

X THE LEADING BOYS' STORY PAPER X

The POPULAR

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Every
Tuesday

Week Ending October 27th, 1925. New Series. No. 506.

"LET 'EM
ALL COME!"



"THE SCHOOLBOY 'PUG'!"
Rousing School Tale inside!

CUFFY'S GREAT CHANCE!

Clarence Cuffy, the biggest duffer at Rookwood, to play footer for his House team! Can you imagine it? How has his extraordinary situation come about?



LOOK OUT IN GOAL!

A ROLICKING LONG COMPLETE
TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO, OF
ROOKWOOD.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Brag!

"I'VE done it!"

Thus Tommy Dodd.

Tommy Dodd came into his study in Mr. Manders' House at Rookwood with a lugubrious face, and made that announcement in a lugubrious voice.

Lugubriousness, indeed, was written all over Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth.

Evidently something had happened.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle regarded him inquiringly.

"You've done it?" inquired Cook.

"Yes."

"What may 'it' happen to be?" asked Doyle.

"I've fairly put my foot in it!" said Tommy Dodd. "It really wasn't my fault. That ass Lovell was bragging about footer."

"But what have you done?" inquired the other two Tommies, together.

"I—I said—"

Tommy Dodd paused. He seemed reluctant to state what he had said in the heat of a football argument with Classical fellows.

"Well, what did you say?" demanded Doyle.

"I—I said we'd beat the Classical Fourth at football—"

"So we will intirely."

"With Cuffy in goal," said Tommy Dodd.

"What?"

"Phwat?"

Cook and Doyle stared at Tommy Dodd, and he blinked at them dismally. That reckless offer he had made in the heat of the argument. When the heat of argument had passed, and Tommy Dodd considered the matter coolly, he realised what he had done. Undoubtedly he had put his foot in it. He had "done it" with a vengeance.

"Cuffy!" repeated Doyle.

"Clarence Cuffy!" babbled Cook. "That dummy—"

"That ass!" said Doyle.

"That frabjous chump!" said Cook.

"That blinking, burbling bandersnatch! Why, he doesn't know a goalkeeper from a goalpost!"

"He doesn't know a football from a fancy-dress ball!"

"That howling duffer!"

"It's asking for a licking," said

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Tommy Cook, more calmly. "Putting swank aside, the Classics are quite up to our weight at footer. Every House match is touch and go. They've got more men to select from than we have, being a bigger House. That's an advantage, and it's no good making out that they don't win more matches than they lose, because anybody can read it up in the records. And now you think of tackling them with a passenger in the team—"

"In goal, too!" said Tommy Doyle. "Might as well leave the chicken-run empty. Better, in fact, than putting Clarence Cuffy in it."

Tommy Dodd nodded.

"We're for it," he said. "I've got to keep my word. We can't let those classical asses make out that we swank and then eat our words. Next House match Cuffy goes into goal."

"You ass!"

"You duffer!"

"Go it!" said Tommy Dodd resignedly. "I've asked for it, and you can sling it out all you want to. All the same, I'm keeping up the brag, and Cuffy goes into goal next match. And—and—we've got to beat the Classics, anyhow, all the same."

Cook and Doyle, in a rather excited frame of mind, quitted the study. Tommy Dodd was left alone to reflect upon the imprudence of "gassing" in the heat of argument.

There was a gentle tap at the door of the study, and Tommy looked round irritably.

A kind and gentle face looked into the study.

It was the simple, benevolent face of Clarence Cuffy, who was admitted on all hands to be the biggest duffer inside Rookwood, or out of it.

"My dear Thomas—"

Grunt!

"I trust, my dear Thomas, that nothing has occurred to disturb the serenity of your temper," said Clarence Cuffy anxiously.

Grunt!

"In the unfortunate event of any untoward happening having disturbed your equanimity, my dear Thomas, perhaps you would find relief in confiding the circumstances to me," suggested Cuffy.

Tommy Dodd blinked at him.

This was the fellow who, in a wild

and reckless moment, he had engaged to play in goal in the next House match. Tommy Dodd rose to his feet.

