Great FREE GIFT Number!

The GEM 2d

FREE INSIDE!

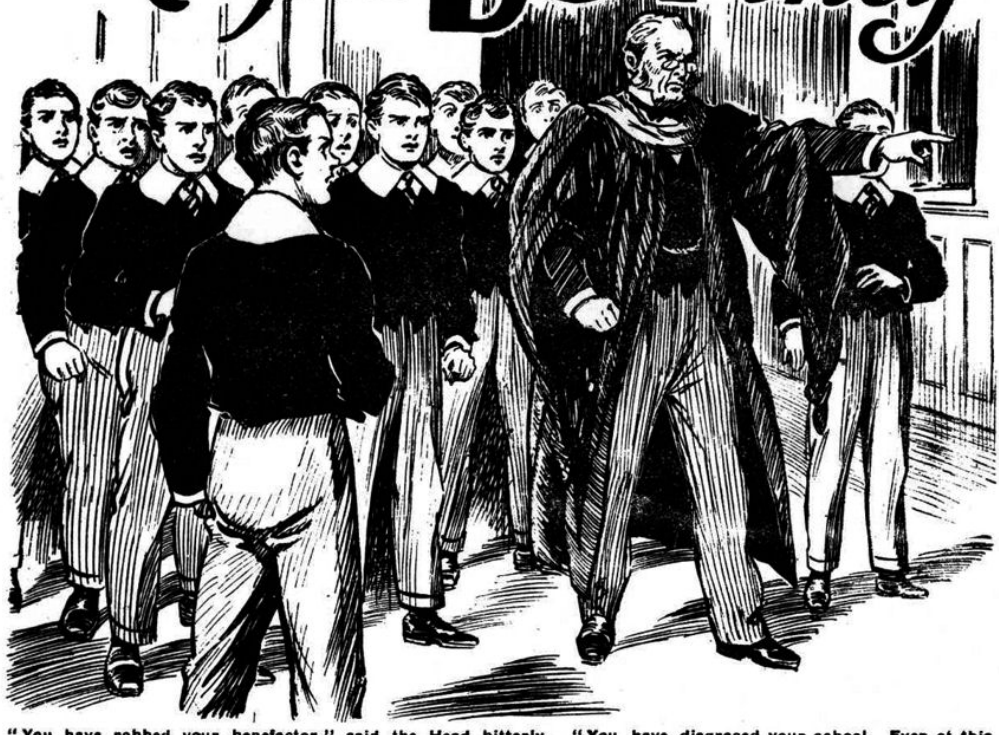
BIG PACKET OF SPECIALLY SELECTED FOREIGN & COLONIAL STAMPS FOR EVERY READER!

No. 1,549. Vol. LII. EVERY WEDNESDAY. Week Ending October 23rd, 1937.

Published by Howard Baker Press Ltd, 27a Arterberry Road, Wimbledon, London, S. W. 20.

THE VICTIM OF A CRACKSMAN'S CUNNING, TALBOT FINDS HIMSELF UP AGAINST SERIOUS TROUBLE AT ST. JIM'S!

The BOY they



"You have robbed your benefactor," said the Head bitterly. "You have disgraced your school. Even at this moment the police are seeking you. Unless you wish to add more shame to yourself by being arrested in this school, you will go at once!" Talbot stood dumb, almost stunned by the torrent of words.

CHAPTER 1.
Gussy Knows What To Do!

"WHAT'S the wowwy?"

D'Arcy of the Fourth asked that question as he lounged gracefully into Tom Merry's study at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry was looking worried.

Manners and Lowther were frowning in sympathy.

The Terrible Three of the Shell, in fact, looked as if a large proportion of the troubles of the universe had settled upon their youthful shoulders.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was quite a striking contrast. His aristocratic face expressed the most complete satisfaction with himself and things generally.

"Anythin' up?" pursued Arthur Augustus, as the captain of the Shell did not immediately reply to his question.

Tom Merry grunted.

"It's the Abbotsford match to-morrow," he said.

"Yaas; that's what I've come to see you about."

"And it's rotten," said Tom Merry discontentedly. "Here are more than half the team laid up in the sanatorium, and——"

"Wathah lucky boundahs, I think, considewin' what a wippin' nurse they've got to look aftah them——"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Here's Manners only just on his legs again, and he isn't fit to play. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn are all on the sick list. What are we going to do for a goalkeeper, with Fatty Wynn laid up? It's rotten!"

It was a serious matter enough for the junior football captain of St. Jim's. The outbreak of influenza at St. Jim's had robbed the junior eleven of many of its best players. A match with the Grammar School had had to be scratched. But Tom Merry was naturally anxious not to scratch the next fixture if he could help it. He wanted to play the Abbotsford match. But with a depleted team, and with even his reserves laid up in the school hospital, his task was not easy.

Hence his worried looks.

But the satisfied smile did not leave the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He seemed to have an inward source of satisfaction that was impervious to mere considerations of footer.

"The fact is, deah boy, I came to see you about the match to-mowwow," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I've been thinkin', and I've got an ideah."

"About a goalkeeper?" asked Tom, interested a little. "Whom do you suggest?"

"I was not thinkin' about a goalkeepah."

"Fatty Wynn and Herries are both laid up, and Clifton Dane is too crocked to play," said Tom Merry. "I suppose it will have to be Gore——"

"I was going to suggest——"

"If you've got a suggestion to make, Gussy, out with it. I'd let anybody suggest anything just now," said Tom Merry resignedly.

"I was thinkin' that Miss March——"

The Terrible Three stared at Arthur Augustus blankly.

"Miss March?" repeated Monty Lowther.

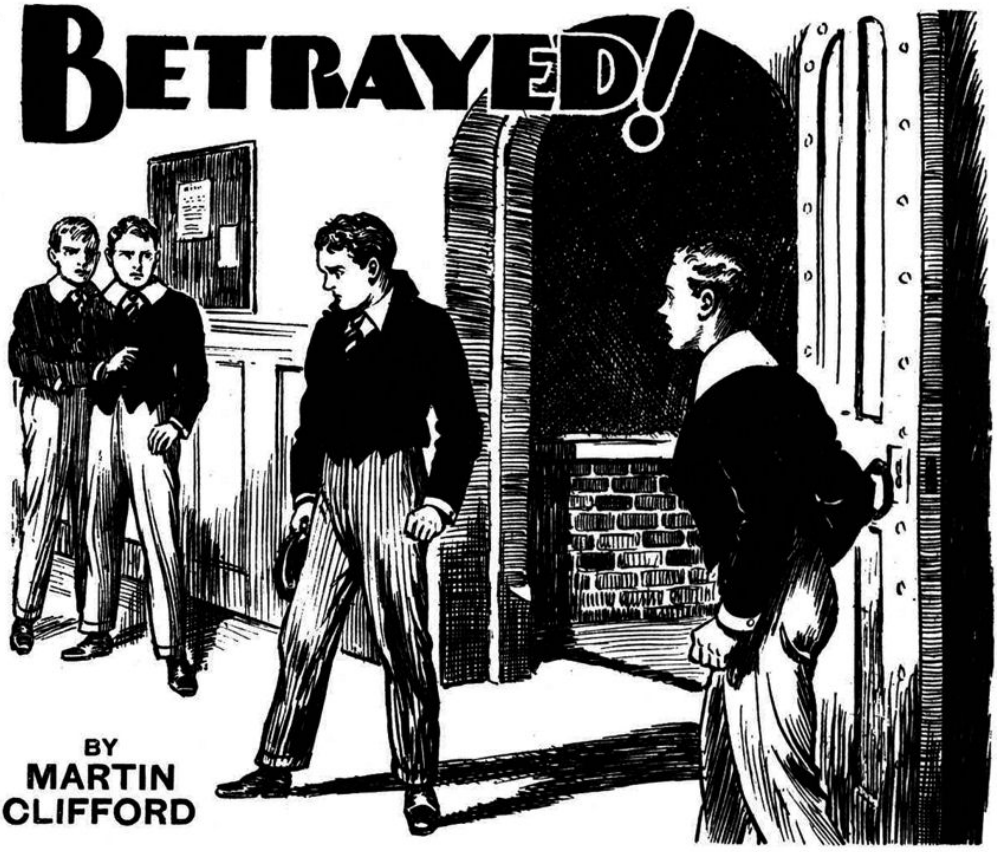
"Nursey!" ejaculated Manners.

"Fathead!" roared Tom Merry.

His good name at St. Jim's means everything to Talbot, the one-time schoolboy cracksman. But as he discovers, it is not proof against treachery.

YOU CANNOT FAIL TO BE ENTHRALLED BY THIS POWERFUL STORY OF THE TOFF'S PLUCKY FIGHT AGAINST HIS FORMER "FRIENDS" OF THE UNDERWORLD.

BETRAYED!



BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD

"What are you getting at? Miss March is a jolly good nurse, but she can't play footer, I suppose?"

"Pway don't be widiculous, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "I was not suggestin' that Miss March should play footah. I have been thinkin' that she must be bored to death lookin' after a lot of sick boundahs, especially with the twouble she takes with them. I heah that she sat up nearly all night with young Fwayne, f'winstance. Well, wouldn't it be a good ideah to awwange it somehow to take Miss March ovah to Abbotsford to see the match?"

"What!"

"Wathah surpwised you—what?" grinned Arthur Augustus. "The ideah flashed into my bwain, you know. I am sure that Miss March would enjoy a wun out, and she would like to see the match, you know. And Talbot will be there, and she seems wathah taken with Talbot for some weason. Isn't it a wippin' ideah?"

"You—you——" gasped Tom Merry.

He could hardly believe his ears at first.

Here he was, worried to the verge of bad temper by the difficulties of making up an eleven that would not be hopelessly licked at Abbotsford. And the best suggestion Arthur Augustus could make was that Miss March should be taken over to Abbotsford to see the match.

The juniors liked Miss March immensely, of course. She was a member of the Little Sisters of the Poor, and she had devoted herself to the task of nursing the invalids in the school hospital. She was very popular. But popular and undoubtedly nice as Miss March was, Tom Merry & Co. were not thinking about her just now. There were more pressing matters to be considered.

The Terrible Three glared at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You fathead!"

"Eh!"

"You burbling ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"You bother me about such a trivial matter when I am at my wits' end to make up a team!" roared the indignant junior captain.

"What! Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"You silly jabberwock! Go and eat coke!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Considewin' what a weally wippin' gal Miss March is, I wegard it as our bisney to put our heads togethah and awwange for her to come——"

"Oh, ring off!"

"I decline to wing off! I considah that——"

"Fathead!"

"Ass!"

"Duffer!"

And with these three clear and succinct expressions of opinion, the Terrible Three rose to their feet, laid violent hands upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and pitched him through the doorway into the passage.

Bump!

"Yawoooh!"

Tom Merry slammed the door.

IN THIS ISSUE:

ANOTHER FREE GIFT PACKET OF FOREIGN AND COLONIAL STAMPS!

Turn to Page 21 for Full Details of the GEM'S Grand Offer of a Special Stamp Collector's Outfit!

"The blithering ass!" he growled, breathing hard through his nose. "When I'm turning my hair grey trying to make up a team, he comes bothering me about taking girls to the match——"

The door was flung open, and Arthur Augustus rushed into the study, a little dusty and ruffled, and with his famous monocle streaming at the end of its cord.

"You uttah wottahs! You feahful beasts! I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin', Tom Mewwy!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry, as D'Arcy's noble knuckles came into sudden contact with his nose. "Yaroooh! Collar the lunatic!"

"Leggo! You wottahs! Yow-ow-ow!"

The Terrible Three closed upon the warlike swell of St. Jim's, and they all grasped him at once. He was swept off his feet, rushed out of the study, and along to the Fourth Form passage, where he was dumped down in Study No. 6. Blake and Digby, who were in the study, jumped up in surprise.

"What the dickens——"

"Yawooh! Wescue!"

"Brought your tame lunatic home," said Monty Lowther affably. "I recommend a strait-jacket!"

And the Terrible Three returned to their quarters, leaving the swell of St. Jim's gasping on the carpet. Somewhat consoled, Tom Merry turned his thoughts again to the difficult task of making up an eleven for the Abbotsford match.

CHAPTER 2.

The Toff's Secret!

GORE of the Shell came into his study with an unusually good-tempered expression on his face. Talbot and Skimpole were there, having their tea.

The three somewhat ill-assorted juniors shared that study.

Gore and Skimpole had lately had their share of the flu, and Skimpole was still looking a little pale. But George Gore was quite recovered. He was in boisterous spirits.

"Hallo! Tea ready?" said Gore, pulling a chair up to the table. "Pass the sardines, Skimmy. I'm hungry. Been at practice."

"You look very chirpy," said Talbot, a little surprised.

Gore was not always so good-tempered.

"I'm playing in the match to-morrow," said Gore. "I'm going in as goalkeeper."

"Good luck!" said Talbot.

"Oh, I shall be all right!" said Gore confidently. "Tom Merry wouldn't have put me in if he could have helped it." Gore sniffed. "But I'll jolly well show them that I can keep goal. It will be rather a scratch team. More'n half the fellows are in the sanatorium. I dare say I should still be there myself but for that new nurse, Miss March. Jolly good sort!"

"Jolly good!" said Talbot.

"She seems to get on awfully well with you, Talbot," said Gore. "Anybody would hardly think that you'd never met her till last week, the way you get on."

Talbot coloured.

"I suppose you never met her before you came here?" said Gore curiously.

Skimpole chimed in before Talbot could reply.

"My dear Gore, I'm rather glad to see that you appreciate the kindness of Miss March. You are not generally grateful, my dear Gore."

"Oh, rats!" snapped Gore.

"You are quite right about that young lady," went on Skimpole, blinking at Gore through his big spectacles. "She is intelligent—very intelligent. While I was getting well I had quite long talks with her. I explained to her about Determinism, and she listened without any of the idiotic interruptions I am accustomed to from you, Gore, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see anything to laugh at, Gore. Miss March was quite intelligent on that subject. She did not interrupt me once," said Skimpole. "Now, as a rule——"

"Must be frightfully intelligent if she can see any sense in your fatheaded theories," said Gore.

"My dear Gore, if you would listen while I explain the principles of Determinism——"

"Shut up!" roared Gore.

Skimpole sighed. A prophet, it is said, is unhonoured in his own country; and Skimpole, the Determinist, found no encouragement whatever in his own study. Only Talbot would listen to him patiently sometimes, letting Skimmy run on while he was thinking about something else.

Talbot rose to his feet.

"Hallo! You haven't finished tea," said Gore.

"Yes, I've finished," said Talbot, taking up his cap.

"My dear Talbot," murmured Skimpole, "I was going to explain the principles of Determinism to you after tea."

"Later on, old chap," said Talbot. "I'm going to take a turn in the quad."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Skimpole. "I'll take a turn with you, my dear Talbot. I can talk while I walk."

"You can talk while you sleep, I think!" growled Gore.

Talbot hesitated. Skimpole had taken up his cap to accompany him in that little walk in the quad. The colour deepened in the handsome face of the Shell fellow. He had reasons for not wanting Skimmy's company just then.

But Skimmy took his arm affectionately and walked him out of the study. They descended the stairs together and strolled out into the dusky quad. Skimpole was going at full tide, but Talbot heard hardly a word he said. They strolled under the old elms, swept clear of leaves by the keen winter wind.

"What is your opinion, my dear Talbot?" asked Skimpole.

"Eh?" ejaculated Talbot, coming out of a brown study and realising that he had not heard a word that Skimpole had been saying.

"Don't you think Determinism would solve many problems of this country, Talbot?"

"Oh—er—perhaps!"

Eight o'clock rang out from the old clock tower, and Talbot started.

"I'm glad to see you so thoughtful, my dear Talbot," went on Skimpole. "It shows that you take an intelligent interest in Determinism. But you have not yet told me your opinion of Determinism. What do you think?"

"I think it's time for prep," said Talbot. "Come on, Skimmy!"

And he started for the School House at a run.

"My dear Talbot! I say, Talbot——"

But Talbot had already disappeared in the darkness.

Skimpole blinked after him in vain. The genius of the Shell started for the School House to look for Talbot.

But Talbot was not in the School House. As soon as he was out of sight of Skimpole he had dodged round the elms, and from a safe distance he watched Skimpole enter the House. Then he turned away in the direction of the Head's garden.

He reached the little gate and vaulted over it, and proceeded up the garden path, thickly carpeted with fallen leaves, to a little summerhouse, dank and dark in the evening.

He entered it quietly and whispered: "Marie! Are you here?"

There was no reply.

Talbot drew a deep breath and waited.

He was not feeling comfortable. Anything surreptitious was foreign to his frank and candid nature. He had dodged the unsuspicious Skimpole, and had entered the Head's garden, which was out of bounds for juniors, to keep an appointment with Miss March, and it worried him a little.

There had been a good many smiles among the juniors about the great friendship between Talbot of the Shell and Miss March, the "Little Sister." When Talbot was free from lessons, and Miss March was free from her duties in the sanatorium, they were often seen speaking together. They had grown "chummy" quite quickly, and St. Jim's did not suspect that they were old acquaintances.

Talbot sat down on a seat in the dusky summerhouse while he waited, his hands thrust into his pockets, and a gloomy frown on his brow.

Was there never to be an end to deception? he asked himself miserably. Was he always to have a secret to keep?

He smiled bitterly as he thought of the change that had come over him. There had been a time, and not so very long ago, when a secret to keep—many secrets—had not troubled his mind. He had had dark secrets to keep in the days when he had been known as the Toff, when he was a member of the gang of cracksmen of which the Professor was now the chief.

It was not so very long ago, but sometimes it seemed to Talbot that centuries had passed since, so greatly was he changed.

He had won his pardon; he had won his way to honour and respect, and his black past was forgiven, if not forgotten. Indeed, Talbot was so popular at St. Jim's that most of the fellows had already almost forgotten that he had been anything but what he now was—a frank and cheery schoolboy. In his early life everything had been against him. He had changed as soon as he had a chance.

But the grip of the past was not easily thrown off, and Talbot wondered bitterly what his loyal chums would think if they could have known, as he knew, that Miss March, the devoted nurse, was Marie Rivers, the daughter of the Professor, the cracksman who had sought to rob the school.

There was a light step on the garden path, and Talbot sprang to his feet.

"Toff!"

It was a soft whisper. Marie, in her

nurse's dress, with a silk muffler drawn about her graceful neck, stood before him.

CHAPTER 3.

Marie's Warning!

"MARIE!" said Talbot quietly.

The girl was breathless.

"I am sorry I am late, Toff. I was kept in the ward. But—but what is the matter?" She peered at the handsome, clouded face in the deep dusk. "You did not want to come?"

"I always want to see you, Marie," said Talbot quietly. "But why a secret meeting like this?"

"I had to see you, Toff. It is important, and I could not speak to you in the ward."

Talbot looked at her anxiously. He had been deep in thought ever since he had visited the sanatorium that afternoon to see little Joe Frayne of the Third Form. Marie had whispered to him in passing that she must see him. She had told him to come to the summerhouse at eight, when she would be free for a time. Talbot had been unable to reply. He had come.

The secrecy of the meeting troubled his mind, but it was not only that. Marie had her reasons, and Talbot, with a heavy heart, thought of the Professor—that threatening, unseen figure he had striven to banish from his mind.

"I had to see you to-night, Toff."

"But why, Marie?"

"It was important."

"You have heard from him?"

She nodded.

"From my father—yes."

Talbot drew a deep breath, and his eyes gleamed in the dusk.

