

The MYSTERIOUS FATE of PERKINS MINOR

A Tallish Story
by FRANK RICHARDS



PERKINS minor, of the Shell, was a chap I knew quite well,
Although what became of Perkins I could never hope to tell,
For he vanished on the day when St. Cuthbert's came to play,
When the final whistle sounded and all Barcroft roared hurray.
When the fellows gathered round to chair Perkins off the ground,
To the general amazement he was nowhere to be found.
What became of Perkins mi.? Did he walk, or run, or fly?
Did he sink into the earth, or did he whiz up to the sky?
None can answer: none can tell: it was such a sudden sell.
Since that day no living eye has seen old Perkins, of the Shell.

Perkins minor was a chap who could never get his Cap,
Though in many other ways he seemed to sit in Fortune's lap.
In his Latin and his Greek he could beat his own Form beak.
When he did Thucydides with Perk the Head himself was meek.

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

In all subjects he was great: he could not forget a date,
He could do things in his head that others couldn't on a
slate.

If you said to Perkins mi. "When did Charles the Second
die?"

"Sixteen-eighty-five" would be his instantaneous reply.
And he never skewed in con., when his Form beak put
him on,

And in German you'd have thought him a professor
straight from Bonn.

Beaks respected Perkins mi., and he held his napper high
In the form-room; and examinations were to him just pie.
Other fellows hated work, and would skew, or crib, or
shirk,

But the toughest sort of stuff was simply infants' play
to Perk.

And if Perkins minor's goal had been just to bag a
schol.,

He could easily have beaten any other man in Coll.

You'd have thought that such a chap, with such gifts
chucked in his lap,

Would have felt as jolly pleased as any fellow on the map.
But poor Perkins, poor old swot, was he happy? He was
not.

While a lot of fellows envied him, he thought it all just
rot.

For old Perkins had a bee in his bonnet, don't you see,
And he wanted to play Soccer like Jim Wilkinson or me.
All his Latin and his Greek, all the tongues that he could
speak,

All the golden good opinions he had won from every
beak,

He'd have given all the lot, just to take a single shot

At a Soccer goal and see the leather land upon the dot.

There his real ambition lay: there his thoughts would
ever stray,

He was just as keen as mustard, but he simply couldn't
play.

And poor Perkins, poor old chap, hardly cared a single
rap,

For a single thing in life except a First Eleven Cap.

It's a rummy sort of go, as perhaps you fellows know,
That a chap will often want the very thing Fate won't
bestow.

It was so with Perkins mi.: he would frown, and he would
sigh,

He would watch the chaps at footer with a melancholy
eye.

With a brow of furrowed gloom he would haunt the
changing-room,

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

And if Wilkinson said "No, Perk!" it was like the knell
of doom.
For his sole and single aim was to play a stunning game,
And he couldn't play for toffee, which he thought a
rotten shame.
If old Perkins kicked a ball, no one knew where it would
fall,
Or in what direction it would go, and Perkins least of all.
Out of pity, all the same, Wilkinson would put his name
In the list up in the changing-room, for some small
pick-up game.
So it happened, now and then, that he hopped round
like a hen,
For his footer, honest Injun, was a sight for gods and
men.
If he blundered near the ball he was pretty sure to fall,
He would fozzle, he would flounder, he would stumble,
he would sprawl,
And the fellows round the field laughed until they fairly
squealed,
For they really couldn't help it, at the form old Perk.
revealed.
Only once was Perkins known to despatch the leather
home,
And the goal in which he landed it, believe me, was his
own!