He picked up a cushion.

"My dear Thomas, what are you going to do with that cushion?" inquired Clarence Cuffy in mild surprise.

Tommy Dodd did not answer in words. He let his action speak for him.

Whiz!

Crash!

Bump!

The cushion flew, and it caught Clarence Cuffy upon the chest, and Clarence Cuffy flew. He sat down in the passage with a terrific concussion.

A yell rang through the passage.

"Yooooooo!"

"Now wait a tick till I get the poker!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

Clarence Cuffy did not wait.

It was only too clear that the serenity of dear Thomas' temper was very much disturbed.

Cuffy was not a bright youth. But he was far too bright to wait for Tommy Dodd to get on with it.

He picked himself up and fled for his life.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Coaching Cuffy!

"WE'VE got to pull it off!"

That was Tommy Dodd's decision.

While on the Classical side there had been chuckling and chortling without limit, on the Modern side there had been a considerable amount of grousing.

Tommy Dodd, as junior captain of Manders' House, was very popular, and as a footballer he was greatly admired and respected. There was no doubt that he was as good a skipper as the House could have found anywhere within its ranks. But there was something very near rebellion among the Modern footballers when they learned to what Tommy Dodd had committed them.

Some of the fellows even went so far as to suggest that it was time that Dobby resigned. Some of them declared that they wouldn't be found dead in a team with Clarence Cuffy in it. All of them told Tommy Dodd what they thought of him in language that was frequent and painful and free.

Whereupon, of course, Cook and

Doyle, like loyal chums, rallied round their leader, and backed him up for all they were worth. In private they told Tommy Dodd that he was every imaginable kind of an ass, a duffer, and a piffing fooler. But in public they stood by him nobly, and even went to the length of declaring that Tommy's rash challenge to the Classics was a jolly good idea.

It would, Cook declared, put the Classics in their place if they were beaten by a team minus a goalie, for that was what it amounted to. It would, according to Doyle, show the Classic side what the Moderns thought of them when they played them with such a howling dummy as Cuffy between the posts.

Tommy Dodd was grateful for this loyal support. It helped him to bear what Cook and Doyle told him in the study.

The fellows groused, but they acquiesced. There was, indeed, nothing else for them to do, unless they sacked Dobby from the captaincy. That was a length to which no one wished to proceed.

But it was quite on the cards that it would come to that if the defeat in the House match proved to be ludicrously overwhelming.

"We've got to pull it off!" said Tommy Dodd. "It's the only way. I admit I opened my mouth a bit too wide, talking to that silly owl Lovell. It can't be helped now. We've got to play those blighters, and play them with Cuffy in goal. Well, if we win the match the Classics will be laughed to death, especially after the way they've been chortling."

"If!" snorted Tommy Cook. "If the skies fall there will be catching of larks."

"We've got to," said Tommy Dodd. "To-day's Tuesday. Match on Saturday. We've got nearly a week. Cuffy's got to learn to play footer."

"In a week!" yelled Doyle.

"Yes."

"Make it ten years, and he might begin to commence to start to get an inkling of the game."

"He's going to learn in a week. After all, he's watched games, and he's done some games practice—not much, but some. We've got to coach him and keep him at it, and make him play up. Let's go and see him now about it."

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"Oh, shut up and come on!" said Tommy Dodd.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle came on, but did not shut up. Tommy Dodd, in fact, had almost given up hope that Cook and Doyle ever would shut up again.

Clarence Cuffy was in his study when the three Tommies called. He was sitting at the table, gently poring over a volume his kind father had sent him on his birthday. It was entitled, "Gentle Georgie, the Boy Who Never Said an Unkind Word."

The career of Gentle Georgie was deeply interesting to Clarence Cuffy. His eyes were moist with emotion as he followed the adventures of that interesting youth. But he looked up with a sunny smile as the three Tommies butted in.

"Busy?" asked Tommy Dodd grimly. "Not at all, my dear Thomas, if there is any little service I can perform for you," said Cuffy brightly.

"There is. I'm going to play you in the House match on Saturday."

Cuffy started.

