blake, the leader of the Fourth. "He said he'd be here on time! He knows we wanted to go at two!"

"Trust a fag to keep us waiting," grinned Sidney Clive.

"Better be gettin' along without the kid, if he don't turn up soon—what?" murmured Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah!" nodded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Oh, give him another minute!" said Talbot good-naturedly. "The young 'un's so keen to meet his brother—I expect he's been spending a bit of time cleaning himself up, for once!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, that may be it!"

But another minute passed, and another, without any sign of Levison minor.

"Well, if we wait any longer we shall miss the giddy train ourselves!" exclaimed Tom at last. "We can't wait any longer for the young ass. Come on!"

He opened the door, and the juniors left the study in a body and turned towards the stairs.

As they passed the door of Study No. 7 Monty Lowther grinned ruefully.

"It's rotten, old Levison coming back to find that rotten bruiser, Burkett, captain now!" he grunted. "Even though he's fit to play footer again, Burkett isn't likely to give old Levison a place in the team, any more than he does us!"

"Yaas, it'll be wathah a shock for Levison, findin' how things have gone to pot," agreed Arthur Augustus mournfully.

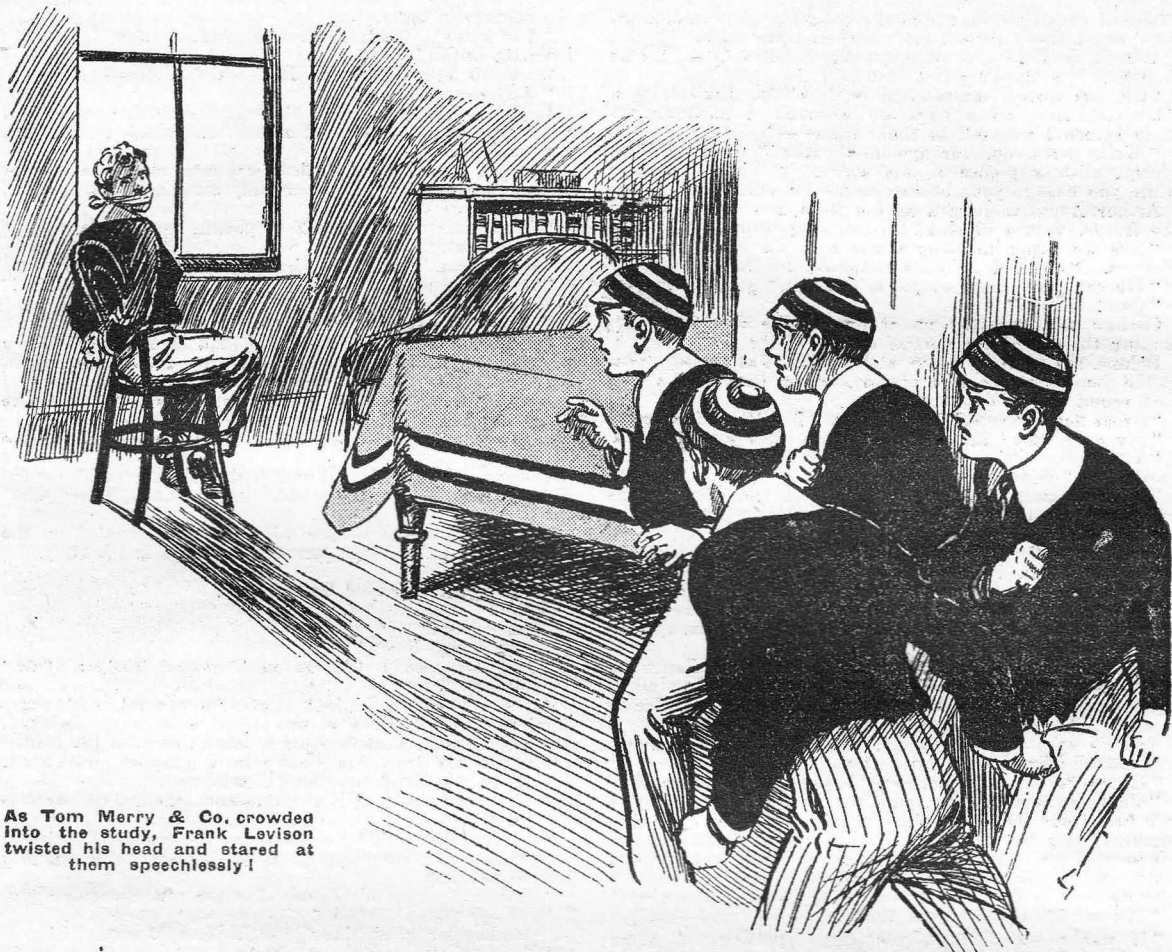
Ralph Reckness Cardew coloured slightly as the group passed on towards the stairs and descended to the hall.

It was true enough that things had "gone to pot," as the swell of St. Jim's expressed it, since the election of Frederick Burkett as junior captain in place of Tom Merry. And it was chiefly the fault of Cardew that Burkett had been elected skipper!

Consequently, under Burkett's blund-ring, tyrannical captaincy, everything was wrong in the Junior School. The junior eleven had been beaten hollow by schools that St. Jim's had usually defeated, and the New House was putting on tremendous airs and claiming to be cock House, with the School House quite unable to make them eat their words. All this, since it was Burkett's fault, was indirectly the fault of Ralph Reckness Cardew, the fellow who had succeeded in putting him in the seat of power.

It had been owing to a bitter feud between himself and Tom Merry, the previous junior captain, that Cardew had set himself the task of accomplishing Tom Merry's downfall, and the setting up of Fred Burkett, the bully of the Shell, in Tom Merry's place.

That feud was over now.



As Tom Merry & Co. crowded into the study, Frank Levison twisted his head and stared at them speechlessly!

But though the feud was over, its disastrous results were by no means at an end!

Cardew had found it easy enough to bring about Tom Merry's downfall—but he had found that he could not now undo the harm he had done.

Deeply though Cardew regretted having put Burkett in the seat of power, by his clever schemes, it was too late for regrets.

Burkett was junior captain, and determined to stick to the captaincy at all costs!

But Cardew said nothing as the little crowd of Ernest Levison's friends descended the stairs to the hall, and passed out of the big doorway into the sunny quad.

Three fags were standing at the foot of the steps, as Tom Merry & Co. and the others emerged from the School House.

Wally D'Arcy, Reggie Manners, and Curly Gibson were wondering how to spend their half-holiday.

Wally had a new catapult in his pocket. The question was, whether to go and "pot" at rabbits in Rylcombe Wood, or whether to use the New House fags for a target, or whether to sally forth in search of Grammar School "game" in the neighbourhood of the village.

It was a very difficult problem! But for the moment, at any rate, it was shelved at sight of the Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers emerging from the doorway at the top of the steps.

"Hallo, Gus!" sang out Wally cheerfully to his major.

"Hallo, Harry!" grinned Reggie Manners to Manners of the Shell.

"I say," broke in Curly Gibson, "where's young Levison?"

"That's what we want to know!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"You've not seen him, kids?"

"Rather! We helped him posh himself up!" returned Wally, in surprise. "Mean to say he didn't turn up at your study?"

"Rummy!" commented Reggie Manners, equally astonished.

"P'r'aps he changed his mind, and biked off to the station by himself," suggested Curly.

"He must have done," nodded Wally. "Well, I don't blame him, not wanting to be seen in public with a lot

of Shell and Fourth asses! We Third-Form men have our dignity to consider, you know!"

Tom Merry laughed good-naturedly at Wally's chaff. So did most of the others. But Arthur Augustus adjusted his gleaming monocle and surveyed his scapegrace minor with a very frigid glance.

"Bai Jove! Wally, you cheeky little wascal, I wefuse to allow you to speak in that wude and uttably diswespectful mannah to your eldahs!"

"Go hon!" grinned Wally.

"As your majah—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Bai Jove! I considah it necessawy to administah a box on the yah for your impertinence!" declared Arthur Augustus warmly. "Come heah!"

"Rats!" said Wally.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard, and took an indignant stride towards his grinning minor, with the intention of carrying out his threat. But Wally had darted hastily away, and Arthur Augustus, missing his footing on the steps, gave a sudden yell as he found himself flying through the air with waving arms and legs.

Crash! Splash!

A puddle, left by the recent rains, received the elegant figure of the swell of St. Jim's, and water flew in all directions.

"Yawwoooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors on the steps doubled up with laughter. So did Wally, Reggie and Curly, the three Third-Formers, as they watched the scene from a safe distance.

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Talbot.

"Trust dear old Gussy to lend a little comic relief, what?" grinned Cardew.

"Hard luck, Gussy!" chuckled Digby.

Arthur Augustus scrambled to his feet, with speechless wrath.

His trousers were plentifully splashed with mud, and as he surveyed the damage done to them, the swell of St. Jim's gave a groan of anguish.

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally, Reggie, and Curly—then vanished round the corner of the building, lest the enraged swell of St. Jim's turned his attention upon them.

But it was of his once-elegant trousers that Arthur Augustus was thinking just then!

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's faintly. "My clobber! These bags are ruined! I must change them before I pwoceed to the station—"

"Well, buck up, for goodness' sake!" grinned Tom Merry, with a glance at his watch. "We'll wait here while you change your blessed bags—but buck up!"

Arthur Augustus limped up the steps and vanished into the House, with a glare at his grinning chums.

"Are we going to hang about here all day?" grunted Herries. "Gussy'll be ages changing his blessed bags!"

"We can give him a couple of minutes," grinned Talbot. "Gad! Look!"

Cardew was pointing up at one of the windows overlooking the quad—the window of one of the Shell studios.

Behind the glass, a white, staring face was gazing down at the juniors at the foot of the steps—a face with a gag tied round it.

"Great Scott!" yelled Tom Merry. "It's young Levison!"

"My only hat!" breathed Blake, in utter astonishment.

"That's Burkett's study, isn't it?" cried Monty Lowther excitedly. "What the dickens—"

The next moment Monty and Talbot and Digby were racing up the steps followed by Tom Merry and Cardew and the rest.

It did not take long for the excited, mystified juniors to reach Study No. 7 in the Shell passage—nor did it take them long to smash open the locked door. They crowded into the study, and Frank Levison, bound to the chair by the window, twisted his head and stared at them speechlessly.

With his legs tied to the chair, it had been difficult for the bound youngster to work himself across to the window with his feet. But he had managed it, and, by wonderful luck, Cardew had seen him.

Frank's eyes were gleaming, as Tom Merry, Manners, and Sidney Clive hastily freed him.

"It was Burkett, I suppose—" began Tom Merry grimly.

"Yes!" panted the fag, rubbing his wrists, which were inflamed from the cords that had bound them. "I was coming along to your study and the beast collared me. He wanted me to go to the New House for him and when I wouldn't, he licked me with a cricket stump and left me tied up here! He knew I was going to meet Ernie—"

"The cad!" breathed Tom Merry.

"It was a bit of luck, you chaps spotting me, after I'd managed to work along to the window!" said Frank, with a faint grin.

Now that he had been freed, and was still in time to meet his major, Frank Levison's spirits were reviving, despite the cruel licking he had suffered at the bully's hands.

"Come on, kid," said Tom Merry, in grim tones.

He glanced at the others.

"Burkett ought to be made to pay for this!" he said, through his teeth.

"Rather!" snorted Manners hotly, and there was an angry murmur of agreement from the others.

Tom dropped a hand on to the fag's shoulder, and led him from the study.

"Come on, you chaps," said Tom Merry. "We can talk about Burkett later! We've got to get along to the station as quick as we can just now."

The rest followed Tom down the stairs. They found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with changed trousers, ready in the hall, looking for them. The swell of St. Jim's eyes gleamed with indignation as he heard of their discovery of Frank Levison.

"Bai Jove! That howwible wottah Burkett ought to be thrashed!" declared Arthur Augustus, as they crossed the quad towards the gates. "I considah—"

"Worst of it is, there's nobody who can thrash him!" growled Tom Merry.

Tom Merry himself, the finest boxer in the junior school, had been badly beaten in a fight with the bully of the Shell.

There was a sudden gasp from Frank Levison.

"I say, there he is!"

The burly figure of Frederick Burkett was crossing the quad from the direction of the New House. He caught sight of Frank Levison with the group of juniors heading for the gates, and came to a sudden halt, staring at the fag in astonishment.

It was clearly a shock to Burkett, seeing the fag he had left securely trussed up in the locked study, now free in the quad!

Tom Merry's face set.

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He strode up to Burkett, and planted himself in front of the astonished bully.

"You cad!" Tom's lips curled contemptuously. "You bullying hound!"

Burkett's face went dark. His great fists clenched.

"Why, you—you—"

He broke off, as he found the others crowding round him with grim faces. A look of sudden uneasiness flashed into his sullen face.

Though, individually, Burkett was more than a match for any of them, even the gigantic bully could not hope to stand up against the whole crowd.

"Hands off!" snarled Burkett, putting up his fists.

"Rats!" snapped Talbot.

"Bump him!" yelled Herries.

"That's the ticket!" nodded Tom Merry. "Collar him!"

There was a rush.

Burkett hit out with all his terrific strength.

Talbot reeled before a smashing blow on the jaw. Digby went flying, lifted clean off his feet by a terrible straight left. Sidney Clive, too, went spinning.

But then numbers told! Burkett was borne, struggling, to the ground, and his arms and legs were held securely.

He gave a bellow of rage and fear as he was raised into the air.

"Leggo, you cads! I'll smash the lot of you!" panted Burkett furiously. "I'll smash you for this! I— Oh!"

Bump!

The bully's threat finished abruptly as he landed on the ground with a force that jarred every bone in his body.

"Yow!"

"And again!" gasped Tom Merry.

Bump!

"Yarooooooop!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Ow! Grooooooh! Oh, my hat!" gasped Burkett. "Oh! Yoooooooop!"

Again and again Burkett smote the ground, and every bump brought a bellow of wrath and pain from the bully.

Not until he had been bumped a dozen times did the School House juniors drop him finally in a gasping, breathless, aching heap. Grinning, though very grimly, Tom Merry and his companions left him there, and marched off towards the gates.

"I twust that will be a lesson to the wottah!" grinned Arthur Augustus breathlessly, as the juniors passed out into Rylcombe Lane.

"Rather!" chuckled Frank Levison, in great delight.

"Good egg!"

"We haven't much time," put in Tom Merry. "Step it out!"

And the juniors went swinging down the lane at a brisk pace, which Frank Levison had difficulty in equalling, on their way at last to meet the train that was bringing Ernest Levison of the Fourth back to St Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

For His Minor's Sake!

"RYLCOMBE!"

The hoarse voice of a porter announcing that familiar name brought a cheery grin to the face of the athletic-looking youngster seated in a corner of one of the first-class compartments, as the local train drew slowly to a standstill beside the platform.

He jumped quickly to his feet, took down his suit-case from the rack, and swung open the carriage door.

It was Ernest Levison.

There was a happy grin on Levison's good-looking face as he jumped out on to the platform, and glanced quickly round.

For a moment his face fell. The platform seemed deserted. But, even as an exclamation of disappointment broke from him, a group of hurrying figures came into view from the direction of the booking-office. A few moments later Ernest Levison's hand was being pumped vigorously by junior after junior.

"Ernest, old chap—"

"Levison, old hoss—"

"How are you feelin', deah boy?"

"Feeling great, thanks, Gussy!" laughed Levison. "It's great, being back!" He clapped a hand on his minor's shoulder, with an affectionate grip. "How's things, young 'un?"

Levison minor's face was shining happily.

Ernest Levison glanced round. His eyes met Cardew's. He took a quick step towards the slacker of the Fourth, and their hands clasped.

"Cardew, old chap—"

"Rippin', seein' you lookin' so fit!" murmured Cardew, with gleaming eyes. "Gad! It's great, you bein' back!"

Their eyes met in perfect understanding.

When Levison had left St. Jim's, sick and ill, there had been a breach between him and Cardew. But the old misunderstanding, that had caused not only Cardew's quarrel with Levison and Clive, but also his feud with Tom Merry, had been cleared up since then, with the result that all was well again between the three chums of Study No. 9.

There was no hint in their manner that there had ever been any breach between them.

But the pressure of that mutual grip told each of them all the other could have wished to say.

"Do you want to cab it to the school, or walk, old chap?" inquired Clive.

"I'd like to walk it," Levison told him.

"Good egg!"

Five minutes later, Ernest Levison and his friends, and his excited minor, were strolling along Rylcombe Lane in the direction of St. Jim's, the village left behind them.

Levison's luggage had been left at the station, to be sent on to the school by carrier.

Ernest Levison asked many eager questions, as he strolled along, concerning happenings at St. Jim's during his absence. His face went glum as he heard details of Burkett's captaincy.

"Rotten!" he exclaimed, frowning. "This chap Burkett must be the giddy limit! He's as strong as a horse, you said in a letter of yours, Clivey, didn't you?"

"Yaas, he's as strong as a horse, all right!" put in Arthur Augustus disconsolately. "That's the twouble! No one can thwash him. Why, he even thwashed Tom Mewwy!"

Tom nodded, with a wry smile.

"That's true enough," he said quietly.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Levison. "He must be a terror!"

"He is!"

There was a frown on Levison's face, as the juniors strode on along the lane.

From all accounts, it seemed fairly certain that he was not going to find St. Jim's, and the School House, such pleasant places as he had known them in the days of Tom Merry's captaincy!

There had been big changes at St. Jim's during his absence, as he realised.

"Yes, Burkett's a beast!" said Frank Levison.

The intensity of his tone caused his brother to glance down at him in surprise.

"Why, what's he done to you, kid?" asked Ernest Levison sharply. "Has he been bullying you?"

With an angry snort Frank told his major what had happened that afternoon.

Levison's face went dark.

"Great Scott!" he muttered.

"It's all right. We bumped Burkett in the quad for that," explained Blake cheerfully.

Levison said nothing. But that dark frown remained. Tom Merry gave him a quick glance, and took his arm.

He could read Ernest Levison's thoughts just then, and he wanted to warn him.

"If you're thinking of tackling Burkett about this, I shouldn't!" Tom advised quietly. "I know how you must feel. But Burkett would only smash you. You don't realise yet what a huge lout he is—how frightfully hefty. We bumped the rotter for bullying your minor, so you can afford to forget it, old chap."

