

meal. Charley Budd sidled up to him.

"Wonder what they'll give us for grub—sir?" he asked. "I'm downright hungry! Steak an' kidney pie would do me, with spotted dog for afters."

"It's a buffet lunch!" Matt said loftily.

Secretly, Budd's words had set his stomach rumbling. This boy was a darned nuisance. Always stirring up poor Matt's appetite.

"Buffet lunch?" Charley repeated. "What's that. Looks more like a sorta cafeteria to me. Look, they're lining up with plates. Come on, guv, before the best goes!"

Matt joined the line, and knew his first disappointment of the day! He was distinctly peckish, and Budd's suggestion as to what a decent lunch might consist of had added fuel to the fire.

He faced up to the counter expecting at least something solid. He was unprepared for finely-cut ham sandwiches followed by trifle!

Even so, he could bear it! After all, he was a St Michael's man now. He munched the thin strips of white bread with their razor-thin wafers of ham.

Nevertheless, he was distinctly unsettled internally.

It was all the more unfortunate, therefore, that after he had seen the batsmen settled down at the crease to a slow rate of scoring, he should decide to take a look at the famous school's buildings.

It was almost as ancient as St Mike's. He wandered along corridors carved with the names of Belchester heroes.

He stared at portraits of poets and men of letters. He longed to see just one man of action.

And then he caught the tail-end of a smell. A beautiful smell that wafted on the breeze as light as a feather! A smell that went straight to Matt's stomach and drove into it like an arrow!

Without a shadow of doubt it was a panful of sausages frying! He pictured them. Lovely, rotund sausages, all bursting with goodness.

By now his hunger was raging furiously. He was a man possessed! He had to follow that beautiful smell to its source, and if necessary go down on his knees and beg for a banger or two!

Sniffing like a bloodhound, he padded along a passage, and then, through an archway, into a line of studies. The third door was open, and the smell of cooking came from within!

He tapped very gently on the door and looked in! There was no one inside! On a gas ring

was a large frying pan, and in it were more than a dozen sausages, all prinking themselves happily, just waiting to be eaten!

It was too much for Matt! He was no longer the proud science master of St Michael's. Some demon had taken his place—a demon that must eat—or collapse!

He stepped inside and pulled out his handkerchief. Quickly he grabbed a fork and whipped most of the bangers out of the pan. These he placed in his handkerchief, wrapped the linen round them and headed out into the passage again!

The sausages were hot to his hand, and he could feel the fat

ton, the famous blank verse writer to dinner."

"That's all right, sir," Matt said unhappily, still holding the sausages out of sight behind his back. "We're still batting. A hundred and twenty on the board, I think."

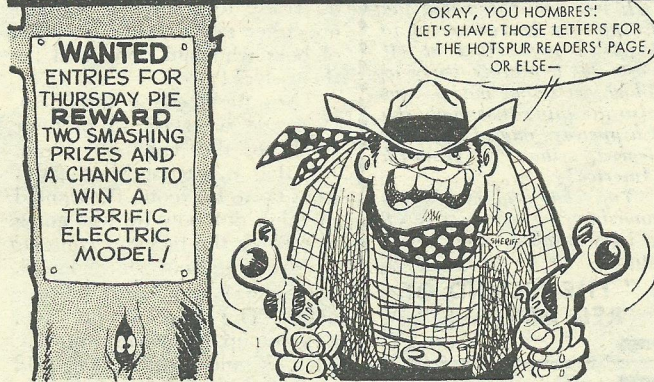
"Good! We'll go and take a look, eh?"

The Rector took up station beside Matt and they began to walk back towards the playing field.

The mastiff walked behind, and in two shakes its sensitive nose had discovered the luscious secret of Matt's handkerchief.

Matt felt the dog's muzzle poking into the handkerchief. He tried to push it away, but

YOU CAN COLLECT THE REWARD!



soaking through the handkerchief.