"My dear Thomas, I am very flattered at your selecting me," he said. "But I feel bound to warn you that I am not

expert at this game. It is not one of the games I play well."

"Go hon!" gasped Cook.

"It would be false modesty on my part, my dear fellow, to deny that I am very expert indeed at noughts-and-crosses," said Cuffy. "I have had some success, too, at draughts and—"

"Draughts!" gurgled Doyle.

"But to games of a more strenuous, indeed rough, character, I have given little attention," said Cuffy. "To be quite frank, I have rather considered them beneath my intellectual powers. Projecting a ball across a field by the impact of a foot does not appear to me to be a form of activity adequate to my mental gifts. I trust my dear Thomas, that you will not regard me as speaking in a boastful or vain-glorious spirit."

Tommy Dodd gazed at him.

"After all, he's got a good wind," he said. "Must have plenty of wind, or he couldn't chin-wag like that."

"That's so," agreed Cook.

"Well, you're playing on Saturday in goal," said Tommy Dodd. "I suppose you know what a goalkeeper does?"

"Certainly, my dear Thomas. I have learned quite a good deal by watching games, though I have seldom taken a personal part in them. The goalkeeper, I think, stands in the goal area—"

"You—you think?" gasped Cook.

"You don't know? You only think?"

"I should be sorry, my dear Cook, to speak positively on a subject in which I am not well grounded. But I am somewhat keen of observation, and I think I may venture upon saying that the goalkeeper occupies the goal, and one of his occupations is to wave his arms about and thump himself on the chest. At least, I have often observed this."

"Oh dear!"

"He also has to keep the other side from putting in the pill," suggested Doyle.

"Dear me! I did not know a pill was used in the game," said Cuffy. "That is indeed news to me."

"The ball, fathead—the ball!" shrieked Doyle.

"My dear Doyle—"

"Come on, Cuffy," said Tommy Dodd. "We're going to make a goalkeeper of you. We've got an hour for practice this afternoon. You're putting in sixty minutes. Come down and change."

"My dear Thomas—"

Clarence Cuffy did not really seem keen on it. His glance lingered longingly on "Gentle Georgie." He really did want to pursue the enthralling, if somewhat mild, adventures of the youth who never spoke an unkind word.

But the three Tommies persuaded him out of the study—Tommy Dodd took him by one ear, Tommy Cook by another. Cuffy's ears had to go down to the changing-room, and the rest of Cuffy had no choice about going with them.

So Cuffy changed for footer, and a few minutes later emerged from Mr. Manders' House, and walked down to the Modern practice-ground with a crowd of Modern fellows.

Most of the footballers seemed to be in a mocking humour, apparently not expecting great things of Clarence Cuffy. But it was agreed that, as Cuffy was to play on Saturday, it was better to put him through his paces.

Even Cuffy, they considered, ought to be able to pick up a few tips about keeping goal, with plenty of coaching, and a little kicking and cuffing to brighten him up; though, of course, he could never expect to become so expert at footer as at noughts-and-crosses.

Tommy Dodd pointed to the goal. "That's the goal, Cuffy," he said patiently. "See?"

"I certainly observe it, my dear Thomas."

"Get into it."

Cuffy got into it.

"Now, you've got to keep this ball out," said Tommy Dodd. "We're all going to pile in shots—see? Every time you let the ball pass you, we're going to kick you hard! Catch on?"

"My dear Thomas!"

"Play up!"

"Look out in goal!"

Clarence Cuffy looked rather unhappy in goal. He thought it very, very hard that he should be kicked if he let the ball pass him. But he could see that dear Thomas was in deadly earnest, so he resolved to do his very, very best.

Tommy Dodd sent the ball whizzing in.

Clarence Cuffy blinked at it. He had to turn his head to finish blinking at it. It dropped, and there was a shout from Tommy Doyle.

"Kick him, bedad!"

"My dear Thomas— Yaroooh!"

"Why didn't you stop that ball?" roared Tommy Dodd.

"Yow-ow-ow! My—my dear—"

"Chuck that ball out, and stand up to it!" howled Towle.