"But hang it, Tom—" Levison broke off. He was clearly astonished that Tom Merry should advise him to take no notice of the fact that another junior had been bullying his minor. "Even if you chaps did bump him—thanks for doing it—I'm my minor's brother, and it's up to me—"

"I—I say, Ernie," gasped Frank nervously, "I wouldn't have said anything if I'd thought you'd take it like this. You mustn't tackle that beast Burkett. Why, he—he can lick even Tom Merry—"

His brother broke in with a grim laugh, and shrugged his shoulders.

At that moment the party turned a bend in the lane, and the gates of St. Jim's came in sight. Levison's eyes lit up at sight of the ancient, familiar gateway, and in an instant the subject of Burkett was forgotten.

"The old place looks just the same," grinned Levison.

"Well, you didn't expect to see a new golden roof on Taggy's lodge, and jewel-studded gates, I suppose?" queried Monty Lowther humorously.

Levison laughed.

A number of fellows were in the quad as Levison and his friends entered the gates. At sight of him juniors came hurrying across from all sides, eager to welcome him back to St. Jim's. Even Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, who was going out with Darrell, paused to say a word to the returned junior before strolling on.

Figgins & Co. of the New House, emerging from Mrs.

Taggles' little tuckshop, grinned a cheery welcome at sight of Levison of the Fourth.

"Hallo! Hallo!" sang out Figgy. "So here you are, all alive and kicking!"

He and Levison shook hands.

"Glad to be back—eh?" grinned Figgy. "I s'pose you know that New House is cock House now?"

"Bai Joye! Weally, Figgay—"

"Well, it's true!" affirmed Figgins serenely. "We've ragged the School House time and again lately, and they've not been able to do a thing. And at footer, Levison, old scout, New House licked School House by seven giddy goals to nil."

"Wha-at?" yelled Levison.

"Seven—nil!" grinned Figgins. "Oh, we're cock House all right!"

And there were broad smiles on the faces of George Figgins, George Francis Kerr, and David Llewellyn Wynn, as the New House trio strolled away.

Levison stared at Tom Merry breathlessly.

"Seven—nil!" he echoed. "Is that really true?"

"'Fraid so," nodded Tom gloomily. "Thanks to Burkett."

"Who played for the School House?" asked Levison, in a wondering voice.

"Burkett, Crooke, Mellish, Roylance, Reilly—chaps who hardly know a football from a goal-post," growled Sidney Clive.

"My hat!"

"They're all barred from the footer, now Burkett's captain," said Blake angrily.

There was a queer look on Levison's face as he crossed with the others towards the School House.

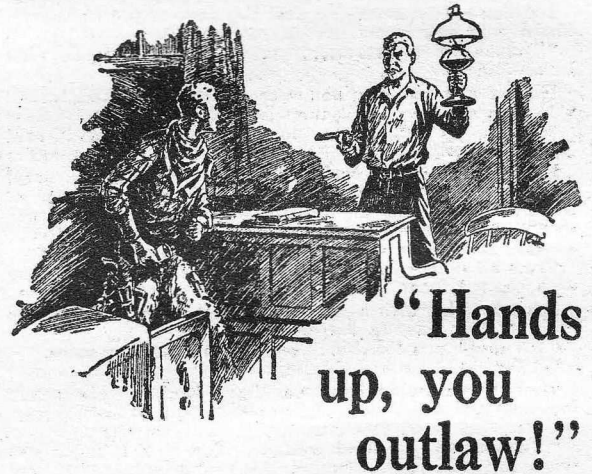
More and more he was realising that astounding changes had taken place at St. Jim's during his absence.

As the party entered the big doorway a brawny figure was standing by the board, pinning up a notice; a rugged, surly face that was unfamiliar to Ernest Levison glanced towards them.

It was Burkett himself.

At sight of Tom Merry & Co. the junior captain scowled savagely. Memories of his recent bumping at their hands were very fresh in his mind. But they were in force, and he had evidently no intention of tackling them.

(Continued on next page.)



A sudden gleam of light, and the Rio Kid swung round to find himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver . . . caught red-handed with his boss's dollars in his hand. But, outlaw though he is, the Rio Kid's not guilty! Many stirring and dramatic adventures has he experienced, but none of them come up to those that are described in the long complete Western Yarn that appears in this week's issue of

THE POPULAR 2 THE FAMOUS SCHOOL STORY PAPER Every Tuesday. Don't miss this week's issue!

Then his eyes fell on Ernest Levison, who was staring back at him with more curiosity than anything.

So this was the fellow who had bagged the captaincy, and under whose regime the New House had established a claim to being cock House—the fellow who had brought a ten-nil defeat to St. Jim's at the hands of the Grammar School, as Levison had heard.

This was Burkett—the fellow, too, who had been bullying his minor.

Levison's face set in grim lines.

Despite all he had been told, Levison was rather taken aback for a moment at the terrifically muscular appearance of the Samson of the Shell. He could scarcely feel surprised now that even Tom Merry had fallen before him. But even so, Ernest Levison had not yet realised what most of the St. Jim's juniors had discovered to their cost—that when dealing with Fred Burkett discretion was sometimes the better part of valour.

With gleaming eyes Levison stepped towards the huge, ungainly figure of the captain of the Shell.

"So you are Burkett, are you?"

Burkett stared at him. A dark frown appeared on his face.

"Yes," he growled. "Who the dickens are you?"

"My name's Levison."

"Oh! So you're Levison?"

Burkett grinned unpleasantly. He had heard a good deal about Ernest Levison of the Fourth—knew that he was a friend of Tom Merry & Co., and a member of the old junior eleven which had now been completely "dropped" under the new regime.

"So you are Levison, are you?" repeated Burkett rudely.

"Well, I dare say you'll find things a bit different here now. I'm skipper these days. What I say, goes!"

He threw out his great chest boastfully.

"So I hear," nodded Levison.

Something in his tone caused Burkett to glare at him suspiciously.

"What do you mean?" he growled, scowling darkly.

"I hear that things have gone to pot, with you as junior skipper," went on Levison.

"Eh?" bellowed Burkett. "What's that? Why, I'll—"

"I hear, too, that you were bullying my minor this afternoon," said Levison, in even tones. "That you tried to keep him from coming to the station to meet me—"

"Look here," broke in Burkett truculently, "you talk too much!" He thrust a scowling face close to Levison's. "You don't seem to realise that I'm cock of the walk here. Chaps who talk to me in that tone get hurt—see?"

"Thanks for the warning!" said Levison. "Here's what I think of it."

His fist shot out, straight from the shoulder, and landed with stinging force on Burkett's jaw.

"That's for bullying my minor, you great lout!" said Levison fiercely.

Burkett had reeled back with a roar of pain and rage. Tom Merry & Co. and their companions gave gasps of consternation. They knew that Levison had done it now; and he was nowhere near a match for Frederick Burkett, athletic though he was, and full of pluck.

From all sides other juniors were converging on the scene with excited faces.

Burkett stood with a hand to his jaw, surveying Levison with an ugly glint in his eyes.

"I'll smash you for that!" he said, in a choking voice.

"All right!" nodded Levison.

There was a sobbing cry from Frank Levison. He sprang forward, and faced Burkett with flaming eyes and quivering lips, his small fists clenched.

"You brute!" he cried wildly. "You bully! Don't you touch my major, you beast! Leave him alone! If you hurt him, I—I'll go to the Head—"

Burkett thrust the almost hysterical youngster aside with one hand impatiently. Levison moved quickly to his minor's side, and laid a hand on the Third-Former's quivering shoulder.

"Don't worry about me, Frank," breathed Ernest Levison. "Just buzz along, there's a good kid!"

For a moment a rebellious look appeared on the excited fag's face. But that definite request from his beloved major could not be refused.

With a quivering lip, Frank Levison stumbled away. His brother turned to Burkett.

"What about the gym?" he said.

Tom Merry stepped quickly forward.

"Look here, Burkett," he said angrily, "you can't do it! Levison's been ill—"

"I'm all right now, thanks," broke in Levison quietly.

"I can fight him!"

"But—"

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Sidney Clive had stepped between Burkett and Levison, with a pale, set face. But Levison would have none of it. "I hit him, you chaps," he said in an even tone. "I can't refuse to fight him after that, even if I wanted to."

"No, but—"

"Will you chaps second me?" went on Levison, with a glance at Clive and Cardew.

Ralph Reckness Cardew was looking the coolest of Levison's friends. But despite his calm exterior, inwardly he was as anxious as Clive.

"Look here, Levison," said Cardew, "isn't it rather redic, you fightin' Burkett the very minute you set foot in the old Alma Mater again? What about callin' it off?"

"Not unless Burkett wishes to," said Levison.

"By George, no!" roared Burkett. "I'm going to smash him up!"

Levison's friends looked at the burly junior's determined face, and did not argue further.

It would clearly have been useless to do so.

But it was with gloomy faces that they all turned and marched in a body, with Levison and Burkett in their midst, out of the School House and across to the gymnasium.

Ernest Levison was soon to learn from personal experience why Frederick Burkett was known as the bully of the Shell!

CHAPTER 4.

The Bully's Victim!

THUDD!

Levison was down again.

A smashing right-hand blow from Burkett's terrible fist had dropped him to the floor of the gymnasium like a log.

"Poor old Levison," breathed Tom Merry.

"It's wotten!" muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

As the chums of the Shell and Fourth had known must be the case, Ernest Levison had stood no shadow of a chance against the hefty Samson of the Shell.

From the first moment of the fight, Burkett had waded in with the evident intention of giving Levison the licking of his life.

There was a malicious scowling grin on Burkett's face.

Filled as he was with the sullen resentment for the bumping he had received at the hands of Levison's friends that afternoon, he was determined to avenge that bumping now—by smashing into Ernest Levison!

Levison was a useful man with his fists against any junior of normal strength. But against Frederick Burkett, he was all but helpless. He did not stand an earthly chance against the herculean Shell fellow.

The fight had only been in progress for a minute or so, yet already Levison had been downed half a dozen times—blow after blow smashing in upon his battered face, knocking him down almost as soon as he had staggered dazedly up.

The fight was a farce, and as Levison went down again before a sledge-hammer punch, the onlookers felt that they could stand it no more.

As Levison, reeling half-blinded, managed somehow to gain his feet again, there was a yell of indignation against Burkett when the bully of the Shell, grinning brutally, raised his fist again to strike.

"Stop it, Burkett!"

"Let him go!"

"Keep back, you cad!"

Sidney Clive jumped into the ring, and threw in the sponge he had been holding, as Levison's second. He placed himself between his chum and Frederick Burkett, grim-faced.

"The fight's finished!" snapped Clive. "Can't you see I've chucked in the sponge?"

"Stand aside, Clivey," muttered Levison thickly. "I—I—"

His words broke off. He reeled, and Clive caught him.

Burkett turned away with an angry snarl, as half a dozen fellows jumped into the ring and aided Clive and Cardew in carrying Levison away.

Percy Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth, and one of Burkett's chief cronies, sniggered.

"He, he, he!" he chuckled vindictively. "Don't Levison's precious pals look sick? He, he, he! Serve him right!"

Burkett only growled. He had wanted to give his beaten opponent the final knock-out blow, but he had not dared, with the crowd so dead against him.

Had he struck Levison after Clive had thrown in the sponge, Burkett would have been very roughly handled, and he knew it!

He swaggered from the gym, followed by Mellish

and Gerald Croke, with a scowl upon his face. But in the quad he grinned, and gave a sudden guffaw.

"Ha ha, ha! I hope Levison likes the welcome I've given him, now he's come back at St. Jim's!" guffawed Burkett.

And with grinning faces, Burkett & Co. strutted across towards the School House.

In the gym, an anxious crowd surrounded Ernest Levison, where he lay on the mattress by the vaulting-horse, with Cardew supporting his head and shoulders while Clive bathed his bruised face.

"Poor old Levison!" muttered Talbot of the Shell, with a dark frown on his usually sunny face. "That brute Burkett—"

"He was bound to get licked," put in Blake gloomily. "But he wouldn't listen to reason."

"Didn't realise what he was up against, I suppose," grunted Kangaroo, the Australian junior. "Hallo, he's coming round!"

Levison's eyes had flickered open.

He grinned very faintly after a moment or two of dazed staring.

"How are you feelin', old chap?" asked Cardew.

"I bit off more than I could chew, didn't I?" muttered Levison faintly. "Great Scott! That chap Burkett is a

regular prize-fighter! Blowed if ever I want to take him on again!"

He grinned ruefully.

Ernest Levison did not wonder now that the advent of Frederick Burkett at St. Jim's had brought about some drastic changes in the junior school!

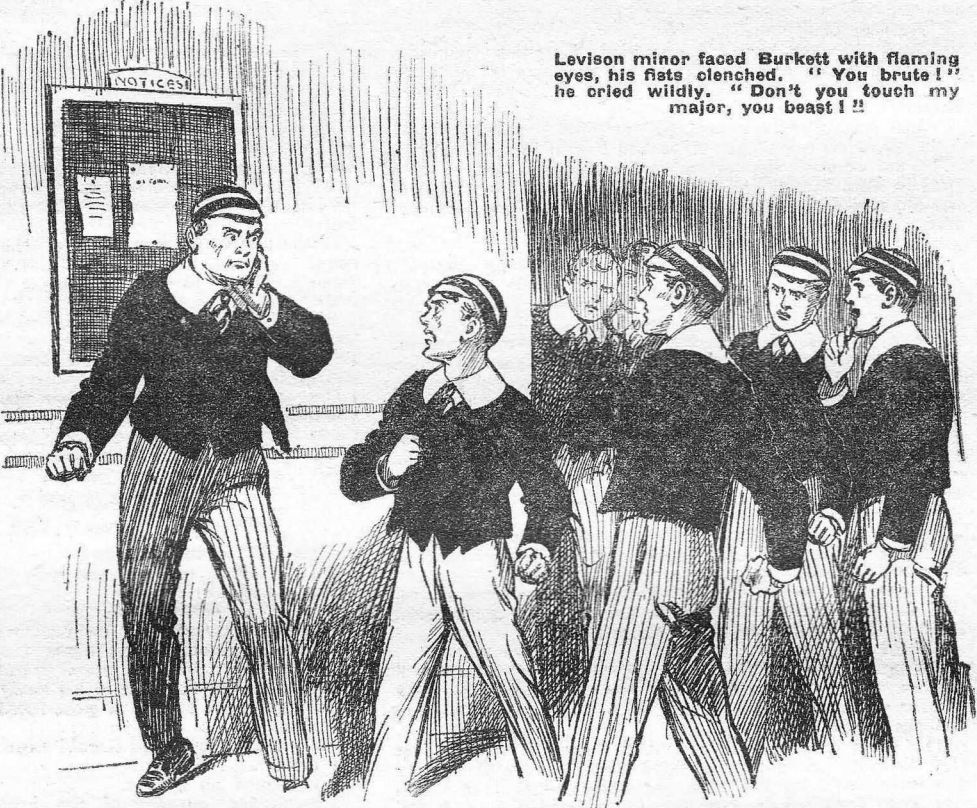
He could understand only too well that the juniors were all but helpless beneath the iron hand of the new junior captain—an iron hand that was not even concealed within a velvet glove!

A little later Ernest Levison was being helped from the gym by Clive and Cardew—a battered, rueful figure.

"Rotten luck this happening!" muttered Tom Merry to Manners and Monty Lowther. "It was jolly plucky of old Levison to stick up for his minor; but—"

Tom broke off with a hopeless shrug.

"Rotten!" agreed Monty Lowther gloomily. Ernest Levison had certainly not had the sunny welcome that his friends could have wished him to have had on his return to St. Jim's!



Levison minor faced Burkett with flaming eyes, his fists clenched. "You brute!" he cried wildly. "Don't you touch my major, you beast!"

Herries' tone was vitriolic!

"What's the matter with the board, old chap?" inquired Digby, who was standing by the fire, with Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Clive, and Ernest Levison, and several others.

"Burkett's just put up the team to play against Gordon Gay & Co. on Saturday!" snorted Herries, slamming the door behind him and crossing to the fire. "What do you think? He's had the cheek to stick up the same team that Gordon Gay's crowd licked ten-nil in the last Grammar School match!"

"My hat!" breathed Clive.

"Even Grundy?" yelled Blake.

Herries shook his head.

"Well, no—not Grundy. Burkett has drawn the line at

Grundy, I'll admit. But all the other duds are playing! Gordon Gay & Co. will lick them to a frazzle!"

Talbot shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course they will," he said quietly. "But Burkett's captain. He can put in any team he likes, I suppose."

"Can't anything be done?" demanded Herries desperately.

The door of the Common-room opened, and Kerruish, the junior from the Isle of Man, entered.

Kerruish was frowning.

The Manx junior was one of the fellows who had voted for Burkett in the election some weeks previous; Burkett regarded him as one of his supporters, and consequently had always given Kerruish a place in the footer eleven.

Kerruish, however, had come to realise that without the presence in the team of Tom Merry and a few, at any rate, of Tom's friends, the new Junior Eleven was hopeless!

Though he was, to do him justice, one of the best of Burkett's team, he was not up to the standard of footer as set by Tom Merry's old eleven, as he had come frankly to realise at last. And he would willingly have given up his position in the eleven to Tom Merry, or Reginald Talbot, or any of the others of the "old brigade," had it been possible for him to do so.

But Burkett would no more have played Tom Merry or any of his friends than have resigned the junior captaincy!

Burkett was up against them in every way, and determined to keep them utterly in the background by any possible means.

CHAPTER 5.
A Deputation!

"SEEN the board?" George Herries burst into the junior Common-room in the School House with that breathless query.

It was the following Tuesday evening, three days after the return of Levison, and the Common-room was crowded.

Levison himself was there. Thanks to Clive's timely intervention on the occasion of his meeting with Burkett in the gym, Ernest Levison bore few signs of his punishment at the bully's hands; he was looking his cheery self again—evidently as glad as ever at finding himself back among all his friends, despite the shadow that the advent of Burkett had cast over the Lower School.

"Seen the board?" repeated Herries hotly, as the juniors glanced at him in surprise.

"Seen the team?" inquired Kerruish disconsolately, as he joined the group by the fire.

"Yes!" snorted Herries. "Except for Grundy, the same team that got licked ten—nil by the Grammar School in the last match! Of all the——"

"You're playing, I suppose?" put in Blake, rather grimly.

Kerruish coloured.

"Yes, my name's down," he nodded. "I'd give up my place willingly to somebody from the old team, though, if I could. But it wouldn't do any good my refusing to play. Burkett would only put in somebody still more hopeless."