"Marie, I know you are loyal to your father, little as he deserves it. I don't ask you to be otherwise. But you have promised me, Marie, that while you stay at the school you will never allow his orders to make you break the law. You are going to keep that promise, Marie?"

The cracksman's daughter, trained from childhood to assist in her father's lawless career, had come to St. Jim's with the full intention of helping John Rivers to carry out his plans—to tempt Talbot back to the old life that he had left, and the cunning Professor had counted upon her influence as upon a certainty. But in his cunning he had overreached himself. Talbot had not been tempted back to dishonesty; but his influence had implanted in the girl's mind a growing horror of her father's way of life. The result had been the reverse of what the Professor had calculated.

"You'll keep that promise, Marie?"

"I shall keep it, Toff."

"But—but, then, what is the trouble?"

"I had a letter from my father this afternoon." The girl's voice was unsteady. "He is angry with me because I have kept my promise to you, Toff. I have not done what he has ordered. I will never desert him—that I have told him; but I will not break the law again. But—but he is my father, Toff, and in his way he is fond of me."

Talbot sighed. Truly the position of the girl was as difficult as his own. She was torn between her longing for the path of honour and her devotion to her worthless and unscrupulous father—and the end was still doubtful.

"But—but that isn't all, Toff. The Professor has come back."

Talbot started.

"He is not here?"

"Not here—no! The letter came from Abbotsford."

Talbot drew a sigh of relief.

"That is a long way from here, Marie."

"But—but I am sure that it means harm to you," said Marie in a low voice. "The Professor has never given up the idea of getting you back, Toff. They have had evil days since you left them, and he will stop at nothing. They know now that you will not go willingly—they know I cannot and will not persuade you, and—and I fear——"

"What do you fear, Marie?"

"They will use force, Toff."

Talbot smiled slightly.

"How can they use force, Marie? They cannot kidnap me."

"He is at Abbotsford," said Marie. "You are going there to-morrow, Toff. He knows that somehow, and I am convinced that is the reason why he is there. You must not go."

"But there is no danger; I shall be with the football team, Marie. There will be eleven of us," said Talbot reassuringly.

"You do not know how cunning he is. You must not go."

"The Professor is at Abbotsford," said Marie. "You are going there to-morrow, Toff. He knows that somehow, and that is why he is there. You must not go." "But I must go, Marie," said Talbot. "There is no danger, and I cannot desert the team." "Toff," said the girl, "promise me that you will not go!"

Talbot's face became very grave.

"But I must go, Marie. It is an important match. Tom Merry is hard put to it to make up a team at all, owing to so many fellows being in the sanatorium, and he would never forgive me if I failed him—for nothing, too! I could not explain to him."

"You must not go!"

Womanlike, Marie came back to the point, oblivious to argument.

"But I must, Marie. What could I say to Tom Merry?"

"Anything. You must not go."

"There is no danger, Marie. I could not desert the fellows; they depend on me. And I cannot tell even Tom Merry about your father. I must go."

Marie's little hand closed on his arm with an almost convulsive grasp.

"Toff, tell me that you will not go!"

"Marie," said Talbot wretchedly—"Marie, I——"

"Promise me!"

For a moment more Talbot hesitated.

"Toff, I—I haven't asked anything else of you. Promise me that you will not go to Abbotsford to-morrow."

"Very well, Marie, I—I will do the best I can," said Talbot heavily. "I cannot promise not to go—that's out of my hands. But—but I will resign my place in the eleven to-morrow and get Tom Merry to put another fellow in. If he does that, it won't be necessary for me to go."

"You will do that, Toff?" said Marie, with a breath of relief. "You will resign your place in the eleven? That's all I ask."

"I will do that, Marie."

"Thank you, Toff! My mind will be easy now. Thank you, and good-night!"

She pressed his hand and was gone.

Talbot, with knitted brows, made his way out of the Head's garden and returned to the School House. He had a difficult task before him.

CHAPTER 4.
High Words!

"THAT'S settled!" said Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three had finished tea, and Tom Merry had been at work again on his troublesome task of finally settling the football eleven.

He had done it at last. With more than half the best junior players laid up, and most of the reserve players, too, it had not been an easy task. But the captain of the Shell had done the best he could.

Monty Lowther and Manners read over the list, and nodded approval. It was the best that could be done. The list read:

Gore; Lumley-Lumley, Kerruish; Reilly, Thompson, Lowther; Hammond, Talbot, Tom Merry, Blake, D'Arcy.

"I don't know what Gore will be like in goal," said Manners dubiously. "But as Wynn and Herries are laid up, there doesn't seem to be much choice. The front line's good, anyway. Hammond will play up pretty well at outside-right."

"Have to keep on attacking," said Lowther. "The forwards are good."

"Yes; thank goodness, we're strong somewhere!" said Tom Merry. "Talbot will be a giddy tower of strength. Hallo! Come in!"

There was a tap at the door and Talbot came in. The Terrible Three greeted him with genial looks.

"Just talking about you," said Manners.

Talbot laughed constrainedly.

"Something to my credit, I hope?"

"You bet," said Tom Merry cheerily. "Congratulating ourselves on having you in the team to-morrow. Look at the list. What do you think of it?"

Talbot coloured, and he hardly saw the list as he looked over it. He had come there to break the news that he could not play for St. Jim's to-morrow, and Tom Merry's greeting made it very difficult for him to begin.

"If you can suggest any improvements, out with 'em," said Tom Merry. "Always open to suggestions, you know. I've had a valuable suggestion from Gussy. He thinks it would be a ripping idea to get Miss March to come over and see the match—just the idea that would flash into his empty brain at a time like this. But what do you think?"

"This puzzle's got me beat, No. 99. I can't see how the prisoner escapes from his cell!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Alexander, 6, Meynell Road, South Hackney, London, E.9.

"The—the list seems all right," stammered Talbot. "There's Julian of the Fourth, you know; he's been hard at practice, and he's coming on."

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, I must say that Julian is showing up well," he admitted. "I shall give him a chance in the team later on. Not in this match, though."

"The—the fact is——" said Talbot, and halted.

"Yes." Tom Merry looked curiously at his flushed face. "What's the matter?"

"The fact is, I was going to recommend Julian to you," said Talbot.

"In whose place?" asked Tom Merry, taking the list again and looking at it. "He's best in the forward line. But we've got a very good forward line. Hammond is all right on the wing—better than Julian, anyway. Which place were you thinking of for Julian, Talbot?"

"Mine!" said Talbot, with an effort.

It was out at last. The three Shell fellows stared at one another.

"Joking?" said Monty Lowther.

"No; I mean——"

"Blessed if I know what you mean," said Tom Merry, wonderingly. "Do you mean we could take him along as a reserve? No harm in that."

"No; I—I don't mean as a reserve. The—the fact is, I—I want you to excuse me to-morrow," said Talbot haltingly.

"Bow-wow!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, don't be funny!" urged Manners. "What should you want to stand out of the match to-morrow for?"

"You're jolly well not going to, whether you want to or not, Talbot!" said Tom Merry decisively. "We can't possibly do without you. The team's weak enough as it is. Of course you've got to play!"

"I can't!" said Talbot.

Tom Merry knitted his brows. He had a great regard for Talbot—they were close chums; but this was a little too unreasonable. After all the trouble he had in getting together an eleven that could uphold the colours of St. Jim's it was a little too much for his best player to stand out, for no apparent reason.

"Why can't you?" Tom demanded.

"I—I want to stand out, if you don't mind."

"But I do mind!" exclaimed Tom Merry warmly. "What the dickens, Talbot! You can't leave us in the lurch like this! What do you want to stand out for?"

Talbot coloured deeply. Certainly he could not mention Marie Rivers, whom the juniors knew as Miss March, and still more certainly he could not mention the Professor. If the Terrible Three had known that the cracksman was in Abbotsford, they would have taken instant measures to inform the police. It was not for Talbot to give Marie's father into the clutches of the law.

The chums of the Shell regarded Talbot in amazement. They could see that he was distressed and agitated, but they could not imagine the reason.

Talbot did not speak. What was he to say? He had no explanation to give. There was a painful silence in the study.

Tom Merry broke it at last. His voice was not quite so good-tempered as usual.

"Will you tell me why you want to stand out of the team? If you've got any good reason, of course, that makes a difference!"

"I'd rather not play."

"Rather not play!" said Monty Lowther hotly. "Is that a reason for leaving the team in the lurch, when we've got trouble enough on our hands already?"

"I—I'm sorry!"

"I should jolly well think you are sorry!" grunted Lowther. "If I were skipper of the team, and a player served me such a trick——"

Monty Lowther paused, remembering that he was talking to a chum; but he did not feel very chummy at that moment.

"Hold on, Monty," said Tom Merry. "Talbot must have some reason. Get it out, Talbot—there's nothing to be bashful about. Why don't you want to go to Abbotsford? Don't you feel fit?"

"It isn't exactly that," said Talbot.

"Then what is it? I suppose I've a right to know, as your footer captain?" asked Tom testily. "You said nothing about it before. I've consulted you a dozen times about making up the team. You leave it till nearly the last minute to spring it on me, and I've a right to know your reason."

Tom Merry's voice was rising a little, though he was doing his best to keep his temper.

"I—I don't want you to misunderstand me," said Talbot wretchedly. "I—I don't want to come to Abbotsford to-morrow, that's all!"

"Do you mean you won't come?" demanded Tom Merry.

"No. I—I—I want to resign my place in the team, that's all. But—but if you don't consent, I—I must come!"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"I don't understand you," he said. "Will you tell me why you don't want to come, or won't you?"

Talbot was silent.

"You know how we stand," said Tom Merry angrily. "You know what sort of a team I've been able to get together, with half the fellows in the sanatorium. Do you think it's acting like a sportsman to leave us in the lurch like this?"

"Talbot must have some reason," said Manners. "Don't you feel up to it, old man? You're not catching the flu, are you?"

Talbot shook his head.

"Well, why don't you speak?" said Tom. "You're going to play us this trick without giving a shadow of a reason. Why don't you answer?"

"I've got nothing to say," said

Talbot. "I—I've said all I had to say. I'd rather you left me out to-morrow. But—but I'll come if you insist upon it."

Tom Merry made an angry gesture.

"Oh, I don't insist upon it! You're not a slave, I suppose; and that's not the humour for a fellow to play in, anyway. If you don't want to come, don't. But I think it's rotten, and I say so plainly!"

Talbot nodded, and turned to the door.

The Terrible Three watched him grimly as he went out. They were in a bad humour, and they did not take the trouble to conceal it. The door closed behind Talbot.

"Well, my hat!" said Monty Lowther, with a low whistle. "That beats the band! What's come over old Talbot? This isn't like him at all!"

Tom Merry frowned angrily.

"I don't understand him," he snapped. "I know that this is a beastly thing to do. I shall have to put in Julian. To leave us in the lurch like this, when the fellows are all crocked! I never expected that of Talbot."

"I—I suppose——" began Lowther slowly.

"You suppose what?" said Tom crossly.

"I suppose there's nothing——" Lowther hesitated. "Nothing in it about—about Talbot's old connections? He hasn't been seeing any of his old friends—the Professor, or Hookey Walker, or the rest?"

"Not that I'm aware of. Hookey Walker's in prison, and the Professor is skulking somewhere, with the police after him. Besides, why should that have anything to do with a footer match? You wouldn't suggest that he's throwing us over to meet any of those rotters to-morrow?"

"Oh, no! He's given us his word about that kind of thing."

"They can't influence him," growled Tom Merry. "It can't be anything of that sort. Blessed if I know what he's got in his head! He must have some reason, I should think, for playing us this trick. But I must say I don't like it. If it were any other fellow, I'd take jolly good care that he never played in the team again, after deserting us like this. And even with Talbot——" Tom Merry paused. "Dash it all, let's get on with prep! I shall lose my temper if I talk about it any more!"

Monty Lowther grinned. He thought his chum was perilously near having lost his temper already. But he made no remark, and the chums of the Shell went on with their preparation glumly.

. . . . . .

After lessons the next morning Tom Merry posted up the team on the notice-board, with Julian's name in place of Talbot's. Tom had left doing it till the last moment, hoping Talbot would change his mind. But Talbot had not said another word on the subject.

There were many surprised exclamations from the juniors when they read the list of names and found Talbot's missing. But their surprise gave place to indignation when they heard from Tom Merry that Talbot had simply resigned his place in the team, without giving an explanation.

The juniors, not unnaturally, were a little incensed to find Talbot had left the team in the lurch for no apparent reason. Arthur Augustus sought him out to reason with him, but Talbot couldn't be found. He was not seen again till dinner-time, when he had to turn up in the dining-room in the School House. And after that there was no time to attend to Talbot, as it was necessary for the team to start for Abbotsford at once.

ST. JIM'S JINGLES. No. 2.

FATTY WYNN.

WITHIN the old, secluded shop,
Away from wrathful "Ratty,"
Regaling pies and ginger-pop,
Is found the famous Fatty.
Amid the clash of fork and spoon
His eyes are gaily gleaming,
And full as any harvest moon
His ruddy face is beaming.

"Eat not to live, but live to eat"—
What doctrine could be better?
And Wynn, who loves a tuckshop treat,
Obeys it to the letter.
Delicious tarts, divine to taste,
And doughnuts in their legions,
Are all dispatched with frantic haste
Toward the "inner regions."

The full extent of Wynn's renown
No mortal man could tell us;
'Twould make the circus fat boy frown
And feel extremely jealous.
The hungry "porpoise" oft will pack
About a dozen courses;
And what he merely terms a "snack"
Would fill the British forces!

Although the dear delights of tuck
Are Wynn's chief consolation,
The boy possesses heaps of pluck
And dour determination.
In all the conflicts which exist
Within the ancient college,
He shows, with hard and heavy fist,
A fund of fighting knowledge.

When summer sheds her golden sheen
On every glade and thicket,
Arrayed in flannels he is seen
Among his chums at cricket.
For in the world of bowling few
So skilful can be reckoned;
And brilliant bats feel rather "blue"
On facing Voce the second.

But if at cricket Fatty shines,
At football he's resplendent!
The stout custodian clears his lines
In manner most transcendent.
And when he stops each lightning drive,
Averting all disaster,
The finest forward of the five
Must own he meets his master.

Good luck attend you, worthy Wynn!
And though we've never seen you,
We hope you long may revel in
The good things on the menu.
The boys of Britain all acclaim
Your actions clean and clever;
And may your good and glorious fame
Abide with us for ever.

Next Week: RICHARD REDFERN.

CHAPTER 5.
Crocked!

ELEVEN juniors wheeled their bicycles out of the gates of St. Jim's.

They had a good long ride before them; but it was a splendid afternoon, dry and sunny and cold. A crowd of fellows came down to the gates to give them a send-off, but Talbot was not among them. Talbot was still avoiding the juniors, to escape their comments and questions upon his inexplicable conduct.

Tom Merry & Co. rode away in cheerful spirits. Julian of the Fourth looked the most cheerful. He was glad of the chance that had come his way, though he was thinking a good deal about Talbot's curious action.

Arthur Augustus cast a glance or two back as he rode off. The swell of St. Jim's had not given up his idea of asking Miss March to come over to Abbotsford to see the match.

He had sought her out and endeavoured to impress upon her the great benefit that would result from a little trip for the afternoon. But the Little Sister had explained that she would be wanted in the school hospital.

"It's wotten," said Arthur Augustus, breaking his thoughtful silence as the juniors left Rylcombe behind and buzzed along the wide High Road for Abbotsford.

"Anything wrong with the bike?" asked Blake.

"The bike? No, deah boy. I was thinkin' that it's wotten she can't come."

"She? He, you mean," said Blake.

"I was wefewwin' to Miss March," said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "If she had come, I should have hired a cah. It would have been weally wippin'. I'm sure Miss March could have had the afternoon if she had asked. Now that boundah Talbot will be hangin' wound——" Arthur Augustus frowned. "It is weally wemarkable that Miss March seems to think so much of Talbot, deah boy. I wemembah when she came, and Talbot and I met her at the station. Talbot didn't seem pleased at all. He was as mum as anything. I wathah suspect that Talbot is mashed, deah boy, which is weally widiculous in a kid of his age."

Blake grinned.

"My hat! That can't be why he's chucked the match this afternoon, surely?"

"I wondah!" said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Oh, rot!" said Lowther, who was riding next to Blake. "He wouldn't be such an ass."

"When a fellow's in love, deah boy, he isn't weally accountable for his actions, you know," said Arthur Augustus, with an air of wisdom. "I've been there myself, you know, in—ahem!—my youngah days."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry had heard Arthur Augustus' remarks, and though he said nothing, he frowned. It seemed too absurd that Talbot had thrown over the match because he was in love; yet it was the only apparent reason for his inexplicable conduct.

The team had a long ride before them, and there were no followers on this occasion. The eleven had gone off by themselves. The miles glided under the swift wheels, and Abbotsford drew near at last.

The road was muddy, and the mud

was cut up by frequent motor-cars, and the juniors were pretty well splashed by the time Abbotsford came in sight in the distance.

Unknown to the juniors, a motor-car had been following them at a moderate pace for some distance. Now it speeded up, and, as the driver sounded the horn, Tom Merry & Co. drew to the side of the road to let it pass. It was a small car, with a chauffeur. The hood of the car was down, and a glimpse could be had of a heavily bearded man, wearing large, gold-rimmed spectacles, sitting in front. He scanned the juniors as the car passed them, and Tom Merry glanced carelessly at the bearded man.

The car, which was painted grey, glided on ahead of the juniors. The road was narrow at this point, and at the sides it was thick with ridges of mud. Jack Blake, who was strung out ahead of the party as they got out of the way, skidded upon a muddy rut. As the grey car buzzed on past him there was a crash, and Blake and his machine were deposited by the roadside in a heap.

The grey car shot ahead, and then stopped. The cyclists halted, jumping off their machines, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy ran towards Blake.

The Fourth Former was sitting up beside his machine, his face very pale and contracted with pain.

"Hurt, old chap?" asked Tom anxiously.

Blake grunted.

"My beastly ankle! I caught it on the pedal! Ow!"

"Oh, what rotten luck! Let's look at it."

Blake bared his ankle. The skin was growing blue, and he gave a yelp as Tom Merry touched it.

"Yow!"

"It's a sprain," said Tom Merry, with knitted brows. "How rotten!"

"Oh, I'm not really hurt!" growled Blake. "I shan't be able to play, though! Hang that rotten car!"

"Well, it wasn't his fault," said Tom. "You skidded."

"I know that."

Blake rose to his feet with difficulty. His ankle was hurt, and though the injury was not serious in itself, it was painful, and it made it quite out of the question for him to play in the football match.

Tom Merry set his lips. It was the last straw. The team had had a series of strokes of ill-luck already, and now one of the best of the eleven was disabled. It was the last straw, and the match was as good as gone.

The car had halted at a little distance, and the passenger inside alighted and came back towards the juniors. He wore a thick overcoat and a soft hat, and his gold-rimmed glasses gleamed in the sunlight.

"Nothing serious, I hope?" he asked.

"No!" said Blake, a little snappishly.

"I am sorry you had a fall!" said the old gentleman kindly. "Can I give you a lift into the town?"

"Thank you, sir!" said Blake, a little more graciously. "I can't ride, that's a cert. One of you fellows can wheel my bike."

"And what about the match?" muttered Lowther. "Are we going to play Abbotsford a man short? That will be the giddy finish!"

Tom Merry made an impatient gesture.

"Talbot will have to come, after all," he said.

"Talbot! But——"

"Too late!" said Thompson.

"It isn't too late. We can ask the Abbotsford chaps to make the kick-off a little later, and get Talbot here."

