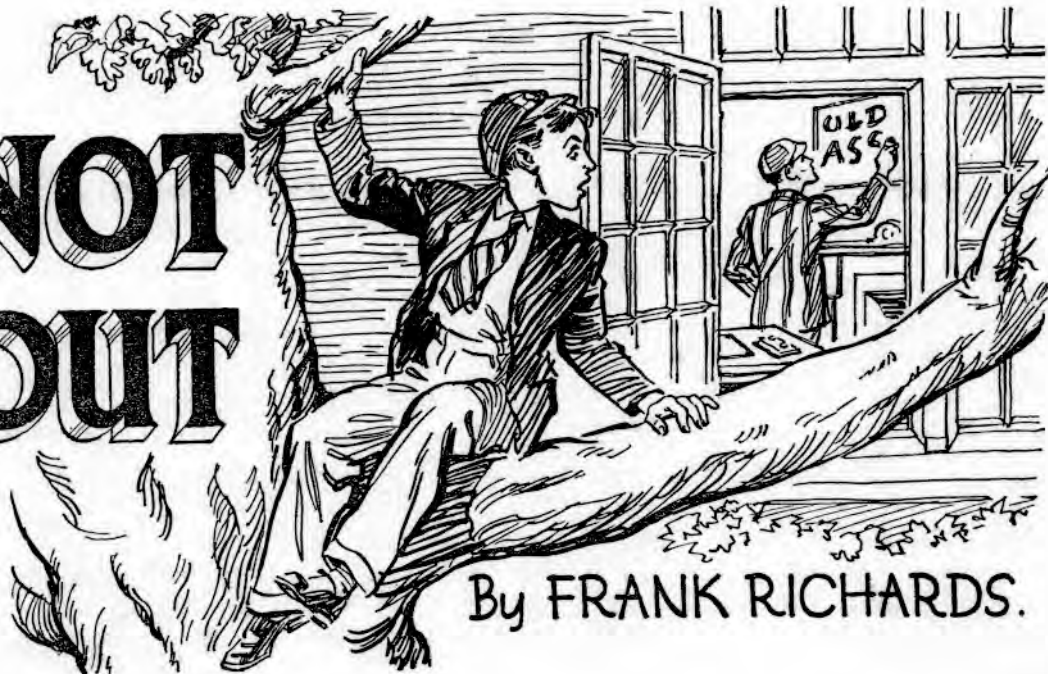


NOT OUT



By FRANK RICHARDS.

“THAT ass!” murmured Tom King.

Tom would not have so described Perkinson of the Fifth in his hearing. Such home-truths, from a Fourth Form junior to a Fifth Form senior, especially so great a games-man and so tremendous a “Blood” as Percival Perkinson, would certainly have led to painful results.

Nevertheless, the description was just. Perkinson of the Fifth was most undoubtedly an ass, and never had he been more asinine than at the present moment, when Tom King’s startled eyes fell upon him.

It was quite by chance that Tom spotted him in the Head’s study. Bullinger, whose ideas of humour were somewhat crude, had snatched Tom’s cap and tossed it into the thick branches of the oak tree opposite Dr. Leicester’s

study window. Bullinger’s idea was that Tom wouldn’t venture to climb after it in full view of that window. But Tom King happened to know that the Head had gone out; so, having kicked Bullinger, he clambered after his cap. Having recaptured it, and preparing to descend, he cast a casual glance at the Head’s window, wide open on the sunny summer morning. He jumped when he saw Perkinson in the study.

Perkinson’s face was quite fierce.

Everybody at Felgate knew that the Head had given Perkinson a Georgic. And as old Perk was no man to hide his feelings, everybody knew he was furious about it. The briefest Georgic perpetrated by Virgil ran to over five hundred lines. Perk did not love the classics. A mighty hitter at the wickets, a good change bowler, and a useful

man in the field, he was tireless on Big Side—but Virgil made him tired. That was not all. From wicket to wicket he was as swift a man as Felgate could produce—but at transcribing Latin he was slow—very slow. That Georgic had haunted Perkinson for days. Not only did it use up his leisure, but it kept him away from the nets—with the Lanchester match coming on, too! While the Georgic lasted, Perkinson was like a bear with a sore head. Even his pal Purring found him almost unbearable in their study. Tom King, as he saw Perk in the Head's study and read the expression on his face, knew at a glance that Perk was out for trouble. Obviously Perk, like Tom, knew that the Head was out: that was why he was there.