After such a game as that, trodden on like any mat,
In the changing-room old Perkins never lingered for a
chat,
While they all roared at the joke he would sort of frown
and choke,
And would tramp up to his study, slam his door, and
sport his oak.
There he'd take Thucydides or old Homer on his knees
And would try to get such comfort as a fellow could
from these.
But he found it rather poor, and a chap who passed his
door
Might have heard him chuck Thucydides or Homer on
the floor.
At such times, I've heard it said, that when Perk. went
up to bed
Other fellows sometimes noticed that his eyes were very
red.
Such was Perk's unhappy state, till St. Cuthbert's day—
the date
When the queer old duffer met his strange and most
uncanny fate.
It's the rummiest of goes, you may easily suppose,
For the way it came about no man at Barcroft really
knows.

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

It occasioned great surprise and amazement, giving
rise
To an awful lot of rumour, and conjecture, and surmise.
How did Perkins get his Cap? How on earth did such a
chap
Pile up goals for School, and wipe St. Cuthbert's fairly
off the map?
Not a man knew how or why: there was simply no reply:
And the strangest thing of all was, what became of
Perkins mi.?

We had seen for several days something changed in
Perkins' ways.
He would moon about the day-room with a sort of
vacant gaze,
Or extended in his chair, with a fixed and stony stare,
He would look a fellow through as if a fellow wasn't
there.
If you met him in the quad. he would pass without a nod
Just as if he didn't know you, which was very queer and
odd.
In his construe he would skew, which was something very
new,
Quite an unexpected sort of thing for Perkins mi. to do.
Some supposed the poor old swot might be going off
his dot,
Having stuffed his poor old brain-box much too full of
classic rot.

But this change in Perkins mi. went much deeper bye-
and-bye.
He would hike off to his study with a queer look in his
eye.
There he'd sit for hours and pore over books of ancient
lore,
Mostly German stuff, queer books no Barcroft man had
seen before.
He would rise and walk about, like a fellow deep in
doubt,
With a problem on his mind and trying hard to think it
out.
He reminded me of Faust, that old nut who used to
frowst
In a solitary room, where he soliloquised and groused.
And I've wondered, looking back, was Perk. following
his track,
Mugging up some means of contact with the Gentleman
in Black.

Once I hear him shout "Appear!"—I was on the landing
near,
And I looked in at his study, and said "Hallo, Perk!
I'm here."
But it seemed I couldn't be just the chap he wished to see,
For the minute I appeared he buzzed Thucydides at me.

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

But—believe it, chaps, or not—that ass Perkins mi. had
got
In his hand a paper scrawled with some queer cabalistic
rot,
And I just had time before I backed out and shut the
door
To observe that he had traced a circle on his study floor.
And I thought, “By gum, it looks as if Perk. is raising
spooks.
Like those jolly old magicians in those queer old German
books.”

Well, a few days after that, while a lot of fellows sat
In my study after supper, for the usual Soccer chat,
Slogger Jones, our inside right, came in looking very
white,
Like a chap who'd seen a spectre in the middle of the
night.
And he said—it seemed absurd—but he told us he had
heard
Perkins minor in his study bark “Herein!”—a German
word.
Then a voice came hard and clear, saying “So gefälltst du
mir,”
Just like Mephistopheles, “Bin ich als edler Junker
hier.”
Slogger didn't stop for more, but in telling us he swore
That the chap with Perkins minor hadn't gone in by the
door.

But it seemed a lot too thick. How could Perkins do the
trick?
Even if he had the nerve for conversations with Old Nick.
Still, it certainly was true, as a lot of fellows knew,
That in Perkins' study often there was talk enough for
two.
Fellows passing on the stair sometimes heard him in his
lair.
Talking nineteen to the dozen though no chap was with
him there.
It was surely never known for a chap to sit alone
Keeping up a conversation absolutely on his own.
Just as if the queer old bean had some sort of pal unseen,
Sort of spook familiar spirit, if you know just what I
mean.

Then one night—shall I forget?—It was cold, and dark,
and wet,
With a roll of distant thunder—I can sometimes hear it
yet.
I was passing Perkins' door, when, amid the thunder's
roar,
Came a voice that stopped me dead, as if I'd frozen to the
floor.