He made his way back down the passage, found a door out into the open and cast his eyes round for the nearest patch of cover where he could devour his loot.

Beyond the school buildings he saw a shrubbery, with a path running through it. The very place. Almost breaking into a run, he made for the bushes. His mouth was watering.

Only a few more yards, and he would be able to sink his teeth into the succulent sausages. Only another pace and—

"Ha, there!" a strident voice proclaimed.

Matt shoved the handkerchief and its precious load behind his back. Bearing down on him along the path through the shrubbery was a bespectacled man who was unmistakably the Rector of Belchester!

The Rector—or Headmaster, if it had been any other school—was followed closely by a mastiff at least four feet tall from paws to ears!

Winning The Cup.

YOU'RE with the St Michael's team. I suppose, young fellow?" the Rector demanded. "Sorry I couldn't welcome you myself when you arrived. I had Hugo Henning-

the dog persisted. It was only a matter of seconds before it had grabbed the first sausage and wolfed it in one gulp.

Matt and the Rector strolled across the quad. By the time they reached the far side of the cricket field, there was only one sausage left.

"Horatio seems to have taken a liking to you!" the Rector boomed. "Looks like he's eating your fingers, young fellow!"

Matt was so upset at losing his sausages that he really wouldn't have cared if the mastiff had eaten his fingers right up to the elbow!

They reached the pavilion. All Matt had was an empty handkerchief stained with fat. As for Horatio, the mastiff, it looked at Matt out of understanding eyes and licked its chops with a tongue as big as a dishcloth!

Shortly after they arrived, the last St Michael wicket fell, and Belchester went in to bat, faced with making a hundred and sixty-five to win.

"Well done, chaps!" Matt said. "I think it's in the bag!"

"How they expect us to play on starvation rations I dunno!" Charley Budd grumbled. "Frame-up, that's what it is, guv. My stomach's rattling round my ribs like a pea in a balloon. I s'pose they'll give us mustard an' cress

sandwiches for tea, instead of kippers an' Welsh rarebit!"

It was certainly a grim thought! Matt was now doubly empty. Once because of the thin lunch, and once because of his loss of the sausages. He settled down in a deck chair to last the day out.

Surprisingly, St Mike's thrived on half rations! They kept the rate of scoring down, and took an occasional wicket. By tea-time it was obvious that Belchester were playing for a draw.

As Charley had forecast, tea consisted of cress sandwiches, followed by delicate biscuits and tea with practically no sugar. Even Todhunter, the captain, of the side, looked a bit put out.

The Governors' Cup, for which the team were playing, had been brought out and set on a table.

It was a massive, silver-plated cup, with large handles on each side, and a lid that went up to a tall point. It seemed pretty certain that it would be going back to St Mike's that evening!

After tea the team went back on the field. Their sketchy tea seemed to make them determined to finish the job and get home! Anyway, Belchester wickets began to fall faster and faster, and by ten to six the last man had gone to the crease.

Charley Budd took him with a clean catch from a fast ball by Todhunter. The snick as the ball hit the bat could be heard in the pavilion!

"That's it!" the Rector said clearly. "Your cup, Crannis. Good game—look forward to next year's! We'll win it back—you'll see!"

The teams came into the pavilion, and the big cup was handed ceremoniously to Todhunter. Then it was placed in a green baize bag, some instructions were given to Matt about seeing to its insurance against theft, and the St Mike's party went to the coach.

Everyone was in fine fettle. "The St Michael's Beagling Song" was sung through twice—all twenty-three verses of it, and for the moment Matt forgot the big emptiness inside him, and joined in the last few refrains!

Some of the dullness departed from him, and he was fairly happy when Todhunter came back to his seat near the rear of the coach.

"We pass the Regency Road House, sir," said Todhunter politely. "I was wondering if we might stop there for a while. I must say we're all jolly hungry, seeing what stingy feeding Belchester gave us. Sort of