Blake laughed, despite himself, at Kerruish's gloomy countenance.

"Oh, you aren't so hopeless as most of 'em, Kerruish!" he grinned. "You do know the difference between a centre-forward and a penalty-area——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Most of 'em don't!" growled Kerruish candidly. "Look here, we can't let Burkett throw this match away and let the Grammar School lick us into fits a second time! Something must be done——"

"Just what I've been saying!" grunted Herries.

"Well, what can be done?" asked Ernest Levison quietly.

"What about a deputation to Burkett, insisting that he puts in Tom Merry and Talbot, and some of the others of the old crowd?" suggested Bernard Glyn of the Shell hopefully.

"Not a bad idea," nodded Manners.

"It might work, if the deputation was strong enough," agreed Kerruish, brightening. "But the last deputation that visited Burkett got licked, you may remember. All six of 'em!"

Blake grinned. But his face quickly went grave again. The question of the coming return match against Gordon Gay & Co., to be played on the Grammar School ground, was a serious one.

If Burkett were allowed to take the team that he had selected to the Grammar School on the following Saturday, nothing was more certain than that St. Jim's would receive another disastrous thrashing at the hands of the Grammarians. Such a thing could not be allowed to happen, if it were possible to prevent it!

The Grammarians had crowed enough after their last smashing victory. If they repeated it St. Jim's would be disgraced for ever.

"We've got to demand that Burkett makes some alteration in the team!" said Blake grimly. "I don't mind heading the deputation, if you chaps like."

"Good egg!"

"Wippin, deah boy!"

More juniors were entering the Common-room now—fellows who had just come downstairs after finishing their prep.

The topic of conversation among them all was the fact that Burkett had defiantly stated his intention of playing the same team on the following Saturday as that which had been thrashed so appallingly by Gordon Gay & Co. before. Indignation was running high.

"The rotter's doing it on purpose!" declared Kit Wildrake hotly.

Kit Wildrake, the boy from British Columbia, had once been a member of Burkett's eleven himself. But the new captain had "chucked" Wildrake, after criticisms of Burkett's captaincy on Wildrake's part had ended in a little "argument" between them—an argument in which Wildrake's eye had been blackened, his nose swollen, and one of his ears thickened!

Wildrake was a good chap at heart, despite the fact that he had been misled into backing up Burkett in the past. And now Wildrake was as hot against the tyrant of the Shell as anyone.

"Something's got to be done to stop him taking that collection of duds to the Grammar School!" snorted Wilkins of the Shell.

Wilkins, like Wildrake, had once been a member of Burkett's eleven. But he had been dropped from the team, as Wildrake and several others had been, after criticism of their skipper.

"Hear, hear!" growled Gunn.

Blake jumped on to a chair.

"Listen, you chaps!" he shouted; and instantly the hum of talk died away into silence as the crowd stared at him. "Some of us have been talking it over, and we've decided to go as a deputation to Burkett, and demand that he sends a decent representative team over to the Grammar School for Saturday's match."

A lusty cheer rang out.

"We're not going to let Burkett have St. Jim's licked ten—nil again by Gordon Gay & Co.!" yelled Blake, with

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increasing vehemence. "Not if we can jolly well help it!"

"Rather not!"

"What-ho!"

"No feah, deah boys!"

"I say, it's all very well, you know!" broke in Harold Bates dubiously. "I'm as keen as anyone to see a decent team sent to the Grammar School, but the last deputation that went to Burkett got licked!"

Blake grinned.

"This one won't get licked!" he announced grimly. "We mean business! If enough chaps roll in, even that blessed bruiser, Burkett, can't wipe up the ground with us! But, by gum, we'll wipe up the ground with him, if he isn't careful!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well, who's coming with me?" demanded Blake, shouting to make himself heard above the excited clamour of the crowd in the Common-room.

There were yells of assent from all sides.

Nearly all the juniors in the Shell and Fourth—even those who had once been inclined to support Burkett, on the grounds that a change in the captaincy would freshen things up—realised now that Tom Merry and his friends were badly needed in the Junior Eleven, unless St. Jim's was to become a laughing-stock among her rivals!

Whether they could persuade Burkett to see that fact was very much another matter. But they meant, at any rate, to try.

Burkett was in possession of the captaincy, and they could not eject him from it. But they might be able to force his hand to their wishes if they tackled him in a body!

Blake jumped from his chair, and pushed his way towards the door. Herries and Digby, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Levison, and Clive, followed him, and the crowd came jostling behind.

Out of the Common-room they poured, into the passage, and along towards the stairs, with Blake marching grim-faced between his chums in the front rank—on their way to Study No. 7 in the Shell passage!

CHAPTER 6.

A Stormy Visit!

TRAMP, tramp, tramp!
"What the dickens——"
Crash!

"By George!"

Frederick Burkett had been surprised to hear an army of tramping feet coming along the Shell passage while he was busy with his prep. But he was thoroughly astonished when the door of his study crashed open without ceremony, and a swarm of grim-faced juniors marched into the room.

"My hat!" ejaculated Gerald Croke, who was sitting at the table with Burkett.

He jumped up hastily.

Though the purpose of the army of visitors was a mystery to both the inmates of Study No. 7, it was clear from the faces of the uninvited guests that they had not come on a friendly mission by any means!

Croke's face, therefore, displayed more than nervousness, as he put the table between himself and the juniors—it showed funk.

"W-w-what the thump——" stammered Croke.

Burkett's face had gone dark. He rose heavily to his feet and glared at Blake and his army, with beetling brows.

"What do you want?" he roared truculently.

"We want to talk about footer!" retorted Blake.

"Really?" sneered Burkett. Despite his rather slow wits, he could guess now what the trouble was. "What's the footer got to do with you? You're not in the team!"

"That's just it!" cut in Ernest Levison coolly.

Burkett glared at him.

"You shut up," he snorted, "or you'll be getting another licking, like the one I gave you the other day!"

"Look here, Burkett——" began Wildrake hotly.

"I considah——"

"Shut up, Gussy! Listen, Burkett!"

"Ring off, the lot of you!" bawled Blake. "I'm head of this deputation, and I'll do the talking!"

He turned to Burkett.

"It's about the Grammar School match!" he declared.

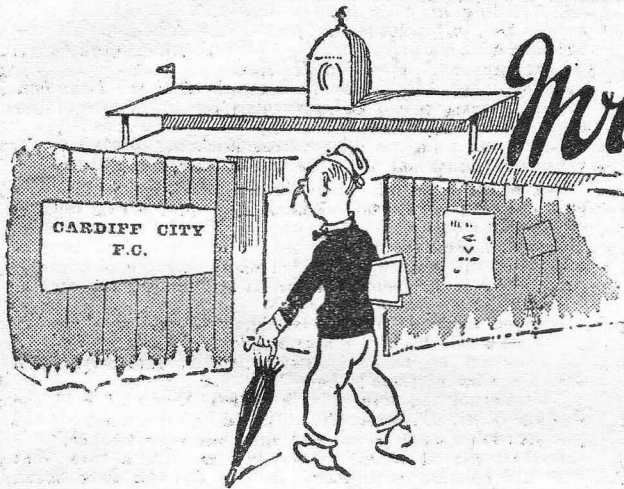
"We see you're playing the same rotten team as you did last time! It isn't good enough!"

"Wathah not!"

"Who are you to interfere?" roared Burkett furiously. "I'm junior captain—I'll select any team I like! And if you don't like it, you can lump it!"

(Continued on page 12.)

STAND BY, CHAPS! HERE'S THE FAMOUS CARDIFF TEAM!



Mr. Parker POPS IN TO SEE CARDIFF CITY.

Held Up!

THE people who, with great pluck, decided that Cardiff City Football Club should play at Ninian Park left me with a grumble. They so arranged the place that you can only get away from it by taking a level crossing, and many a time when I have wanted to hurry away from a big match at the Cardiff City ground I have been held up at that level crossing. It doesn't seem to be the slightest use asking the railway company why they want to run trains over that level crossing on a Saturday afternoon when Cardiff City are playing a big match.

However, that is by the way. I once explained my grumble to Mr. Fred Stewart, the secretary-manager of Cardiff City—the only one they have ever had—and I expected some sort of sympathy. Actually I didn't get a bit. What he said was, roughly, this: "But you shouldn't want to get away from Ninian Park in a hurry. It is the sort of place where we want people to stay, not rush away from as though they hadn't received a real welcome."

The Spirit that Wins!

AT the end of last season they dropped into the Second Division, and there they seem likely to remain for another season at least, which is not too good for the only Welsh side which has ever won the English Cup and which would once have won the championship of the First Division if a player of theirs had scored from a penalty kick in the last match of the 1923-4 season, instead of missing the goal altogether.

However, to all clubs sooner or later there comes an unlucky patch, and Cardiff City are having theirs. Like so many other clubs they are paying the penalty of a few seasons of success, during which the team as a whole got on in years. And, of course, in these days, when South Wales is having a thin time in the industrial sense, Cardiff City are not too well off financially, and that was why, not so long ago, they had to dispose of certain players.

However, you may take it from me, Cardiff City will come back. They must do so, because they have the right sort of management, the right sort of spirit. This is the spirit which caused a Soccer club to be established at Cardiff when that place had always been considered a stronghold of rugby. Indeed, when the Cardiff City Soccer club was first formed it was generally described as a "mad idea." But the faith which built the wonderful ground at Ninian Park out of what had been a rubbish heap will see Cardiff City

back into the top circle sooner or later—probably sooner than later.

On the Surface!

THERE is a good story told of the early days at Ninian Park which I will get off my chest ere dealing with the players whom I met there the other day. I have mentioned that the patch was made out of what had been a rubbish heap. Well, one morning, after a very heavy night's rain followed by sunshine, a player who turned

**A WONDERFUL FOOTBALL
GROUND BUILT OUT OF A
RUBBISH HEAP—THAT'S NINIAN
PARK, CARDIFF!**

up for training thought he had stumbled on a diamond mine. As he looked out over the pitch it glistened in many places. But the sun was not shining on diamonds: it was shining on bits of glass which had gradually worked through the turf, and had been finally assisted to the surface by the heavy rain. And it was a big job to remove all the bits of glass from that pitch. I can tell you.

Now to turn to current affairs. The lads at Ninian Park are quite cheery, and they cannot very well help being so because, in addition to a manager who never stops smiling, they have a most cheerful trainer in George Lathom. To give him his full title we should say Captain George Lathom, M.C., the title and the decoration—with bar—having been well won in the Big War. So George is known as the Captain, and he knows all there is to know about the training of footballers.

Meet the Skipper!

LATHOM is the captain in the dressing-room, and Fred Keenor is the skipper on the field. I don't know how long Fred has been playing for Cardiff City, but everybody hopes that it will be a long time before he stops playing for the side. No club has ever had a more loyal or whole-hearted servant.

Fred tells the lads that he is better at growing dahlias than at football, but they don't believe it, and I got an impression that Fred would love to win a prize or two with his dahlias just to show the lads. Rabbit-shooting is another recreation of Keenor's, or at least he passes some of his spare time in the attempt to shoot rabbits. After he had told me about this little hobby, however, another of the Cardiff players—who must be nameless because I don't want to be responsible for starting a fight in the camp—said that

Fred Keenor's rabbit-shooting only confirms the judgment of the regimental sergeant-major who had Fred under his charge during the war, and who declared that he was the worst shot in the British Army. Fred used to reply to this taunt with the observation that he would do much better if they would let him shoot with his feet.

Billy Hardy is not now seen so regularly in the Cardiff City team as he used to be, but he has been another of the fine old servants, and he actually went to Cardiff as the first player signed on by Manager Fred Stewart when the club was first formed.

For some reason or other the Cardiff City manager has always had a special liking for Irish players, and the "begorrahs" and "bedads" can still be heard in the dressing-room. Among the Irish representatives are two of the defenders—Tommy Farquharson, the goalkeeper, and Jimmy Nelson, the full-back. Both have played for their native "country."

Farquharson is certainly a goalkeeper with ideas, and he has the credit—if it be credit—of being responsible for a football rule being altered. Some little time ago "Fargy" conceived the idea of stopping penalty kicks by going to the back of the net and dashing forward as the ball was kicked. The ruse was successful, too, but the spoil-sports who rule football stopped the little game and decided that when penalty kicks are being taken goalkeepers must stand on the goal-line.

Jimmy Nelson's career was once very nearly cut short. Travelling home to Ireland at the end of a season some time ago he happened to go on a ship which went down in Belfast Lough—the "Graphic." Jimmy lost all his luggage, but was himself saved from the water. And as showing how thoughtful he is, Manager Stewart told me that the first thing he did—in his wet clothes—was to go to the post-office and send a wire to the club that he was safe.

A Great, All-round Sport.

BILLIE ROBERTS now keeps Nelson company at full-back. He comes from Flint, and is as hard as the word suggests. As half-back companions, Keenor has Harry Wake and George Blackburn. Blackburn, who once played for the Villa, is a great all-round sport, playing cricket and lawn tennis, while he has also won many prizes on the running track.

The forward line of Cardiff City at the moment, apart from Len Davies, an old stalwart who has played in every position in the attack, is mostly composed of young players. But these lads—Williams, Jones (you can't have a Welsh team without players with those names), Robinson and Harris are making good. And when they come along Cardiff City will climb back into the First Division.

As I was hurrying away I ran into Manager Fred Stewart again, and this was his parting message: "Mind you don't get run over at the level crossing!" The fact that these notes have appeared show that I didn't get run over, but one of these days I shall push a train over at that level crossing.

"NOSEY."

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The Fall of the Tyrant!

(Continued from page 10.)

"Do you want St. Jim's licked ten-nil again?" demanded Bernard Glyn angrily.

"Rats! That was a fluke!" growled Burkett, though he went rather red. "A rotten fluke!"

"A fluke?" yelled Blake derisively. "Oh, my hat! Why, a team of one-legged chimpanzees could lick your eleven, Burkett!"

"What's that?" thundered Burkett, pushing up his cuffs, revealing his huge forearms. "Why, I—I'll smash you! I—"

"Look out, old chap!" mumbled Croke. "There are the dickens of a lot of 'em, you know—"

"Oh, shut up!" glared Burkett; and Croke relapsed into a hasty silence. "Think I'm afraid of this lot of dummies?"

He surveyed Blake and the rest with savage ill-temper, his big fists clenched. One or two of the more nervous ones tried to edge out into the passage. But the crowd in the doorway was so tightly packed that it was impossible for them to do so.

"You'd better clear out, the lot of you," roared Burkett, "or shall I chuck you all out?"

"You'd have a bit of a job to do that!" grinned Blake. "You may be a blessed bruiser, but we're not afraid of you!"

"Bai Jove, wathah not!"

Burkett's eyes gleamed, and his knotted fists seemed to tighten. But Blake went on coolly enough.

"We demand that you alter that team for the Grammar School match!" he declared in a grim tone. "You've got to send a decent eleven over on Saturday—with Tom Merry in, and Talbot, and Gussy, and—"

"I won't!" bellowed Burkett savagely. "I'm captain, and I'll send the team I choose, and I won't alter a single man for anybody!"

"Look here, you cad—"

Blake did not finish his angry words.

Burkett had jumped forward, and raised his fist. He brought it crashing into Blake's face with all his tremendous strength, and Blake went hurtling back into the crowd, sick and dazed.

For a moment there was a tense hush. Then, as one man, the crowd surged forward. There was a frightened cry from Gerald Croke, and a savage bellow of defiance from Burkett. He hit out, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the forefront of the crowd, reeled back from a stinging right-hander that would have floored him had the study not been too full of juniors for him to fall!

Clifton Dane, the Canadian junior, staggered back before one of Burkett's terrible punches, delivered with all his giant strength. Herries and Gunn and Alan Lorne also went flying—but then the odds told, and Burkett was borne to the ground beneath the weight of numbers.

"Scrag him!" gasped Blake, clutching the table for support, as he dabbed with a handkerchief at his bleeding lip. He still looked white and dazed. "Scrag the cad—"

"Rather! We'll scrag him!" panted Wilkins.

"Help! Help!"

Burkett's voice sounded thoroughly alarmed at last, as it emerged from somewhere beneath the struggling swarm of juniors in the centre of the room. But Croke, standing white-faced in the most out-of-the-way corner of the study, made no movement to help his leader.

"Scrag the rotter!"

"Collar him!"

"Give him socks!"

And then a sudden firm step in the doorway caused one or two of the excited juniors to glance quickly round.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Kangaroo, in dismay.

"Kildare!" gasped Digby.

Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was gazing into the study, with an angry frown.

CHAPTER 7.

Burkett Scores!

STOP this!" Kildare's stern voice cut the air like a knife, above the trampling din in Study No. 7.

There were gasps of consternation and dismay.

The juniors fell back hastily—most of them looking

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decidedly dishevelled, many of them with swollen noses and bleeding lips, for Burkett had been hitting out still, even when half smothered beneath the crowd of his unwelcome visitors.

"Oh, my hat!" mumbled Herries.

"B-bai Jove! Kildare!" gasped Arthur Augustus, adjusting his monocle and surveying the tall figure of the captain with breathless consternation. "Oh, deah!"

There was a furious bellow from Burkett.

Burkett scrambled up. He was certainly a picture.

His collar was off, and his tie had vanished. His coat was half ripped off his back, and most of the buttons of his waistcoat had disappeared. His hair was wildly dishevelled, and his face looked as though it had been a good deal sat upon and trodden on during the struggle.

He stood in the centre of the study, panting for breath, beside himself with rage.

Kildare stepped into the study.

"What's all this?" he snapped.

"They set on me!" bellowed Burkett furiously. "I'll smash the lot of them! I—"

"That's not the way to talk to me, Burkett," said the captain of St. Jim's sternly. "You'd better keep quiet till you've cooled down a bit and regained your temper."

Burkett glared round at the juniors with a face that was still crimson with fury. But he did not dare speak again. Kildare turned to Reginald Talbot.

"Talbot, you'd better explain."

Talbot of the Shell coloured.

"Ahem! We—we were a deputation to Burkett," he said, with a cough. "We wanted him to alter a footer team, and he wouldn't. And—and then the row started," he finished rather lamely.

Kildare frowned.

The captain of St. Jim's knew a great deal more about the doings in the Junior School than many of the juniors realised. He knew perfectly well that Burkett was anything but a popular junior skipper, and he knew, too, that it was Burkett's fault that he was disliked by the majority of the fellows in the Fourth and Shell. That Burkett was a tyrant and a bully Kildare was perfectly well aware.