"But how?"

"A wire from the post office in Abbotsford," said Tom Merry shortly. "He will get it almost at once, and he will come. I won't give him any choice about the matter. I'll simply wire that he's to come."

"Oh, that's all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "He's bound to come. Talbot won't leave us in the lurch, even if he has to put off taking a little walk with a weally charmin' young lady."

"If that's his reason for keeping out, serve him right if he's disappointed!" growled Blake. "It's a good idea, Tommy, and it's the only thing to be done. Help me into the car, somebody! My ankle won't stand the strain."

"Here you are, deah boy!"

Blake was helped into the grey car, and the bearded motorist followed him. The grey car glided on towards Abbotsford, and the ten cyclists remounted their machines and followed it.

Tom Merry rode with a grim brow. There was no real reason, so far as he could see, why Talbot shouldn't play; and if there was a reason, Talbot should have explained it. As he had given no reason, the captain was fully entitled to call upon his services, especially as it was now the only possible alternative to playing a man short.

The grey car stopped outside the big post office in Abbotsford High Street, and the team dismounted there from their bikes. Blake was helped out of the car. But the chauffeur did not drive on. The bearded, spectacled old gentleman apparently had business at the post office as well as Tom Merry. He followed the St. Jim's junior in, and as Tom Merry stopped at the telegraph desk, the old gentleman stopped at the next desk, and also took a slip of paper and a pen.

Tom Merry wrote out his telegram to Talbot. He made no effort to conceal what he was writing. It did not even occur to him to do so. There was no reason why he should suppose that the obliging motorist at the next desk was interested in his telegram.

"Talbot. School House, St. Jim's.—Blake crocked. Man short. Come at once. Waiting for kick-off till you arrive Abbotsford.—TOM MERRY."

And that peremptory message was promptly sent off.

———

CHAPTER 6.
Man Short!

TOM MERRY came out of the post office and rejoined his chums.

The juniors were standing in a group with their bicycles near the grey car.

Jack Blake was standing on one leg, leaning on the shoulder of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was suffering a good deal of pain, though he was bearing it quietly. He was not a fellow to make a fuss.

"Sent the telegram, deah boy?"

"Yes," said Tom.

"It's all wight; he'll come."

"He's a good cyclist. He will scorch for all he's worth, and he won't keep us waiting for long," said Lowther. "We're early, anyway."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, we're early," he agreed. "What are you going to do, Blake? You can't stay and watch the match, I suppose? You'd better get home."

Blake made a grimace.

"I'd better get back, I suppose," he said. "Though I'm blessed if I know how."

"You can get a taxicab, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "That will be all wight. You can have your jiggah put on top."

"Frightful big bill, here to St. Jim's."

"Oh wats! I've got plenty of tin."

"Well, I suppose it will have to be a taxi!" groaned Blake. "The blessed thing hurts like anything. If I pass Talbot on the road, I'll hurry him up."

"He'll take the short cuts," said Tom

STORIES BEHIND STAMPS

Strange are the stories which lie behind some of the foreign stamps in your album!

WHAT a wealth of interesting facts and fancies lie behind stamps and their designs.

You've probably got quite a number bearing the title HELVETIA. Doubtless, at first, you found yourself hard put to it to identify them, and probably even after you did learn to allocate them to Switzerland you were puzzled. Why use a name which seems so far removed from that now general for that lovely country?

Why Helvetia was Adopted.

There's a very good reason. There are at least three main groups of people living in Switzerland; those who speak French and revere all things French, those who speak German and *think* German, and those who speak Italian and are Italian-minded. While these three vastly different factions live together quite peaceably, it would obviously be unfair to favour one by selecting, say, French for the wording on their stamps. So a compromise was reached, favouring none. The old-time Latin name Helvetia was adopted.

And when the stamp's face value is given neither "centimes," nor its German or Italian equivalent, is printed; or else only the letters in "centimes" common to all three languages are included. All of which shows that there's much more even in the tiniest details of a stamp than at first meets the eye.

Sometimes you'll come across a stamp bearing a postmark which is placed so dead central and so clear-cut that it makes you think it is an instance of postmarking to order. It is—to the order of a post office, not an unscrupulous dealer who wants to earn a dishonest penny changing reprinted or stolen stamps into very genuine-looking issues.

William Tell, Switzerland's archer hero.

In some countries, like Belgium, Luxemburg, and the States the P.O.'s sell stamps ready postmarked to big business firms. The precancelled stamps, as they are known, save valuable post office time in the dispatch of mails.

Mistakes in Design.

Of mistakes made in stamp designs whole volumes could be written. Here's just a few. In 1926 Holland issued a number of very beautiful stamps, part of the sale of which went to support a society for the welfare of poor children. The lowest denomination featured the coat of arms of Utrecht, with, below them, a snow crystal. The reason for the latter was that the name Utrecht was derived from that of Ultrajentum, the Teutonic god of snow. To show a snow crystal, the snow god's badge, so to speak, was therefore an excellent scheme. But where the artist responsible went off the rails was in depicting that crystal. He showed it with eight arms, or radii, whereas in actual fact, though no two snowflakes are alike in design, *they always possess exactly six arms.*

Christopher Columbus is the subject of at least one amusing error.

In 1893 the U.S.A. issued a handsome commemorative series, honouring the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus' crossing of the "Herring Pond." On the one cent stamp of the series we see him in sight of land, a good-looking, clean-shaven man. The two cent depicts him actually landing, certainly no more than a day later; yet he sports a full grown beard! Such phenomenal beard-growing doesn't and never did occur, even in the States, for the two stamp designs are copies of famous paintings, made independently by artists who had no need or even the means of checking up on the correct facts.

Good-bye to all that! Jugo-Slavia blots out all memory of the Hapsburgs.

If legend is correct, Columbus is the subject of another error. On a certain St. Kitts-Nevis stamp he is shown peering into a telescope. If this is true, Columbus is credited with being a greater man than even history reveals him to be, for he's looking into an instrument which wasn't invented until nearly a century after his death!

Nearly Caused a War!

Probably the most famous of all errors occurred in 1900, and according to rumour, nearly caused a war. The Dominican Republic featured a map of the island it shares with Haiti. Unfortunately, more than Dominica's legitimate share was shown and this so much put the Haitians' backs up that nothing short of withdrawing the stamps averted open warfare.

The stamp with the correctly drawn voortrekker cart.

Sometimes, when a mistake is considered really grave, the authorities will re-issue a stamp or stamps with the mistake amended. This happened in the Transvaal. In 1894 a new series appeared bearing the coat-of-arms of the colony, in the base of which is a wagon, of the "covered wagon" style as used by the intrepid Boer Voortrekkers of the 1830's, when they forsook the peace and security of the Cape to found the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony.

The artist responsible for this wagon gave it a pair of shafts. This is definitely wrong, for these vehicles have only a single shaft or disselboom to which the long string of oxen are harnessed. Next year Transvaal set matters to rights with a disselboomed cart.

Few things more readily reflect the fortunes and, more significantly, perhaps, the misfortunes of countries than their stamps. Just after the Great War anything connected with the Austro-Hungarian monarchy was completely taboo in Jugo-Slavia, part of which, as Bosnia and Herzegovina, had been trodden beneath the royal heel for generations. But there were still stocks of good usable Bosnian stamps available, so the authorities re-issued these with the hated head of their one-time Emperor Francis Joseph heavily blotted out by means of an overprint!

Next Week:
"FOILING THE FORGER."

Merry. "Let's find a taxi first, and then get you on to the school."

Jack Blake was soon bestowed in a taxicab, his machine being placed on top. He started off on the return journey, and Tom Merry & Co. remounted their machines and rode on towards Abbotsford School.

The grey car was still outside the post office, the chauffeur sitting idly in his seat. But when the juniors were out of sight, the old gentleman came out, spoke a few words to the chauffeur, and stepped into the car, and it swung round in the road.

Apparently the old gentleman's business in Abbotsford was finished, for the grey car hummed off back the way it had come, and once out of the town the chauffeur "let her go" at a tearing speed in the direction of St. Jim's.

Thinking of anything but the grey car, Tom Merry & Co. arrived at Abbotsford School, which was on the outskirts of the town.

Yorke, the junior captain of Abbotsford, gave them a warm greeting, but he looked rather surprised at finding only ten of them.

"Man short?" he asked as he shook hands with Tom Merry.

"Accident on the road," Tom explained. "We've wired for another man. If he's a bit late——"

"Oh, we'll wait!" said Yorke cheerily. "You're early, anyway. And we can put off the kick-off for a bit. Anything you like so long as we have time to finish before dark."

"Thanks!" said Tom.

The St. Jim's juniors changed in the Abbotsford dressing-room, and then waited, lounging about, or punting a ball to pass the time. Whatever haste Talbot made on receipt of the telegram, it would be some time before he could reach Abbotsford.

It had been arranged that Julian was to take Blake's place, and Talbot would have his old place at inside-right. If he came in time to play, the St. Jim's team would not be the worse off for Blake's accident. And surely he would come in time! Whatever might be his motive for cutting the match, he could not possibly disregard that urgent telegram from Tom Merry.

"Cheer up!" said Monty Lowther, as he noted the cloud on Tom Merry's brow. "Talbot will come all right. Do you remember that it was here he first played for us, old chap—the day we hid him from the giddy detective by putting him in the team?"

Tom Merry's brow cleared a little at the recollection.

"Yes, and he played rippingly," he

said. "We beat them three to two that time. I hope it will turn out the same again for us. They're a good team. I wish he'd come."

"Well, he couldn't be here yet," said Julian, looking at his watch. "Give him a chance, you know. You don't think it's possible he won't come, surely?"

"Oh, I suppose he's bound to come!" said Tom uneasily.

"Yaas, wathah! Quite certain, deah boy!"

"And he knows all the short cuts, and he's a good cyclist," said Lumley-Lumley. "I guess he'll turn up pretty soon."

Yorke came over towards the St. Jim's fellows.

"Your man coming along?" he remarked.

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Well, I suppose it's pretty nearly time he was here," he remarked.

"I don't want to hurry you, of course, but it gets dark early now, you know. We want to finish."

"Make it another quarter of an hour, and if he's not here we'll begin, anyway."

"Right-ho!"

"That'll be the limit," said Lowther. "We can't play after dark. I suppose Talbot wouldn't be ass enough to come by the road. He knows the short cuts."

"Oh, he'll turn up in a few minutes!" said Reilly.

A few minutes passed, but Talbot did not turn up. More minutes ticked away, but Talbot did not turn up. The quarter of an hour was up, and Talbot had not appeared.

Tom Merry's brow grew very dark.

Even had Talbot gone by the High Road, and had not taken advantage of the short cuts, he should have been at Abbotsford by this time.

What was delaying him?

He must have received the telegram—and he must know how urgent it was. Yet he had not come.

"Accident on the road, perhaps," hazarded Lumley-Lumley.

"Two accidents don't happen in the same afternoon!" said Tom Merry irritably. "He hasn't had an accident!"

"Then why doesn't he come?"

"Might have been some delay getting the telegram, or—or—I don't know. Anyhow, we've got to play; we can't keep those chaps waiting any longer. There isn't too much time to finish before dark, as it is."

"Play a man short, then," said Kerruish.

"No choice about it."

Yorke and his men were showing some signs of impatience, in spite of their politeness.

Tom Merry hurried over to the Abbotsford captain, who was idly punting a ball.

"We're ready!" he called out.

"Wait a bit longer if you like," said Yorke.

"No good: it'll be too dark to finish if we do. When my man comes, he can come straight on the field."

"Right you are."

The teams went into the field and lined up. The kick-off fell to the visitors, and the game was soon in progress. With a man short in their ranks, the St. Jim's fellows devoted themselves to defence. They missed Talbot sorely and they missed Jack Blake. Julian was doing unexpectedly well in the front line, but he did not make up for what was missing.

Tom Merry did not give up hope, however. When Talbot arrived he would come into the game, and that would make all the difference in the world. If he did not come the game would probably be lost. With a man short, the Saints could not hope to keep out their opponents for the whole ninety minutes of the match.

But he was bound to come, Tom Merry told himself almost crossly. Never had he felt so angry with his chum. It was really too bad of Talbot, and Tom Merry could find no excuse for him.

With the odds against them, as they were, the Saints would not have done so badly if Fatty Wynn had been in his old place in goal. Gore was doing his best there, but he was not a patch on the Welsh junior. Abbotsford attacked hotly, too, and when they got through Gore was not quite equal to the shots which flashed in from the opposing forwards.

The ball went into the net—and went in again!

Still Talbot did not appear

Tom Merry packed his goal, and the Saints defended hard, and when the whistle went for half-time no more goals had been scored. The Saints came off the field for a rest, looking far from cheerful. If Talbot did not come the second half was pretty certain to be a repetition of the first, and St. Jim's would go home soundly licked.

Why had Talbot not come?

He had had ample time now if he had taken the longest route, and if he had had even a puncture. There was no reason to be imagined why he should not have come, unless he did not choose to come.

Tom Merry looked anxiously towards the gates for a sign of him as the teams went into the field for the second half, but he was not to be seen, and Tom had to resign himself to the certainty that he would not come. And the ten St. Jim's players lined up once more.

CHAPTER 7.
Kidnapped!

"TELEGRAM for you, Master Talbot."

Toby, the page of the School House, brought it into Talbot's study.

Talbot was alone there. He had done as Marie asked him—he had given up the match. He was disappointed, but his own disappointment did not trouble him so much as that of his chums. He could not help feeling that he had fallen in their opinion by his unexplained desertion.

Golfer (far off in the rough): "I say, caddy, why do you keep looking at your watch?"
Caddy: "It ain't a watch, guv'nor—it's a compass!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Worswick, 4, Broadley Place, Spotland Road, Rochdale.

After the departure of the team he had seen Marie for a few minutes in the Head's garden, and the girl had been much relieved to see that he had not gone to Abbotsford. Marie was on duty again now in the sanatorium; and Talbot was reading a book when Toby brought in the telegram.

"Thank you, Toby!"

Talbot opened the telegram in some wonder. There was nobody, as far as he knew, that was likely to send him a telegram, unless it was some new attempt of the Professor to trouble him.

He started as he read Tom Merry's message.

"Tom Merry! By Jove!"

"Any answer, sir?" asked Toby.

"No, Toby."

The page departed, and Talbot stood for some moments in thought, with the telegram in his hand.

He had told Marie that he would resign his place in the team, but that he must go if Tom Merry insisted.

The telegram from Tom Merry was insistent enough.

He had to go. He wondered for a moment whether he should tell Marie. But Talbot, remembering her agitation the previous evening, decided very quickly that it was better not to tell her. He had to go, and it was useless to cause the girl worry and alarm. She need know nothing of it till he came back with the St. Jim's team.

A minute was enough for Talbot to think that out; then he rushed away with his football things to the bike-shed to get out his machine. To fasten his football things into a bag and on his machine was the work of a few moments.

He wheeled the machine out of the school gates and mounted and started off in high spirits.

He had to go, and Marie could hardly blame him afterwards for having obeyed Tom Merry's summons. And he was glad to go. A football match was better than reading in his study. And it would make matters right with the fellows who were hurt and offended by his unaccountable refusal to play. Once he was at Abbotsford he would pile in and play the game of his life, and everything would be all serene. Talbot's heart was light as he pedalled away.

He simply flew along the road. He passed Rylcombe, and sped on along the High Road, and then turned into a short cut that saved him a couple of miles. He came out on the High Road again, and a few minutes later passed a taxicab going in the opposite direction.

A hand was waved to him from the window.

"Put it on, old son!"

Talbot recognised Jack Blake.

There was no time to stop, but Talbot smiled and waved his hand. The cyclist shot on, and Blake proceeded on his way to St. Jim's, much comforted in mind.

Talbot rode hard.

He had to follow the winding High Road for a couple of miles, and then there was another short cut that lessened the wide loop of the road. But before he reached the turning a grey car came into view.

The motor-car had been proceeding at a snail's pace. Talbot did not know

Just as the car was overtaking Blake, the junior's bike skidded on a muddy rut. There was a crash and Blake and his machine were deposited in a heap by the roadside.

it, of course, but the car had been crawling up and down that section of the road for ten minutes or more. The spectacled motorist might have been supposed to have plenty of time on his hands, from the conduct of his chauffeur.

At the sight of Talbot scorching on his machine, the chauffeur speeded up, and came rushing along directly in the cyclist's path.

Talbot swerved to avoid the car, but the car swerved, too, swinging across the road as if the driver were intoxicated.

Talbot slacked down and jumped off his machine. He was exasperated at wasting a minute; but, concluding that the motor-driver was drunk, it was the only way of avoiding a collision.

The chauffeur jammed on his brakes, and the car halted within a few yards of the cyclist.

Talbot wheeled his machine out into the road angrily, to remount and ride on past the halted car.

But as he did so the door of the car opened, and the bearded old gentleman jumped out, and at the same moment the chauffeur left his seat.

Talbot had to stop, as both of them had jumped directly in his way.

"What the dickens——" began Talbot.

Then he almost staggered.

In spite of the beard, in spite of the big glasses, he knew the face of the motorist, even if his actions had not betrayed him.

"The Professor!"

"Well met!" said John Rivers, with a chuckle.

"Don't try to stop me," said Talbot, between his teeth. "I have nothing to say to you, John Rivers, and I have not a moment to spare. Get out of the way!"

The Professor cast a quick glance up and down the road. He had chosen that spot because it was lonely, and because he knew that a cyclist coming from St. Jim's could not avoid passing there.

Talbot jerked his machine aside to pass, and, as he did so, the two men rushed on him.

Then the junior understood.

It was not an appeal from his old confederate that he had to listen to this time; it was not the Professor's intention to urge him to return to the old gang. John Rivers had learned that that was useless. Marie's misgivings had not been unfounded, after all. The rascals meant violence.

But Talbot was not an easy fellow to handle.

He let the machine slide, and put up his hands instantly as the two scoundrels closed upon him. The chauffeur, powerful man as he was, reeled back from a heavy drive on his chest, and pitched against the car. But even as he reeled away the Professor was upon the schoolboy. He had torn off his glasses, and it was as well for him, for Talbot's left crashed full in his face. Heedless of the blow, the cracksman grasped the junior in a savage grip.

"Quick, Nobbler!" he panted.

Talbot struggled fiercely with the Professor.

He was a boy against a man, but he would have freed himself in a few moments had he had only the cracksman to deal with.

But the chauffeur was quick to recover himself. He rushed at the schoolboy again, and grasped him savagely, and the junior was borne to the ground.

Talbot struggled hard in the grasp of the two scoundrels. He was strong, and he had unbounded pluck and determination. And as he fought for his liberty, he shouted for help.

"Hold him!" panted the Professor.

The cracksman dragged a leather bag from his pocket as Talbot struggled on the ground with the chauffeur. He opened the bag, and a strange, sickly scent came to Talbot's nostrils. Before he could release himself from the chauffeur, the Professor was upon him again, and a cloth saturated with chloroform was pressed over his face.

The boy still struggled feebly; but he was firmly held, and the cloth was kept tight on his face. In a minute more he was helpless in the grasp of the kidnappers.

"Hang him! He gave us enough trouble," snarled the Professor. "Into the car with him—quick! There's a wagon on the road!"

The insensible junior was lifted swiftly into the car. Down the road a farm wagon had appeared in sight, jogging on slowly towards the scene of the kidnapping, with the driver half-asleep.

Talbot was seated in the car, and a big coat wrapped round him. Nobbler lifted the bicycle on to the carrier of the car, and strapped it there.