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

It was Perk's voice, speaking slow, quite distinct, though
very low,
And I heard him say "Dread spirit! I have signed the
compact! Go!"
Then I felt a kind of blast as I stood there quite aghast,
And I thought that something passed me, and it scorched
me as it passed.
As I stumbled down the stair, I could swear—or almost
swear—
That I smelt a smell of sulphur that was floating in the air.
Still, I never thought a lot about Perkins and his rot,
For a games-man hasn't time to bother much about a
swot.
While he went his own queer ways, I was counting up the
days
To the Cuthbert's match: the biggest fixture Barcroft
ever plays.
Wilkinson, our skipper, then was hand-picking Barcroft
men,
We were like a lot of chicks, and he was like an anxious
hen.
Ours was far the better game, Barcroft men all said the
same,
It was merely winning oftener that Cuthbert's men could
claim.
Still, to put them to the rout, there was not the slightest
doubt,
That our stoutest lads were wanted, and would have to go
all out.
Monday evening, in the dorm., when I went up with the
form,
Perkins minor was surrounded by a laughing, grinning
swarm.
For he said—it made us blink!—Perkins said "You
chaps, I think
I shall play for School on Wednesday, and I'm feeling in
the pink!"
Every fellow in the Shell, as I hardly need to tell,
Simply stared at poor old Perkins mi., and burst into
a yell.
Just to think of Perkins' name in the list up for the
game
With St. Cuthbert's, was enough to make a cat do just
the same.
All the dorm. set up a roar, and we chortled more and
more,
Till a beak howled up the staircase, and a pre. came to the
door.
But next morning, when the Shell tumbled out at rising-
bell,
There was startling news that like a sudden clap of
thunder fell.

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

Young Macpherson of the Third shouted out "You chaps,
you've heard?

Perkins' name's up for the Cuthbert's match—that duffer,
on my word!"

Not a fellow in the lot could believe such awful rot,
And we booted young Macpherson, but we hurried to
the spot,

Then we stared up at the board, and said "Crikey!"
or "Good Lord!"

For the name of Perkins minor there was written big and
broad,

In the first-eleven list: in Jim Wilkinson's own fist,
And we stared, and glared, and gasped, and some chaps
laughed, while others hissed.

Well, I stood and rubbed my eyes, in a state of great
surprise,

But the name was there, and what it meant no fellow
could surmise.

If a First-Eleven cap was to go to such a chap,
It was plain that Barcroft Soccer would be washed right
off the map.

Slogger Jones said "That's too bad! Poor old Wilkinson's
gone mad!"

And by gum, it really looked as if our poor old skipper
had!

Every fellow when he heard, from the Sixth down to the
Third,

Simply gasped for breath, the thing was so impossibly
absurd.

And that day, you bet your hat, Barcroft talked of only
that,

And a lot of us resolved to have our skipper on the mat.

"What the dickens—?" "What the thump!" "Have you
gone right off your chump?"

Thus we talked to Jimmy Wilkinson, and put it to him
plump.

"Perkins minor up to play!" "What will happen on the
day,

With that mad ass Perkins barging round in everybody's
way?"

"Now then, Wilkinson, come clean—will you tell us what
you mean?

Are you dotty? Are you potty? Are you off your nut, old
bean?"

Jimmy Wilkinson sat there, sort of worried, in his chair,
And he rubbed his nose, and then he ran his fingers
through his hair,

Then he answered, very slow, "It's a rummy sort of go,
Why the thump I picked out Perkins mi. I'm bothered
if I know!"

Some exclaimed "Oh, holy smoke!" Others stared, and
never spoke,

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

And it seemed to me that this was just a ghastly kind of
joke
Or a potty sort of whim, and I stood and stared at him,
And believe me, every fellow there was looking pretty
grim.
Slogger Jones said "Now, old chap, can that seedy swot
and sap,
Perkins minor, shove his napper in a first-eleven cap?
He's the biggest dud in Coll., can't play games to save
his soul,
Why, I don't believe the fathead knows a goal-post
from a goal.
It's a sin and it's a shame: it will chuck away the game."
Jimmy answered, "Shouldn't wonder: but he's playing
just the same?"