He knew, too, that Burkett had deliberately thrust Tom Merry & Co. and all their friends into the background as far as he was able, with disastrous results to the junior football. Accordingly, he was scarcely surprised that trouble had occurred in that connection.

But wherever his sympathies might lie, Kildare was a strict disciplinarian. The fact that Burkett's unpopular captaincy was liable to cause trouble among the juniors from time to time made him all the more determined to prevent it as much as possible by dealing with a heavy hand with what "rows" he happened to come across.

He surveyed the "deputation" sternly.

"Every one of you will do me three hundred lines!" said Kildare quietly. "And don't let me find anything of this sort happening again. Burkett is junior captain, and takes the entire responsibility of arranging football matters. If he fails to do so to your liking is no reason for disturbance and racket. Now clear off to your own studies."

Blake and the rest made their way glumly from the study, leaving Burkett dishevelled, but grinning with triumph.

Kildare glanced at the bully of the Shell.

"There's nothing to grin about," he said curtly.

Burkett went red, and the grin left his face abruptly. Croke's grin vanished very suddenly, too.

"Now you are junior captain it's up to you to run the job without any friction as far as you can," said Kildare quietly. "And without favouritism, too."

"I don't know what you mean," muttered Burkett, his eyes gleaming.

Kildare shrugged.

"I fancy you do, Burkett."

He strode from the study, closing the door behind him. Burkett growled at the shut door. Then a slow grin appeared on his face.

He gave a sudden guffaw.

"So the chaps want me to put Tom Merry and his precious pals in the team on Saturday, do they?"

His eyes gleamed maliciously. He was viciously delighted at this splendid opportunity of displaying his power over the dissatisfied juniors.

"They can go on wanting!" he growled vindictively.

"Tom Merry & Co. shall never play in another footer match at St. Jim's—so long as I'm captain! If they want to play in footer matches they can leave and go to the Grammar School!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Croke.

And the bellowing laughter of Frederick Burkett joined with that of Gerald Croke in Study No. 7.

CHAPTER 8.

Monty Lowther's Idea!

"GRAMMAR SCHOOL cads!"

Monty Lowther gave that sudden exclamation. The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. were returning to the school along Rylocombe Lane after a visit to the village. It was Friday evening—the night before the Grammar School match.

The chums of St. Jim's had been discussing that forthcoming match—hence their gloomy frowns.

But on rounding a bend they had found themselves face to face with a group of approaching figures. Gordon Gay himself, the cheery leader of the Grammarians, was coming down the lane accompanied by his chums, Frank Monk and the two Woottons.

"Talk of angels!" ejaculated Digby. The Grammarians had halted, looking distinctly uneasy

at sight of the seven St. Jim's juniors. But Tom Merry and his companions were not feeling in the mood just then for even a scrap with their rivals of the Grammar School, although they owed Gordon Gay & Co. a ragging for one that they had received at the Grammarians' hands some while before—on the day of the arrival at St. Jim's of Frederick Burkett.

"All right—pax!" exclaimed Tom Merry shortly.

"Oh! All serene!" grinned Gordon Gay. "I say, are you chaps playing in the match to-morrow?"

"No!" snapped Blake. Gordon Gay chuckled.

"You aren't exactly pals of your new skipper, I take it?" he grinned. "Well, anyway, you ought to buzz over and see the match. It'll be a wonderful show—and no entertainment tax. We licked the St. Jim's team by ten—nil last time. We're going to make it twenty—nil to-morrow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Rather!"

Frank Monk and the two Woottons chuckled. The St. Jim's fellows glared.

"Oh, w a t s!" snorted Arthur Augustus.

Though they were up against Burkett all along the line, and considered his footer eleven an utterly hopeless proposition, the chums of St. Jim's all felt that they had to stick up for what was, after all, the official St. Jim's Junior Eleven in front of Gordon Gay & Co.

"Last time was a blessed fluke!" growled Herries.

"St. Jim's will lick you to-morrow—hollow!" said Manners.

"I don't think!" chuckled Gordon Gay, and passed on with a cheerful nod.

The Grammarians vanished round the bend, and Tom Merry and his companions went on towards the school with frowning faces.

"The trouble is Gay's right," said Tom, with a rueful grin. "They probably will lick Burkett's bunch twenty—nil, or jolly nearly!"

"Shouldn't wonder!" grunted Blake.

"If only—" began Monty Lowther; then broke off abruptly. "My giddy aunt! I've got a wheeze!"

"What for?" demanded Herries.

"Why, for making sure St. Jim's wins the giddy match to-morrow!" chuckled Monty Lowther excitedly. "Look here, why should Burkett and his crowd play against Gordon Gay at all to-morrow? Why not us instead—all the old team?"

"He's burbling!" said Blake. "Rats!" grinned Monty Lowther. "It could be done! All that's necessary is to kidnap Burkett's eleven—"

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Kidnap 'em!" repeated Monty Lowther serenely. "And then Tom Merry can take a team—a real, decent team, that can play footer—over to the Grammar School and play the match, and lick Gordon Gay!"

"B-bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus surveyed Monty Lowther wonderingly through his gleaming monocle. His aristocratic brow cleared.

"Gwreat Scott! It's a wippin' ideah!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

"But—but we couldn't kidnap a whole footer eleven!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Why not?" chuckled Monty Lowther.

Tom stared at him. Then suddenly his dubious frown turned to a broad grin, and he clapped Monty Lowther on the back with a force that almost knocked Monty flying.

"Ow!" gasped Monty Lowther. "Chuck it!" "You're right, Monty!"

"chuckled, Tom Merry. "It could be done! My hat, we'll do it!"

There were curious grins on the faces of Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. as they entered the school gates a few minutes later—grins that puzzled many fellows who saw them.

**SENSATION AT ST. JIM'S!
SCHOOL GOVERNORS' AMAZING
ORDER!**

St. Jim's must move with the times! Eton jackets must go! There, in a nutshell, you have the cause of all the excitement at St. Jim's in

"GOOD-BYE TO ETONS!"

next week's grand long yarn of Tom Merry & Co.

Arc Eton jackets out of fashion—antiquated? The governors of the school think so, and, having come to that conclusion, their fiat goes forth. From that moment Etons are doomed—the time-honoured "clobber" of the Lower School is a thing of the past.

Then, what happens? What have the juniors to say about it? Does Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the glass of fashion and mould of form, submit quietly to this new order from the powers that be, or—

But I won't spoil a good thing by letting the cat out of the bag. Take it from me, chums, there's fun and excitement galore at St. Jim's before the old school finally bids

"GOOD-BYE TO ETONS!"

I expect you've all seen the good news on page 24 of this issue! If you haven't, take a look at it now and read all about our great new serial story, starting next week—

"CHICK CHANCE—ADVENTURER!"

All I need say about it here is that it's well up to the GEM'S standard for serials—and that's the highest!

Our cheerful football-news gatherer, Mr. "NOSEY" PARKER, must have worn out a good many pairs of boots during his wanderings, but, bless your heart, he doesn't mind. He puts his best foot foremost next week and turns in an interesting article, full of inside information about Bradford City. Finally, there's our wise and whiskery ORACLE, with his usual answer corner. He's always ready to clear up any knotty problem that may be puzzling you, so send it along!

Cheerio, chums!

YOUR EDITOR.

"Wathah not!" put in Arthur Augustus warmly. "I considah the measuah, though decidedly dwastic, fair and permissible—"

"Absolutely!" grinned Kangaroo. "It's not as though Burkett were an honest sort of skipper. He knows he's not taking the best team to the Grammar School. He's keeping out all the best players—like you, Tom—for spite. So he can't expect to be treated gently!"

"Rather not!" murmured Cardew, with a grin.

"Then all our plans are clear?" queried Tom, glancing round at the crowd of eager faces.

"All cleah!" nodded Arthur Augustus.

"Remember, not a word of this to anyone but the chaps we actually want to help," warned Tom. "If Burkett got suspicious—"

"We'll keep it dark as mud!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Rather! Mum's the word!"

With grins and chuckles the meeting broke up. Burkett, passing from the top of the stairs towards Study No. 7, stared in astonishment at seeing so big a crowd leaving Study No. 10.

"Hallo, Burkett!" grinned Jack Blake cheerily. "Feeling all fit for the match to-morrow?"

Burkett scowled and grunted, and vanished into his study. Blake & Co. strolled away. And all four chuckled!

CHAPTER 9:

The Kidnapped Eleven!

RIPPING day for footer!"

Lennox spoke in satisfied tones. But Frederick Burkett, to whom that remark was addressed, only growled in reply.

It was Saturday afternoon, and the brawny junior captain was cycling along Kylcombe Lane with his football eleven, on their way to Kylcombe Grammar School. They were all clad in footer kit.

They were certainly not a very promising-looking crowd! The presence of such fellows as Crooke and Mellish alone made Burkett's team ridiculous. One or two, such as Kerruish and Julian and Hammond, were not bad footballers, so far as they went—Hammond, in fact, being quite a smart goalkeeper. But they were certainly not up to the standard required for beating Gordon Gay & Co.

That they were in for a licking at the hands of the Grammarians was certain—if they ever reached the Grammar School!

"We'll lick Gay and his crowd this time," said Pratt of the New House, as he cycled along. "See if we don't!"

"Then won't Tom Merry & Co. be sick!" grinned Digges.

Burkett only grunted.

He was in rather a bad temper, apparently. But, then, Burkett's temper was seldom of the best.

The team was well strung out, and Burkett was towards the rear of the procession of cyclists. Consequently, the first Burkett knew of any trouble in store for him was when he pedalled round a bend by a big thatched barn, and found those of his footer eleven who were in front of him engaged in a desperate struggle!

Some of their attackers were clad in footer kit like themselves. But there were others who were not, and altogether Burkett & Co. found themselves badly outnumbered.

"By George!" stuttered Burkett, dismounting hastily.

He saw now that the footballers, who had evidently fallen upon the cyclists from behind the hedge, were Tom Merry, Talbot, Kangaroo, Blake, Arthur Augustus, Ernest Levison, and the rest of the fellows who had comprised the Junior Football Eleven under Tom Merry's regime. The sole exception was Monty Lowther, who was standing down in favour of Ralph Reckness Cardew, who was, accordingly, clad in footer kit.

Lowther was there, however—as were Harry Manners, Herries, and Dig, Sidney Clive and Bernard Glyn, Clifton Dane, and several New House fellows.

And a desperate struggle was in progress between Burkett's astonished footer eleven and their mysterious assailants.

"What the dickens—" panted Mellish, his face white and frightened, as Blake and Herries dragged him from his cycle. "Hands off, you cads!"

But Mellish was dragged, struggling vainly, to the side of the road, and in another minute he was lying on the grass with his wrists and ankles tied, while he stared in dazed consternation at the struggle still in progress in the lane.

Had not Frederick Burkett been one of their number the official Junior Eleven would soon have surrendered. But with Burkett to back them up, and yelling dire threats to his followers as to what would happen to them at his own hands if they did not resist their assailants, the scared cyclists put up a surprisingly good struggle for the most part.

Burkett was a tower of strength!

With his back to the hedge, his great knotted fists kept his attackers at bay for a long while. Half a dozen of them were gasping in the road, their hands to their noses and chins, before Burkett was finally dragged down by the weight of numbers, and trussed-up with his followers.

"Got 'im!" panted Manners, tenderly massaging a swollen nasal organ, when at last Burkett had been made a prisoner. "Yow! My nose! Ow!"

"You cads!" roared Burkett, writhing and twisting in his bonds. "You rotten cads!"

"Thanks for the sweet words, Burkett, old chap!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Fraid we shall have to stop your foghorn for a bit, though!"

He found Burkett's own handkerchief, and stuffed it cheerfully into the raging junior captain's mouth.

Tom Merry glanced quickly up and down the lane. It was deserted.

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"Buck up!" he muttered. "Gag 'em quick and stick 'em in the barn!"

"What-ho!"

It took less than a minute for his instructions to be carried out. The prisoners were all securely gagged, and lifted by their captors through a gap in the hedge, and deposited within the big barn that stood just inside the field.

Gurgling and mumbling behind their gags, Burkett & Co. glared impotently at the Terrible Three and their merry men. But Tom took no notice of Burkett or any of them. He glanced at his watch.

"Just nice time for us to get along to the Grammar School if we borrow their bikes!" he announced.

"Good egg!"

"You chaps don't mind if we borrow your bikes, do you?" grinned Figgins to the helpless eleven. "I know you wouldn't like us to be late for the match at the Grammar School!"

Farmer Robinson stared in amazement at the strange sight that met his eyes. "What be you young varmin'ts doing in my barn?" he roared.



"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see," explained Redfern sweetly, "we're playing Gordon Gay & Co. this afternoon, instead of you!"

Burkett twisted and writhed, and strange gurgling noises issued from behind his gag.

But he and his team could do nothing. They had walked fairly into the ambush.

With helpless glares, they watched dumbly as Tom Merry and his footballers hurried from the barn, with some of the others, leaving Manners, Clive, and Digby to guard the prisoners.

The latter three grinned round serenely at their captives. Manners seated himself comfortably on a bale of hay, and Clive and Dig followed suit.

"Only about an hour and a half to wait, Burkett," grinned Manners. "It'll soon go!"

"And you have the satisfaction of knowing that Tom

Merry's team will lick Gordon Gay & Co. into a cocked hat!" chuckled Digby.

"Whereas you chaps would only have been licked by about a hundred to nil!" added Clive cheerfully.

Grunts and gurgles were their only answers.

Meanwhile, outside the big barn, in Rylcombe Lane, Tom Merry and the rest of the footballers mounted the eleven cycles, and set off very gaily for the Grammar School, followed on foot by their grinning supporters.

There was a decidedly unpleasant surprise in store for Gordon Gay & Co. when Tom Merry's team arrived at the Grammar School in place of the kidnapped eleven

"Here we are!" he grinned. "Ripping day for the match!"

"B-but—" began Gordon Gay dazedly.

"We thought Burkett was bringing over the—the new team!" gasped Frank Monk.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Oh, no!"

"But when I saw you yesterday, you said you wouldn't be playing—any of you!" roared Gordon Gay.

"We didn't know then that we should be—er—wanted, you see," grinned Blake calmly.

"But where's Burkett?" exclaimed Monk blankly.

"He—ahem!—isn't able to play this afternoon," explained Tom Merry, truthfully enough! "I'm tempora y skipper in his absence." He glanced at his watch. "Time we got on the field, isn't it?"

Looking anything but happy, Gordon Gay led the visitors across the quad to the playing-fields.

He could not hide his disappointment.

The Grammar School had promised themselves the pleasure of licking the St. Jim's team by an even bigger margin of goals than last time. But then, they had expected Burkett and the new Junior Eleven!

They had certainly never dreamed of the possibility of the old junior team putting in an appearance.

But it had—and the Grammarians' faces were glum!

A few minutes later the two teams had lined up.

The ref's whistle sounded, and Tom Merry tapped the ball across to Ralph Reckness Cardew, at inside-left.

The return match against the Grammar School had begun; but Gordon Gay & Co. were up against a very different proposition this time from the team they had beaten ten—nil on their last visit to St. Jim's.

Tom Merry's eleven was a little out of practice—yet there was no sign of rustiness about them, as the forwards swept through the Grammar School line as though it had not been there, the ball flashing from foot to foot.

Like an old war-horse at the sound of the trumpet, each member of that famous eleven woke to life at the sound of the referee's whistle, ready to play the game of his life!

Cardew flashed the ball out to Ernest Levison, on the wing, and Levison flashed it back a few moments later to Cardew. Cardew passed to Tom, and Tom swerved round a half-back who rushed at him, and sent the ball across to Talbot, at inside-right. Talbot, in turn, passed to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the St. Jim's outside-right, and the swell of St. Jim's, his monocle jammed in his eye and the ball dancing at his toes, raced in towards the Grammarian goal, almost before the home team realised that their citadel was even in danger!

The Grammar School left-back tackled Arthur Augustus fiercely. But the swell of St. Jim's sent a lightning pass in to the centre. Tom trapped it, slipped it across to Cardew as the goalie rushed out, and Cardew, smiling, punted it gently into the net before the bewildered goalkeeper had time to turn his attention away from Tom Merry.

Grinning, the St. Jim's forwards turned and made their way back to the centre of the field.

The Grammarians gazed at one another blankly.

A goal against them in the first two minutes of the game! It was a horrid shock.

"Oh crumbs!" muttered Gordon Gay. "Pull your socks up, chaps!"

The teams lined up afresh.

Gordon Gay kicked off. But though he led a spirited attack into the St. Jim's half, it was soon stemmed. Blake, Redfern, and Kangaroo, the three half-backs, were towers of strength, and the Grammarian assault broke against them. Blake sent the ball up-field again to Tom Merry.

There was an excited cheer from the group of St. Jim's supporters on the touchline, who had just arrived on foot from the barn where the kidnapped eleven were in durance vile at that moment, under the watchful eyes of Manners, Digby, and Clive.

"Come on, Tom!"

"On the ball, St. Jim's!"

Already the St. Jim's forwards were sweeping up the field.

Cardew had possession now, and there was a very grim and determined expression on the face of the slacker of the Fourth.

It was rarely indeed that Cardew played in the Junior Eleven. He was too much of a slacker—as a rule. But ever since his recent feud with Tom Merry—a feud which had been a bitter one on his part—Cardew had been eager to make amends for the harm he had done in helping Burkett into the seat of power.

He could not undo the harm he had brought about—but he could, at any rate, help to win this match against the Grammar School! He was as eager now to help Tom Merry



CHAPTER 10.

Piling up the Goals!

"GREAT pip! It's Tom Merry!"

Frank Monk, of the Grammar School, gave that astonished exclamation.

Monk was standing with Gordon Gay in the quad at the Grammar School, as Tom Merry cycled in through the gates, followed by his team. Gordon Gay jumped.

"Merry and Blake and T-Talbot!" he stuttered. "And—and Figgins, and Levison—all the old team! Oh crumbs!"

"What the dickens—"

The Grammarians stared in utter bewilderment.

Tom Merry swung off his bike, and nodded to Gordon Gay very cheerily.

Merry as he had recently been to harm him; it was a startling change, but typical of Cardew's volatile nature.

And, brilliant footballer that he was, Cardew was capable enough of scoring goals, when he had set his mind upon doing so.