The wagon came along, and the driver glanced at them sleepily. He noted nothing but a boy huddled up, apparently asleep, in the corner of the car. The wagon passed..

"Close shave!" said the Professor. "But a miss is as good as a mile. We've got him at last. Get off—sharp!"

The Professor stepped into the car. Nobbler gave a doubtful look at the junior.

"He won't come to, I suppose?" he muttered.

The Professor laughed savagely.

"If he does, I shall give him a second dose. Get off!"

"Home?" asked the chauffeur.

"Yes. London, and let her go!"

"Right!"

The chauffeur took the wheel again, and the car started. Talbot, overcome by the drug, scarcely breathing, motionless and inert, lay huddled in the car as it tore along the roads. The Professor's eyes gleamed with triumph. The Toff was in the hands of his old confederates at last.

—•—

CHAPTER 8.

A Surprise!

"BEATEN to the wide!"

"Rotten!"

"Hard cheese, deah boys!"

Tom Merry & Co. came off the football field at Abbotsford in black humour.

The match had ended, as it could only possibly have ended, with a scratch team and a man short, against keen and determined opponents.

Talbot had not come. If he had arrived even in the second half the fortunes of the game might have changed. But he had not come.

St. Jim's had been beaten to the wide. They had played up gallantly, and had done their best.

Tom Merry had succeeded in putting the ball in, in spite of the odds. But it was the only goal St. Jim's had scored. Abbotsford had put on three more in the second half, in spite of all the Saints' efforts.

Five goals to one!

It was a crushing defeat. Seldom or never had five goals been scored against St. Jim's junior eleven in a footer match.

They put the best face on it they could before the Abbotsford fellows. It was no good looking glum after a licking. If it had been a fair licking after a fair fight they would not have minded. But they had lost because Talbot had left them in the lurch. That was where the bitterness of it came in. They changed, and mounted their bikes in the winter dusk for the ride home to St. Jim's.

Tom Merry was silent. He was feeling morose enough; he could imagine no reason why Talbot had failed him in this way. But the other fellows made remarks pretty freely. Talbot had left them in the lurch—it was a rotten trick—and they had plenty of things to say to Talbot when they got back to St. Jim's. They said some of them en route, by way of relieving their feelings.

At any other time nothing was more certain to rouse Tom Merry's ire than a slighting remark concerning Talbot. In the Toff's earlier days at the school his chums had come down very heavily on mean fellows who had been inclined to bring up Talbot's past against him. But now Tom Merry had not a word to say in defence of his chum. There was nothing to be said. Talbot, knowing how they were placed, had chosen to leave them in the lurch.

"Oh, I'll talk to him when we get in!" said Thompson of the Shell savagely. "A New House chap wouldn't have left us in the lurch like this!"

Thompson belonged to the New House.

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther crossly.

"There were New House chaps who would have played, too!" growled Thompson. "But you had to pick a School House fellow, who goes and leaves you in the lurch! Poof!"

Hallo, Everybody!

Why is twelve midnight like the roof of a house? S'late.

Of all the kings, which is the most polished? Blacking.

What is the diff. between an umbrella and a very talkative fellow? Well, you can shut up the umbrella!

I hear the cook has been breaking the law. Yes, she has been poaching eggs.

Straphangers in London tubes are getting restive. They declare they won't stand much more.

"This report says you are not doing so well at school," said Gibson's guardian grimly. "But there's one thing I can do that nobody else can," answered Gibson. "And what's that?" "I can read my own handwriting."

A doctor says slimming makes people ill-tempered. Fast—and furious.

Skimpole, who is superstitious, says if you fall downstairs it means somebody is going to give you something. A bottle of liniment oil, I hope.

I hear a prison governor can't sleep. He should try counting his black sheep.

A world's record has been set up by a man hopping on one leg for three and a half hours. He dropped the nail and hammer at the beginning.

True story: On a scouting expedition, Blake, who was reading a map, turned suddenly to Skimpole with the question: "Can you swim, Skimmy?" "No," replied Skimpole. "Why?" "Because, according to my calculations," answered Blake seriously, "we are now three miles to seaward of Dungeness."

A writer advises you to cut your tailor's bill in half. But if you do, he'll only send it in again.

A shark 25 feet long and weighing three tons was caught off the Scilly Isles. Probably its own Scilly fault.

"I can get America," boasts Gore. First I knew that they were giving it away.

"Sculptor Bankrupt," we read. Just another bust.

Headline from the "Wayland Courier": "Army Officer Becomes Music Hall Critic." Write about turn?

So long, chaps!

"Weally, Thompson——"

"It's no good talking!" said Tom Merry savagely. "Talbot must be able to give some explanation of this. If he can't, he's out of the team for good—both for School and House matches. I'll never play him again unless he can give some jolly good explanation!"

"What explanation can be given?" snorted Gore. "You don't suggest that he broke his neck riding over? He didn't come because he wouldn't come. Five goals to one! My hat! Why, the blessed fags in the Second Form will be grinning at us! I've hardly got the cheek to show my face at St. Jim's at all!"

"It's pretty rotten," said Julian. "But don't be down on a fellow till you know how matters stand. Give him a chance, anyway!"

Gore gave another emphatic snort.

"Rot! I think he's acted like a cad!"

"Hear, hear!" said Thompson.

"I guess it does look rotten!" said Lumley-Lumley. "Still, as Julian says, give him a chance to explain!"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Gore. "After all, you can't expect much from a fellow who's been a cracksman and a blessed thief, when you come to think of it!"

"Let that drop, Gore!" said Tom Merry sharply. "That's got nothing to do with this, anyway!"

"How do you know?" snarled Gore. Gore was excited and very bad-tempered just now. There had been some unpleasant remarks on the subject of his goalkeeping, which certainly had not been very successful. The match had been a great chance for Gore, but he had not shone. "How do you know, I say? Why didn't he come in the first place? Why didn't he come when you wired? What reason has he got for wanting to keep by himself all the afternoon? Looks to me jolly suspicious!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" murmured Reilly.

"Well, that's what I think, and I say what I think!" growled Gore.

"And now you've said what you think, shut up, or I'll have you off that bike and mop up the road with you!" said Tom Merry savagely.

Gore grunted, and let the subject drop.

In far from a cheerful humour the juniors finished the ride home, and arrived at St. Jim's tired and dispirited, and out of humour. They put up their bicycles, and hurried into the School House to look for Talbot. Jack Blake, limping a little, met them as they came in.

"Hallo! How did it go?" he asked.

"Wotten, deah boy!"

"Licked?" asked Blake, his face falling.

"Licked to the wide—five goals to one!" growled Gore.

"My only hat!" said Blake, in dismay. "Five goals to one! Don't tell anybody, for goodness' sake! What was the matter with you?"

"Scratch team, and a man short!" growled Lowther. "What could you expect?"

"Man short?"

"Yes, ass!"

"But—but why?" asked Blake. "Where's Talbot? Hasn't he come back with you?"

"Talbot! He didn't come!"

"Didn't come!" howled Blake, with a jump. And then he howled again as he got a painful twinge in his damaged ankle. "Talbot didn't come! Why?"

"That's what we're going to find out!"

said Tom Merry grimly. "Where is he? Have you seen him?"

"Yaas, where is the boundah, deah boy?"

"Seen him?" said Blake dazedly. "Yes, I've seen him. I passed him on the road as I came home in the taxi. Why didn't he come?"

"You passed him on the road?" yelled Lowther.

"Yes."

"Going to Abbotsford?"

"Of course! Where the deuce would he be going?" demanded Blake. "And he was scorching like thunder. I gave him a yell, and he saw me. Do you mean to say that he didn't arrive at Abbotsford?"

"Wathah not."

"Well, my hat!"

The footballers stood dumbfounded. This was an unexpected light on the matter. They had come in prepared to rag Talbot bald-headed for having failed to respond to the telegram. But it was evident that he had responded, if Blake had passed him on the road to Abbotsford. What did it mean?

"You—you're sure it was Talbot you passed, Blake?" asked Tom Merry, bewildered.

Blake sniffed.

"Don't I know him, fathead? Of course it was Talbot! I yelled to him and he waved his hand and kept on without stopping, going like thunder!"

"Well, he didn't arrive at Abbotsford."

"But he must have arrived!" exclaimed Blake. "Why shouldn't he arrive? What was there to stop him?"

"Bai Jove! There's been some accident," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy soberly. "I was sure all the time, Talbot wouldn't have left us in the lurch. You fellows wemembah I said so all along."

"I don't remember!" snapped Gore.

"Weally, Gore——"

Tom Merry knitted his brows in thought. All his resentment had vanished now. Whatever had been Talbot's reason for standing out of the match in the first place, he had loyally come to help his comrades when he had received Tom Merry's urgent message. That was clear now. But what had become of him? He had passed Blake on the Abbotsford road, and then he had vanished, seemingly, into thin air. Certainly, he had never arrived at Abbotsford.

"An accident, of course!" said Monty Lowther uneasily. "I was afraid there might have been an accident, all the time. Poor old Talbot! I say, Tom, we'd better go and tell Railton this at once."

Tom Merry nodded, and turned his steps in the direction of the Housemaster's study.

—·—

CHAPTER 9.

Dark Suspicions!

MR. RAILTON received the captain of the Shell with a genial smile.

"How did your match go, Merry?" he asked pleasantly.

The School House master always took a keen interest in the junior matches.

"We were beaten, sir," said Tom. "But that doesn't matter. I'm afraid something has happened to Talbot."

Mr. Railton was grave at once.

"Talbot! Was he not with you?"

"No, sir."

Tom Merry then explained what had happened.

The Housemaster listened to him in surprise. He did not speak a word, however, until the junior had finished.

"That is very extraordinary!" he exclaimed at last. "If there had been an accident, surely word would have reached us by this time? If Talbot were seriously injured he would have something on him to show his identity. His cap would be known by its badge. Then there is the telephone. Certainly, whoever found him would have telephoned at once. It is extraordinary. However, inquiry must be made. I will see the Head."

Mr. Railton hurried away to Dr. Holmes without losing a moment. Tom Merry rejoined his chums.

The juniors had come home hungry, but the Terrible Three, at least, had little appetite for tea. Manners had tea ready in the study, and they sat down to it in a lugubrious mood.

Where was Talbot? He had not arrived at Abbotsford, and he had not come back to St. Jim's.

An accident was the only possible theory, yet how was it that news of an accident had not reached the school? Hours had passed since it must have happened—if it had happened at all.

Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy came into the study after tea. They were all looking very glum.

"No news yet," said Blake. "I say, you chaps, this is beastly. I'm worried about poor old Talbot."

"Same here," said Manners.

"Yaas, I wathah think we're all wowwied," said Arthur Augustus. "It is weally a most extwaordinawy happenin'. I've just been talkin' to Toby. He says he took the telegwam to Talbot, and he left at once. It's quite cleah that he went as soon as he weceived the telegwam."

"And I passed him on the road," said Blake, for the twentieth time. "He must have been going to Abbotsford. He was going in that direction, top speed."

"There's no doubt about where he was going," said Tom Merry miserably. "All I can think is that he met with an accident."

"But then the school would have been notified," said Blake. "Even if a car knocked him down, and didn't stop, somebody would have found him on the road."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I simply can't make it out," said Tom. "It beats me. I only hope that he comes back safe and sound."

All the fellows waited anxiously for news that evening. Gore and some of the others muttered a suspicion that Talbot hadn't had an accident, but had gone off "on his own." If there had been an accident something would have been heard of it.

Crooke of the Shell remarked that he had suspected something of the sort all along. Mellish of the Fourth fully agreed with him. But as yet the possibility of a serious accident kept those remarks to furtive mutterings. If there

(*Continued on the next page.*)

were no news later on they would be heard more openly, and from other fellows beside Gore & Co. There was no doubt about that. And no news came.

The Head, it was known, had telephoned to Rylcombe and Wayland, asking for news. No news of an accident was known there. Nothing at the police station. Nothing at the cottage hospital. Nothing at the doctor's. It seemed as if the missing junior had vanished into space.

Bed-time came, and the juniors went to their dormitories, most of them in a very subdued mood.

It was late that night before Tom Merry slept.

He was awake and down before the rising-bell in the morning. Mr. Railton was already down, but in response to Tom Merry's anxious inquiry for news the Housemaster shook his head.

"Not a word, sir?" asked Tom.

"Nothing."

"But—but there must have been an accident, sir."

"It does not seem possible, Merry," said the Housemaster quietly. "News of it would have reached us before this. We have been in communication with the police at Rylcombe, Wayland, and Abbotsford, also with the hospitals. Nothing has been heard or seen of Talbot. No accident is known to have happened. It is extraordinary."

"I can't think what else could have happened to him, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Merry," went on Mr. Railton very quietly, "you have been, I believe, Talbot's closest friend here?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Has he ever said anything, or dropped any hint, concerning any intention of leaving the school?"

"Never, sir."

"Has he ever said anything to lead you to suppose that he was in communication with his former acquaintances?"

"I know that he was not, sir," said Tom Merry. "I know he has thrown them over. I think he proved it when he gave away that rascal who calls himself the Professor and who came here calling himself Mr. Packington."

"Quite true, Merry," said the Housemaster, with a nod. "I cannot suspect him without proof. Yet it is scarcely possible now to believe that an accident has happened. The facts simply are that he left the school of his own accord and has not returned. Have you any reason to suppose that his former acquaintances are making an effort to entice him to rejoin them?"

Tom Merry's cheeks crimsoned.

"Come, Merry!" said Mr. Railton sharply. "I see you are aware of something. At this moment it is your duty to tell me anything you know."

"I suppose I ought to, sir. But it's very little. Talbot mentioned to me last week that he was afraid the Professor had not done with him; that he would try to cause him some harm. He said that he feared the man would come back. But after that he seemed quite to have got over it and to be as cheerful as ever; so I concluded that it was all right."

"He was afraid the man would come back!" repeated Mr. Railton. "But this man who was known here as Mr. Packington, and whose real name seems to be Rivers, could not come back here without being arrested, Merry."

"I suppose he would not have come openly, sir," said Tom. "I had an idea that he would skulk about the neighbourhood secretly, and that Talbot was afraid of hearing from him. He thought the man was still making plans to get him back."

Mr. Railton knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"But Talbot had only to refuse to have anything to do with him and to denounce him to the police, as he did before. He was under no obligation to treat the man with any consideration. If he has indeed reappeared, and Talbot had gone with him, it must have been of his own accord."

"I—I've been thinking, sir, that Talbot may have been collared by those rascals," said Tom diffidently.

The Housemaster started.

"Kidnapped, do you mean?"

"Isn't it possible, sir?"

"It is possible, I suppose," said the Housemaster slowly, "but it's far from probable. How was it, Merry, that Talbot came to be going to Abbotsford alone? Was he not a member of the eleven?"

"Yes," said Tom reluctantly.

"If he had gone over with the party certainly this accident—or whatever it was—could not have happened. Why didn't Talbot go with the rest?"

"He resigned from the team, sir, and I put another chap in. Then Blake was crocked going over, and I had to wire for him."

"That is very odd. If he were able and willing to play, why did he resign from the team in the first place?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You had had no quarrel?"

"Oh, no! Talbot simply said that he did not want to go to Abbotsford."

"He gave no reason?"

"No, sir."

"But surely that was very unusual? Did you not question him as to his motives?"

"Well, yes. But he—well, he didn't explain. I don't know why he didn't want to play," said Tom, with an uncomfortable feeling that he was making matters worse for Talbot. "He didn't say why. He simply stood out."

"Then it was due to Talbot's own action that he was left out and that he came to ride over to Abbotsford alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then how can you suggest that he has been kidnapped? He could not have been kidnapped if he had been with the rest of the team certainly. Yet he deliberately refrained from going with the party in the first place. If he has fallen in with his old associates, and has gone off with them willingly, is it not due entirely to his own action in keeping out of the eleven?"

"I—I suppose it is, sir."

"I am afraid, therefore, that that quite abolishes the idea of a kidnapping," said Mr. Railton dryly. "Further, is there any proof that when he left here on his bicycle yesterday he really intended to go to Abbotsford?"

"Blake passed him on the road, sir, and he was scorching for Abbotsford as hard as he could go."

"That is no proof that he did not intend to stop at some place this side of Abbotsford. You say he gave no reason whatever for resigning from the eleven?"

"None, sir."

"He did not say that he had another engagement?"

"No, sir."

"Did not you think this very odd?"

"Well, I did, sir, at the time."

"He must have had some reason, Merry. He was, I understand, very keen on football?"

"Hold him!" panted the Professor, as Talbot struggled himself before the Professor was upon him again, and

"Keen as mustard, sir."

"I suppose Talbot's staying out seriously affected your chances of winning the match?"

"Yes, sir."

"He knew that, I suppose?"

"Yes; I told him so."

"And yet he persisted in staying behind, although he knew you needed him?"

"Ye-e-es," said Tom reluctantly.

Mr. Railton pursed his lips.

"That will do, Merry. I still hope that it may prove that Talbot has simply met with some slight accident."

Tom Merry went out into the quadrangle, feeling rather miserable. He knew very well what was in the House-

master's mind. Mr. Railton could not help suspecting that Talbot's unaccountable action of the previous day meant that he had some appointment with his old associates. And if he had met them deliberately of his own accord, the theory of kidnapping was out of the question. If he had gone with them, he must have gone freely, as he was under no compulsion to meet them. He might have gone to Abbotsford with Tom Merry's team, and then all would have been well.

Indeed, into Tom Merry's mind there crept for a moment a chilling doubt.

Was it possible that the Toff had yielded to temptation at last—that the

...rately with the chauffeur. But the junior could not free ...th saturated with chloroform was pressed over his face.

persuasions or the threats of the Professor had turned him at last back to the old paths?

It was a miserable thought, and Tom Merry drove it angrily from his mind; but, in spite of himself, it would come back to him.

—

CHAPTER 10.

In the Hands of the Tempter!

TALBOT opened his eyes.

His head was aching, his pulses throbbing.

Where was he?

He looked dimly, dizzily round him. Back into his aching brain came the remembrance of what had happened to him on the road to Abbotsford—the struggle with the Professor and Nobbler, the chloroform, and then a blank.

He was in the hands of his old friends, now his enemies. Marie's fears had been only too well founded.

He was in a small room, lying upon a miserable bed. There was a little window high up in the wall, covered with strong wire netting, evidently prepared in advance for a captive. Through the window came a dim light—the light of a foggy city.

He did not need to ask where he was; he knew. He remembered the room—a garret in the old building where the gang held their meetings. He remembered the building only too well—one of those old, once stately mansions, in what had been a fashionable quarter of London two centuries ago, now a place of poverty and vice.

Well he knew the place in which his earliest years had been passed. He had been in that big building many a time in his earlier days, when his father, now dead, was the chief of the gang of forgers, cracksmen, and thieves.

In this very garret, Talbot remembered, he had studied with his books while his father was below carousing with the Professor and Hookey Walker, Nobbler, and the rest. It all came strangely back to his dazed mind, as he lay on the wretched pallet and gazed about him.

He was a prisoner.

The Professor's blow had fallen. He was in the hands of the gang once more. Once their associate and leader, now their prisoner.

He rose from the bed and tried the handle of the door. It was locked on the outside. He crossed to the window, mounted upon a rickety chair, and looked out through the strong wire-netting that barred escape.

There was fog below, and through the fog he caught a glimpse of uneven roofs, filthy chimneys, broken, patched windows. The sight struck him with a chill. Once it had been familiar enough to his eyes, and he had thought little of it; but there had been a change in his life since then.