"My dear Towle—"

"Chuck that ball out, fathead!"

"Certainly, my dear Towle."

Clarence Cuffy hurled the ball out. It landed on Towle's nose, and there was a shout from Towle.

"You clumsy ass—"

"Really, my dear Towle—"

"Ow! Wow!"

Towle rubbed his nose, and seemed disposed to charge into the goal and commit assault and battery. But Tommy Dodd pushed him back, and placed the ball for another kick.

"Look out, Cuffy! Mind you stop it this time."

"I will endeavour—"

"Shut up and look out!"

Whiz!

Smack!

Clarence Cuffy had been kicked once. He did not want to be kicked twice. So he glued his eyes on Tommy Dodd and the ball, and as it came in he jumped at it and stopped it—with his features. There was a loud smack as the footer came on Cuffy's features, and there was a wild and dismal yell from Cuffy.

"Ha, ha! Well stopped!"

"Bravo, Cuffy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Modern juniors roared. Some of the Classical fellows, who had heard that Cuffy was on the football-ground, had hurried along to see the entertainment, and they yelled. The only fellow present who did not chortle was Clarence Cuffy. He yelled in quite a different way. The impact of the whizzing footer had hurt Cuffy's features. There was a little stream of red oozing from his nose, and one of his eyes blinked wearily. And he was feeling very startled, and shocked, and upset. He had always known that Soccer was a rough game. That was why his fond father had stipulated that he should be exempt from games practice. But he had never realised that it was quite so rough as this. More than ever, Clarence Cuffy realised how much superior noughts-and-crosses was, as a game.

Cuffy dabbed his injured nose, while the Modern juniors yelled. He blinked dazedly at Tommy Dodd.

"That's right!" said Tommy encouragingly.

"My dear Thomas——"
 "You stopped it all right," said Tommy Dodd. "Do that again! Every time you stop the ball you're let off a kicking. See?"
 "Oh, dear! But—but really, my dear Thomas——"
 "Play up!"

Clarence blinked at the juniors in dismay, almost in horror, as Tommy Dodd prepared to kick the ball in again. Apparently he had done right—by accident. But if it was the duty of a goalkeeper to stop a whizzing ball with his nose, Clarence Cuffy felt that he was not really up to a goalkeeper's duties. He was very, very sorry, but really, he could not undertake duties like that.

So while Tommy Dodd was kicking, and the other fellows stood back laughing, Clarence Cuffy made a sudden bolt out of goal and fled across the field.

There was a roar at once.
 "Stop!"
 "Stop him!"
 "Come back!"
 "After him!" yelled Towle.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Classics as the whole troop of Modern fellows rushed in pursuit of Clarence Cuffy.

Cuffy was not, as a rule, much of a sprinter. But circumstances alter cases. Fear lent him wings.

He was off the football ground almost in a twinkling. He was fleeing across the quad in a few seconds more. Puffing in breath in great gasps, he fled into Manders' House, and raced up the staircase.

He bolted into his study like a rabbit into a burrow, and slammed the door and turned the key.

A minute later Tommy Dodd was rapping on the door.

"Cuffy!"
 "Oh, dear! Go away!"
 "Come out, you villain!"
 "My dear Thomas, it is with exceedingly deep regret that I resolve to refuse a request made by you, but in the circumstances I feel that I have no alternative but to do so," gasped Cuffy.

"You've got to practice!" roared Tommy Dodd.

"My dear Thomas——"
 "Will you come out?" shrieked Tommy Dodd.

"The answer, my dear Thomas, is in the negative."

"I'll jolly well punch your silly nose!"
 "I trust, my dear Thomas, that you will not yield unthinkingly to an angry impulse——"

"B-r-r-r-r!"

Tommy Dodd tramped away. Football practice on the Modern junior ground went on without Clarence Cuffy after that. It was not till dark that Clarence ventured to unlock his study door. The interval he spent in rubbing his damaged nose, and wondering how dear Thomas could be so very, very cross, and what dear Thomas could possibly see in so very, very rough a game as football—which, as a game, was so very, very inferior to noughts-and-crosses.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Gunner Puts His Foot Down!