He danced nimbly round a Grammarian who rushed up to tackle him, and sped on.

Again he was tackled—again he made circles round his opponent, and raced on with easy grace.

There were only the backs and the goalkeeper between him and scoring now. He feinted as if to pass out to Levison, but swerved away with the ball himself, utterly fooling the right-back. The next moment he poised himself for the fraction of a second—and shot!

The goalkeeper leapt high as the ball whizzed for the top corner of the net. His fingers touched it, but could not stop it.

The leather crashed into the net, and the whistle sounded. Ralph Reckness Cardew smiled faintly, and turned away.

"Goal!"

"Well played, Cardew!"

On the touchline, the St. Jim's supporters yelled themselves hoarse. Tom Merry crossed to Cardew and clapped him on the back as the footballers returned to their positions. Levison grinned across at Cardew.

"Good man!" chuckled Levison.

But the faces of Gordon Gay & Co. were full of dismay.

Two—nil, in the first five minutes!

Ten minutes later, Talbot scored a splendid goal from a centre by Levison, making it three—nil against the Grammarians in the opening quarter of an hour. It looked as though Tom Merry's eleven was well on the way towards avenging that smashing ten—nil defeat that St. Jim's—thanks to Frederick Burkett—had suffered at the hands of Gordon Gay & Co. some weeks earlier.

Gordon Gay scored for the Grammar School after that, beating Fatty Wynn, in goal, with a lucky shot. But five minutes later Tom Merry had scored for St. Jim's.

At half-time the score was four—one.

St. Jim's had a smashing lead!

Gordon Gay's face was set in very grim lines at the kick-off after half-time.

He knew that Tom Merry's team was out to give them a record beating if possible, to even matters up. And he knew, too, that they looked like doing it!

"Come on, you chaps!" he muttered. "Buck up, for goodness' sake!"

"Pheeeep!"

The referee's whistle sounded, and the second half had begun!

CHAPTER 11. Tough Luck!

"U-U-U-URRRRRGH!"

Frederick Burkett made that weird and wonderful sound as he choked with rage behind his gag.

In the big barn where the kidnapped eleven were lying, helpless prisoners, time seemed to be passing slowly enough for Manners, Clive, and Digby.

But it was passing ten times more slowly for Burkett and the rest of the captives!

"Grooogh-ooogh!" mumbled Burkett.

Manners chuckled.

He was seated very comfortably on a big bale of hay in one corner of the barn, as were Digby and Clive. The eleven captive footballers were lying in a row against one wall, dividing their time between wriggling their cramped limbs and glaring at the three grinning juniors who were on guard over them.

Digby glanced at his watch.

"Just about half-time now, you chaps!"

"Wonder how they've got on at the Grammar School?" murmured Clive.

"Giving Gay & Co. the hiding of their lives, I expect," chuckled Manners.

Burkett, his big, muscular figure huddled between the weedy frames of Percy Mellish and Digges, glared at the grinning three with an expression that, if looks could kill, would have stretched Manners, Digby, and Sidney Clive lifeless on the floor of the barn.

Whether Tom Merry's eleven was likely to win or not, he neither knew nor cared.

Burkett would far sooner that St. Jim's lost the match against the Grammar School, than that it should be won by Tom Merry's team.

He writhed and grunted. But he was helpless to escape from his bonds, and he sank down again after a few moments, his eyes fastened ferociously on Manners.

Manners grinned at him serenely.

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But the next moment he gave a sudden exclamation, and turned his head quickly.

The door of the barn had opened. A burly figure appeared—staring in utter astonishment at the sight of the eleven bound and gagged footballers. Behind him, other figures could be seen, evidently farm-hands.

But the burly figure in the doorway was familiar enough to Manners. It was old Robinson, the farmer to whom the barn belonged.

"Oh, my hat!"

Manners' face was blank with dismay.

Clive and Digby were staring across at the amazed farmer and his men with equal consternation.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Clive.

"That's torn it!" gasped Digby.

It was a stroke of utterly unexpected bad luck that the farmer and his men should have chosen that particular afternoon to visit the old barn.

That the farmer was furious at his discovery was obvious enough from the look on his ruddy countenance as he surveyed Manners, Clive, Digby, and the eleven helpless juniors in footer kit.

"Well, I'm danged!" he exploded, his eyes almost popping out of his head.

Farmer Robinson stared round as if he could hardly believe his eyes.

"What be you young varmint's doing in my barn?" he roared.

"We—we're not doing any harm," mumbled Digby hastily. "We—we only—"

He broke off. It was certainly difficult to explain exactly what they were doing there to the irate farmer! The helpless condition of Burkett & Co. showed very clearly, however, that some of the inmates of the barn, at any rate, were hardly there for amusement.

"More of your skylarking, hey?" roared the angry farmer. "You young rascals! Clear off, the lot o' you!" He turned to his men. "Untie those lads!"

Manners, Clive, and Digby glanced at one another. As if by mutual consent, they dived for the door.

They certainly did not wish to be on the scene when Burkett was freed!

The farmer made a grab at them, but they eluded him. A few moments later the three were safe in the lane, sprinting in the direction of the village.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" groaned Dig breathlessly, as he ran.

"Dished!" panted Manners.

"Well, the game's half over now!" gasped Clive. "Burkett can't interfere now—"

"Who says he can't?" growled Manners. "I'll bet he does!"

The three slowed down as they came in sight of the Grammar School. As they hurried into the quad, from the direction of the playing-fields came the sound of excited shouting.

The second half was in full swing.

Bernard Glyn, Clifton Dane, Mynor Lowther, and several other School House juniors were standing in a group near the Grammar School goal, as Manners and his two breathless companions hurried on to the scene from the direction of the quad.

So far, there had been no scoring in the second half. The score still stood at four—one. But nearly all the play had been in the vicinity of the goal-line. The St. Jim's fellows watching were far too excited to notice the arrival of Manners and the two others who had been left to guard the kidnapped eleven in Farmer Robinson's barn.

"Monty—" gasped Manners, as he hurried up.

But Lowther's eyes were riveted on the running figure of Reginald Talbot.

"Go it, Talbot!" yelled Kangaroo, beside himself with excitement. "Oh, well passed there—"

"Monty!" Manners grasped his chum by the arm.

But Monty Lowther failed to notice Manners!

Talbot had passed to Arthur Augustus, and the swell of St. Jim's was busy dealing with an obstinate tackle on the part of one of the Grammarian halves. But he managed to break free from the half-back a few moments later, with the ball still in possession. He sent the ball into the centre—a lofty pass that sailed high over the heads of several intervening Grammarians, and dropped at the feet of Cardew, who was unmarked.

Cardew sped for goal. He was tackled, and flashed the ball across to Tom Merry, who instantly slipped it to Reginald Talbot. The next moment Talbot had sent the ball whizzing into the bottom corner of the net with a perfect shot.

From the little group of St. Jim's supporters there came a triumphant yell.

"Goal!"

Then suddenly they realised the presence of Manners, Clive, and Digby. They stared in utter astonishment.

"What the dickens are you chaps doing here?" hooted Glyn. "Mean to say you've left Burkett and the others—"

"Old Robinson turned up," explained Manners grimly. "We had to clear off—quick! Burkett and his crowd will be along here any blessed minute—"

"W-w-what?" stuttered Glyn. "Oh—oh, snakes!"

"Well, they can't interfere now," said Clifton Dane desperately. "Can't they?" groaned Manners. "Why not? I'll bet Burkett interferes all right—"

He broke off sharply. A crowd of figures in footer kit had appeared from the direction of the quad, hurrying towards the footer ground.

Even at that distance the big, ungainly figure of Frederick Burkett could be seen, his face dark with rage.

"Here they come!" snapped Manners. "Oh, my hat!"

In utter dismay the juniors watched as the kidnapped footer eleven—freed now and vowing vengeance, without a doubt—came hurrying towards the field where Tom Merry and his team were piling up the goals against Gordon Gay & Co.

CHAPTER 12.

The Interrupted Match!

BURKETT'S face was black with fury as he lurched swiftly towards the crowded touchline, his followers at his heels.

Some of the members of the recently kidnapped footer eleven appeared almost as angry as their bulky leader. But the majority of them were looking decidedly sheepish.

They felt that they cut rather ridiculous figures—without some reason.

Had Burkett not threatened to lick the lot, they would certainly never have consented to visiting the Grammar School now.

But Burkett, in his fury, cared nothing for the reputation of St. Jim's. He did not hesitate a moment before setting out to wash St. Jim's dirty linen in public, so long as he could squash Tom Merry's daring scheme.

The play had been resumed, after Talbot's goal, as Burkett reached the touchline, and pushed his way with savage rudeness through the line of Grammar School fellows who were watching the game, with disconsolate faces.

"What on earth—"
"Who the dickens—"

The Grammarians stared at Burkett in astonishment as he pushed his way through them, and marched on to the footer field, with his team trailing after him.

There were gasps and wondering exclamations of amazement on all sides. Some of the footballers had caught sight of Burkett now, and they stared.

"What on earth—" ejaculated Frank Monk, of the Grammar School.

"Burkett!" breathed Talbot, in bewilderment and dismay.

"G—g—g—w—w—w— Scott!" stammered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he, too, caught sight of Burkett, from the other side of the field. "That—that awful wottah's turned up!"

At the moment an exciting mid-field tussle was in progress between the rival forwards, the St. Jim's half-backs having just stemmed a desperate Grammarian attack, and returned the ball to the half-way line. Tom Merry, in the thick of it, had as yet failed to notice the amazing intrusion of Frederick Burkett and his followers upon the actual field of play.

The first he knew of the startling new turn of events was the sound of Burkett's bellowing, furious voice, half choking with rage.

"Stop this game!"

Tom had just got rid of the ball to Ernest Levison, and had been about to set off into the Grammarian territory, when that amazing shout broke in upon his senses. He stopped dead, staring dumbly.

Burkett was well out towards the centre of the field now. "Stop this game!" thundered Burkett savagely.

The Grammar-School prefect who was refereeing the game jumped as if he had been shot. He turned and stared in utter amazement.

Whether he imagined that Burkett was a little mad was a question that the Grammarian prefect alone could have answered. Probably he did. At any rate, he raised his whistle to his lips, and with a shrill blast, brought the footballers to a surprised standstill.

"What the dickens is up?" muttered Kangaroo. Then he, too, caught sight of Burkett, and his expression went blank with astonishment.

The referee was striding towards Burkett with a dark frown. He flung out a pointing hand.

"What on earth do you mean by this?" he cried angrily. "Get off the field!"

Burkett stood his ground. His brow was black. "Rats!" he retorted. "This game has got to stop!"

The Grammarian prefect looked as though he thought he must be dreaming.

"Are you crazy?" he asked sharply. "No," roared Burkett, "I'm not! I'm the junior footer captain of St. Jim's—"

"What?"

"I'm junior captain of St. Jim's," repeated Burkett savagely. "This is my team!" He flung a brawny arm round in the direction of his sheepish-looking followers, before pointing a finger that quivered with anger at the silent, muddy eleven wearing St. Jim's shirts out on the field. "Those—those cads"—he almost choked—"those cads haven't any right to represent St. Jim's!"

The astonishment on the face of the referee and the Grammarians on the touchline who had heard Burkett's savage words was exceeded only by that of Gordon Gay, who had turned wonderingly towards the bully of the Shell.

"What's that?" he yelled. "Tom Merry has no right to bring that team here to represent St. Jim's, unless I give him permission!" roared Burkett viciously. "And I don't give him permission!"

He swung away from Gay and the prefect and strode towards Tom Merry, planting himself in front of that junior with blazing eyes.

"Get off the field!" he snarled. "D'you hear?"

Tom Merry faced Burkett with set lips. "D'you hear?" repeated Burkett, his great fists clenching.

"Get off! I'm junior captain of St. Jim's, and only a team authorised by me shall represent the school in any footer match! So clear off!"

A deathly silence fell over the footer field as Burkett's furious words ended.

They had been loud enough to be heard by all, players and spectators alike.

And the silence that followed them was strangely tense.

The footer field at Rylcombe Grammar School had never, perhaps, known such an amazing situation. And the feeling among the crowd of Grammarians was electric.

The referee's astonished, bewildered face took on a deep frown. He strode towards Tom Merry.

"Is this true?" he demanded. Tom nodded.

"I am afraid so. If Burkett refuses to authorise us to represent St. Jim's, we cannot very well finish this game."

"I do refuse!" snarled Burkett.

(Continued on next page.)

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The Grammarian prefect glanced at him. There was a curious, rather contemptuous look on his face.

"This is all very extraordinary," he said shortly. "It seems a great pity for the game to be abandoned like this!"

"Well, it's going to be abandoned!" said Burkett fiercely. Gordon Gay, looking very troubled, tapped Tom Merry on the arm.

"Look here," he said. "this is rotten! Surely the game can be finished?"

Even though the Grammarians seemed booked for a crushing defeat, Gordon Gay was sportsman enough to feel keenly the stopping of the match.

"I'm sorry," said Tom quietly. "But it's Burkett who must decide. He is perfectly right in saying that we have no authority to represent St. Jim's if he forbids us."

"Look here, Burkett—" began Gordon Gay, persuasively, turning to the beetle-browed St. Jim's junior.

But Burkett waved him aside.

"I've said all I've got to say!" he scowled.

"But St. Jim's are winning!" hooted Gordon Gay angrily.

Burkett's lips set in a sullen, dogged line.

"I forbid the game to go on!" he said stubbornly. "The official St. Jim's Junior Eleven is the only team that I shall allow to represent the school."

"But it's too late now for the official eleven, as you call it, to play the match off!" cried Gay, in an exasperated tone.

"I know that!" snapped Burkett. "The match is off, that's all!"

He turned to Tom Merry and the rest of the muddy footer players from St. Jim's.

"I've told you rotters to clear off!" he said viciously.

Tom Merry shrugged. He glanced at the others, seemed about to speak, but instead turned towards the touchline. He strode from the field, followed by the rest of his team, and watched by the silent, amazed Grammarians.

Five minutes later, Tom Merry and his eleven were tramping back towards St. Jim's.

Their daring scheme to field a real footer eleven, in spite of Burkett, against the Grammarians that afternoon had ended in disaster! The fact that they had been well on the way to piling up a huge score against Gordon Gay & Co. was little consolation.

The match had been abandoned, so they could not even claim a win.

No decent fellow would have made such a scene before a rival school, of course. But then Tom Merry & Co. never expected Frederick Burkett to act with any decency at all.

"To think we have an uttuh outsiders like that for juniah captain!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bitterly, as they tramped along.

"Rotten!" growled Blake.

Tom Merry said nothing. But his face was set and grim as he strode on with the rest of the "unofficial" eleven in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 13.

The Only Way!

"SEEN the notice?"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, had just emerged from Mrs. Taggles' little shop under the elms, after having had tea there, when Kit Wildrake accosted them.

"What notice?" asked Manners curiously.

"About the Greyfriars match," answered Wildrake glumly.

"Go and have a squint at it!"

He went on, and the Terrible Three made their way towards the School House. In the Hall, one or two fellows were standing by the green baize board, reading a notice there.

It was written in Burkett's big, scrawling handwriting.

"The following will represent St. Jim's against Greyfriars on Saturday, April 5th, playing at St. Jim's:

"Hammond; Reilly, Burkett; Pratt, Mellish, Crooke; Lennox, Julian, Roynance, Digges, Kerruish.

"(signed) FREDERICK BURKETT."

"Great Scott!" breathed Tom Merry.

So this was Burkett's revenge!

Furious over the affair of the Grammar School match, Burkett had deliberately put up that notice about the forthcoming match against Greyfriars, in order to show his power, and gail Tom Merry. The match, Tom saw, was to be played in a fortnight's time; there was no need for Burkett to have put up the notice about the team to take part in it for a long while yet.

But he had done so—to "rub it in" to Tom and the others that the team they had prevented from letting down St. Jim's at the Grammar School, should meet Greyfriars, St. Jim's far more formidable rivals on the footer field!

And Tom knew—as, in his heart, Burkett must have known—that if that eleven were fielded against Harry Wharton & Co., the only result would be a smashing defeat for St. Jim's.

There was dismay in the faces of the Terrible Three as they turned from the board.

Burkett had wasted no time on his return to the school in letting them feel his tyrannical heel!

Tom laughed bitterly.

The Greyfriars match!

To Tom it seemed strangely recent, that visit to Greyfriars School when his team, sadly weakened by the absence of Talbot, Blake, Figgins, and Levison, all through illness, and playing a man short in addition, had been defeated rather badly by Harry Wharton & Co.

And he remembered very vividly his grim promise to himself on that occasion—the promise that when Greyfriars visited St. Jim's for the return match, St. Jim's should avenge that defeat.

How little he had dreamed then that when the return match against Greyfriars came along, he would be a "nobody" at St. Jim's, unable even to play without permission—a permission that he would never be granted!

"Greyfriars will lick us all ends up!" he heard Monty Lowther saying angrily. "Burkett's doing it for sheer spite! He must realise—"

"But what can we do?" exclaimed Manners bitterly. "He's got the power!"

The Terrible Three went up to their study. It was time for prep. But when Manners and Lowther had finished theirs, Tom was still a long way from having done so. He had been thinking too much about the Greyfriars match.

"Don't you chaps wait for me," he said quietly. "If you want to buzz down to the Common-room, I'll join you later."

"Right-ho!" nodded Manners.

He and Lowther left the study. At the table, Tom Merry sat staring across at the fire, frowning and thoughtful.

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Surely there was some way of ousting Burkett from the captaincy?

"And it's got to be done before the Greyfriars match!" breathed Tom, with a sudden bitter fierceness.

But how?

Tom threw down his pen and jumped to his feet, pacing to and fro across the study, thinking—thinking!

"Bed-time, young 'un!"

Eric Kildare put his head in at the door of Study No. 10 with that announcement.

The bell had gone two minutes ago, sitting in a deep reverie in front of the fire in the otherwise empty study, had not heard it apparently.

Tom had not joined Manners and Lowther in the Common-room after all.

His thoughts had kept him to the solitude of the study, by the dying fire.

"Bed-time, young 'un!" repeated Kildare cheerfully. "You seem to be in a blessed brown study!"

Tom jumped up and grinned faintly. "Afraid I never heard the bell!"

Kildare surveyed him rather curiously.

"What's the matter, young 'un?" he asked kindly. "Not worrying about something, are you?"