“The fathead!” breathed Tom.

On the very day of the Lanchester match, that ass, that goat, that fathead, was hunting for trouble with the Head!

From the high branches of the oak, where he had a clear view right into the wide-open study window, Tom watched him—in horror!

He could hardly believe his eyes as he watched! Was even Perk, known to be the biggest ass ever outside games, such an ass as this? He was!

Spell-bound, Tom watched him screw up his handkerchief and dip the corner into the Head's inkpot. Then he watched him step across to the looking-glass and daub thereon the words in capitals: OLD ASS.

It was incredible! But there it was. Tom could almost have fallen from his perch in his amazement and horror.

Perkinson laid the inky handkerchief

on the Head's blotter and fumbled in his pockets. He drew out a bottle of gum. No doubt his intention was to pour the gum into the inkpot—a pleasant surprise for the Head next time he came to use his pen. But at that moment, a change came over Perk—perhaps he heard some sound from the corridor. Tom saw him step to the study door and stand there listening—evidently to passing footsteps. Luckily for Perk, the door did not open. Whoever the passer was, he passed on, and Perkinson breathed again. But very plainly he had been deeply alarmed, for he opened the door, disappeared from the study, and shut it after him.

Perkinson was gone.

“Oh, the mad ass!” groaned Tom.

In his alarm and hurry Perk had quite forgotten the inky handkerchief. He had left it on the blotter on the writing-table. That was Perk all over. Tom, from the high oak branches, gazed at it.

Perkinson was booked to play for Felgate that day. He was the very last man whom Langdale, the Felgate captain, could have spared from the team. But he was not going to play for Felgate. He was going to be sacked. The minute the Head came in he would see that awful inscription on the glass, he would find the inky handkerchief, which would infallibly be traced to Perkinson, and the fathead of the Fifth would be sitting in the train home while the Felgate first eleven played Lanchester.

“Oh, the goat!” breathed Tom.

But it did not take Tom King long to decide what he was going to do. He slithered down the oak and cast an anxious glance around. It was risky—

awfully risky—to clamber in at the Head's open window. If the eye of a beak or a prefect fell on him——!

Luckily, there was no one at hand. He did not lose a second. After that one glance round he clambered up and whipped in at the open window. He landed in the Head's study almost in fear and trembling. If anyone came——!

But no one came! With his own handkerchief he wiped that mad inscription from the glass. He jammed Perk's inky handkerchief into his pocket along with his own. And he clambered back out of the window. So far, so good. But just as he was dropping from the high windowsill Charne came along the path.

“King!” rapped out the Fourth Form master.



“Oh!” gasped Tom. “Yes, sir!”

“How dare you climb upon the headmaster's window-sill!” said Mr. Charne severely. “Take a hundred lines, King.”

“Yes, sir!”

It was fortunate that Charne had not come along a minute earlier!

* * * *

Perkinson groaned.

Purring eyed him impatiently.

Perk was pacing his study in the Fifth when Purring came in to look for him. For the first time on record Perk seemed to have forgotten cricket. Generally he lived and moved and had his being in games. It was indeed because that Georgic interfered with cricket that Perk had been so furious about it. That Perk could ever be indifferent to cricket, could remain oblivious of the fact that the Lanchester men had arrived, seemed wildly impossible. Yet he was nowhere to be seen; and improbable as it seemed that he could be sticking in his study at such a time, Purring at last went up to look for him—and found him there, his face wrinkled with worry, his hands in his pockets, striding to and fro, occasionally emitting a sigh, a grunt or a groan. All the troubles of the universe, and a few over, seemed to have landed on the broad shoulders of Perkinson of the Fifth.

“Gone crackers?” asked Purring politely.

Groan!

“What's the matter?”

Groan!

Perkinson evidently was in the depths of woe. Niobe, Rachel, or any other

woeful person in fiction or fact had simply nothing on him. Perk had forgotten cricket, which could only mean he was in the sad state of the Raven's unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster. The expression on his rugged face might have touched a heart harder than the nether millstone.

"Look here," said Purringe, "if you're moaning about that Georgic, forget it. Fellows have had Georgic before without doing a song and a dance about it. I can jolly well tell you, Perk, that I'm fed up with you and your Georgic."

Groan!

Perkinson came to a stop, groaned once more, and eyed his chum with lack-lustre eye. Purringe began to feel a little alarmed. He realised that whatever was the matter with Perk it was something more awfully serious than even a Georgic—serious as that undoubtedly was!