"I'M putting my foot down!"
 Peter Cuthbert Gunner, of the Classical Fourth, made that observation in emphatic tones to his study-mate, Dickinson minor.

Dickinson minor looked at him rather nervously.

"Hard!" added Gunner.
 Gunner of the Fourth had a hefty

size in feet. He could not have put his foot down without making the study furniture dance. Really, from Dickinson minor's uneasy look, it might have been supposed that he fancied that to be Gunner's intention.

"What's the matter, old chap?" asked Dickinson minor.

Gunner of the Classical Fourth was not a bully. But he had manners and customs almost indistinguishable from those of a bully. Certainly, he made his study-mate walk in fear and trembling. Being always prepared to introduce an enormous fist into any discussion, Gunner was not a pleasant fellow to argue with.

Dickinson minor prepared to dodge out of the study. One of his chief occupations was evading scraps with Gunner.

"That silly ass, Silver——" went on Gunner.

Dickinson minor brightened up. Apparently he was not the object of Gunner's wrath; the object of it was Jimmy Silver, captain of the Fourth. Dickinson minor was very glad to hear it. Jimmy Silver was quite able to take care of himself—the wrath of P. C. Gunner was wont to pass him by like the idle wind which he regarded not.

"I've been patient," said Gunner.
 "I've given him his head. I've waited to give him a chance to make up his mind to play me in a football match. He hasn't done it. He thinks I can't play footer. As if he knows anything about the game, the silly ass!"

Dickinson minor grinned.
 A fellow did not need to know much about the game to know that P. C. Gunner couldn't play football. That fact leapt to the eye, as it were, when Gunner was seen at games practice.

"I've talked to him," said Gunner.
 "He can't say that I haven't mentioned my claims."

"He can't," agreed Dickinson minor.
 "I've even pushed them," said Gunner.

"You have," said Dickinson minor.

"Lots of times!"

"And yet he leaves me out. I'm putting my foot down now!" said Gunner darkly. "I'm going to give him his choice—he can play me in the next House match or he can take a thundering licking. What?"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Dickinson minor.

"That's what I've decided," said Gunner determinedly. "I'm fed-up with being passed over like this! Injustice is a thing that rankles. Mind, I wouldn't dream of pushing my claims if I didn't know that I was the best junior footballer Rookwood ever turned out. Being that, I'm entitled to play. What?"

"Oh!" gasped Dickinson minor.
 "Don't you agree with me?" roared Gunner.

"Oh, yes, certainly!"
 "Well, I hope Silver will, for his own sake," said Gunner. "Otherwise, I shall feel it my duty to smash him up. I'm fed-up with his cheek. I'm going to put my foot down, and put it to him plainly."

"I—I would!" gasped Dickinson.

"And I jolly well will!" said Gunner.
 And Peter Cuthbert Gunner, in a mood of great determination, quitted the study much to Dickinson's relief.

Gunner went along the Fourth Form passage to look for Jimmy Silver.

It was Friday—the day before the House match—that match which was causing Tommy Dodd & Co. so much anxiety. Gunner felt that he had been

patient too long. He had never figured in a match—even in a game with the Third Form his claims were overlooked. Being blissfully unconscious that he was as hopeless a fumbler at football as at everything else, Gunner naturally felt indignant.

The captain of the Fourth was not in his study—prep was over. Gunner went downstairs to look for him in the junior Common-room.

There he found Jimmy Silver.
 The Fistical Four were all there, and they had smiling faces. They had been discussing the match of the morrow, in which Clarence Cuffy was to figure on the Modern side.

During the week they had watched, with keen interest, Tommy Dodd's manful efforts to turn Cuffy into a footballer. They had not noticed that Dobby had met with any success. And the feelings with which the Modern fellows anticipated the House match were a subject of great hilarity to the Classics. Tommy Dodd's unfortunate brag had come home to roost, as it were, and it was causing great stress of feeling among the Modern footballers.

"Silver!" bawled Gunner, as he came in.

Every eye was turned on Gunner at once.