At St. Jim's the wide green playing fields, the old quad shaded by ancient elms, the grey old buildings and airy class-rooms—how different his later surroundings had been!

He sat on the bed, striving to collect his thoughts. His head was still buzzing from the drug.

What was the object of his captors—to imprison him, to threaten him until he agreed to rejoin them, to place his peculiar talents at the services of the gang? He knew that that was what the Professor had planned.

He set his teeth grimly at the thought. The Toff, once the prince of cracksmen, was made of sterner stuff than they deemed. Even for the sake of life itself he would never yield. What would life be worth under the old conditions, with everything that made it worth living taken away? To be a cracksman, a thief, a hunted felon, his hand against every man's, and every man's hand against him!

That should never be.

He went to the door again, and struck upon it with his knuckles. He wished to let the Professor know that he had recovered his senses—that he was ready to "have it out." The sooner that was over the better.

A whistle sounded below, and a few minutes later there was a sound of the key turning in the lock.

The Professor stepped into the room. His disguise was gone now; he had no beard, no glasses. He revealed a hard, cold, clean-shaven face, the face of a man still young.

He gave the Toff a nod as he came in. Behind, in the dirty passage, loomed the athletic figure of Nobbler. There was no chance of escape. The Professor closed the door behind him.

"So you've come to, Toff?"

"Yes."

"Sit down, and we'll talk it over."

Talbot sat on the bed. He was still weak and dizzy. The Professor seated himself on the rickety chair, and took out a cigarette-case. He extended it to Talbot.

The Shell fellow shook his head.

John Rivers shrugged his shoulders, and lighted a cigarette.

"There is nothing to talk about," said Talbot. "You cannot keep me here. I shall get out of this sooner or later. You might as well make up your mind to it, and let me go at once."

"You will not find it quite so easy to get away," said the Professor. "You are in our hands. You will remain so until you come to your senses. You chose to desert us, and you must come back. Take a sensible view of it, Toff. Did we treat you badly when you were with us?"

Talbot shook his head.

"In this very room," said the Professor, "you were always keen to study, and you remember that I helped you. Your father was keen to take care of your education, at least, to fit you for the part you had to play—a swell cracksman. And did I not help you? You owe me something, Toff!"

"Very little, considering your motives," said Talbot.

"Did we treat you badly? You were a genius in the profession. Even your father did not possess your skill, though they still remember Captain Crow at Scotland Yard as one of the best cracksmen of his time. You had the touch of a magician for a safe. You were worth a fortune to us. You had nothing to complain of. You never wanted money; you might have had thousands. You did have thousands, only you were fool enough to part with them when you tried this new game—this fool game!"

"It's useless talking," said Talbot. "Money is nothing unless it is earned by honest work. I've learned that since I left you."

The Professor sneered.

"You are dreaming dreams, Toff," he said. "What is this honesty you have suddenly grown so particular about? Look from that window—look at the filthy hovels! The landlords draw rent for those buildings—from half-starved, wasted wretches—grind out of them all they can pay, no matter how they slave or steal or starve to get the money,

and those landlords are honest and honourable gentlemen. There are two classes in the world, Toff—the looters and looted. I choose to be a looter!"

Talbot smiled slightly.

"It's easy enough to talk," he said. "There are lots of rotten things going on, I know that. But a decent fellow's business is to do his little bit to alter it, to make things better. And his business is to begin by being honest himself. That's the first point."

The Professor shrugged his shoulders.

"You have changed, Toff. You used to look on things as I do."

"I have changed," said Talbot. "I see more clearly now. Honesty comes first—that's the cardinal point. Let every fellow make up his mind to be honest, and all evil will disappear of its own accord. And the wrongdoings of others is no excuse for one's own wrongdoings. If everybody acted on your principles, Professor, we should all be thieves."

The Professor laughed.

"You mean that you have made up your mind, and that nothing I can say will make any difference?" he asked.

Talbot nodded.

"Then the time comes to use something more than persuasion," said the Professor, his face hardening. "You are determined to live your new life—a struggle for honesty—as long as you can?"

"All my life," said Talbot.

"It may become impossible to you," said the Professor. "What is your prospect now? They have given you a scholarship at St. Jim's. But when you leave St. Jim's? You hope to slip into some comfortable berth, I suppose, and live in idleness or semi-idleness, while the work of the world is done by others less lucky. Is that much better than stealing?"

"I hope to get a chance to work my way," said Talbot. "I will never touch a penny that is not fairly earned by my hands or my brain."

"But what if you are forced to leave the school—if you are turned out in disgrace, with the reputation of having fallen back into your old ways?" said the Professor menacingly.

"That will not happen."

"There you make your mistake. That is exactly what is going to happen," said John Rivers coolly. "The first step has been taken. You have disappeared from the school—of your own accord. If you tell a tale afterwards of kidnapping, who is going to believe you?"

Talbot changed colour a little.

"My friends will believe me," he said.

"You will see. You do not know the whole game yet. You have played into my hands, and I shall take full advantage of it. I was there with the car, hoping to get a chance of kidnapping you while you were in Abbotsford—at any risk. But chance helped me, and you came along, and there was no witness of the kidnapping. You do not know how much you helped me, Toff, by staying behind and coming on later by yourself."

Talbot was silent. Marie had, in fact, in her effort to save him, only thrown him all the more helplessly into the hands of his enemies.

"Now they will suppose at the school that you have gone of your own accord. And when the robbery takes place——"

"The robbery!" said Talbot, with a start.

"Exactly! And when something belonging to you, and easily recognisable, is picked up on the scene of the robbery——"

"You—you villain!"

"And still you fail to appear to justify yourself, what then?" asked the Professor, with a sneer. "What will your new friends think?"

"That—that is what you intend?" panted Talbot.

"That is it!"

The boy sat silent, crushed. What could prevent that dastardly scheme from being carried into effect? Only his instant return to St. Jim's, and he was a prisoner!

The Professor watched his working face with grim mockery. He broke the silence at last.

"Make the best of it, Toff. The game's gone against you; you can't play it out. Throw in your lot with us——"

"Never!"

"How will you live?"

"I will face whatever comes!" said Talbot fiercely.

"You will have your choice," said the Professor grimly. He rose to his feet.

Talbot sprang to his feet.

"Nobbler!" called the Professor, reading the boy's desperate intention in his face.

The muscular ruffian came into the garret instantly. Talbot made a spring for the door. It was desperate, hopeless, and he knew it; but he would not submit tamely. The two men grasped him, and he was flung on the bed. As he rolled there, Nobbler and the Professor quitted the room, and the key was turned in the lock, on the outside.

Talbot sat up dazedly.

There was no chance. He was a prisoner—a helpless prisoner, while his cunning enemy carried out his plans, while his honour was smirched, his

(*Continued on the next page.*)

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest with each other. Readers wishing to reply to notices appearing here must write to the advertisers direct. Notices for publication should be accompanied by the coupon on this page, and posted to The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Miss Lilian Hartley, 19, Hanover Crescent, Brighton, **Sussex**; girl correspondents; age 14-17; Canada (particularly Prince Edward Island), India, Scotland, and Straits Settlements.

Miss Sheila Millman, 15, Elmgrove Road, Redland, **Bristol**; girl correspondents; age 13 or over; operas, Budgerigar breeding, or autograph hunting; outside British Isles preferred.

Leo Johnson, Box 403, Selkirk, Manitoba, **Canada**; pen pals; age 12-16; stamps, postcards; all over the world.

Miss J. Harris, 11, Broad Street, Margate, **Kent**; girl correspondents; age 13-14; films, literature, foreign lands and snapshots; Canada.

J. Fallon, 520, East Prescot Road, **Liverpool, 14**; pen pal; age 15-16; America or Canada.

"The Atlas Correspondence Club" (General Section) require members. No fees or age limit. Write A. W. Godfrey, 3, School Lane, Cookham Village, **Berks.**

"The Atlas Correspondence Club" (Scientific Section) require members. No fees or age limit. Write Geo. H. King, "Greyroofs," Cookham Rise, **Berks.**

Desmond Smith, c/o Box A., Tuatopere, Southland, **New Zealand**; pen pals; letter writing; all letters answered.

Clifford Jordan, 58, Friars Lane, Barrow-in-Furness, **Lancs**; stamps; Falkland Islands, Newfoundland, India, Bermuda, Barbados.

Miss E. M. Chappell, 35, Fox Street, **Sheffield,** THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,549.

3; girl correspondents; age 16-18; stamps, photography, swimming and sports; British Colony.

C. M. Hockey, 36, Downham Way, Bromley, **Kent**; age 16-18; sports; any part of the world.

Eric Carter, Newlands, R.M.D., Ashburton, **New Zealand**; age 13-17; stamps; British Empire.

Miss Joyce Manners, 668, Windermere Ave., Toronto, Ontario, **Canada**; girl correspondents; age 15 upwards; anywhere.

Miss Joyce Taylor, 6, Bristow Road, Hounslow, **Middlesex**; girl correspondents; age 12-17; overseas.

J. C. Billington, 113, Moseley Ave., Radford, **Coventry**; stamps; all British Colonies.

A. Fraser, Victoria Avenue, Waiuku, Auckland, **New Zealand**; pen pals; age 13-16; stamps; anywhere in the world, but preferably U.S.A.

Miss Sheila Harrison, "Hainault," 19, Paget Road, **Gt. Yarmouth**; girl correspondents for the "Hainault" Correspondence Club; age 12 upwards; England or elsewhere.

Jack Rosenberg, 108, Briutenkant Street, Gardens, Cape Town, **South Africa**; pen pals.

C. Westman, 175, Briutenkant Street, Gardens, Cape Town, **S. Africa**; ships, postcard collecting, sports and stamps; anywhere.

E. Koen, 14, Neale Street, Beaconsfield, **South Africa**; pen pals interested in exchanging British colonial stamps.

Miss M. Sheatar, P.O. Box 99, Umtato, Transkei, C. Province, **S. Africa**; girl correspondents; stamp collecting, snaps, autograph collecting, tennis, hockey, swimming; India, Australia, China, Canada.

Miss Muriel Abrahamson, 66, Nightingale Road, Clapton, **London, E.5**; girl correspondents; age 14-15; gardening, sports; abroad.

D. Hay, 165, N. E. Bett, Ashburton, Canterbury, South Island, **New Zealand**; pen pals; age 14-16; stamp collecting; overseas.

B. Cowan, 2, Cromwell St., Mt. Eden., S.W.1, Auckland, **New Zealand**; pen pals; age 14-15; stamps; Samoa, South Africa, New Guinea, N.W. Pacific Isles.

E. C. Healey, Waiuku, North Island, **New Zealand**; age 13-17; stamps.

S. Glennie, 53, Duke St., Guelph, Ontario, **Canada**; age 13-16; stamps and photography; British Colonies.

Ronald McEwen, The Manse, Millbrex, by Fyvie, Aberdeenshire, **Scotland**; age 14-18; stamps; anywhere except Gt. Britain.

C. Edwards, 47, Herne Road, Surbiton, **Surrey**; age 13-14; stamps, South Africa, Australia, Canada.

L. P. Moody, 170, Higham Road, Tottenham, **London, N.17**; age 16-18; sports, Australia.

D. C. Bishop, 358, Malden Road, Cheam, **Surrey**; age 14-17; films, sport, dance music, agriculture.

S. Lewis, Inglenook, Doagh Road, Whitehouse, Co. Antrim, **Northern Ireland**; any age; stamps.

Worldwide Correspondence and Exchange Club; members wanted for exchange of books, papers, stamps, etc.; anywhere. Magazine Monthly. Write, H. Samson, 13, Woodland Way, Shirley, Croydon, **Surrey.**

John Nicholson, Blanquita, 10, The Crecent, Maidenhead, **Berks**; age 14-17; stamps, books, animals, air transport; British Empire.

James Lang, 30, Whitehaugh Drive, Paisley, **Scotland**; pen pals; stamps and books; Australia, Canada.

Leo Goldberg, 342, Bree St., Johannesburg, **S. Africa**; pen pals; age 13-15; interested in any topic except stamp collecting.

Miss L. Lusman, 19, Irwinton Road, Sea Point, Cape Town, **S. Africa**; girl correspondents; age 12-14; sports, old "Gems" and "Magnets"; Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and all parts of the British Empire.

J. Bayhack, 18, Arras Street, Witbank, **S. Africa**; stamps.

Miss V. Grant, 52, Bay Street, Ultimo, Sydney, **Australia**; girl correspondents; age 17 years; film stars, cycling, reading and tennis.

PEN PALS COUPON
23-10-37

reputation lost for ever, his future blackened past hope!

The struggle was over, and he had been beaten. St. Jim's would be closed to him; his closest chums would never believe in him when the Professor's diabolical plan had been carried into effect. It was all over. For the first time since he had set his feet upon the new path the Toff's courage failed him.

CHAPTER 11.
Sealed Lips!

"I—I want to speak to you!"

Tom Merry stopped, raising his cap, as Marie Rivers came towards him in the quad.

The girl's face was pale, and her eyes had a haunted look.

It was easy for Tom Merry to see that Miss March had heard of the disappearance of Talbot, and that the news had been a heavy blow to her.

"Yes, Miss March," said Tom. "What is it?"

"I have heard about Talbot! They are saying—what has happened to him?" exclaimed the girl breathlessly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Nobody knows, Miss March. He has simply disappeared—that's all we know so far."

"But—how—how—when? Tell me!"

Tom Merry explained once more what happened the previous afternoon. Miss March listened to him, breathing hard.

"Then—then he went to Abbotsford—alone?"

"Yes."

"And—and he did not come back?"

"No."

The Little Sister caught her breath.

"Why did he go—why did he go?" she murmured. "I—I thought that you went without him! I thought he would stay! Now he has gone!"

She looked very distressed. Tom looked at her curiously. He remembered the talk of the juniors on the way to Abbotsford—that Miss March had had something to do with Talbot's giving up the match.

"Miss March," he exclaimed, "if you know anything about this it will be best to speak up! Do you know why Talbot gave up the match yesterday?"

The Little Sister did not reply, but her eyes held a startled look.

"You see, it looks bad for Talbot now," said Tom. "My idea was that he had been kidnapped, but it does look as if he gave up the match on purpose, so as to get away from the school by himself. He gave no reason for throwing the match over. If you know why he did it——"

"I can tell you nothing," said the girl heavily.

"Got any chewing-gum, Bill?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Upham, 6, Sandhurst Road, Mills End Lane, Stockport, Cheshire.

And she turned at once and hurried back into the Head's garden towards the sanatorium.

Tom Merry knitted his brows. It was borne in upon his mind more strongly than ever that Miss March knew something of the Toff's reason for giving up that match. If that reason could be explained, it meant that suspicion would be lifted from Talbot.

She had said that she could tell him nothing—not that she had nothing to tell. He noted that. Yet, if she could say a word to help Talbot, why should she leave it unsaid? Her uncontrollable agitation showed how hard hit she was by the happening.

Marie hurried back into the garden. There, secure from observation, she stopped, under the leafless trees. Her face was very pale.

"My father!" she moaned. "What can I say—how can I help the Toff? But—but he will not dare to injure him!"

That thought was her only comfort.

That Talbot had fallen into the Professor's hands was certain; she had no doubt on that point.

But what could she say?

Confess that she was the cracksman's daughter—that her work as a Little Sister of the Poor was a sham, an imposture to cover the miserable truth.

Even that she would have faced for the Toff's sake.

But it was not only that. There was her father.

Villain as John Rivers was, he was her father. A word uttered to help Talbot was a word to help in the condemnation of her father.

She could tell what she knew—that the Professor had been in Abbotsford the previous day—that she suspected that he had waylaid Talbot and seized him by force. She could tell, even, whither the kidnapped boy had been taken; she had little doubt. And then?

Talbot's rescue might follow, and the clearing up of his name—and inevitably the arrest of her father!

That could not be avoided.

To save Talbot, the police must be set on the track of John Rivers. Once he had escaped from the law, but that would not happen again. Arrested, his fate was certain—long years of crime had to be atoned for. A long sentence of penal servitude would be his lot. Every man's hand was against him—was his daughter's hand to be raised against him, too?

She knew that it was impossible. Even for Talbot's sake, for the sake of the innocent, she could not give her father to justice.

But Talbot—what was to happen to him? That he would refuse to take up the old life, that he would never yield, she knew. What would they do with him? They must let him go at last. But not till, by the Professor's cunning, his good name had been blackened, his career at St. Jim's ruined for ever, his new life made an impossibility. She realised clearly enough that that was the plan.

She had her choice to make—to keep silent while the Professor carried out his treacherous scheme, or to hand her father over to the law. And that she could never do. The Professor knew that she could never do it, or he would not have run the risk. Her lips were sealed.

But it seemed to Marie that the anguish was greater than she could bear.

And she must bear it in silence. There was no one she could tell—no one who could counsel her.

She walked slowly back to the sanatorium at last. She was late, and Miss Pinch, the head nurse, met her with a severe look, which softened as she saw the girl's white and strickened face.

"You are ill!" she exclaimed. "My dear child, you have been overworking yourself. Go to your room at once!"

Marie went to her room. She was glad to be alone—to think. Yet thinking could show no way out of the terrible tangle. Her father or Talbot—one or the other she must desert.

The poor girl tried to think it out.

The day passed wearily and anxiously to her. She did not fear for Talbot's personal safety, as his chums did. The Professor and his confederates would not harm him. The Toff was too valuable to them. But she anticipated what was coming—the blow that was going to fall.

And she could not raise her hand to

(Continued on the next page.)

avert it—she could not speak a word to save the innocent junior whose honour was to be the sacrifice.

The hours passed on wings of lead.

Miss March did not appear in the sanatorium again that day. When Frayne of the Third inquired for her, he was told that she was over-tired, and was taking a spell off duty. Truly, the Little Sister was in no state to administer to others.

CHAPTER 12.

What Happened in the Night!

WEARILY, too, passed the day to Tom Merry and his friends.

There was no news of Talbot to hand

Lessons went on just the same, but the thoughts of the chums of St. Jim's were with their missing friend.

Where was Talbot?

That there had been an accident was now known to be impossible. The whole route Talbot had taken to Abbotsford had been carefully searched, and there was no sign of him, or of the bicycle he had taken with him.

He had vanished as completely as though he had melted into thin air.

Was he coming back at all? the juniors wondered. Had he gone freely? Had he been taken by force? Questions there was no answering.

Gore and a good many other fellows were not slow to state their opinions now that the possibility of an accident was definitely cleared away.

The Toff had grown tired of his new life. He was sick of the routine of St. Jim's after the wild excitement of his former life. Sick of the poverty of a scholarship schoolboy, after the wealth he had known as a cracksman. He had stayed behind from the match on Wednesday afternoon in order to be free to leave the school, unhindered, unquestioned. That was how Gore looked at it, and how more and more fellows looked at it as the day wore away and there came no news of the missing junior.

Even Talbot's best friends were staggered.

Tom Merry & Co. remembered his flushed face, his confusion when he had told them that he wanted to be left behind. They remembered that he had not given a shadow of a reason for his wish.

Had he, even then, had this intention in his mind—to leave St. Jim's quietly after they had departed?

It looked only too probable.

But they clung to their faith in him. They clung to the hope that he would return; that he would be able to explain.

Inspector Skeat had called to see the Head on the subject. To Dr. Holmes' anxious inquiry as to whether he thought a kidnapping possible, he had replied with a shake of the head. His opinion simply was that the boy was "fed-up" with his new orderly life, and had gone back to his old haunts and his old associates. Which was really only to be expected, the inspector added.

However, he promised that inquiries should be carefully made. And they were duly made. But the result was nothing.