"Look here, the cricket——!" he said.

"Blow the cricket!" said Perkinson in a hollow voice.

Purringe almost fell down. When Perkinson of the fifth "blowed" cricket it was time for the skies to fall.

"Lanchester's arrived."

"Blow Lanchester!"

"Langdale's wondering what's become of you."

"Blow Langdale!"

"Mad?" asked the utterly puzzled Purringe. "Look here, Perk, what's the row? If you've gone sick——!"

"I'm going to be sacked," said

Perkinson in the same hollow voice. "Nuff to make a man sick, ain't it?"

"Sacked? What for?"

"For calling the Head an old ass."

Purringe jumped clear of the floor.

"You didn't—you couldn't—even you ain't idiot enough for that!" he gasped. "Don't talk rot! You're crackers! You're batchy! You didn't!"

"Not to his face," admitted Perk.

"I wrote it in ink on the glass in his study. He's seen it long before this."

"You ought to be kicked," said Purringe indignantly.

"I know," said Perk meekly. "But I was mad about the Georgic—keeping a man away from the games practice and all that."

"Well, the Beak won't know you did it," said Purringe. "We all know what an idiot you are in the Fifth, but the Head doesn't! He would never dream that a Fifth Form man did it."

"I did it with my inky hanky——"

"Well, I suppose you didn't leave the inky hanky in the Head's study as a souvenir for him?" said Purringe sarcastically.

"I—I—I did!"

"What?" yelled Purringe, aghast.

"I—I forgot it—I—I only remembered it half an hour ago, when I put my hand in my pocket for my hanky, and it wasn't there."

"Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles!" said Purringe. "Why, your initials will be on it—you might as well have signed your name after what you wrote on the glass. You're for it, by gum."

Perkinson fell, rather than sat, in the armchair. Only too well did he know that he was for it. He was sorry, so far

as that went, for that disrespectful affront to the Head. Perk very often was sorry for hasty actions when it was too late. He was wont to act in haste and repent at leisure. But his sorrow for what he had done was not likely to serve him. He was going to be sacked. He realised, indeed, that he deserved to be. But that was no present help in time of need.

"I'm done for," he said. "I—I don't know how long it will take them to find out whose hanky it is. Not very long, I expect. Then——" Perk finished up with a groan. Only by a series of deep, dismal groans did he seem able to express his feelings.

Purringe stood looking at him, almost as dismayed as Perkinson. A voice called up the passage from the stairs—that of Langdale of the Sixth.

"Found that ass Perkinson?"

"He's here," called back Purringe. "But——"

"Bring him along, then."

"Oh, all right."

Purringe crossed the study to Perkinson and dropped a hand on his shoulder. Perkinson looked up at him, worried and woeful.

"Cricket——!" said Purringe.

"What's the good?" said Perkinson wearily. "I'm going to be bunked! Think I can play cricket with that on my mind?"

"You'll have to," said Purringe firmly. "You can't let Langdale down, and Felgate down. You're going to be bunked, there's not a spot of doubt about that, and you jolly well deserve it, if you ask me. But you're not bunked yet, and you've got to brace up and play for the school, see?"

"With that on my mind!"

"You haven't much mind to speak of," said Purringe. "If you had, you wouldn't play the fool as you've done. Never mind your mind—such as it is."

"Look here——!" exclaimed Perkinson hotly.

"Oh, brace up," said Purringe. "Will it make it any better to mope in your study instead of playing cricket? You can't help being an ass, Perk—but you can play cricket. Get up."

"But——!" groaned Perkinson.

"Come on, I tell you!" rapped Purringe impatiently. "Play and put up the best game you've got in you—then you'll leave Felgate trailing clouds of glory, see? Like somebody in some poem we had in English Literature the other day."

"Oh!" said Perkinson. He sat up.

"I say, they'll remember me as a jolly good cricketer—they'll remember I was a games-man——"

"They'll remember you all right if you help to beat Lanchester today," said Purringe encouragingly. "Trailing clouds of glory...."

Perkinson heaved himself out of the armchair. He was going to be bunked. Not later than that very evening he would be called into Dr. Leicester's study to hear that dread sentence. There was no hope—not a glimmer of hope! He had dished himself as thoroughly as any fellow ever had dished himself, and he had to go. But Purringe had touched the right chord. They might remember him at Felgate as a man who had asked for the sack and got it; but they would remember him, too, as a great games-man, as a man to whom Felgate owed something,

as a man who had played a great game on his last day. Trailing clouds of glory. . . . There was consolation in that idea.