Tom shook his head.

"No."

On a sudden impulse, Kildare stepped into the study and laid a hand on Tom's shoulder.

"Sure you aren't worrying about the captaincy?" he asked quietly. He frowned. "I know that—well, things haven't been going too well lately, under Burkett's captaincy. Strictly, between you and me, young 'un, I know as well as you do that Burkett is a rotten sort of captain, and I'd like to see a change, for the good of the Junior School. But the juniors voted for Burkett, rightly or wrongly, and so I can't call a new election, not without giving him a run for his money. So there's no chance of a new election this term, at any rate. Unless of course," added the captain, "Burkett resigns of his own accord."

Tom nodded.

"Yes. I realise that," He grinned. "I've been trying to think of a way of getting him to resign, as a matter of fact. I've got an idea, too. I won't tell you what it is, if you don't mind. For one thing, I'm afraid it's not much of an idea. But there's a faint chance it might come off."

Kildare's glance was curious. He seemed about to ask a question, but he changed his mind.

"Well, I wish you luck!" said the captain. "Good-night!"

"Good-night, Kildare!"

Tom Merry left the study and turned towards the stairs on his way to the Shell dormitory.

"He's a ripper, old Kildare," he told himself. "So he knows what a dud Burkett is! Well, it's not surprising!"

The Shell dormitory was full as Tom entered it.

Monty Lowther sang out to him, and Tom grinned across at his chum. But it was towards Burkett's bed that Tom Merry strode.

The muscular captain of the Shell was slipping off his waistcoat as Tom came up. He glared.

Had it not been for fear of reprisals on the part of Tom's friends, Burkett would have set himself the task of thrashing Tom Merry for the affair of the kidnapped eleven. But though he was a match for any junior singly, even Burkett dared not risk bringing down the wrath of a big crowd of them upon his head.

"I want a word with you, Burkett," said Tom quietly.

Burkett glared at him, and snorted.

"Oh, you do, do you!" he growled. "Well, I've a bone to pick with you, if it comes to that! By George, I—"

"I've seen your notice, and the team you propose to play against Greyfriars the week after next, went on Tom, ignoring Burkett's words.

A malicious grin appeared on Burkett's face.

"What do you think of it?" he sneered,

"Rotten!" said Tom briefly.

Burkett scowled at him with black brows. Then he threw back his head and gave a guffaw of laughter.

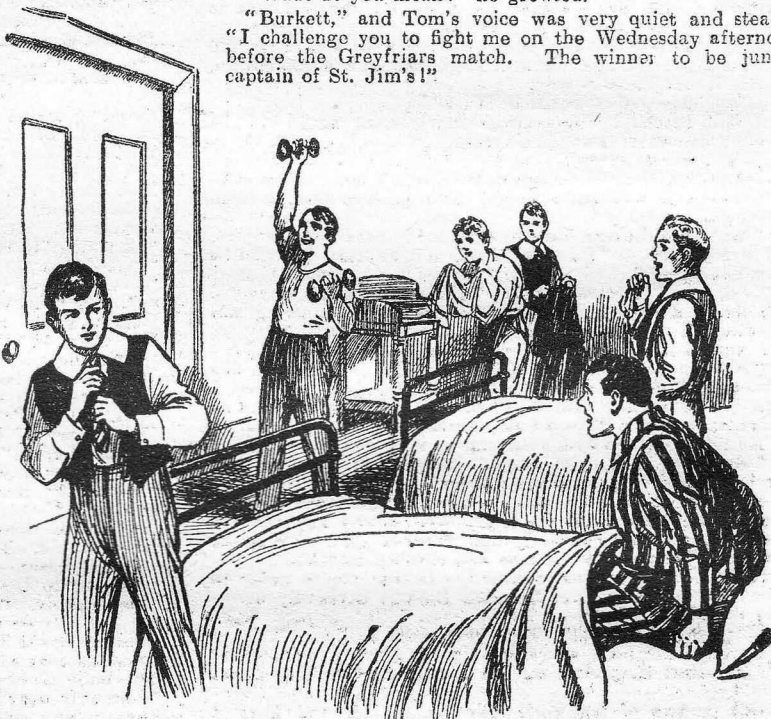
"Well, you'll have to put up with it, whether you think it's a rotten team or not!" he jeered. "That's the team that is going to play Greyfriars on Saturday week, Tom Merry!"

"Well, we'll see about that," said Tom Merry coolly. "I've got a proposal to make to you, Burkett."

Burkett stared at him darkly.

"What do you mean?" he growled.

"Burkett," and Tom's voice was very quiet and steady, "I challenge you to fight me on the Wednesday afternoon before the Greyfriars match. The winner to be junior captain of St. Jim's!"



Burkett sat up in bed and stared blankly. Standing in the centre of the dormitory floor was Tom Merry, busy with a pair of dumb-bells!

CHAPTER 14.

Challenged!

THERE was a breathless hush in the Shell dormitory following Tom Merry's staggering words.

The fellows stared at Tom as though they wondered if he had lost his senses. Manners and Lowther gazed at him in dumb dismay.

Burkett himself was surveying Tom in blank surprise, utterly stupefied.

Then slowly his expression changed. A slow grin crept over his face. He threw back his head, and gave a bellow of laughter that echoed round the dormitory.

"Ha, ha, ha!" His hulking figure fairly shook with merriment. "By George! You challenge me to fight you? For the captaincy? Oh, my aunt! D'you expect to get the captaincy from me that way?"

Tom Merry shrugged.

"You never know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Burkett gave another huge guffaw. "Why, you blessed dummy, I'll knock you silly!" He thrust his grinning face down to Tom's. "Remember how I walloped you last time we fought? It wasn't a fight—it was a massacre! You want to go through that again?"

"I'll take the chance," nodded Tom coolly. "Will you fight me?"

Burkett's grin died away, to be replaced by a malignant scowl.

"Fight you?" he roared. "Will I? I'll say I will! I'll be glad of the chance of slaying you alive! I smashed you last time—this time I'll break you into bits, Tom Merry!"

"Good!" said Tom. "That's settled, then. We fight on the Wednesday afternoon before the Greyfriars match. At the same place in Rylcombe Wood?"

"Yes!" grinned Burkett.

"And if I lick you, you resign the captaincy, remember," went on Tom steadily.

Burkett gave a guffaw.

"I'll remember!" he grinned mockingly. "If you lick me! Ha, ha, ha! If?"

Tom glanced round at the silent, wondering Shell fellows. "You're all witnesses to that," he said. "Burkett has agreed to resign the captaincy if I can lick him when we fight on Wednesday week."

No one answered. The fellows were all too utterly dumb-founded to say a word.

Without another glance at Burkett, Tom crossed towards his bed, and began undressing.

His heart was beating a trifle faster than usual, perhaps. But there was nothing else to tell him that it was really true that he had committed himself to fighting Burkett, the Samson of the Shell, the fellow who had thrashed him so thoroughly only a few weeks before!

Only too well did Tom Merry realise what a task he had set himself. The magnitude of it might well have appalled him.

But it was the only way. If he lost—well it would be his finish!

But if he could win, by some miracle, he would rid the Junior School of Burkett's tyranny.

"Tom, old chap—"

Manners and Lowther had crossed to his bed. They were watching him with curious eyes. Tom grinned back at them serenely.

"What the dickens did you do it for?" breathed Manners, in a low tone. "Hang it, Tom, it's useless! Burkett's unbeatable—"

"Oh, rats!" muttered Tom. "I'm going to try, anyway! He licked me before, I know. But this time I'm going into training. The fight isn't until Wednesday week."

Manners made a gesture of impatience.

"It's the only way," said Tom quietly. "It's the one chance! A slim chance, I know; but the only one that I can see of pulling things out of the fire. If I can lick Burkett, by some blessed fluke, perhaps—"

He broke off, his eyes gleaming at that thought.

"Wish me luck, you chaps," he grinned. But it was rather a twisted grin, despite himself.

Manners gripped his hand, unnoticed by the silent, wondering Shell fellows in the dormitory. Monty Lowther did the same. Tom's chums turned towards their own beds, and Tom donned his pyjamas and climbed into his.

"Don't have nightmares over the licking you're going to get on Wednesday week!" called Burkett derisively across the dormitory.

"Thanks, I won't!" Tom answered coolly. "I'll be dreaming, I expect, about the footer team I'll choose to play against Greyfriars on the Saturday after I've licked you."

One or two of the Shell fellows chuckled, and Burkett glared across at Tom with a scowl.

He would have given a good deal to have been able to intimidate Tom Merry. But that seemed to be impossible.

"Oh, rats!" growled Burkett.

The door opened. Darrell of the Sixth put his head in at the dormitory door, glanced round, and snapped out the light. In the ensuing darkness, Burkett's heavy breathing could be plainly heard.

"Merry!"

His growling voice broke the silence, as Darrell's footsteps died away along the passage.

"It's no good asking me to let you call the fight off, Burkett, old chap," answered Tom's sleepy voice.

"What?" roared Burkett furiously. "I wasn't going to, you rotter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were soft chuckles on all sides. Burkett gave a snort, and relapsed into silence, his face bearing an angry frown in the darkness.

He had not the faintest doubt that he could repeat his

smashing defeat of Tom Merry. It astonished him that Tom could apparently imagine that there was any hope of his escaping that fate again.

"The fool!" muttered Burkett, as he snuggled down comfortably under the blankets, with a malignant grin on his lips. "Well, he's asked for it. And he'll get it—worse this time than before."

CHAPTER 15.

Do or Die!

THE clang of the rising-bell echoed across the quad, awakened most of the Shell fellows to the early morning sunlight that was streaming in through the long windows of the dormitory.

Burkett grunted and yawned and sat up, rubbing his eyes.

The next moment an astonished exclamation broke from him.

Standing in the centre of the floor was Tom Merry, busy with a pair of dumb-bells of businesslike weight.

Burkett stared at him in blank surprise.

"W w-what on earth—"

Tom Merry did not pause in his exertions. The muscles rippled beautifully under his skin as he carried on with his exercises. He grinned across at Burkett, and nodded.

"Morning, Burkett!"

"But—but what the dickens—" began Burkett again.

"Just a bit of training, Burkett," explained Tom Merry cheerfully, "for Wednesday week, you know."

Burkett gaped as Tom continued exercising with dumb-bells. Other fellows were sitting up in bed watching him in great surprise, too. Tom Merry seemed quite oblivious to their stares, however.

He carried on cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The guffaw of laughter came from Burkett.

"Look at him!" grinned Burkett. "Oh, my hat! Think that'll do you any good?"

"It might," murmured Tom serenely. "Great things—dumb-bells!"

He lowered them and felt his muscles thoughtfully, while Burkett stared. Tom crossed to his bed and slipped on a shirt and blazer, and moved towards the door.

"Just off to the gym for a spell of punch-ball," he explained calmly. "So long, everybody!"

He left the dormitory. Manners and Lowther grinned. So did Reginald Talbot and several more of Tom Merry's friends, as they glanced across at Burkett.

The bully climbed out of bed with a scowl.

"The silly ass!" he scoffed. "If he thinks he can get out of what's coming to him on Wednesday week, he's jolly well mistaken, by George!"

"Don't you want to borrow some dumb-bells, Burkett?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"No," roared Burkett, "I jolly well don't!" He gave a boasting laugh. "Why, I could lick Tom Merry with one hand tied round my neck!"

"You'd look more like a monkey than ever, then," said Manners cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Burkett glared at him, and scowled angrily. But he did not say any more. With scowling visage he proceeded to wash and dress.

During the week that followed, with Tom Merry training hard and strictly, the excitement among the juniors at the prospect of the forthcoming fight between the burly captain of the Shell and his daring challenger grew day by day.

At first the fellows had not believed that Tom stood any chance at all of defeating Burkett. But gradually they began to admit that there was a possibility of that happening, after all.

For Tom, always a picture of fitness, under his present training regime was fairly glowing with health and athletic strength—a big contrast to Burkett who, despite his powerful frame and huge muscles, was rather pasty-faced after one or two dingy smoking-parties with Mellish and his other cronies.

Percy Mellish, always out for a little "flutter," had started by offering odds of ten to one on Burkett in the big fight, and even at that price had been unable to find any takers. But at the end of the week, with only four days more to elapse before the fight came off, he had reduced the odds he was offering to three to one on Burkett—a precaution which showed which way the wind was blowing.

Burkett himself appeared vastly amused by Tom Merry's training.

He lost no opportunity of scoffing when, every morning at rising-bell, he awoke to find Tom Merry in the middle of the dormitory at work with the dumb-bells.

Tom's cheerful grins in reply simply infuriated him.

(Continued at foot of next page.)

GOOD NEWS for STAMP ENTHUSIASTS

Boys all over the British Isles are delighted with the news that Messrs. Carreras, Ltd., are now enclosing Colonial and Foreign Stamps in all packets of their famous "Turf" Cigarettes.

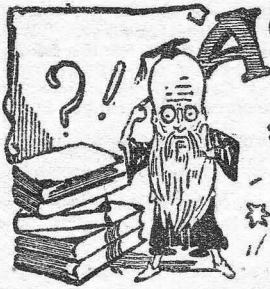
More than 6,000 varieties are being distributed by Messrs. Carreras during the current month.

Geography can become a fascinating subject for old or young when the interest is piqued by a strange stamp.

What country is it from? Where is that country? Would one care to live there? These and a hundred other questions are provoked by that small scrap of printed paper.

There are so many angles to the hobby of stamp collecting that it is no wonder so many find it an all-absorbing pastime.

ASK THE ORACLE!



After great persuasion, the Editor has allowed me to occupy the top of the page again this week. He refused to let me have the centre pages (nasty fellow.) But I suppose I must consider myself lucky to be where I am!



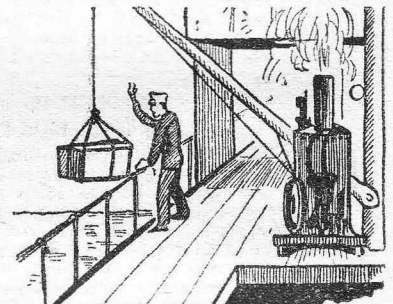
happened through an incident in 1794, when some British ships attacked a tower on Cape Mortella, and got such a pasting from the men in the tower that it was thought to be impregnable. So towers of the same design were built along the coast of England, and called Martello, from the name Mortella.

Q. What is the best cure for Wasp Stings?

A. Catch the wasp. Count the stripes on its stomach to find out its age. Feed it on salmon-and-cucumber sandwiches and call it "Wopsy." Then remove the sting. The wasp, after a few months, will eat out of your hands, run errands, and do your home-work.

Q. What is a Donkey-Engine?

A. This is a small steam-engine, "Young Mechanic," of Margate. Donkey-engines are used for working cranes or hoists on board ship, and the steam is supplied by a donkey-boiler. A donkey-pump can be fixed to the side of a ship, and is worked by the direct action of a steam-driven piston in the pump cylinder.



A donkey-engine at work.

Q. What is an Alpaca?

A. An animal, "Puzzled," of Hove, that is bred for its valuable wool. They are kept in flocks on the Andes. An Alpaca looks like a sheep with a long neck, and its fleece is thick and woolly, black or dark brown, and very strong. Alpaca cloth is supposed to be made from the fleece of the Alpaca, though very often mohair is used instead.

Q. Do Moles Eat Worms?

A. Every time, "Weedkiller," of Leytonstone. The main occupation of our little friend, the mole, is burrowing in the ground for the edible earthworm, which it gobbles raw, and in great quantities. A hungry fellow the mole! In fact, it can't live more than ten or twelve hours without food. It will go after birds, lizards, even snakes, if it can't get its full ration of earthworm every morning! Funny enough, toads it won't touch at any price, and vegetables leave it quite uninterested. Put a couple of moles together without any food, and they'll end up by one eating the other.



A great engineer, is the mole. With its two front feet it can burrow underground for miles. The strong bones of the fore-foot are shown.



Q. What is the Albert Medal?

A. This is a medal given, Tom Hayes, of Harringay, for saving life at sea. Only acts of daring are given this award, in which the recipient's own safety has been endangered. It consists of a gold badge,

oval in shape, enamelled in dark blue. The monogram of the initials V and A are worked on it round an anchor, surrounded by a bronze garter and the words "For Gallantry in Saving Life at Sea." The ribbon is dark blue, with two white stripes, or dark blue with four white stripes. The ribbon with the four stripes is awarded for acts of outstanding heroism.

Q. Why Do Nettles Sting?

A. On receiving this query from "New Reader," of Winchelsea, I sent the office-boy into the back-garden to find out all he could about nettles. I told him to find the biggest nettles he could, and to seize them firmly by both hands, and then let me know what happened. He went out all right, but up to the time of writing he has not returned with the information or the inflammation that I expected! Somewhat nettled, I decided to investigate the matter myself, anxious to please our chum of Winchelsea. Taking a telescope, a note-book, and an empty glass jar, I set out to have a personal interview with the fiercest nettle I could find, and ask him just what he meant by it. Well, it appears that the stinging part of the stinging-nettle consists of hairs filled with fluid, and the hairs being finely pointed, they penetrate the skin, and discharge the fluid under it. The most stinging stinging-nettle in England grows on the East Coast, near the sea, and is known as the Roman nettle. I hope you grasp all that, chum?

Q. What Were Martello Towers For?

A. Martello towers are dotted round the East Coast of England, Edgar Cooke (N.W.3), and were intended, when they were built, for coast defence. It all

(Continued from previous page.)

But as the days went by, with Tom Merry looking fitter and fitter each morning, an uneasy shadow began to appear in Burkett's eyes.

Even to himself he would not admit the possibility of his failing to thrash Tom Merry. But in secret Burkett began to do one or two furtive dumb-bell exercises in the privacy of Study No. 7.

He was too conceited to let his friends know, or to train in public. He still strutted round with boastful confidence in his outward manner.

But inwardly he was feeling far less sure of himself. Tom's cheery manner gave him something to think about.

On the Monday before the fight, after prep, Burkett mouched out into the quad with a very thoughtful frown on his face.

Almost at once he came face to face with an athletic figure in running-kit that loomed up through the dusk.

It was Tom Merry returning to the House after a short training run. At sight of Burkett, Tom halted. Manners and Monty Lowther were with him.

"How are you feeling, Burkett?" grinned Tom. "All ready for a licking on Wednesday?"

Burkett scowled. Manners and Lowther chuckled.