Talbot was gone, and that was all. He had not left a trace behind. The inspector hinted very plainly that Dr. Holmes had reason to be thankful that the schoolboy cracksman had gone empty-handed. Probably some latent scruple in him had kept him from robbing his benefactor before he went. Certainly, he could easily have done so. To the light fingers of the Toff, the Head's safe would have offered no difficulties, and the money and the securities there would have afforded a very valuable plunder, to pay for his footing among his old friends.

But Dr. Holmes shook his head decidedly at that. The boy had gone apparently of his own accord, but he would not go back to dishonesty. After all, he would never have robbed the man who had been kindness itself to him. The inspector had his own opinion about that. His profession did not make him confident in human nature. He hinted that the Head would do well to take special precautions to guard his valuables, a warning that fell upon deaf ears.

Tom Merry & Co. had glum looks that evening.

They missed their chum, and they were worried about him. They clung to the belief that he had been kidnapped.

And a fellow like Talbot, determined, plucky, full of resource, was not the kind of fellow to be kept a prisoner long, Lowther pointed out. He would get away, and he would come back, and then he would be cleared of suspicion.

The Terrible Three did not speak much upon the matter. They took no part in the endless discussions upon Talbot's disappearance. What was there to say, except to reiterate their faith in him.

In a gloomy mood they went to bed that night.

Tom Merry slept badly.

In his dreams he seemed to see his old chum, a prisoner in the hands of the Professor, bound, confined in some murky cellar in a London slum, threatened and persecuted, but never yielding to the demands of his old confederates.

Tom was tired and pale when the rising-bell clanged out, and he rose.

The Shell fellows came down.

They had not been down long when they realised that something very unusual was "on" in the School House.

Mr. Railton, with a frowning brow, passed them in the passage without a word. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was talking in low tones to Darrell. Before breakfast Inspector Skeat was seen to arrive, and he was immediately shut up with Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton in the Head's study.

"Something's on," said Monty Lowther uneasily. "It must be some news of Talbot."

"Looks like somethin' pwetty sewious," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Let's ask Kildare."

As the juniors came out from breakfast, some of them asked Kildare.

"You'll hear all about it pretty soon," said Kildare curtly.

"Is it news of Talbot?" asked Tom Merry.

Kildare looked at him rather queerly.

"I'm afraid it is," he said.

"But—but what——"

"You'll know soon."

Kildare strode away. The curiosity of the juniors was at burning point. It was only too clear that there had been some happening in the night. If there was news of Talbot, why should they not be told?

They went into Form-rooms in mystified and worried mood.

After morning lessons they knew.

The news spread through the school, and Tom Merry & Co. were dumbfounded when they heard it. Levison of the Fourth brought them the news.

"There was a robbery last night," he said. "The Head's safe was broken into. Luckily, there wasn't much in it—about fifty pounds, I hear. But it's gone."

So that was the news!

There had been a burglary in the school. That was the cause of the portentous look they had seen on Inspector Skeat's face.

Later in the day the details were all known, passing from mouth to mouth.

The Head's safe had been opened by a master-hand evidently, for the lock had not been broken. It was the work of a skilled cracksman. The burglar had gained admittance to the House by means of clambering over an outhouse, and unfastening a window in the box-room. The window had been found unfastened in the morning. And there was a clue—a clue in the hands of the police.

What was the clue?

Tom Merry felt his heart sicken at the news. A burglary—the night after Talbot had gone! And he had not come back. Had he paid a surreptitious visit to his old school for that purpose?

Tom drove the thought fiercely from his mind.

But the other fellows were discussing it, and there was a little division of opinion among them. And even those who doubted could doubt no longer, when it leaked out what was the nature of the clue in the hands of the police.

A knife had been used to open the box-room window, and the blade had broken. The broken knife had been dropped there in the dark, and it had been found. It was a penknife. And it was marked with Talbot's initials on the silver handle.

Talbot's knife, used to effect an entrance into the House. It was scarcely possible to doubt further. And that was not all. From Talbot's study a number of things had been taken—books, and small personal belongings—things of no value whatever to a thief, but of value to the junior himself. That an ordinary burglar would have taken them was, of course, impossible to suppose. What would a burglar want with Talbot's camera, with his lesson-books, with his colour-box?

"That's the crow's-nest, madam."
"How lovely! Could I have a look at the little darlings?"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Fairclough, 1, Woodview, Drighlington, near Bradford, Yorks.

"But—but," said Tom Merry, "I—I can't believe it! It—it wasn't Talbot, you fellows. I know it wasn't Talbot!"

Monty Lowther and Manners were grimly silent. They, too, wanted to believe that it wasn't Talbot. But their faith was shaken.

Tom Merry strode away towards the Head's study. He felt that he must know the worst.

CHAPTER 13.
Condemned!

DR. HOLMES received the junior with a very grave face.

Mr. Railton was in the study, and he, too, was looking grave and troubled.

"What is it, Merry?"

The Head would have spoken sharply; he was in no mood to be troubled by juniors just then. But Tom Merry's anxious face touched his heart, and his voice was very kindly.

"About—about Talbot, sir. The—the fellows are saying——" Tom Merry broke off. "It wasn't Talbot, sir—I know it wasn't!"

"I am afraid there is no doubt, Merry."

"None!" said Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry almost staggered. The Head, who had been kindness itself to Talbot—Mr. Railton, whose faith in him had been complete—both believed that he was guilty. They would not have been satisfied without evidence—conclusive evidence.

"I don't believe it, sir," said Tom. "There's some awful mistake—or else a plot of some sort. You remember Talbot was suspected before, and it turned out——"

"This is quite a different matter, Merry. Calm yourself, my boy," said the Head kindly. "I understand your feelings—I admire your faith in this unhappy boy. It is a heavy blow to me to know that my faith was misplaced. I see now that I made a mistake in allowing him to come here, after his wretched past—I confess it. Yet I had great faith in him."

"It can't be true, sir," gasped Tom.

"It is true, my boy," said the Head patiently. "Unfortunately, there is no doubt whatever. I will explain the matter to you, Merry, and you will tell the others, so that there may not be a faintest suspicion that injustice has been done. My safe was robbed last night—opened in a way that shows great skill—and we all know the skill that unfortunate boy possessed. It was evidently done by someone with a complete knowledge of the interior of the House. Admittance was gained in the easiest way. There was no alarm—even the electric alarm in this room was disconnected. A knife, proved to have been Talbot's, was used to open the box-room window, and was found broken. The boy's own personal possessions have been taken—a camera, some books, a colour-box, a pencil-case, and other trifles. Who should want them but Talbot? Who should know where to find them, if wanted, but Talbot? There is no doubt, my boy. A warrant has already been issued for the wretched boy's arrest, and he is being sought for. That is all, Merry."

"Still I don't believe it, sir—I cannot."

"There is nothing more to be said, Merry."

Tom Merry realised that. He walked dejectedly from the study.

The Head glanced at Mr. Railton.

"It seems a heavy blow to Merry," he said. "Talbot seems to have had the gift of inspiring confidence."

"I believed in him," said the Housemaster.

"And I," said the Head, with a sigh. "I can see now that I made a mistake; but who would have believed that that lad's apparent frankness and earnestness could hide so much duplicity?"

Manners and Lowther met Tom Merry in the Shell passage after his interview with the Head.

"Well, Tom?" said Monty Lowther.

"It's all up with poor old Talbot," replied Tom miserably. "They believe he's guilty, and there's a warrant out for him."

"And a jolly good thing, too!" exclaimed Gore. "We all know that he did it. What's the good of talking rot?"

Tom Merry clenched his fists furiously.

"You cad!"

"Oh, cheese it!" snapped Gore. "Hard words break no bones, and we all know what to think. Why did he slope off like that? How did his penknife come to be found near the box-room window? And who'd want his books and rubbish? A burglar? Rot!"

"Utter rot!" said Kerruish. "Dash it all, Merry, I believe in sticking up for the fellow, but you can't go against positive facts!"

"Give a fellow a chance while you can," said Reilly, with a shake of the head. "But sure, this is settled now."

"I can't quite believe it, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus distressfully. "I wefuse to believe that Talbot is a thief. I can't."

"You know what he was," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Yaas, but he dwopped all that!"

"I guess he's taken it up again."

"It's too howwid to believe."

Talbot made a spring for the door. It was desperate, hopeless, and he knew it, but he would not submit tamely. The Professor and Nobbler grasped him, and he was flung back on the bed.

But even the loyal Arthur Augustus spoke half-heartedly. The evidence was too strong for him.

"We're jolly well rid of the cad," growled Gore. "He had every chance here, and he's an ungrateful rotter!"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry. "I tell you I won't stand it. Talbot's not a thief—I believe in him, and I stick to him. And I won't hear a word against him from anybody."

"Yes, let it drop," said Blake uneasily. "No good running a fellow down. If he's done it, he's got to pay pretty dear for it; and we shall never see him again, anyway."

"So you believe it, too?" said Tom Merry.

Blake was silent.

"And you, D'Arcy?"

"I—I don't know what to believe, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus miserably; "it looks fwightfully bad."

"It looks what it is, a dead cert!" said Mellish of the Fourth. "Even Levison believes it against him. Don't you, Levison?"

Levison, who had always got on well with Talbot since the Shell fellow had once saved him from disgrace, flushed uncomfortably.

"I—I haven't said so," he muttered. "I don't know what to think. I'd never have believed it—only—only——" He broke off. "I know Talbot helped me out of a tight corner once, like a thoroughly decent chap, and whether he's guilty or not, I'm not going to say a word against him."

"Quite wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, I'm going to say a word against him, and a good many words, and as many as I like!" exclaimed Gore. "I think it's like Tom Merry's cheek to stand up for a convicted thief——"

Smack!

"Oh, you rotter!" roared Gore, as Tom Merry's open palm came across his face with a crack like a pistol shot.

"If you want any more, you've only got to repeat your words!" said Tom Merry, clenching his teeth.

"I'll jolly well repeat them as loud as I like!" shouted Gore. "Talbot's a thief—a convicted thief, and—ah! Would you?"

The next moment they were fighting furiously.

"Cave!" muttered Reilly, as Mr. Railton came hurriedly down the passage.

"What is this?" exclaimed the Housemaster angrily. "Merry! Gore! Cease this at once! How dare you! What is all this about?"

"Tom Merry's standing up for that thief," panted Gore, as he separated from his opponent with a flushed face. He——"

"Merry!"

"He called Talbot a thief!" said Tom Merry fiercely.

Mr. Railton frowned.

"Talbot is a thief," he said coldly. "If you are going to quarrel with everyone who thinks so, Merry, you will find yourself in trouble. Go to your study immediately."

Tom Merry turned away without a word. Mr. Railton had repeated Gore's words; but it was scarcely possible to quarrel with the Housemaster. But Tom Merry's heart was burning with resentment. He could not, he would not, believe that Talbot of the Shell had deceived him—he never would believe it, unless his chum confessed it with his own lips.

Manners and Lowther followed him gloomily into the study.

"No good getting your back up, Tommy," said Lowther. "You can't fight the whole school and the giddy Housemaster, you know."

"Do you believe it—about Talbot?" Tom Merry exclaimed.

"We're not going to quarrel about it, Tommy," said Lowther, very quietly. "Keep your wool on, old chap."

Tom Merry gave him a fierce look for a moment; he was almost ready to fight his oldest and best chum at that moment. But the anger passed—and he flung himself into a chair miserably.

Manners and Lowther eyed him uncomfortably.

"I—I say, Tom," muttered Lowther, "I—I believe the same as you do, you know. I—I do, really! I back up old Talbot."

"Same here," said Manners. "Pull yourself together, Tom, old chap. We three'll stick to him."

Tom Merry did not speak. They would stick to him. But what use would that be to Talbot—disgraced, condemned, and hunted by the police?

—•—

CHAPTER 14.
Cast Out!

FREE!

Talbot could scarcely believe it as the bitter wind blew in his face in the foggy, misty deserted street.

Free!

What did it mean?

For four days he had been a prisoner in the old house behind Angel Alley. He had been guarded—watched. Always the Professor and Nobbler had come together when his food was brought, lest he should make an attempt to escape. Always the door had been locked and bolted upon him. Then suddenly to-night his imprisonment had ceased. The door had been left unlocked. He had tried it and found it open to his hand.

The house had been deserted. No one had stopped him, no one had appeared as he stole cautiously down the stairs and made his way into the street.

He was free!

What did it mean? He asked himself that question with a throbbing heart. For he knew that this was no carelessness on the part of his captors. The Professor was not a man to make mistakes of that kind. Had the cracksman given up in despair the hope of inducing him to join the old gang? Had he abandoned the attempt and left the Toff his liberty, caring only to be rid of him without further trouble?

It was possible, but it was not likely. It was far more probable that the Professor was serving his scheme in thus allowing the Toff to go free; that it was all part of the cunning scheme. How? Did it mean that John Rivers had been at work at the school—that Talbot's name was so blackened there that his return could not help him; that he would go back there only to meet with contempt and condemnation?

Talbot felt that this was the probable explanation. As a recalcitrant prisoner he was useless to the gang. But if he was turned out of St. Jim's, if he found himself once more an outcast, despised, avoided, then the Professor might calculate that the Toff would fall into his hands an easy prey. Where would he turn for help? In the bitterness of the injustice, would he not turn back to his old associates as the only resource left to him?

What was awaiting him at St. Jim's?

Talbot shivered as he thought of the possibilities. But he must get there at once, whatever reception awaited him. He must know the truth. He must explain. He must protest his innocence. He would convince them somehow. At all events, he would not give up hope while a gleam of hope remained. He felt only too bitterly that the Professor would not have allowed him his liberty until it was no longer of any use to him. But he would try.

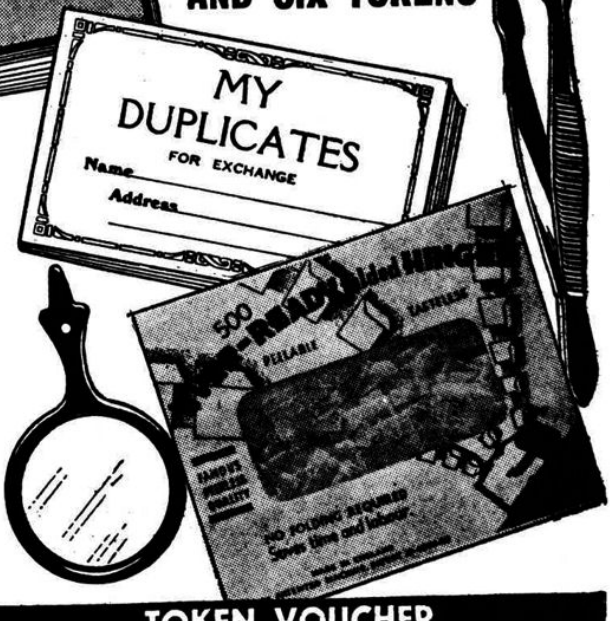
He tramped through the dim streets of the city. The hour was late. He had no money. That had been taken from him while he was unconscious, with all his other belongings except his clothes. It was bitterly cold, but the junior hardly felt it as he strode rapidly along. The mere exercise was welcome to him after his long inactivity.

He must get back to St. Jim's. That was his only thought now. He

(*Continued on page 22.*)

SPECIAL OFFER by the Editor to all readers of The "GEM"

THIS WONDERFUL Stamp Collector's Outfit FOR ONLY 2/6 AND SIX TOKENS



Readers are fortunate in being able to secure this splendid outfit at such an astoundingly low price. The outfit comprises everything for the up-to-date Stamp Collector, including 160-page ALBUM, MAGNIFYING GLASS, 500 STAMP HINGES, TWEEZERS and DUPLICATE BOOK for exchanges.

The splendid album holding 6,400 stamps is INDEXED, contains Hints to Collectors, and tells you how to Recognise Difficult Stamps as well as giving information about the Rarest Stamps in the World. It is beautifully bound in light blue leatherette to withstand hard wear.

This is an offer no boy should miss. All you have to do is to collect the tokens (from the bottom left hand corner of page 4 of cover) from six successive issues of the GEM, attach them to the Token Voucher below and send together with label and P.O. for 2/6 to:

GEM, STAMP COLLECTOR'S OUTFIT,
C.P.O. Box 184a, Cobb's Court, Broadway, London, E.C.4.

IMPORTANT.—To make sure of your outfit, you must POST THE RESERVATION FORM (on the opposite page) NOW.

DO NOT POST THE FORMS BELOW UNTIL YOU HAVE COLLECTED YOUR SIX TOKENS.

LABEL

CARRIAGE PAID HOME

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

If undelivered return to:—
GEM BOOK Dept., Bear Alley, Farringdon St., E.C.4.

TOKEN VOUCHER

Please send to address given on label on left

STAMP COLLECTOR'S OUTFIT

in accordance with your offer in GEM. I have affixed in the spaces above tokens cut from six issues of GEM, and enclose herewith P.O. for 2/6.

Signed .....

tramped on through the night, leaving Angel Alley farther and farther behind, safe from pursuit, safe from recapture.

Through the silent streets, dimly lighted, lowering with fog, he tramped on, till the city and the suburbs were left behind. And the grey, rising dawn found him well out in the country.

Through the cold winter morning he tramped on, fatigued and hungry, but still determined. Only one thought was in his mind—to get back to St. Jim's. And if the doors were closed in his face, if his old friends deserted him—Talbot could not think what he would do.

That day passed slowly to the tramping junior. Weary, weary tramping; lifts in market-carts; once a lift upon a long stretch of road by a kindly motorist—somehow the ground was covered. But the early winter night was closing in when he drew near at last to the old school.

Footsore, weary, he stood at last outside the gates of St. Jim's.

There he paused.

The gates were closed, and he hesitated to ring the bell. What was to be his reception—what was it that the cunning of his enemy had prepared for him?

He must know—he rang the bell at last.

Taggles, the porter, came down to the gate, lantern in hand. He almost dropped the lantern as he peered through the bars of the gate and made out Talbot's haggard face in the night.

"Master Talbot!"

"Open the gate," said Talbot faintly.

"You'd better get off," said Taggles, hesitating, and wondering if it was his duty to ring up the police station. But he had always liked Talbot. The boy had always been kind and considerate to the old porter, and he felt that he would give him a chance. "You get off!" he whispered through the gate.

"Let me in."

"But—but they're arter you!" whispered Taggles.

Talbot looked at him with dull eyes.

"After me! Who are after me?"

"The police!"

Talbot shuddered.

"Let me in, Taggles! I must see the Head."

Taggles opened the gates at last. He had done his best. Talbot walked in, and the porter did not fasten the gate again.

"Which you've done very badly, Master Talbot," he muttered. "But—but this 'ere gate's still open for a bit—you understand?"

And the worthy Taggles disappeared into his lodge without waiting for a reply.

Talbot did not heed him. He dragged his weary limbs on towards the School House. The windows blazed with lights into the dim mist of the quadrangle.

How long was it since he had been there, a cheery schoolboy, among his chums? Five days. It seemed like years. With an inward shudder the unfortunate boy felt that he had broken with his life there—that things could never be the same again with him—that he and St. Jim's were parted—that between the cheery junior who had started out to cycle to Abbotsford and the dishevelled weary fellow who returned there was a great gulf fixed.

But he kept on.

He tramped up the steps of the School House. The great door was open, the hall dazzling with light. Talbot blinked in the light. He stepped into the House. There was a shout:

"Here he is!"

"Talbot!"

"The thief!"

"He's come back!"