“Come on,” he said quite briskly. And he was first out of the study.

“Well hit!”

“That’s a boundary !”

“Good old Perkinson !”

Practically all Felgate had turned up to watch the Lanchester match. Tom King, Dick Warren and Skip Ruggles, the three chums of Study Four in the Fourth, were of course there. Tom King and Dick Warren eyed Perkinson very curiously. Skip, for the moment, did not. Skip was eyeing a bag of cherries as he disposed of them one by one. Skip, no doubt, was keen on



Skip, no doubt, was keen on cricket, but he was keener on cherries.

cricket, but he was keener on cherries, and the Felgate first eleven were not likely to get much attention from Skip till that bag was empty. But King and Warren were deeply interested, especially in Perkinson.

How a fellow who had, that very day, asked for the sack, or rather begged for it, could play cricket just as if nothing had happened was rather a puzzle to the juniors. But there he was—at the top of his form. Tom wondered whether he had missed yet the hanky he had left in the Head’s study as a clue to what he had done there. Perhaps he hadn’t? Perhaps he hadn’t even remembered it—or perhaps he did not realise what it implied? Perk, really, was ass enough for anything. Ass as he was, there was no doubt that he was a tremendous cricketer, and that if Felgate beat Lanchester that day it would be largely owing to Perk. Which consoled Tom for the hundred lines he had received from Charne.

Langdale had won the toss and Felgate took first knock. Perkinson opened the innings with Langdale at the other end. Langdale was a mighty man at the summer game; but Langdale was out and Perk still going strong. Man after man came in, and subsequently departed; but there was Perkinson of the Fifth, a tower of strength that the Lanchester bowlers seemed quite unable to shake.

How he did it Perkinson really did not know.

For he did not, and could not, forget the shadow of the sack that hung over him. Most things, almost anything in fact, Perk could dismiss from his mind when he felt the willow in his hands—

but not that ! That was ever present. He was going to be called before the Head—he was going to be bunked. He did not flatter himself that there was any hope. He was playing the last game he would ever play at Felgate. That was fixed in his mind. But, all the more because it was his last game on the Felgate ground, he was going to make it the game of his life. He was not going to let Felgate down, whatever might be coming to him afterwards. He seemed to have a split mind during that game—one half of it envisaging the dread scene in the Head's study when the crushing sentence fell, the other half fixed on cricket. Purring's words, from some poet or other for whom Perkinson did not care a boiled bean, lingered in his mind—"trailing clouds of glory !" They were going to remember him at Felgate as the man who played a great game just before he went up to take the K.O.

For only one thing he hoped and prayed—that the blow would not fall before the game was over. If he were called off the cricket field to go up for judgment . . . ! The mere possibility was enough to make any fellow feel his flesh creep. But even that awful possibility did not cramp Perkinson's style. He was not going to fail Felgate. Most fellows, looking on, thought Perkinson of the Fifth must be a happy man that day. Nobody guessed that he was the miserablest fellow at Felgate, or anywhere in the wide world.

"Eighty-nine not out !" said Tom King when the innings ended. "By gum ! That man can play cricket, if he can't do anything else."

In the Lanchester innings Perkinson,

as a change bowler, captured a couple of wickets, and in the field he made a catch in the slips. Yet all the while he seemed to see, close at his elbow, a stern face, and he could almost hear a stern voice pronouncing the awful words: "Perkinson ! You are expelled !" If only it held over till the match ended !

When the time came for Felgate's second knock Perkinson went in again with Langdale. But suddenly, on his way to his wicket, he halted, as if rooted to the ground, the colour ebbing from his face and leaving it as white as chalk. All eyes were on him, and fellows wondered anxiously whether Perk had been suddenly taken ill. That would have been very rough luck for Felgate. Perk, standing like one petrified, had his eyes fixed on two figures that were coming along from the House to the cricket ground. One was Charne the other no less a person than Dr. Leicester. Other fellows, who noticed the Head coming, thought it very decent of the old boy to give the match a look-in, and never guessed the alarm and despondency that the sight of him caused poor Perk. The ghost of Banquo could not have startled Macbeth more than the appearance of Dr. Leicester startled Perkinson of the Fifth. Indeed he would have preferred to see a ghost.

Langdale touched him on the arm.

"Get a move on, Perk ! What's the matter ?"