Well, it wasn't left at that, you can bet your Sunday hat,
Not a fellow there could understand what Wilkinson
was at,
But to everything we said, he just sat and shook his head,
And we might as well have argued with a bedpost, or
a bed.
He was playing Perkins mi., though he couldn't even try
To make any Barcroft fellow understand the reason why.
He was ready to resign, if we made the slightest sign,
But so long as he was skipper, he was taking his own line.
That was all he had to say, if we argued night and day,
But we couldn't sack old Jimmy, so we let him have his
way.

Later on, he talked to me, in his study after tea,
And I saw the chap was worried: it was plain enough to
see.
I said "Jimmy, it's too thick: what the dickens made you
pick
For the Cuthbert's match tomorrow that unmitigated
tick?"
"Late last night," he slowly said, "just before we went to
bed,
I was going through the list, when Perkins' name popped
in my head.
Something, somehow, seemed to say, that on Wednesday,
come what may,
If I liked it or I lumped it, Perkins minor had to play.
I was all alone in here, not another fellow near,
But it seemed to me that Perkins' name was whispered in
my ear."

Then he paced the study floor, from the fireplace to the
door,
With his hands shoved in his pockets, looking worried
more and more.
And he said "It does just seem like some awful, fearful
dream,

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

Just to think of Perkins minor in a Barcroft Soccer team.
And a dozen times, old scout, I've said 'Dash the footling
lout!

And I've taken up a pencil to scratch Perkins minor out.
But—"He shook a puzzled head," something seemed to
stop me dead,

And I know I've got to play him, though it makes the
chaps see red.

He's the worst of all the batch, but his name I cannot
scratch,

I've just got to play young Perkins in the big St. Cuth-
bert's match."

This to me seemed awful rot, as I told him on the spot,
And it made me fear that Wilkinson was going off his
dot,

For he didn't want a scrap to let Perkins have his Cap,
But it seemed as if some weird, uncanny spell was on the
chap.

When the Shell went up to dorm. there was something
like a storm,

Perkins mi. was slanged by nearly every fellow in the
form.

What we said was far from mild, but we couldn't get him
riled,

While we called him awful names he sat upon his bed
and smiled.

All he said was "Wait until you have seen me pot the
pill:

We shall beat St. Cuthbert's, easy, with a heap of goals
to nil."

Well, I said "My only hat!" and I left him where he sat,
It was not much use to argue with a footling ass like that,
And I sadly laid my head on the pillow in my bed,
And could hardly sleep for thinking of what Wilkinson
had said.

When I got to sleep at last, I was dreaming thick and
fast

Of St. Cuthbert's piling goals up to a total wildly vast,
It was such a vivid dream that I woke up with a scream,
Seeing Cuthbert's blighters simply mopping up the Bar-
croft team.

As I sat up in a sweat, with my forehead running wet,
It was barely light—I realised it hadn't happened yet!

When we went to morning school there was Perkins,
calm and cool,

And he looked so jolly bucked I couldn't help but whisper
"Fool!"

I had always liked the chap, even though he was a sap,
But that morning I was near to getting Perkins in a scrap.

I was rather in a bait, for, the honest truth to state,
Cuthbert's Soccer team was just a little bit above our
weight,

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

With eleven good and true, we could hope to put it
through,

But with ten men and a passenger, what could we hope
to do?

With a fumbling, fozzling lout barging helplessly about,
All our chances of a victory were washed completely out.

All the fellows said the same, it was just a rotten shame,
And was simply making Cuthbert's men a present of the
game.

Jimmy's face was full of gloom later in the changing-
room,

And the other fellows looked about as cheerful as a
tomb.