There was a rush of feet from all quarters. Fellows gathered round him in a crowd. But no welcoming hand was stretched out, no kindly glance met his. Contempt, dislike, and scorn mingled with surprise—that was all there was to greet him.

Talbot looked at the sea of faces with haggard eyes.

"Blake—Reilly——" he muttered.

"So you've come back!" shouted Gore, with a burst of mocking laughter. "Come back, by gum! Forgotten something you meant to steal?"

"Cut off!" muttered Blake hurriedly. "What have you come back for, Talbot? Are you mad? Cut off! The Head's coming—Talbot——"

"What have I done?"

"Talbot!" It was the Head. He swept towards the white-faced junior, his brows contracted, his face stern.

Never had the St. Jim's fellows seen their headmaster look so angry and indignant. "Wretched boy! You—you here! You dare to come here?"

Talbot panted.

"What have I done? What——"

There was a shout on the stairs. Tom Merry had been in his study. He came tearing down the staircase, his face lighted up.

"Talbot, old man! You've come back! I knew you would! I knew——"

"Merry!" thundered the Head. "Stand back!"

"But—but, sir——"

"Silence! Do not dare to approach that wretched boy! I forbid you to speak to him!"

Talbot staggered. It was the worst he could have anticipated. It was worse than the blackest of his anticipations. What was he supposed to have done?

Tom Merry had paused. Monty Lowther and Manners caught him and pulled him back, or at that moment he might have defied even the orders of the Head.

Dr. Holmes fixed his eyes upon the junior who had returned, and he raised his hand, trembling with anger and indignation, and pointed to the door.

"Go!" he said.

"What have I done, sir?"

"Have you come back here to attempt to brazen it out? Have you no shame—no sense of decency?" thundered the Head. "Have you left your criminal associates, to make one more attempt to impose yourself upon my confidence? Go! I warn you that I shall immediately telephone to the police. You have little time to lose! Go!"

"What have I done?" Talbot panted again, his eyes growing almost wild. "I—I have been kidnapped, sir. I have been kept a prisoner. I—I——"

"Do not tell me falsehoods, boy! I repeat that you cannot deceive me now. I am not to be imposed upon a second time," said the Head bitterly. "You have taken advantage of my trust, and betrayed it. You have robbed your benefactor. You have disgraced your school. Even at this moment, the police are seeking you. Unless you wish to add more shame to yourself by being arrested within the walls of the school, you will go at once!"

Almost stunned by the torrent of words that struck him like the lashes of a whip, the unhappy boy turned blindly and obeyed. He was condemned—condemned past hope. With heavy, dragging feet he passed out into the quadrangle, out into the darkness of the winter night.

The great door swung to, and closed, and shut off the light behind him—and, with the light, hope!

He went blindly down to the gates. It was all over. He was an outcast once more; driven into the darkness. He groaned aloud in bitterness of spirit. So this was the end of his struggle; this was the outcome of his fight for honesty.

What remained for him now—what but the old life? He was adjudged guilty—he knew not of what—guilty and condemned unheard. And not a friend there to raise a voice for him.

There was a hurried step in the dusky quad. A panting voice:

"Talbot! Talbot!"

It was Tom Merry!

He gripped Talbot's cold, nerveless hand.

"Talbot! Don't think that I believe it, old chap! I trust you! I believe in you—always!"

A new light came into Talbot's face.

"You, Tom! But tell me what has happened?"

Tom Merry told him in hurried sentences. Talbot groaned as he listened. Too well he realised how cunningly the plot had been laid, how thoroughly it had been carried out.

"I am innocent, Tom!"

Tom Merry pressed his hand.

"I know you are, Talbot. I will stake my life on it. You—you must go. They are telephoning to the police. But—but I will fight for you! I will find out the truth somehow. You shall come back!"

Talbot shook his head. Hope was dead in his heart. But the faith of his chum had given him new courage—new life. While Tom Merry believed in him he would have the strength to fight his way to resist temptation.

"Good-bye, Tom! Believe in me, that's all I can ask of you now. That will help me. Good-bye—good-bye! The best pal a chap ever had!"

Tom, utterly dejected, watched him as he passed through the gateway.

"Good-bye, old chap!" he called. "Keep a stiff upper lip—and the best of luck!"

"Good-bye!" said Talbot.

He was gone.

Tom Merry turned away. The footsteps of the outcast were lost in the silence of the night.

THE END.

HILARIOUS YARN OF THE MOST AMAZING AND AMUSING FOOTBALL MATCH EVER PLAYED AT GREYFRIARS!

GREYFRIARS versus ALIENS!

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

With avid eyes on the big supply of tuck bought by the alien schoolboys of the Foreign Academy, Billy Bunter plans a raid on them. Bulstrode & Co. agree to back him up, but their help consists in getting Bunter captured by the aliens, and the Owl receives a ducking—not a feed—for his pains.

Hoffman, Meunier & Co., the rivals of the Greyfriars Remove, take up football, and challenge Harry Wharton & Co. to a match. But their challenge is treated as a joke, which leads the aliens to think that the Remove is frightened to meet them.

Meanwhile, Bunter has caught a cold after his ducking. He is a great believer in feeding a cold, and tries to borrow money for the purpose. Harry Wharton & Co., taking pity on him, lend him four shillings, but Bulstrode collars the money as repayment of many loans he has made Bunter. So Bunter's cold still remains unfed!

(Now read on.)

The ball went flashing in from Harry Wharton's boot, and the two alien goalies both leaped together to save. Their heads came together with a sharp crack, followed by two simultaneous yells, while the ball whizzed into the net.

Pulling Bunter's Leg!

TEMPLE, DABNEY & CO. of the Upper Fourth at Greyfriars were chatting in the Junior Common-room when Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove, came in with a handkerchief to his nose, sniffing. The Upper Fourth fellows glanced at him, and sniffed, too.

"Young grampus!" said Temple. "You never see that chap but what he's sniffing and snorting."

"Ought to be muzzled," said Fry.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Dabney.

"I've got a cold, you fellows," said Bunter, blinking at the trio. "I don't suppose it will be cured until I'm able to feed it properly."

"You've always got a cold," grunted Temple.

"It's only the third one I've had this term."

"Well, why don't you keep in your own silly study when you've got a beastly cold, or go into the sanatorium? You might give it to us."

"I think that's very likely," said Bunter. "I'm an awfully dangerous fellow to have a cold, as I always give it to people."

"Here, get farther off!"

"I say, you fellows, I've had lots of colds and I've always cured them in the same way. They only want feeding. It has occurred to me that fellows who don't want to catch my cold might raise some tin for me to feed it and cure it for their own sakes. If you fellows like to raise ten bob or so for the purpose you can have it back out of my next postal order."

"Yes, I can see us doing it," remarked Temple.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Dabney.

"I say, you fellows, I could do with five bob, you know."

"Well, he ought to have his cold cured," said Temple, with a wink at his companions. "I suppose that, as heads of the juniors, we are called upon to do something."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"Just what I was thinking," remarked Fry, with a nod.

Billy Bunter's eyes glistened. He knew that Temple had plenty of money

When Harry Wharton & Co. accept the football challenge of the Foreign Academy, they little guess that their alien rivals' team numbers eighteen players and two goalies!

as a rule, and the sudden obliging humour of the Upper Fourth trio made his hopes rise.

"I say, that's very decent of you, you fellows," he said eagerly. "Come to think of it, it would be better to give the cold a really good feed, and a pound would be all right——"

"A pound of what?" asked Fry.

"I mean a pound—money, you know——"

"But do you think a pound would be enough to give it a regular good feed?" said Temple seriously.

"Well, of course, it would be done better on thirty bob," said Bunter. "I know you have lots of cash, Temple, and I wish I'd spoken to you about it before."

"Don't stint yourself, Bunter, you know. Make it as much as you like!"

"Well, I must say that that's generous of you, Temple. On the whole, I suppose I may as well make it two pounds. That will cover everything."

"But will two pounds be enough?"

"Yes, I think so—unless you'd like to make it more——"

"It's not a question of what I'd like, but of what you need," said Temple solemnly. "Your cold has to be cured at any price. If two pounds wouldn't be enough, say so."

"Oh, rather!"

"Well, certainly, Temple, I must say this is ripping of you! Of course, though you can get a good feed for two pounds, you can get a better one for three. That stands to reason."

"Something in that, Dab."

"Oh, rather!"

"Then you think three pounds would be about the mark?" said Temple.

"It would be ripping."

"Think it over once more, Bunty. Don't err on the side of being too moderate. In my opinion a fiver would meet the case more completely. Of

course, I don't want to over-ride your opinion," said Temple modestly. "Still, I can't help thinking that a fiver is what you really want to give your cold a thorough feeding."

"You—you're a prince!" said Bunter, almost gasping. "A fiver would do me rippingly. If you can stand a fiver, Temple——"

"My dear Bunter, I can lend you a fiver quite as easily as I can lend you five bob."

"Good! Hand it over then."

"Hand over what?"

"The—the fiver you're going to lend me."

"You're making a little mistake, Bunter," said Temple blandly. "I'm not going to lend you a fiver. What put that idea into your head?"

"I—I—you—you said——"

"I felt that I ought to do something for you," said Temple seriously. "I couldn't lend you any money, but I've helped you work it out now, and you know exactly what you want. All you have to do now is get somebody to lend you a fiver."

"Oh, rather!"

"I've no doubt somebody will jump at the chance. Anyway, I've done the best I can for you. You don't look grateful."

"You—you beast!"

"Such is life!" said Temple, looking pathetically at his chums. "You take a lot of trouble to help a chap because he's ill, and, so far from being decently grateful, he calls you names. It reminds me of something in Shakespeare—about a thankless serpent, or something, or an ungrateful tooth."

"It's from King Lear," grunted Fry. "'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.'"

"You beasts!" said Bunter.

"Oh, come away!" said Temple. "I can't stand ingratitude! There are a lot of things I can stand, but I can't stand ingratitude. There's something else in Shakespeare that touches on the case, but I can't recall it now—something about wintry wind——"

"'Blow, blow, thou winter wind,'" said Fry, "'thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude.'"

"You rotters!" exclaimed Bunter.

"Come on, you chaps! The sight of ingratitude always affects me painfully," said Temple. "I've worked out the whole problem for him, and now he's only got to borrow a fiver off somebody, and still he's sharper than a serpent's tooth. Come away!"

And Temple, Dabney & Co. shook their heads solemnly and walked off, leaving Bunter gazing after them with an absolutely ferocious look on his fat face. He had almost felt the crisp fiver rustling in his fingers, and it was too bad to be done like this.

"The rotters!" muttered Bunter. "They were only rotting all the time. I suppose I'd better go and try Wun Lung, and if he fails me I'll ask Mr. Quelch for an advance on my pocket-money. I know he has advanced cash to Wharton before now, and I don't believe in favouritism."

Still Unfed!

THERE was a sweet smell proceeding from the study occupied by Wun Lung, the Chinese member of the Remove, as Billy Bunter drew near it—a very sweet smell to Bunter, for it was the fragrant odour of a stew.

Wun Lung, the Chinee, was a great hand at cooking, though the juniors were now very suspicious of the ingredients he used. The Remove had not forgotten a celebrated feed given by the Chinese junior when they had thought that the solid portion of the appetising stew he provided had been supplied by the housekeeper's Fido. It had turned out to be a jape, but, all the same, the juniors were now very wary of Wun Lung's stews.

Bunter peeped in at the half-open door. There was a good fire in the grate, and a saucepan was bubbling on it. Wun Lung, with his loose sleeves pushed back, was attending to the stew. He looked round as Bunter pushed the door open and beamed on the fat junior.

"Hallo!" said Bunter.

"Allee light," murmured the Celestial. "Comee in. Me pleasee if Buntel stayee to glub with me."

"Well, what kind of grub is it?" said Bunter suspiciously. "I'm jolly hungry, and I want to feed my cold, but I don't want any dog stews."

"No doggee."

Bunter looked relieved.

"Oh, that's all right, then! It certainly smells ripping. What is it made of?"

"Cattee."

Bunter shuddered.

"You—you horrid young cannibal! A cat's as bad as a dog!"

Wun Lung's almond eyes opened wide.

"Nicee cattee! Better than labbit."

"Rats! If it were rabbit now—— You young ass, why couldn't you make a rabbit stew?" said Bunter regretfully.

"Cattee better."

"Rats! You're a horrid Chinese bounder!" muttered Bunter. "Are you really going to eat that filthy stuff?"

"No filthy—nicee-nicee—me eatee."

"Well, I'd stay to supper with you, Wun Lung, if you'd have something decent to eat," said Bunter. "I say, Wun Lung, old chap, can you lend me five bob?"

"No lendee cashee."

"Rats! You've got plenty of money, I know."

"Me spendee all money on stew."

"Then how the dickens am I to cure my beastly cold?"

"No savvy."

"Look here, can you make it half-a-crown?"

"No cashee."

"A bob would be better than nothing."

"No cashe. Stay eatee stew if hungly—nicee-nicee."

"Gr-r-r!" growled Bunter. "I'm fearfully famished, but I draw a line at cats! Go and eat coke!"

And he walked out of the study discontentedly. Wun Lung grinned and served up his stew and started on it.

Bunter drifted back to Study No. 1, but he found it dark and empty. The chums of the Remove were downstairs. Bunter went down, and discovered Harry Wharton and his chums in the Common-room.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Had that feed?" asked Bob Cherry. "Feel any better?"

"No. I don't!" grunted Bunter. "I haven't had the feed. Bulstrode took away the cash you chaps lent me!"

"What's that?" said Harry Wharton. "Are you telling the truth, Bunty?"

"If you doubt my word, Wharton, I——"

"Don't be an ass! Do you say Bulstrode took the money from you?"

"He pretended I owed it to him."

"And didn't you?"

"Well, I owe him some money, I suppose, but that was an old account." Billy Bunter evidently considered it very unjust that he should be called upon to pay an old account. "It was frightfully mean of him to take the money I was going to feed my cold with."

"I suppose he did it for a lark," said Wharton. "It was mean enough, too! But if you owe him the money you can't grumble."

"Can't he?" grinned Bob Cherry. "You don't know Bunter if you think he can't grumble. He could grumble the hind leg off a mule."

"I think you fellows ought to do something for me."

"We've done all we can, Bunter, and we're stony. Better try the simple life for a change. It will bring down your fat."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Don't bother, now, anyway. Take your cold away somewhere else, there's a good chap, and be quiet."

It was not much use telling Bunter to be quiet. He grumbled for the rest of the evening, to anyone who would listen to him.

When Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, looked into the Common-room to tell the juniors to be off to bed, Billy Bunter sidled up to him.

"I say, Wingate, I've got a fearful cold."

"Sorry," said Wingate. "Don't come near me. I don't want to catch it."

"I was thinking——"

"Eh?" said Wingate.

"I was thinking that you might be willing to help me cure my cold."

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, rather! You see, the proper thing is to feed a cold and to starve a fever. I want to feed this cold, but I haven't any tin."

"Don't you get any meals at meal-time?"

"I never get enough, Wingate. Besides, I want to feed up this cold extra well, to get the beastly thing cured. If you could lend me ten bob, you could have it back out of my next postal order."

"You young ass! Get off to bed."

"Won't you lend me the ten bob to cure my cold?"

"I'll lend you a thick ear to cure your confounded cheek, if you don't shut up!" said the captain of Greyfriars. "Buzz off, you youngsters!"

Billy Bunter discontentedly went up to bed with the Form. He looked sulky when he tumbled into bed. He was so accustomed to raising little sums from the chums of Study No. 1, that he felt deeply injured when the horn of plenty ceased to flow. He grunted and sniffed pathetically as he drew the bedclothes about him.

"My hat! We can't stand that row in the dormitory!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "Bunter, if you don't shut up, I'll come and pour a jug of water over you!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"

"Might as well be in a pigsty. Do you think I'm going to stay awake all night listening to your grunting?" demanded Bulstrode.

"It was your fault I caught a cold."

"Well, it will be your fault if I drench you with cold water," said Bulstrode, "and I'll jolly soon do it if you don't shut up!"

And Bunter shut up. He soon fell asleep and forgot all about his cold.

The Challenge Accepted!

"PEEGS!"

"Cowards!"

"Yah!"

The uncomplimentary epithets were shrieked at the chums of the

Remove as they came out early the following morning for a little football practice before breakfast.

The aliens were ready for them!

Hoffman & Co. of the Foreign Academy were waiting, and they shrieked at the Removites the moment they made their appearance. Harry Wharton and his chums stared at the foreign youths, who were all shrugging up their shoulders and pointing the finger of scorn at them.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's the matter with our foreign friends? They seem excited this morning."

"The excitefulness is terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent. "They're pointing the finger of scorn at us because we won't meet them at footer."

"Peegs! Cowards! Yah!"

"I tink tat ve shows our fearful contempt, ain't it!"

"I zink zat ve crushes zem viz ze despision!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Other fellows were crowding out, and they all stared at the foreigners in amazement. The excitable aliens shrieked and yelled and pointed the finger of scorn, and shrugged up their shoulders until it seemed as if they must go out of joint. The Removites yelled with laughter. The laughter only excited the aliens more, and they shrieked and gesticulated frantically.

"My hat!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "We can't stand this row. It's worse than a heap of monkeys. Let's clear 'em out!"

"Good idea!" said Bob Cherry. "Come on!"

And the Remove charged. The aliens shrieked in real earnest now. They had no chance of stopping the charge, which sent them careering away. The pursuit of the Remove was hot, and many of the unlucky aliens were rolled over in the Close, and given better reason to yell than they had had before.

The discomfited aliens disappeared into the Cloisters, and the clang of the iron gate showed that they had reached their own quarters.

The chums of the Remove roared with laughter.

"They mean to shame us into accepting their football challenge," grinned Bob Cherry. "That's the idea. Nothing will get it out of their heads that we've refused because we're afraid of getting licked on the field."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton's brows were wrinkled a little.

"It's a lot of nonsense, of course," he remarked. "But suppose we did play them. It's not pleasant, upon the whole, to have the duffers think we're afraid."

"It would be too funny for anything. They haven't an idea of the game and we should look a lot of silly asses playing them," said Nugent.

"Well, there's something in that. All the same, we don't want them shrieking at us that we're afraid, and they'll never get the idea out of their heads till we lick them," said Harry. "Saturday afternoon is free, as it happens. It would be fun if it wasn't footer."

"Ha, ha! It would be funny enough. But what will the fellows say?"

"Well, it would be more in the nature of a huge joke than anything else," said Harry. "Of course, the duffers can't play footer. But I think this will get round the school, and we'll have the Upper Fourth chipping us if we don't accept the challenge."

Harry Wharton was right on that point. Temple, Dabney & Co. were not likely to let slip such an opportunity of chipping the rival Form. They made the most of it, as was to be expected.

"I hear you've been challenged," Temple remarked, as Wharton came in to go to morning lessons—"challenged by a team above your weight. I should have thought that even the Remove kids could lick the aliens."

"Oh, they couldn't lick a team of six-year-olds!" said Fry. "But it's rather a come-down for Greyfriars to have a junior team refusing a challenge from such a scratch lot as those foreigners."

"Oh, rather!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Harry Wharton. He walked away with a heightened colour, followed by a giggle from the Upper Fourth fellows.

"We shall have to accept, Bob," said Harry, as they entered the class-room. "We'll send a message over to the aliens after lessons."

"Good!"

After morning lessons the matter was arranged. Harry Wharton decided to take the message himself, and he walked over to the Cloisters, a number of the Remove accompanying him in case of hostilities. The gate was fastened, and Wharton rattled it and drew the attention of Hoffman, Meunier & Co., who soon came crowding up.