"Better borrow my dumb-bells, Burkett," urged Tom, with a chuckle. "I've put on pretty well an inch round the biceps, I believe."

Even in the dusk it was clear that Tom Merry was fairly bursting with health and strength. Although Burkett was a head taller, and proportionately bigger built, it was Tom Merry who really made the more striking figure.

Burkett gave a laugh that was rather forced.

"I could lick you on one leg!" he scoffed.

"Could you, really?" murmured Lowther, with deep irony.

"Yes, I jolly well could!" roared Burkett. "But look here—" Suddenly his tone altered. It became milder than the Terrible Three had ever heard it. "What's the good of us fighting, anyway? Blessed if I can see why we should! I don't want to hurt you, Merry. You—you wouldn't care to call the fight off?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Hallo," he said. "Got cold feet already? Well, I'm blessed! But it's no good, Burkett. I'm not cancelling the fight. Not unless," he added cheerfully, "you give me best."

Burkett's face went crimson.

"Why, you silly chump," he roared, "I—I'll—"

"Hand over the captaincy now, Burkett, and I'll let you call the fight off," interrupted Tom, with a grin.

"By George!" Burkett found his voice with an effort.

"I was offering to let you off for your own good—"

"How kind of you!" chuckled Tom.

"But I'll jolly well smash you now!" bellowed Burkett furiously. "I—I'll spifficate you! You'll wish you'd never been born!"

He swung on his heel and strode away with beetling brows.

Tom grinned, so did Manners and Monty Lowther.

"I say, Burkett!" sang out Tom, after the burly, re-treating figure of the muscular junior captain. "What about taking down that notice about the Greyfriars match? Save you trouble later, you see. 'Cause I intend to be

the chap who'll choose the team to meet Greyfriars on Saturday."

Burkett's reply was an angry growl as he vanished into the School House.

Arm-in-arm Tom Merry & Co. strolled on after him towards the lighted doorway, very cheerfully.

Burkett had clearly got "cold feet," as Tom Merry had expressed it. Not for a moment did the Terrible Three believe that it was for Tom's sake that the bully had suggested calling off the big fight.

Tom Merry was faced with the task of his life. Though he had trained himself to the last hair for the coming fight, it was very doubtful if he could manage to escape another bad thrashing at the hands of the giant bully.

But no longer did his chums regard his chances as utterly hopeless!

On the contrary, they were filled now with eager hopes! "My hat!" muttered Manners, as the three strode into the School House, and headed for their study, where Tom was going to have a brisk rub-down by his chums. "If only you could lick him!"

Tom nodded grimly. "If only I can! Hang it, I must! I've got to lick him! If I fail—"

He broke off. The prospect if he failed was one that he did not care to discuss.

The iron heel of Burkett would be on the necks of the juniors for good if he failed to win that fight.

The big match against Greyfriars, too, would be a fiasco, with Burkett's eleven hopelessly outclassed by Harry Wharton & Co. The name of St. Jim's would become a laughing-stock among all their rivals.

As he entered Study No. 10 and peeled off his running things, Tom repeated, half to himself:

"I must win! I've got to—that's all!"

CHAPTER 16.

The Great Fight!

LOWTHER! You were talking!"

Mr. Linton's voice was steely.

The master of the Shell was not in a very good temper that morning.

It was Wednesday morning. In the afternoon the great fight between Tom Merry and Burkett, the bully of the Shell, would take place in Rylcombe Wood. The minds of all the juniors were far more occupied with the prospect of that fight than with the works of P. Virgilius Maro, on which they were supposed to be concentrating all their attentions.

Lines had been falling thicker than leaves in Vallombrosa, in consequence!

Mr. Linton fixed Monty Lowther with a gimlet eye. Lowther had just whispered to Bernard Glyn that Philip Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, had agreed to referee the fight between Tom and Burkett, Burkett having objected to any Shell fellow. Consequently, Lefevre had been let into the secret of the fight, and had good-naturedly promised to lend his services; he was probably nothing loath to take the chance of witnessing what promised to be a thrilling meeting.

"You were talking, Lowther!" rasped Mr. Linton.

"Ye-es, sir!"

"You will stay in this afternoon, Lowther, until you have copied out the passage on which you were supposed to be working, ten times!"

Lowther gasped. His face went blank with dismay.

"Oh crumbs!" he breathed.

His detention meant that he would probably miss the big fight.

Five minutes later, when morning lessons finished and the Shell poured out of the Form-room, Monty Lowther's face was utterly miserable.

Any other punishment, however much more severe—five hundred lines, even a Head's licking, anything—would have been preferable in the present circumstances to having to stay in that afternoon and copy out ten times that hateful passage from Virgil!

"Hard luck, old chap!" said Manners sympathetically.

"Rotten luck!" nodded Roginald Talbot.

Monty Lowther grinned ruefully, trying bravely to make the best of it. He turned to Tom Merry, who was strolling towards the stairs with his books under his arm.

"Feeling fit, Tommy?"

"Fit as a horse!" grinned Tom.

Frederick Burkett, not far away, overheard Tom's cheery words, and scowled.

"It's rotten, Linton dropping on you with detention, Monty," said Tom, as the Terrible Three mounted the stairs, surrounded by their well-wishers. "Talbot, old chap, I wonder if you'll second me now that Monty's unable to?"

"Rather!" grinned Talbot.

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"Thanks!"

"Well, if I buck up, I ought to be able to get the job done in a pretty short while," growled Lowther. "With luck, even now I might get along in time to see the finish."

"In time to see Tom Merry knocked out—eh?"

It was the malicious voice of Gerald Crooke, who was coming up the stairs behind them, and had caught Monty Lowther's remark.

"Rats!" snapped Lowther. "To see Burkett smashed to a jelly, most likely!"

"I don't think!" sneered Crooke.

He strode into Study No. 7 with a malicious grin still on his face, as the Terrible Three went on towards their own study.

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

In the Shell Form-room, Monty Lowther was working at a feverish pace, covering the paper with breathless rapidity. He had had to begin his detention at a quarter to two. The big fight was to start at two-thirty. Lowther reckoned that with luck he could be finished in less than an hour, in which case, unless the fight ended very quickly, he should be able to get along to the clearing in Rylcombe Wood in time to see the finish of it.

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

His pen fairly flew.

Half-past two struck, the deep tones coming to his ears with a strange, ominous note, it seemed to Lowther in the silent Form-room.

For a moment he lowered his pen, staring at the window with unseeing eyes.

Half-past two!

In Rylcombe Wood the great fight was just beginning! Only for a moment did he pause, however. An instant or two later Monty Lowther's pen was flying on.

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

"Seconds out of the ring!"

The quiet voice of Philip Lefevre broke the tense, waiting hush that had fallen in the clearing in the wood where Tom Merry and Frederick Burkett were facing one another.

Manners and Talbot, Crooke and Mellish climbed out of the improvised ring. His eyes glued to his watch, Lefevre raised his hand.

"Time!"

There was not a sound from the army of crowded spectators as Tom Merry and the bully of the Shell stepped quickly forward.

The eyes of the juniors round the ring were wide and tense.

Strangely enough, Tom Merry himself seemed the coolest of the whole assembly. A picture of glowing fitness, there was a quiet smile of evident confidence on his face as he put up his fists.

Burkett's face, on the contrary, was dark and savage as he advanced quickly towards his foe.

He led off with a powerful swinging blow of his right fist that went smashing for Tom's face. But, somehow, Tom's head was not there when the blow arrived. It landed on air; and the next moment Tom's left fist had thudded into Burkett's ribs.

"First blood to Tommy!" muttered Manners, with gleaming eyes.

Again Burkett swung at Tom, and again Tom's skilful footwork made him miss. Once more Tom's own fist, however, landed hard on Burkett's body.

"My hat!" breathed Talbot. "I believe he'll do it!"

Burkett's face bore a sullen flush of anger now. His eyes were glinting. Those two ineffective punches of his had exasperated him, and those two powerful blows in the ribs had shaken him considerably.

He hurled himself at Tom, and Tom retreated coolly before the fury of his attack.

Burkett succeeded in landing a blow on Tom's shoulder, and for a moment Tom staggered. But he recovered instantly, and his right flashed out, and thudded on to Burkett's square-cut jaw. Burkett reeled, and there was an excited cheer from round the ropes.

"Oh, wippin'!" muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his eyeglass gleaming excitedly. "Gweat, bai Jove!"

Burkett's mouth twisted in a snarl of rage, and he sprang at his opponent ferociously. He swung for Tom's head, but Tom blocked the blow.

Again Burkett swung for his head, clumsily. Tom side-stepped, and ducked, as yet another swinging punch was aimed at his face. Then he stepped in, and brought both fists smashing home in Burkett's ribs in quick succession, with a force that made Burkett reel and gasp.

Crash!

Following up his advantage, Tom had landed a straight left on Burkett's jaw. The bully reeled against the ropes, daed and stupefied, his hands falling feebly to his sides. "Now!" yelled Herries. "Finish him!"

Burkett lurched forward, with blazing eyes, a moment later, however. Though that straight left had done damage it had by no means finished him, even so far as that round was concerned.

He hit out with his right and left. Tom blocked the first terrific blow, but the second landed on the side of the head, and sent him pitching helplessly sideways. He collapsed on to the grass, dazed and panting.



A dismayed hush fell, as the voice of Philip Lefevre began the count.

CHAPTER 17. For the Captaincy!

"THANK goodness for that!"

In the Shell Form-room Monty Lowther flung down his pen, gathered up the sheets of paper that he had covered, and raced from the room. The imposition was finished.

Three minutes later he was cramming a cap on to his head as he sprinted down the School House steps into the quad and tore across towards the gates.

As he ran he glanced at his watch.

It was nearly a quarter to three.

Monty Lowther covered the distance between the gates of St. Jim's and Rylcombe Wood in something like record time.

As he raced breathlessly through the trees towards the clearing where the fight was in progress he heard a sudden excited cheer from somewhere ahead—a cheer that died away abruptly into a tense hush.

Monty Lowther burst into the clearing a minute later. He saw that the huge crowd was gathered round the ring—evidently the fight was still in progress.

He thrust his way through to the ropes.

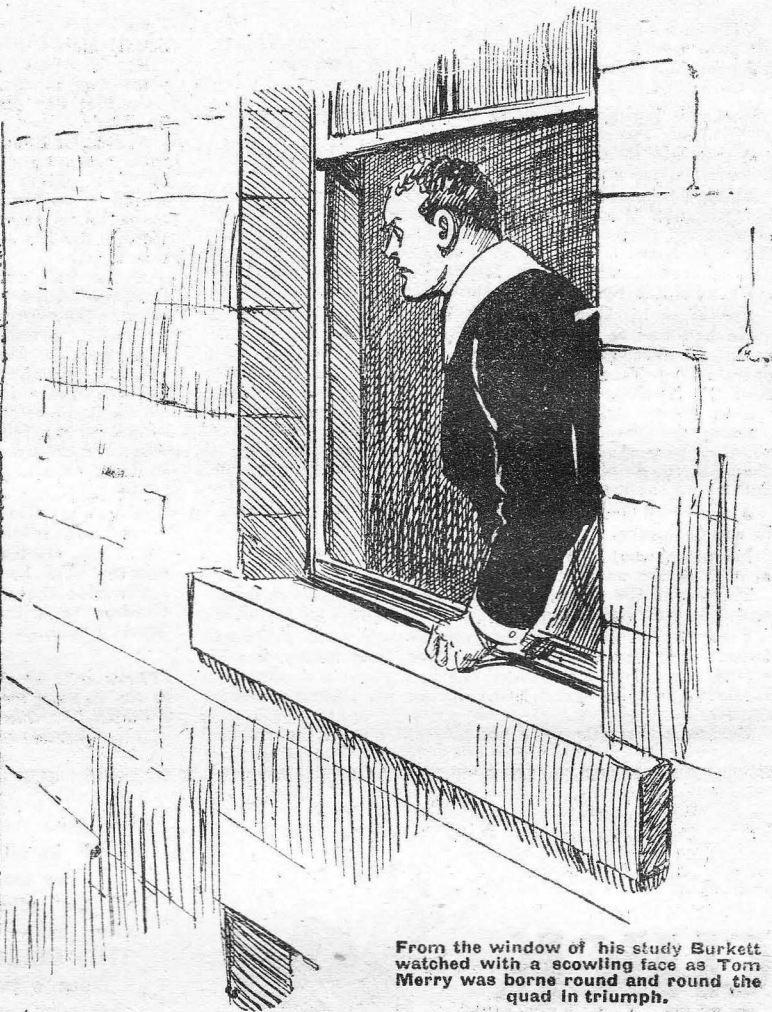
Two fiercely battling figures met his gaze.

Tom Merry and Burkett were fighting as strongly as though it were still the first round, instead of the seventh. But their faces showed well enough how long, and how fiercely the fight had been in progress.

Monty Lowther gave a gasp of dismay as he stared at Tom Merry's battered countenance. But then his eyes fell on Burkett's—if anything, more battered than Tom's!

And it was clear that Tom was holding his own—more than holding his own, it seemed to Monty Lowther, watching with breathless intensity from the ropes.

A blow to the jaw from Burkett's left staggered Tom.



From the window of his study Burkett watched with a scowling face as Tom Merry was borne round and round the quad in triumph.

But an instant later Burkett reeled back from an uppercut that would have lifted any other junior clean off his feet.

He reeled, but he did not fall. Lurching and panting, he staggered forward, his single open eye glittering with a savage, almost despairing light.

Like a panther Tom Merry sprang at him.

Tom put all his skill and strength into one terrific straight left, straight from the shoulder to the point of Burkett's jaw.

It landed exactly on the fateful point. Without a sound, not a groan nor a sigh, Frederick Burkett pitched backwards on his heels, and crashed to the grass like a fallen oak.

He lay quite still, one leg twisted under the other, his left arm bent above his head; his eyes were closed, and he was breathing heavily.

In a deathly silence Lefevre began to count.

All eyes were riveted on Burkett. But he made no movement. Crooke's face went white as he stared at his inert leader. Mellish was breathing hard, his hands clenching and unclenching.

Tom Merry reeled, panting, and rested a hand on the ropes as he stood staring down at the prone figure at his feet.

The voice of the captain of the Fifth finished the count. Lefevre stepped into the ring.

"Tom Merry wins!" he said.

And then a wild, tumultuous cheer rang out in the clearing. It echoed through the trees, scaring away the rooks from a distant rookery—jubilant, deafening!

Tom Merry had won.

He was battered and weary; his lips were swollen, his cheeks were bruised, his lip was cut and bleeding. But he had won—a triumph for sheer physical fitness and scientific boxing over brute strength. And a few moments later the victor was being chaired round the clearing by the tramping crowd, high on the shoulders of the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

"Tom wins!"

Again and again the deafening cheers rang out.

Burkett's regime as cock of the walk among the juniors of St. Jim's was over at last!

His defeat at the hands of Tom Merry had been his downfall—final and complete.

Though he had not heard Tom Merry's victory acclaimed in Rylcombe Wood, since he had been lying oblivious to everything, thanks to that last knock-out blow, Burkett, at any rate, heard the cheers on the following Thursday evening, after tea, when Tom Merry was chaired round the quad after his re-election to the junior captaincy.

For after his defeat Burkett had sullenly resigned.

He had had to do so. Even Burkett dared not go back on his promise, given before all the Shell, that if he were defeated by Tom Merry he would resign the captaincy. And the resulting election had been a nominal one only.

Tom Merry had been re-elected without opposition.

From the window of Study No. 7 Frederick Burkett watched with eyes that were still beautifully blackened, as Tom Merry, despite his vigorous protests, was borne round and round the quad.

A muttered growl came from Burkett as he stared down in sullen silence.

No more would he be able to swagger round St. Jim's as cock of the walk in the Junior School!

There was one fellow, at any rate, who could lick him—and that was Tom Merry, once again captain of the Shell.

Even though he could lick anyone else—and the timid fellows still feared him—the fact that Tom Merry was his master would prove a decided check, without a doubt, upon Burkett's bullying proclivities during his future career at St. Jim's.

Burkett's thoughts were not pleasant ones as he watched

Tom borne at last, amid shouts and cheers, back into the School House doorway.

But Tom Merry's triumph was not even yet quite complete—not till the following Saturday.

On that day Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars visited St. Jim's.

And the honours of the footer match between those welcome visitors and their old rivals were shared about equally by Tom Merry and Ralph Reckness Cardew, who each scored a couple of goals. And since Greyfriars only managed to register one goal, with a resulting four—one victory for St. Jim's, Tom Merry's promise of weeks ago was kept.

As he had promised on that memorable day when Cardew's failure to arrive at Greyfriars—with excellent reasons, as everyone now knew—had enabled Harry Wharton & Co. to inflict defeat upon St. Jim's, the return match had given St. Jim's their revenge!

Tom's triumph was complete.

There was a happy grin on his face as he was carried off the field after the match by his enthusiastic supporters—and on the face of Ralph Reckness Cardew, too, as he was chaired side by side with Tom Merry, there was a smile of satisfaction.

Not so long ago Cardew had been waging a bitter feud against Tom Merry; he had been the cause of Tom Merry's downfall—and he had been glad of it.

But the slacker of the Fourth had come to see the big mistake that he had made—and there was no fellow on Little Side that afternoon more glad than Ralph Reckness Cardew to witness, after those disastrous weeks, Tom Merry's triumph!

THE END.

(There will be another grand long story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, entitled: "GOOD-BYE TO ETONS!" There's fun and thrills galore in this yarn, chums, so don't miss, it whatever you do.)

CHICK CHANCE

Adventurer!

By
ROBERT MURRAY.