He was a truculent youth and a great fighting man, and more often in a row than out of one. If Gunner had known anything about boxing he would have been quite a dangerous character. Fortunately, his boxing was on a par with his football and cricket.

"Hallo, old bean!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

Gunner planted himself before the chums of the Fourth, with something of the air of Ajax defying the lightning. Undoubtedly, Peter Cuthbert Gunner was going to put his foot down.

"There's a House match to-morrow," said Gunner.

"That's so!" assented Jimmy Silver.
 "I believe I'd heard of it; but thanks for the information, all the same."

"You've not posted up the list yet."

"Not yet!" agreed Jimmy.

"I want my name to appear in it!"
 "Dear me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a general cackle from all corners of the room. Gunner and his claims to play for Form and House were a standing joke in the Classical Fourth. As Mornington had put it, Gunner and football were a contradiction in terms.

Gunner stared round angrily.
 "You can cackle!" he snorted.

"Thanks—we will!" said Conroy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean it, Jimmy Silver! I'm fed-up with being passed over in this scandalous way. The way you run football matters is a disgrace to the House and the School. I'm speaking plainly; I'm a plain chap!"

"You are," agreed Jimmy Silver—"frightfully plain! How your looking-glass stands it without cracking is a giddy mystery."

"You—you silly ass! I don't mean that——"

"I do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want any rot!" howled Gunner, in great wrath. "I'm giving you an ultimatum—either to play in the House match to-morrow or I give you the hiding of your life!"

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump the cheeky ass!" exclaimed Puffy of the Fourth. "Say the word, Jimmy, and we'll rag him baldheaded."

A crowd of Classical fellows closed up

round the group. Gunner was a lofty and dictatorial youth—qualities that had often landed him into trouble. But to claim a place in the Classic eleven, with the alternative of committing assault and battery upon the football captain, was really the limit—it was altogether too thick. At a sign from Jimmy Silver, Peter Cuthbert Gunner would have been subjected to the tagging of his life.

But Jimmy Silver did not make the sign.

"I didn't come here to be grinned at, Jimmy Silver!" hooted Gunner. "I want a plain answer. Do I play to-morrow, or do I thrash you till you won't feel like grinning again for a week—which?"

"Dear man," said Jimmy Silver, "the fact is, you order me to play you—what?"

"It amounts to that!" assented Gunner.

"Well, if you order me, what's a fellow to do? To hear is to obey, isn't it?"

Gunner stared. He had hoped, if not expected, to gain his point. But this surrender on the part of the junior football captain was rather surprising.

"Oh! You—you'll do it!" he stuttered.

Jimmy smiled cheerily.

"How can I help it, when you order me?" he asked pleasantly. "Who am I to disregard your instructions?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If that's a joke

growled

Gunner.

"Not at all. You play."

"Oh, good!" said Gunner, astonished but greatly gratified. "I'm your man, then. Where are you putting me?"

"Goal!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'm good in goal, of course—in fact, I may say that there isn't any place on the footer field where I'm not worth my salt. But I think I'm rather better at centre-forward."

"Just as good, at least," assented Jimmy.

"Well, I'm glad you can see it."

"My dear man, I know you're quite as good in one place as in another, in any game," said Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we specially want you in goal," said Jimmy. "I'll shove your name in the list at once, and you can pin it up."

"Well, I'll play in goal!" said Gunner graciously.

"Good man!" said Jimmy Silver cordially.

Pencil and paper came out of Jimmy's pocket, and the name of P. C. Gunner was put on the Classical football list, much to his satisfaction. With his own large hand he pinned up the notice in a prominent position.

"That's good," he said. "I'm glad we've arranged this without my having to pitch into you, Silver."

"You've reason to be glad!" assented Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner walked out of the room with his nose well up in the air to carry the surprising and gratifying news to Dickinson minor that the name of P. C.

Dickinson minor almost fell down when he found P. C. Gunner's name in the football list in the Common-room.

"You're playing Gunner to-morrow, Silver!" he stuttered.

"Yes."

"That silly idiot?"

"That silly idiot!" assented Jimmy.