"Peegs! Cowards! Yah!"

"Hold your row!" bawled Bob Cherry. "We've come to answer——"

"Peegs! Pounders! Yah!"

"We accept your challenge," said Harry Wharton. "Do you hear? We'll meet you in a football match to-morrow afternoon."

"Ach! Ve have conquered!"

"Ciel! Zat is correct."

"Ve have shame tem into tat!"

"We'll meet you to-morrow on our ground. Will you be ready at half-past two?"

"Ja, ja! Ve vill be retty, after, ain't it?"

"Oui, oui! Zat is goot! Ve vill be zere."

"Good! Then that's settled." And Harry Wharton walked away.

The foreigners sent a prolonged shriek after the Removites, who were laughing like hyenas as they departed. The whole of the Remove team entered into the spirit of the thing. The game might not be football, but it would be funny.

During the day the Greyfriars fellows who were curious enough to look through

The aliens had no chance of stopping the Remove charge, which sent them running away. But many of the unlucky aliens were collared and rolled over in the Close, and given better reason to yell than they had had before!

the bars of the gate could see the aliens at practice with a football. They were evidently preparing themselves for the match the next day. But the keenest observer on the Greyfriars side could not determine whether they were playing Association or Rugby. They certainly handled the ball to any extent, and they tackled each other as if they were playing Rugger and not Soccer. The fellows who watched them from the gate shrieked with merriment, which the aliens put down to jealousy.

Interest at Greyfriars centred in the coming match. Even fellows in the Fifth and Sixth asked Wharton when it was coming off, and announced their intention of being present to witness it.

"It will be worth watching," Wingate remarked, with a laugh. "I don't know how much like footer it will be."

"We declined the challenge at first, Wingate," said Harry Wharton, "but they shrieked at us so, we thought we'd better lick them and have done with it."

"Quite right!" laughed the captain of Greyfriars. "I expect you'll have a good crowd to watch. I shall certainly be there."

"By Jove!" remarked Bob Cherry, as Wingate walked away. "It's a pity we didn't think of making a show of this, and charging for admission. We shall have a bigger crowd than we usually get for a Remove match."

"I say, you fellows——"

"They're all coming to see the fun," remarked Wharton.

"I say, you fellows, that's not a bad idea about charging for admission. If you fellows don't want the money you could hand it over to me, and I could expend it in feeding my cold," said Billy Bunter.

"Oh dear! Isn't your cold cured yet?" said Bob Cherry. "I'm getting fed-up with you and your colds! Don't come near me!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! It might have been quite well by now if I had been able to feed it properly at the start. You have to take these things in time, you know. Still, it's not too late now, if you fellows—— I say, Wharton—Cherry! Dear me, I wish they wouldn't walk away while I'm talking!"

Bunter's Last Resource!

SATURDAY morning dawned bright and cold. The Remove, now that they had grown accustomed to the idea, were looking forward to the match of the afternoon.

The only member of the Form who was not thinking of the afternoon's match was Billy Bunter. He was still thinking of his cold, which had grown worse instead of better.

"I say, Wharton," said Bunter, when the Remove came out after morning school, "I want to ask your advice."

"Go ahead!" said Harry tersely.

"If I were to explain the circumstances to Mr. Quelch, do you think he would give me an advance on my pocket-money?"

"What circumstances?"

"Why, the circumstances that I have a fearful cold, and that I may succumb unless I am kept up by good feeding. I should think that would touch his heart."

"He might not believe in the remedy."

"I should explain it to him fully. As a man of sense he should know that it's the proper thing to feed a cold and starve a fever."

"He'll want a lot of convincing before he advances you any cash, I expect," said Harry, laughing. "But there's no reason why you shouldn't try if you like. He won't eat you, anyway."

Billy Bunter nodded thoughtfully.

"It's about the only thing I can think of," he said. "I suppose you wouldn't care to wire to your uncle to telegraph you some money for an important purpose?"

"Quite right—I shouldn't."

"Well, I shall have to speak to Mr. Quelch, then. I'm at the end of my resources. I shall have to risk being sent into the sanatorium. If I get sent there, Wharton, I shall regard it as entirely your fault."

"Well, I've no objection to that, Bunty, if it's any comfort to you."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"But if you want my advice, I should advise you not to bother Mr. Quelch with any nonsense," said Harry Wharton.

"I don't see that there's anything else I can do in the circumstances," replied Bunter. "My friends have all deserted me in the hour of need. Quelchy hasn't come out of the Form-room yet. I shall just catch him."

"The catchfulness will be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter went back into the Form-room. Mr. Quelch was putting away some papers in his desk, and he did not look up. Bunter coughed. Then the Remove master looked round and saw him.

"What do you want, Bunter? Do you wish to speak to me?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Very well; make haste."

"I've got a fearful cold, sir. You can hear it in my voice that I'm rather thick, sir, can't you?"

"You certainly seem to have a cold, Bunter."

"I've always been advised to feed a cold, sir, and starve a fever. I've had lots of colds, and I've always fed them, and they've been cured, sir, all of them."

"Well, they would hardly be permanent, I suppose, in any case," remarked Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, I don't know, sir. You never know what is going to happen when you have a cold, sir, if you don't feed it. The great thing is to keep up your strength on plenty of nourishing food, sir. Don't you think it's a good idea, sir?"

"Probably."

"Unfortunately, sir, I am short of ready cash. My friends have all deserted me in the hour of need, and a postal order I'm expecting has been delayed in the post. I wanted to—to ask you, sir, if—if——"

"You may go on," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "There is no harm in asking, at all events."

Billy Bunter's heart sank. The Form-master's tone was far from promising. But there was nothing for it but to go on.

"I—I thought you might advance me something on my pocket-money, sir."

"Your pocket-money, I believe, is a shilling a week, Bunter?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Do you find it more than sufficient to pay your expenses?"

"Oh, no, sir! I never have enough!"

"Then if you spend several weeks' pocket-money in advance this week, what are you going to do for money later? If you never have enough now, how will you be able to manage with none at all?"

"Well, that's looking forward a long way, isn't it, sir?" said Bunter. "Besides, I'm expecting a postal order——"

"Ahem! I'm afraid I cannot grant your request, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Mr. Quelch——"

"But if your cold is really bad——"

"It's simply frightful, sir!"

"Very well. You are certainly, in that case, in no fit condition to attend classes You will take this note to the matron."

Mr. Quelch scribbled on a sheet of paper, folded it, and handed it to the fat junior.

"Yes, sir. Is it an order for a good meal?"

"No; it directs that you enter the sanatorium."

"The—the sanatorium."

"You may go, Bunter!"

"But—but my cold isn't so bad as all that, sir!" stammered Bunter, utterly dismayed at the prospect of being cut off from every chance of a surreptitious feed. "As a matter of fact, sir, I feel better already."

"Have you been attempting to deceive me, then, Bunter?" thundered the Form-master.

Bunter jumped almost clear of the floor.

"N-n-no, sir! I wouldn't do such a thing for worlds!"

"Then you will enter the sanatorium. Take that note to the matron at once. Another word, and I will cane you!"

Bunter left the Form-room. His face was a picture of woe. Bulstrode slapped him on the shoulder in the passage with a laugh.

"Hallo, Bunter! You're looking rotten!"

"I'm feeling rotten!" said Bunter. "I wish somebody would suffocate Quelch. He's been master of the Remove too long."

"Never mind," said Bulstrode. "Look here, Bunter, I'm giving a feed in my study this evening, to celebrate my being in funds again. You can come."

Billy Bunter groaned in the bitterness of his spirit.

"Just my luck! Oh dear! Just my rotten luck!"

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Bulstrode, in astonishment. "Don't you want to come?"

"I should say so! But I can't. I've got to go into sanatorium for my cold."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at: I wish somebdy would suffocate Quelch! He's too funny to live!"

And Billy Bunter took himself disconsolately off. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh tapped him on the shoulder, a beaming smile on his dusky face.

"Wherefore the downcastfulness of the worthy brow?" he asked. "My worthy self has had a remittance in the letterful communication from my honourable guardian, and if the esteemed Bunter will come to the tuckshop, I will stand him the grub treatfully to feed his esteemed cold!"

"Oh, great pip!" yelled the exasperated Bunter. "If this isn't enough to make a chap kick somebody, I don't know what is! I can't come; I've got to go into the sanatorium."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You inky beast! Why couldn't you get your rotten remittance before I spoke to Quelchy? I'd like to punch somebody's head. Oh dear! Just my luck!"

And Bunter passed on with reluctant feet and heavy heart. There was no neglecting an order of Mr. Quelch's. He delivered the note to the matron, and ten minutes later he was in the sanatorium.

Greyfriars v. the Aliens!

WHILE Billy Bunter was disconsolately taking up his quarters in the school sanatorium, the Remove footballers were preparing for the match with the alien team.

The kick-off was fixed for two-thirty, and before that time the team was all ready on the ground, and the spectators had arrived to see the fun.

As the big hand of the clock in the tower crept towards the half-hour, many glances were cast towards the Cloisters, through which the aliens would come from the academy. Hoffman and his team evidently did not understand the importance of punctuality in football matters.

But as the half-hour chimed out there was a buzz from the crowd. The aliens were seen coming from the Cloisters and making for the football ground.

Hoffman and Meunier led the way. They were followed by about twenty aliens, German and French, in football kit, with startling shirts of red-and-black stripes. Other aliens in ordinary attire followed, all of them chattering excitedly.

Wharton gave a whistle of surprise.

"What do you make of that, Bob?" he asked. "Are they going to look on in football rig, or doesn't Hoffman know how many fellows go to a football team?"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"I fancy he doesn't know."

"But, I say, we can't play twenty of the howling asses!" exclaimed Nugent.

"The too-muchfulness is terrific."

The aliens were greeted with curious stares as they arrived. Hoffman and Meunier nodded to Harry Wharton. Hoffman had a ball under his arm.

"Ve are come," he said. "Are you retty pefore?"

"Yes, we're ready," said Wharton. "How many of you are going to play?"

Hoffman waved his hand towards his merry men.

"Dey are all retty pefore."

"You are playing twenty men?"

"Ja, ja!"

"We only play eleven in Soccer."

"You play as many as ve do," said Hoffman. "Dey all play jolly vell mit feetball, and I not insults dem by leaving dem out, ain't it."

"Oh, very well! I dare say we can tackle twenty of you!" said Wharton. "Anything for a quiet life."

"Ve lets you have twenty, too."

"We don't want twenty-two!" grunted Bob Cherry. "That would give us the odds."

"I nod means twenty-two; I means twenty—too"

"Well, that's lucid, at all events."

"Oh, it's all right!" said Wharton. "We've arranged our team, and eleven is all right for us. Are your fellows ready? We'll toss for goal!"

"Ve lets you take choice of goal," said Hoffman. "Tat is only polite."

"Ciel! Zat is correct. Ve leave the choice of goal to you, mes amis."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We'd rather play according to the rules, if you don't mind."

"Zat is as you like."

Wharton lost the toss. It did not make much difference, as there was hardly any wind, and the game was not likely to be a hard one for the Remove, anyway.

The Remove eleven lined up. So did the alien twenty. They lined up anyhow, very few of them having any clear idea of the different duties of forwards, halves, and backs. Limburger and Lasalle both went into goal, a proceeding that was viewed with considerable astonishment by the Removites.

"Here, I say!" shouted Bob Cherry. "How many goalkeepers are you going to have?"

"Tat is all right," said Hoffman. "Ve tinks it only fair to share te duties petween te French and te Sherman."

"My only hat! Still, I fancy Hazeldene in our goal will be a bit more useful than both those chumps over there!" Bob Cherry remarked.

"I fancy so," laughed Wharton.

The aliens had chosen to kick off. The leadership seemed to be divided between Hoffman and Meunier, and their excessive politeness to one another caused as much delay as their rivalry could have caused.

"Is it zat you kick off, Fritz?" said Meunier.

"Nein, nein! It is tat you kick off, Adolphe."

"Zen ve both kicks off togezzer!"

"Tat is goot!"

And the two aliens kicked off together Neither kicked the ball, as a matter of fact, their aim being rather too bad. Hoffman kicked the air, and Meunier kicked Hoffman's ankle. The German gave a fearful yell and danced on his undamaged leg, clasping his ankle in both hands.

"Ach, I am hurt! You silly pounder!"

"Ciel! I am sorrowful for ze accident, Fritz!"

"Himmel! It is notting! It is all right."

"Are you ever going to kick-off, you funny beggars?" bawled Bob Cherry.

The crowd round the ropes was screaming with laughter already, and the ball was not even kicked off yet. The aliens essayed to kick-off again. Hoffman kicked very hard, missed the ball again, and spun round and sat down on the turf, looking bewildered. But Meunier kicked the ball forward.

"Hold on! Ve will have zat ball placed again so zat my friend Fritz try vunce more——"

"Oh, rather!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I don't think!"

The Removites were on the ball.

The forwards rushed it through the aliens with little effort, the foreigners being left standing in bewilderment.

Laughing almost too much to run, the Greyfriars forwards brought the ball up to the goal, and Harry Wharton kicked it in

There was a yell round the field:

"Goal!"

A goal had been scored in the first thirty seconds of the match.

Hoffman regained his feet by the time the teams were lining up again.

"Is it tat te game has started?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "We've scored a goal, dummy!"

"Ach, I not see him!"

"Keep your eyes open, then!"

The aliens kicked off again. They were more on the mettle now, and they followed up the kick-off with a furious rush, and a scrimmage was soon raging.

A Freak Footer Match!

"HURRAH!" yelled the crowd of Greyfriars fellows in ecstasy. They had expected fun, but not fun quite so rich as they now saw.

The aliens' idea of the great game of football was very vague. The Soccer and Rugger codes seemed to be mixed up in their minds.

They handled the ball without compunction. They passed the ball in any and every direction. Off-side rules did not exist for them. When the ball went into touch they were after it and chased it back again.

The Remove were playing under disadvantages. They were fewer in number, the aliens being nearly two to one. Then they used only heads or feet for the ball, while their opponents were ready to use feet and hands, either on the leather or on the Removites. And some of the Remove players were so doubled up with laughter that they could not run, which was a drawback to their game.

In spite of these disadvantages, however, the Remove continued to score.

Wharton scored three goals in five minutes, Bob Cherry added a couple more, and Nugent put in one and the nabob one.

Seven goals to nil was the score at the end of a quarter of an hour!

"Ach! Tat ve pack up!" gasped Hoffman, as the sides lined up again after the seventh goal. "Meunier, mein friend, you packs me up."

"Mon dieu! I backs you up like anyzing, Fritz!"

"It is tat Vharton tat score most goals. I collars him next, and you goes on mit te football, ain't it?"

"Ciel! Zat is ze good plan."

Hoffman kicked off. The Remove were away with the ball in no time, and Hoffman, springing on Wharton from behind, bore him with a crash to the ground.

"Here, hold on!" yelled Wharton. "Get off!"

"I got him!" roared Hoffman. "On te pall!"

"On ze ball!"

Bob Cherry rushed up to help his unfortunate captain. But the aliens rallied round, and Bob Cherry was dragged down, too, and after him Nugent. The referee was blowing his whistle frantically, but a trifle like that was nothing to the aliens. Half of them clawed hold of the Remove players, while the rest captured the ball, and ran it up towards goal.

Hazeldene was between the posts. He had had nothing to do so far. Now he was on the alert.

Meunier sent in a shot, and Hazeldene fisted it out easily enough. Sachs caught it in his hands and rushed into the goal with it.

It was useless to argue with the German junior. There was no time to explain to him that a goal couldn't be scored like that, nor would he probably have believed it.

Hazeldene wasted no time in words. He hit out straight from the shoulder, and Sachs went over backwards, and the ball rolled away and was cleared.

"Well saved, goalie! Hurrah!"

Wharton and the other Greyfriars forwards had struggled out of the grip of the aliens now. Expostulation proved useless; they hit out right and left, and that method proved effective. They dashed into the fray again, scattering the aliens, and securing the ball.

"On the ball!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites rushed the ball up to the aliens' goal. Limburger and Lasalle stood on the watch.

The ball came flashing in from Harry Wharton's boot. The two aliens leaped to stop it, and their heads came together with what a novelist would call "a sickening thud."

There were two simultaneous yells from the unfortunate aliens, and they sat down together in the goal, and the ball whizzed over their heads into the net.

"Goal!" yelled all Greyfriars. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The score was now eight goals to nil. They went back to the centre of the field, and the two goalkeepers got up, rubbing their heads ruefully. They glared at one another as they rubbed their bruises

"Ach!" muttered Limburger. "Ach! Stupid French peast!"

"Ciel! Silly Sherman chump!"

"Ach! I tinks I trashes you, you peastly French pounder!"

"I zink you not able to trash me, you Sherman rottair!"

"Ach! I soon shows you!"

And Limburger seized Lasalle, and they were soon rolling over in the goal area, fighting like wild cats.

The Remove forwards brought the ball up to the goal again. As the goalkeepers were rolling on the ground outside the goal, pommelling one another, it was not very difficult to put the ball into the net.

"Nine goals!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Ha, ha, ha! I say, Hoffman, come and separate your goalkeepers. This is what comes of having two of them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hoffman and Meunier came panting up. The game was a farcical one, but it was an exhausting one, too, to the aliens.

"Tat you stop it!" Hoffman roared. "Lasalle, let go! You French peast, let go of mein friend Limburger!"

"Zat is so!" gasped Meunier. "Limburger, you Sherman rottair, let go of my friend Lasalle!"

"French peast!"

"Sherman rottair!"

"Is it tat you speaks to me, Meunier?"

"I not speak to you, Hoffman; but ze same vords apply to all Sherman rottairs," said Meunier disdainfully.

"Is it tat you look for te tick ear?"

"I zink zat you are more likely to get ze zick ear!"

The brief friendship was over. Hoffman and Meunier flew at one another, and soon joined Limburger and Lasalle on the ground.

The Remove players shrieked with laughter, while the aliens crowded round shrieking encouragement. The fight soon spread from the leaders to the rank and file. Yells and shrieks of defiance were followed by blows and struggling, and before long the whole of the alien team, oblivious of the Remove eleven, were fighting furiously.

The Remove players looked on in amazement and merriment.

"Well, of all the funny merchants!" gasped Bob Cherry. "I really think these freaks take the giddy biscuit!"

"Rather! Of all the dummies——"

"The dummifulness is terrific!"

"They won't be fit for much more footer when they've done fighting each other," Bob Cherry remarked. "I vote that we clear off."

"Right you are!"

And the Remove eleven went into the pavilion to change. It was some time before the aliens had had enough of fighting among themselves. When at last the scrimmage ended, and they looked round for their opponents, they found that they had the field to themselves.

"Ciel!" exclaimed Meunier. "Zey are gone! Zey have all run avay while ve vas not looking after zem!"

"Ve are victorious! Hoch! Ve are victorious!"

In the exultation of victory the aliens could afford to forget their little differences. They had evidently beaten the Greyfriars Remove, for they had abandoned the ground. Any little trifle of nine goals to nil did not enter into the aliens' calculations. They were victorious, and they marched off the field cheering

. . . . .

That football match is not likely to be soon forgotten at Greyfriars; and nothing will ever convince Hoffman, Meunier & Co. that they did not win a glorious victory.

(Next Wednesday: "THE 'FIFTH' AT GREYFRIARS!" Look out for the first chapters of this lively Guy Fawkes yarn. See that your GEM is reserved for you.)

Printed in England and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription rates: Inland and Abroad, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd., and for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd.—Saturday, October 23rd, 1937. LG