We were for it, as we knew: and our skipper knew it too,
And St. Cuthbert's must have noticed we were looking
very blue.

Only Perkins' face was bright: he was quite a happy
sight:

And while pulling on his footer boots he chuckled with
delight.

And I really think, by gum, that he knew what was to
come.

It's a rummy go, but then, the whole affair was very rum.

Barcroft School all gathered round when we trotted on
the ground,

And some fags hissed Perkins minor, while the seniors
stared and frowned.

All the crowd gave Perk. a stare, but he didn't seem to
care,

He was walking light and airy, just as if he walked on air.
Every fellow thought it rot to see Perk. in such a spot,
For he looked just what he was—a weedy, seedy sort of
swot,

Just a fozzling, footling clown, only there to let us down,
Like a misfit sticking in between old Wilkinson and
Brown

In the Barcroft forward line: but his eyes had quite a
shine,

And whatever we were feeling, Perkins mi. was feeling
fine!

Then the whistle went, and I thought no more of Perkins
mi.,

We were up against it proper, and we had to do or die.
If you've ever seen them play you will know St. Cuth-
bert's way,

Hard and heavy from the kick-off, plunging headlong to
the fray.

We had work enough to do, and we put in all we knew,
With St. Cuthbert's on the ball, and all their forwards
coming through.

Jimmy Wilkinson went smack on the earth upon his
back,

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

And I sat on Jimmy's face as I received a sudden hack,
Halves and backs seemed nowhere then, it was goal for
certain, when
In a twinkling Perkins minor got the ball from Cuthbert's
men.

Did he stumble? Did he sprawl? Did he fumble? Not
at all.

Like a fellow born to Soccer there was Perkins on the
ball.

I exclaimed "My only hat!" too amazed to notice that
It was Jimmy Wilkinson's old phiz on which I breathless
sat.

There was Perkins—Perkins mi.!—like a light-streak
flashing by,

And he had the ball off Cuthbert's in the twinke of an eye.
I could only sit and stare, absolutely unaware

Of old Jimmy underneath me as he gasped and gurgled
there,

For—believe it, chaps, or not—Perkins minor, on the
spot,

Kicked for goal, and got the leather home with that
amazing shot.

Well, I staggered to my feet—not a cheer rang out to
greet

That amazing feat of Perkins: the surprise was too
complete.

Every fellow in the crowd would have shouted good and
loud

At a goal from Jones, or Wilkinson, or me, and done us
proud.

But the goal was Perkins mi.'s, and it took them by
surprise,

Dumb as oysters, fellows blinked as if they couldn't
trust their eyes.

Barcroft simply stood and stared, while St. Cuthbert's
goalie glared

At the leather which had caught him absolutely un-
prepared.

Sort of petrified and still, there we gazed at Perkin's till
Jimmy Wilkinson gasped out "By gum, old Perk. has
parked the pill!"

Then at last there came a sound from the staring fellows
round,

And a gust of laughter rippled on the Barcroft Soccer
ground.

It was goal, that much was sure: and it counted to the
score:

But a goal from Perk. could only set all Barcroft in a
roar.

It seemed just the sheerest rot to suppose that seedy
swot

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

Had done anything but fluke that extraordinary shot,
For if Perkins kicked a ball he could hardly hit a wall,
So that goal seemed just the maddest kind of fluke, and
that was all.
And they shouted "Good old swot! That's a ripping man
you've got?
Let old Perkins have the ball, you men—Perk's hot stuff,
very hot!"

From all sides the laughter came, but I noticed just the
same
That St. Cuthbert's men marked Perkins as we went on
with the game,
Cuthbert's fellows didn't seem to think Perk. was just
a scream,
And they marked him more than any other forward in
the team,
From the whistle every eye now was fixed on Perkins mi.,
And the Barcroft fellows chuckled as they watched him
butting by,
From all quarters came a roar, "Go it, Perkins! Just
one more!
Perk. has come out in his shooting-boots—old Perk's
the man to score!
Go it, Perk., go in and win!" On all faces was a grin,
Till a kick from Perkins minor neatly slammed the
leather in.