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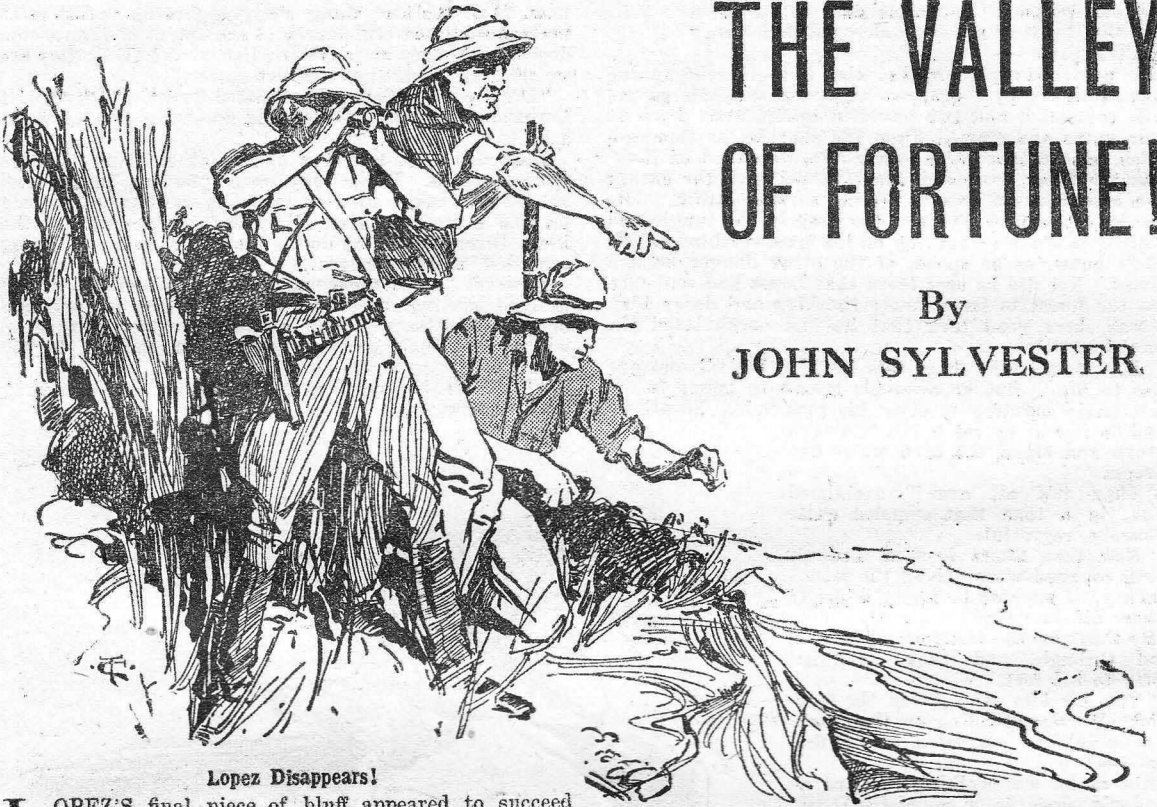
The Amazing Newspaper Advertisement that brings such strange adventures to Chick Chance.

The Concluding Instalment of our Great Adventure Serial!

THE VALLEY OF FORTUNE!

By

JOHN SYLVESTER.



Lopez Disappears!

LOPEZ'S final piece of bluff appeared to succeed better even than he had dared to hope. The shouts died away, and there was a brief, unearthly silence. The fickle native mind was swaying. A piece of theatricality like this impressed them.

Dick's heart sank. He realised the cunning ruse, which made him act as hostage. Trent and West dared not move so long as he was in danger, and that very fact would turn the tide of popular feeling once more in Lopez's favour.

"If only my hands were free!"

Judging by his expression, Chica thought the same, even more fervently.

Lopez was now addressing the crowd again. It was obvious that he was beginning to win them back to allegiance.

"Fools!" he cried. "I have a mind to make the ground you stand on open and swallow you. Am I not your god? Is not life and death in my hands alone? Haven't I put a spell on the demons and caused them to flee? I tell you nothing can hurt you, and no power on earth can touch me!"

As he made that last proud boast there was a flash and a report, and with deplorable inconsistency Lopez uttered a scream of pain and toppled over.

"Got him!" muttered Trent, as he knelt behind a rock and lowered his gun. "Now, what's on the programme?"

The natives were hushed into paralysed silence. It was like a judgment from Heaven. The god, who claimed he could not be harmed, was lying dead on the ground before their very eyes.

Suddenly one of them, an old man, pushed his way forward and held up his hand.

He began a lengthy speech, which was gibberish to Dick. But it had an instant effect on the natives.

"Of what use has been your god?" he demanded, pointing scornfully to the motionless figure on the ground. "We did wrong to turn from our king, under

whom we lived in contentment. For what have we gained by the change except being plagued by evil spirits? Have they not slain with their thunderbolts the flower of our youth? And yet is it not the punishment we deserve?"

There was a storm of acclamation.

"Give us back our king!" yelled the mob.

The witch-doctors eyed each other uneasily. They were in an ugly position. It was impossible to satisfy this clamorous demand.

"Give us back our king! Give us back our king!"

The shouts merged into a thunderous roar. Spears were once more upraised threateningly. It was then, to his bewilderment, Dick saw a tall figure threading between the pillars. The newcomer suddenly leapt forward and mounted the rock Lopez had vacated. "Your king has returned," he said simply.

It was a dramatic moment. Nevertheless, it was all entirely incomprehensible to Dick. He saw that the natives were frantic with excitement, and that Lopez could no longer menace him. But so far he was uncertain whether his own position would be improved by this mysterious change in events.

The fact remained that he was still chained to the ground, and that if he stayed there much longer the torment Lopez had described would begin. Already he fancied he felt an unpleasant tingling in his legs. It may have been only imagination. On the other hand—

"Dick! Dick, you son of a gun!"

The sound of that voice, hoarse with emotion, electrified him. He craned his neck, and to his amazement he saw Trent running towards him. West was close behind. A moment later they were both on their knees beside him.

"By Jupiter, what a night!" Trent gasped. "But we are in time. There's nothing more to worry about. I'll have those handcuffs off in two shakes."

"Then you're an optimist!" Dick murmured characteristically, restraining himself from expressing his almost delicious relief. "But what does it all mean? Why have the blighters suddenly changed their tune?"

"I'll explain—"

He was interrupted by the king himself, who sprang down, followed by a group of eager natives. He gave a swift command, and two powerful brutes went down on their knees and started filing the shackles as though—which was probably true—their lives depended on it.

As the filing proceeded Trent talked with the energy of a man released from a terrific nervous strain. He described how they had met the king in the jungle and resolved to stake everything on his trustworthiness. He didn't know, as he spoke, of the other danger he had missed. Nor did he ever learn that Lopez had sent men into the forest to impersonate the king and decoy him. It was sheer good luck that he had encountered the genuine article.

"He's a splendid chap, this king! We all owe our lives to him. But he owes his return to power to us. He's fairly bursting to show his gratitude. So all we need do is rest up for a bit, and then return and claim the land we've discovered."

"Then it's all over!" exclaimed Dick, in a tone that sounded quite absurdly regretful.

"Now that Lopez is dead I don't think we need worry about the return journey. I suppose he really is dead? Where did he drop?"

By this time the last fetter had been filed through, and Dick struggled stiffly to his feet.

"You hit him straight in the forehead. He was standing on that rock. I shouldn't be surprised if we find that—"

But as he was walking forward he suddenly drew to a standstill. His face became a mask of incredulity.

Lopez had disappeared!

Chica's Revenge!

THAT night they slept deeply from utter exhaustion; and they slept with the knowledge of complete safety. This was a rare experience, but the result was that they awoke feeling wonderfully refreshed. Instead of finding red ants and furry spiders crawling over them, they opened their eyes to the roomy interior of a hut, so comparatively clean and comfortable that it seemed the wildest luxury.

Dick felt none the worse for his grisly experience the day before. He tried to imagine what this morning would have been if he hadn't been rescued. However, that wasn't likely to be repeated. Although it was queer about Lopez.

"Darned if I can make it out!" muttered a voice beside him, and this so exactly echoed his own thoughts that he gave a start.

"Hallo! Are you awake?"

"Do you think I'm talking in my sleep?" grunted Trent. "I've been awake for the last hour. I've been turning this problem of Lopez over in my mind. Now the king may be right, and the witch-doctors may have smuggled his body away with an eye on some future hocus pocus. Or else he may only have been foxing."

"I suppose he can't do much damage now, even if he's alive."

"I'd prefer to think he was dead," said Trent thoughtfully.

"I can't see that it matters either way." West sat up and rubbed his eyes. "The great thing is that we have

discovered the valley and won the Indians over to our side. I propose to drop Lopez out of my calculations now. And the first thing I'm going to do to-day is to make a really careful survey of the extent of the radium deposits. If they are anything like what I think they are we shall all be millionaires twice over."

"It's a pretty picture," admitted Trent. "Pity to let Lopez spoil it. Well"—he stood up—"who is coming for a bathe?"

Dick was glad to get a chance of cleaning the dye from his skin. While they were splashing in the pool behind the hut a number of villagers came cautiously up and peered at them. Despite the assurances of the king, there seemed no doubt that they were still being regarded as supernatural.

However all danger was over. When they had finished bathing, they were summoned into the presence of the king himself, and although it was difficult to make out what he was saying, he seemed highly satisfied.

"I believe he wants us to marry and settle down!" Trent chuckled.



Trent's shot rang out, and there was a piercing scream from Lopez, as the villain toppled back, shot through the back!

They left the royal presence, and the strain under which they had been living for months had finally relaxed. It was replaced now by the excitement of a different quest. For suppose, after all, their hopes of finding sufficient radium had been exaggerated?

To this question West was the only man who could supply an answer. He became thoughtful and silent as they approached the far end of the gorge.

"I notice," Trent remarked, "we are no longer being followed."

"They are scared of this place," West nodded.

"And so was I last night," said Dick warmly. "By the way, what's happened to Chica?"

"I think he must be scared as well," grinned Trent.

In front of them loomed the tall pillars of stone. Viewed in daylight, it was obvious they were the work

of man. They were arranged in semi-circles, and the boulder in the centre was clearly an altar.

"These go back long before the Incas," commented West. "I think they belong to what we call the Stone Age. They were erected by the descendants of those primitive men we encountered in the swamp."

"I knew a lecture was coming. But forget all that and look for the precious radium."

"Look for it?" The scientist gave a queer smile. "My dear Trent, I should require a very powerful microscope. And even then—"

"Do you mean it's all a hoax?" broke in Trent in alarm.

"You wouldn't think so if you were tied down as Dick was. No, we've no reason to be disappointed."



"But I don't get you. Either it's here or it isn't."

West had the air of a schoolmaster trying to be patient with a somewhat stupid but likeable pupil.

"You'll have to listen to that lecture after all," he smiled. "Radium isn't something you can see and pick up. Most of this rock we are standing on is pitchblende. It takes tons of pitchblende to produce a single gramme of radium. That's why it's so expensive."

"But surely, in that case it couldn't injure—"

"Not in the ordinary way, I agree. But in this valley it looks to me as though there are patches in which the radioactive salts are highly concentrated."

"Then lead me to the patches!" cried Trent eagerly.

"You are standing on one," was the quiet reply. Trent gave a comical start and then jumped into the air as though he had touched a red-hot brick. But West reassured him. "There's no danger, for a short time. But do you see that cave, straight ahead? Even last night, none of the natives went near it. I propose we continue our explorations."

Trent still looked as though he suspected the seat of his trousers of being on fire. However, in a chastened voice he told West to carry on.

Dick had said very little so far. He wouldn't have admitted, for the world, that he felt a twinge of uneasiness about entering the cave. But as they crossed the threshold, and plunged from dazzling sunlight into pitch darkness, he didn't feel altogether happy.

"What makes radium burn?" he asked.

"You might as well ask me why you get a shock when you touch a live wire. Radium sends out invisible rays

It's these rays that are used by surgeons for reaching places they can't get at with a knife. The fact was discovered by a French doctor who thoughtlessly went out for a walk with a tube of radium in his waistcoat pocket. He didn't repeat his mistake."

"It sounds almost uneasy."

"It's perfectly natural. Of course, to the natives—"

West got no farther. With a warning shout, just as though the ground had parted under his feet, he disappeared. Trent started forward, in amazement; and so did Dick. But they both had the same sensation of the ground yawning underneath them.

Dick's first fear was that he had fallen into a pit, like the one at the entrance to the village. But the actual drop turned out to be less than six feet. He touched solid earth again, with a jolt that rattled every bone in his body; but he still continued to spin downwards. Over and over he rolled, down a deep shaft, set at an angle of forty-five degrees.

He was the last, and at the bottom he crashed into Trent, who was snorting like a bull, and suffocating the unfortunate West underneath him.

"Gosh!" Trent exploded. "I wasn't expecting that."

They sorted themselves out and staggered to their feet.

"It's going to prove easier to come down than go up!" gasped West.

"But we can't possibly climb up that shaft!" Dick exclaimed, only realising when he had spoken the full significance of the fact.

"No, we can't!" agreed West, pausing to regain his breath.

"Then how are we going to get out?" echoed Trent.

It was so dark they might have been blind. Behind them, at an angle impossible to climb, rose a slippery shaft. In front of them, perhaps the cave came to an abrupt end, or perhaps it tunnelled deeper into the bowels of the earth. And the earth itself contained those deadly and mysterious properties of corrosion they had just been discussing.

"But there must be some other way out."

Trent had no sooner spoken than the silence that followed was cut by a hard,

mocking voice.

"There is a way, but you will never find it!"

Dick felt the blood rush to his head. He held his breath in mingled incredulity and dismay.

"Lopez!" stammered Trent.

"Yes, it is Lopez!" continued the voice mockingly.

"You thought, no doubt, that you had seen the last of me. You were congratulating yourself on your victory. But it has been short-lived."

"The same will apply to you," murmured Trent, recovering from his first stupefaction.

"That remains to be seen—although you will never see it. No, don't draw your revolver. It is a waste of time, and your time is so short that what remains is precious. I have you covered, because, although I cannot see you, I know exactly where you are. Nor am I alone. I have three witch-doctors with me."

"What are your terms?" demanded West.

"I am not making any more bargains. I've got you all at my mercy. And I'm going to have the revenge I waited for so long."

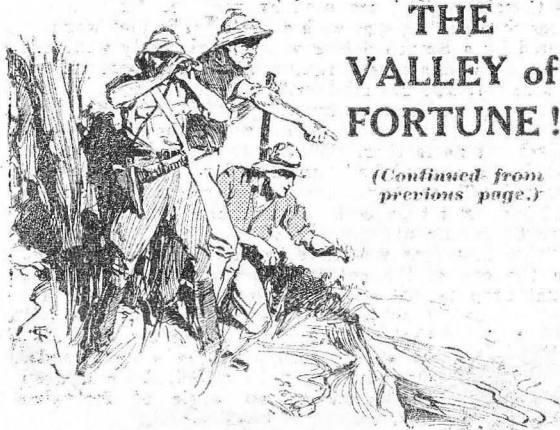
"You are a fool!" said West sharply. "You'll be killed if the natives catch sight of you again."

"That depends on the circumstances of my return. I have not decided yet what I shall do. After all, I can locate this valley again, and if I slip quietly away and return with troops to support my claim, the opposition of the natives won't matter."

As he spoke the darkness was pierced by three tiny

THE VALLEY OF FORTUNE!

(Continued from previous page.)



lights. They came slowly nearer, three savages carrying torches. Lopez himself, however, remained invisible.

"Shall we make a dash for it?" Trent whispered to West.

The latter hesitated. He had to make a tremendous decision. To the consternation of both Dick and Trent, he shook his head.

"Not yet—he could pick us off too easily."

The torches came closer, and once more that voice rang out:

"Throw your weapons on to the ground. A single false move and I shoot!"

Dick felt an overwhelming urge to break away. Surely, in such a desperate position, they had no more to lose by resisting than obeying. But he caught West's warning glance. The scientist had discarded his revolver, and, heavily against their inclinations, both Trent and Dick did the same.

"That's better! Now walk forward ten paces, and then lie flat on the ground."

Dick groaned to himself, but the only alternative was to be shot. He dared not look at Trent, who could hardly prevent himself from running amuck and lashing out at the gruesome-looking witch-doctors in a kind of berserk fury.

"Down!" cried Lopez. "Each man flat on his back!"

Once more they forced themselves to obey, and it was then that Lopez emerged from the rock which had concealed him. He had a revolver in one hand, and his face was distorted by malevolent triumph.

"You do not need to be told that no one will come to your aid. No native would dare to enter this cave. That is why I do not intend to take the easy course of shooting you outright. I mean to leave you here, knowing that you cannot escape."

"I wouldn't be too sure——" began Dick suddenly.

"I agree that I made too sure last time. But now there is a difference. Although I do not intend to kill you, I shall take a certain precaution. You cannot get far if you lose the use of your legs."

The full consciousness of what he meant did not dawn on them until they saw the witch-doctors approaching. One of them held a heavy club. As he came towards Dick he raised the club; and to his horror Dick saw that he meant to bring it down across his legs. Each of them was to have his legs broken, and to be left to die of slow torment in the radium cavern.

The club rose. A second later it would have descended. But there was a startling intervention. A rope whistled through the air. It was the noose of a lasso. It descended on Lopez's neck, and his shriek of fury was choked as it tightened. The rope was pulled, and he struck the witch-doctor, sending him to the ground; then, his arms and legs waving wildly, Lopez was jerked out of sight into the upper darkness.

Trent scrambled to his feet. So did his companions. The revolver Lopez had dropped was snatched up, and West grabbed a club. They made a rush at the three witch-doctors, who seemed transfixed by what they had just seen. There was a sharp, swift struggle. The revolver rang out. It was not a moment to show mercy. The men deserved to die—and they did.

"Now——"

Trent swung round, the revolver smoking in his hand, just as a human shape on the end of a rope dropped from somewhere overhead, oscillated like a pendulum, and detached itself.

"I know the way out, seniors!" said a voice that had never come with such welcome.

"Chica!" breathed Dick. "But how in blazes have you managed it?"

"I entered the cave first," said Chica calmly. "I watched everything from a ledge above. There is a tunnel near the ledge, which leads to the hillside."

"And Lopez?"

"My vengeance is complete," was the quiet answer—and Dick noticed that the long knife in the Indian's waistbelt was bright red.

There had been no mistake this time. The witch-doctors were dead, Lopez was dead, and they had no longer anything to fear. Trent took a stride forward and in silence gripped the native's hand.

Barely a quarter of an hour elapsed before they came out on the side of the ravine. Below them the village glittered in the sunshine; and so remote that they looked like a line of transparent cloud, the Andes hung above the far horizon. They paused, and still they did not speak. Dick was not alone in finding his relief that their ordeal had come to an end tinged with a faint wistfulness. And to each of them came the feeling, now it was all over, that it was not only the wealth they had found which had enriched them, but the loyalty and friendship they had forged, and the adventures they had shared.

"Still, I think a holiday is overdue," sighed Trent.

"We'll look up the map," grinned Dick, "and think of the most exciting place in which we can spend it."

THE END.

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