"That burbling jabberwock—"

"That burbling jabberwock!"



"SOME" GOALIE! Jimmy Silver & Co. swept down the field, and Arthur Edward Lovell put in the ball first, catching Cuffy on the chin with it, and causing him to sit down with surprising suddenness. (See Chapter 4.)

Gunner was, at long last, down for a House match.

He left the room in a roar.

"Better have punched him for his cheek, though," said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Why punch his nose?" smiled Jimmy Silver. "It's all right. We'd decided to play the biggest fool on the Classical side in goal, to make things even for Dobby having to play Cuffy. Gunner offered—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So it's all right." Peter Cuthbert Gunner strolled into his study in the Fourth with an elated look. Dickinson minor eyed him rather uneasily. He had fully expected Gunner to return in a thoroughly thrashed state, and a terrific temper. Gunner's cheery equanimity surprised him.

"It's all serene," said Gunner. "Silver decided to toe the line. I'm down to play to-morrow."

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Dickinson minor. "Gammon!"

"You can go and look at my name on the list."

"I will!" said Dickinson. And he did.

"Oh, my hat! What on earth for?"

"To make things fair all round, as Tommy Dodd is playing Cuffy. It's up to us to play our silliest ass if Tommy Dodd does."

"Oh! Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Dickinson minor.

He understood then. But P. C. Gunner did not understand—and Dickinson minor, when he returned to the study to congratulate him, was careful not to explain. It would really have been a dangerous undertaking to explain to Gunner that he was being played, on this special occasion, because he was the silliest ass and the biggest idiot in the Classical Fourth. Dickinson minor wisely left him to make the discovery for himself.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Well Matched!

"WILL it rain?" murmured Tommy Dodd.

It wouldn't!

This was the very first time that Tommy Dodd had desired to see a heavy downpour of rain on the occasion of a football match. But that

Saturday morning was quite bright and sunny, and the weather showed no sign whatever of obliging Tommy Dodd.

During the week, Clarence Cuffy's career had been something like that of a hunted rabbit.

Tommy Dodd was determined to turn him into something distinctly resembling a footballer. Although very, very anxious to oblige his friend and relative, dear Thomas, Cuffy had developed surprising gifts as a dodger.

Nevertheless, he had been dragged down to games practice several times, and each time Cuffy's sufferings had been enough to touch a heart of stone. But his knowledge of the great game had not perceptibly increased.

In fact, his preference for noughts-and-crosses, as a game, had been greatly intensified.

But hope springs eternal in the human breast; and with a few more days, or a week, to work in, Tommy Dodd would not have despaired of turning Cuffy into a rather less hopeless ass. So a down-pour of rain, postponing the match, would have been welcome.

And so, as Tommy said bitterly to Cook and Doyle, it was bound to be fine! You could always depend on the British climate to play up in the wrong way!

Kick-off was timed for two-thirty; and it was not in cheery spirits that Tommy Dodd led his merry men down to Little Side in the sunny afternoon.

Clarence Cuffy was with them.

Dearly would Cuffy have loved to dodge out of gates, or into a coal-cellar, or anywhere; but that afternoon there was no dodging for Cuffy. Tommy Dodd had to make his words good—he had said that he would play the Classics with Cuffy in goal, and that he was going to do. He had said also that he would beat them; but that was quite another matter.

Jimmy Silver greeted him with a cheery smile.

"Goalie going strong?" he asked affably.

Tommy Dodd snorted.

"Oh, cheese it!" grunted Tommy Cook. "If you ask me, it's rather mean to hold Tommy to it, because he gassed a bit. Just like you Classics!"

"Oh, just!" said Doyle.

"Cut that out!" said Tommy Dodd morosely. "We're going to be as good as our word, and we're ready when you Classics chumps are."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"We're ready," he said.

It was then that Peter Cuthbert Gunner, in shirt and shorts, as a member of the Classical junior team, dawned on the Moderns.

They blinked at him.

Gunner, with an air of great self-satisfaction, walked to the goal after the skippers had tossed. Tommy Dodd blinked after him, not understanding.