Goal! Great pip, it's a goal! Great Scott!" Did they laugh
now? They did not!
Just a gasp of wonder came from every fellow on the
spot.
Was it Perkins—Perkins mi.—who had made the leather
fly?
Perkins minor, with that lightning foot and quick,
unerring eye?
Was it just a fluke? No fear! Strange it was, and odd,
and queer,
But that Perkins could play Soccer now was clear, and
more than clear,
Perk., that dud, that footling lout!—in amazement and
in doubt,
Fellows stared at him, while Cuthbert's goalie hoofed
the leather out.
And our skipper scratched his head. "Are we dreaming
this?" he said,
"Pinch me, somebody, to show me that I'm not asleep
in bed!"

It was rather like a dream, so uncanny did it seem,
And I couldn't help but wonder, as I lined up with the
team.
Perkins minor couldn't play—not, at least, until today—
Barging round like some mad elephant was Perkin's
minor's way.

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

Biggest duffer you could name, simply hopeless at the
game,
Quite unable to make anything of any chance that
came—
Now as nippy as you please, beating Cuthbert's men with
ease,
Going through the halves and backs just like a knife
through Cheddar cheese.
Six or seven minutes more—"Good old Perkins!" came
a roar,
And the ball was in the net, and Barcroft three up on the
score.

"Bravo, Perk.! Hurray! hurray!" Gum, it's not too much
to say,
That the roar might have been heard by people half a
mile away.
The St. Cuthbert's goalie stood with his eyes wide open,
glued
On the leather, like a fellow in a dream, or carved in
wood.
He had got it with his fist and he knew he hadn't missed,
But the ball had twisted round him with an unexpected
twist,
How the thing could happen so, Cuthbert's goalie didn't
know,
And I saw him shake his napper in amazement to and
fro.
But the ball had passed him by—how, he knew no more
than I,
But one certain thing he did know—he could not stop
Perkins mi.!

It seemed much too good to last, but it went on, thick
and fast,
With a mounting score that made the visitors look
quite aghast.
Soccer's not a one-man show, as all Soccer players know,
But old Perkins always seemed to have the leather at his
toe.
Not a chance, since we began, came to any other man.
Even good old Jimmy Wilkinson was just an also ran,
It was Perkins here and there, it was Perkins everywhere,
And he parked the pill with ease and grace and never
turned a hair,
And the Barcroft crowd forgot that he'd been a measly
swot,
And they roared and yelled and waved their hats and
cheered at every shot.

It was one unending roar, as the goals came, more and
more,
Not a man at Barcroft School had ever dreamed of such
a score,

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

Cuthbert's men were good and true, they did all that men
could do,
But they couldn't stop old Perkins, or prevent him getting
through.
Though they buzzed round Perk. like bees, he eluded
them with ease,
Scoring goals as rapidly as he construed Thucydides.
Goal, and goal, and goal again!—five, six, seven, eight,
nine, ten!
It was like a dream—a nightmare to St. Cuthbert's
breathless men,
Was it magic, luck or skill? Had old Perk. bewitched the
pill?
Goodness knows!—but at the interval, the score was ten
to nil.

What the dickens did it mean? Such a score was never
seen.
In the history of Soccer no such thing had ever been.
Cuthbert's stared at Perkins mi., with their faces very
wry,
As he sucked a lemon there, the cynosure of every eye.
Perkins mi., that weedy swot, hadn't missed a single
shot,
It was Perk., and Perk. alone, who'd put St. Cuthbert's
on the spot.
They were stout lads, good and stout, and they meant to
fight it out,
But they knew that they were licked beyond the shadow
of a doubt.
Who could tell how many more Perkins minor had in
store?
Cuthbert's couldn't stop him adding all he wanted to
the score.