"The Head !" breathed Perkinson.

The Felgate captain glanced round. He saw the Head, but nothing alarming in the sight. He glanced back at Perkinson, puzzled.



He tottered to his wicket.

“What about it?” he asked. “Look here, you’re keeping the field waiting. What on earth’s the matter with you?”

Perkinson made no reply. He tottered to his wicket. That the Head knew and had come for him he could not doubt. If the Head knew, he wouldn’t wait for the finish before calling the offender to account. He would be too awfully wrathful for that. He had come there for Perkinson—the hapless fellow could not doubt it. Yet he stood up at his wicket, though it must have been something in the nature of a miracle that the first ball of the over did not scatter his bails far and wide. However, it did not. In momentary expectation of being called off, Perk played that ball, and played the next, and the next;

and then, as the call did not come, he recovered a little. Dr. Leicester, a spectator to be honoured, was accommodated with a seat at the pavilion, where he sat and looked on benignly, little dreaming what a figure of terror he was to one member of the Felgate team. Perkinson, pulling himself together, somehow revived. The Beak was going to wait for the finish—that was his only possible conclusion. Well, the Beak should see that he, Percival Perkinson, could put up a good game for his school, even with the “sack” suspended over his head like the sword of Damocles.

“Good old Perk!”

“Good man!”

“By gum!” said Tom King to his



Langdale and another Sixth Form man carried him on their shoulders off the field.

chum. "This is worth a hundred lines, old man! Am I glad I nipped in at the Beak's window this morning!"

"What-ho!" grinned Warren.

Really it was worth a hundred lines, or a thousand, to any patriotic Felgate man. For Perk was going great guns. Not often had such hitting been seen on Big Side at Felgate School. Not often had the men from Lanchester found themselves booked for such leather-hunting. Cheers and hand-clapping were almost incessant round the field; even Skip, though he had a bag of bull's-eyes in his pocket, forgot bull's-eyes and watched with all his own eyes, and added his fat voice to the roar. Even Dr. Leicester was seen to clap his own majestic hands at one

mighty hit. And history repeated itself—other men came, and other men went, but there was Perk all the time, and it looked as if Perk was going to be "not out" a second time. And so it proved! But he would hardly have dared to come back to the pavilion had not the Head by that time happily gone back to the House.

Lanchester in the last innings had so much leeway to make up, that the game was as good as won. But as if to make assurance doubly sure, Perkinson, when he went on to bowl, put up an unexpected hat trick. That did it! All Felgate roared, and clapped, and yelled, and shrieked. Langdale smacked him on the back. Tom King felt that he would willingly have transcribed the

whole of the works of Virgil for this ! When at length Lanchester had been happily beaten by a hatful of runs Perkinson was the hero of the hour. Langdale and another hefty Sixth Form man carried him on their shoulders off the field, amid cheering, yelling, clapping, that made all Felgate ring again.

Afterwards, in his study, the cricketer who had covered himself and Felgate with glory, and the miserablest fellow in the school or out of it, waited for the dread summons to the Head. Purring with him, sad and sympathetic.

But they waited in vain. That summons did not come. It never came !

Why it did not come Perkinson of the Fifth never knew. The clue of the inky hanky had led to no discovery; and, stranger still, absolutely nothing had been said about that disrespectful inscription on the glass in the Head's study. It was a complete mystery to Perk—which Tom King could have solved for him. Mysterious as it was to Perkinson, it was a tremendous relief. He had expected to be out of Felgate School the next day, but there he still was—Not Out !

SPORTS QUIZ

Can you answer these Questions?

CRICKET

(1) Which match came first in cricket history, Gentlemen v. Players or Oxford v. Cambridge ?

(2) In all Test matches between England and Australia, England have won 56, Australia 68, and 34 have been drawn. Of the 71 matches played in England, which country has won the most ?

(3) Here are the names of six batsmen who have scored 1,000 runs in international cricket. Which country did each batsman represent ? V. S. Ransford, R. H. Catterall, G. A.

Faulkner, S. J. Snooke, A. Shrewsbury and G. E. Gomez.

(4) In the 1940-1 season a batsman scored 148 and 111 on his maiden appearance in first-class cricket and thus set up a world record. What was his name ?

(5) How wide may a cricket bat be ?

(6) An umpire bends his arm upwards and touches the top of his nearest shoulder with the tips of the fingers of one hand. What does this signal mean to the scorer ?

Answers on page 152