"I say, Silver—"

"Hallo!" smiled Jimmy.

"You're not playing Gunner?"

"Oh, yes!"

"What on earth for?" asked the amazed Tommy. "He's jolly nearly as big an idiot at footer as our man Cuffy."

"My dear Thomas—" murmured Cuffy.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"That's why!" he said.

Tommy Dodd looked at him. He seemed slow to grasp the situation. But at last he grinned with relief.

"Silver, old man," he said, with feeling, "you're a brick! You know I got myself into a scrape by opening my mouth too wide—and you're letting me off. You're a real brick!"

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That was all that was said; but Tommy Dodd lined up with his men in much better spirits. All the Moderns, in fact, seemed to be considerably bucked by the sight of Peter Cuthbert Gunner in the Classical goal.

Apart from the custodians, the teams were fairly well matched—ten good men a side. And the goalies were fairly well matched, too, if it came to that—for two worse goalkeepers would not have been found inside Rookwood or out.

Quite a crowd of Classics and Moderns gathered to see the game—a game without goalkeepers, for that was what it amounted to. And the Moderns generally agreed that Jimmy Silver was no end of a sportsman.

Tommy Dodd kicked off in great spirits. He had kept his word—he was playing Cuffy; and he was escaping the dire consequences of his brag. For Gunner was undoubtedly as heavy a handicap to the Classical side as Cuffy could possibly be to the Modern.

It was a match on fair terms after all, and on fair terms the Moderns were sure of beating the Classics. The Classics, on their side, were equally sure of beating the Moderns.

It was quite an interesting game. Arthur Edward Lovell put in the ball first, catching Cuffy on the chin with it, and causing him to sit down with surprising suddenness.

But Tommy Dodd soon followed that up with a Modern goal, the ball missing Gunner's clutch by about a yard.

The full-backs had the duty of defending the goals; and at one end of the field Cuffy thumped his chest to keep warm, and at the other end Gunner stamped and thumped likewise, neither of them having anything else to do. For when the backs failed to keep the goal intact, the ball always went in—Cuffy generally seeking to dodge it as it came, and Gunner sprawling at it in vain.

In the peculiar circumstances the footballers expected a heavy score. It was heavy enough. In the first half, Classics led by four goals to three. After the interval the Moderns picked up, and for

a time they led by seven goals to five. Then the Classics gave Cuffy some concentrated attention, and their figure jumped to eight. By that time it was getting near the finish, and almost on the stroke of time Tommy Dodd planted the ball on Gunner's chin, and Gunner sat down in goal apparently nursing it like a baby.

Then the whistle went.

"Eight all!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "It's a giddy draw! Well, Gunner hasn't beaten us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Cuffy hasn't beaten us!" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "I was going to slaughter him if he did."

"My dear Thomas—"

"I'll kick him, anyhow."

"Yaroooh!"

Clarence Cuffy quitted the football ground, determined that wild horses should never drag him into so very, very rough a game again. Peter Cuthbert Gunner walked off, with his head up, apparently quite satisfied with himself and his performances. In the changing-room he called to Jimmy.

"I say, Silver! You've seen my quality now."

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Satisfied, I hope."

"Quite. One sample is enough."

"When are you playing me in a House match again?"

"Next time Tommy Dodd plays, Cuffy."

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

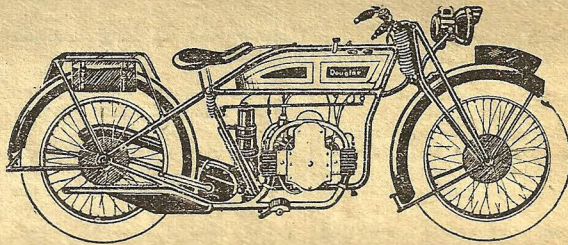
Which was not a promising prospect for Gunner.

Clarence Cuffy was quite, quite determined that he never would play in a House match again. But he was not quite so determined upon that point as Tommy Dodd!

THE END.

(You'll find plenty of fun and excitement in next week's rousing long complete tale of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, entitled: "LOT FIFTY-FOUR!")

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