When the second half began Perk., of course, was in the
van,
As before, no chances came to any other Barcroft man.
How it was, it's hard to tell: 'twas as if some magic spell
Caused the ball itself to seek the toe of Perkins of the
Shell.
“Go it, Perk!” came in a roar: fellows cheered till
throats were sore,
And old Perkins went it proper, scoring faster than before.
Cuthbert's men played up like mad, using every ounce
they had,
And I own I never saw men play a harder game, by gad.
But their struggle was in vain, though they fought with
might and main,
And the ball went in St. Cuthbert's goal, again, again,
again!

“Goal! Goal! Goal!” came shout on shout—well, I
needn't spin it out,

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

On the Soccer field was never such an overwhelming
rout.
When the final whistle blew, Barcroft's score was twenty-
two:
All from Perk.—no other Barcroft man had anything
to do.
“Good old Perk.!” rang to the sky, “Bravo! bravo,
Perkins mi.!”
“Gather round, you men!” yelled Wilkinson, “Up
Perkins, shoulder high!”
And the air shook with the sound, as the cheering crowd
surged round,
Grabbing Perkins mi. to carry him in triumph off the
ground,
“Good old Perk.! Hurray! Bravo! Good old Perkins,
up you go!”
Then—what happened next no man at Barcroft School
will ever know.

For we stared, could only stare, in perplexed amazement
there,
Where was Perkins? Where was Perkins minor? Echo
answered where!
What had happened? None could see, and it's no use
asking me,
All I know is what I tell you, and the rest is mystery.
Perkins mi. stood in the crowd, while the cheers rang
long and loud,
With all Barcroft swarming round about him, keen to
do him proud,
While we cheered with all our might, there he stood full
in our sight,
—I remembered, afterwards, his face looked rather queer
and white—
Then—I know it sounds too thick!—but he vanished, in
a tick,
Like a conjuror performing some strange disappearing
trick.

What became of Perkins mi.? He was gone, but how,
and why?
How did Perkins in a twinkling disappear from every
eye?
At one moment, I will swear, Perkins mi. was standing
there,
And a moment afterwards the spot was absolutely bare!
Did I dream or did I hear, softly muttered “Hier zu
mir!”
Like a hissing whisper breathed by one invisible but
near?
Brown and Wilkinson declare that they saw a sort of
glare,
And old Slogger swears he sniffed a scent of sulphur in the
air,

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

But what happened, none can say—Perk. had vanished
right away,
And no Barcroft man has seen him ever since St. Cuth-
bert's day.

What was Perk's uncanny fate? Ever since that fatal date
That's a mystery that Barcroft men have failed to
penetrate.

There was many a whispered word of what chaps had
seen and heard,

Fellows couldn't but recall queer incidents that had
occurred,

How old Perkins used to pore over books of mystic lore,
How we'd heard him talk though nobody had gone in at
the door,

Had he learned some secret grim, from those volumes
old and dim,

And called Mephistopheles, as Dr. Faustus did, to him?

Had he sold himself away, heedless of the price to pay,

To become a Soccer champion for one great and glorious
day?

Could it be, in sober fact, that he'd made some awful
pact,



It was Perkins here and there,
It was Perkins everywhere.

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

And had had to pay the piper for that wild and reckless
act?

Was it thus it came about, that a fumbling, fozzling lout
Won the match for Barcroft School, and put St. Cuth-
bert's to the rout?

Yes, it sounds too steep, I know—things could never
happen so—

But—but what became of Perkins mi., and where did
Perkins go?

He had been so keen to play, he had had his wilful way,
And had had a mighty triumph on one great, tremendous
day,

Then—ah, then—what followed? Well, that is more than
I can tell!

What I've told is all that's known of poor old Perkins
of the Shell!

THE END