THE ST. JIM'S CADETS.

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

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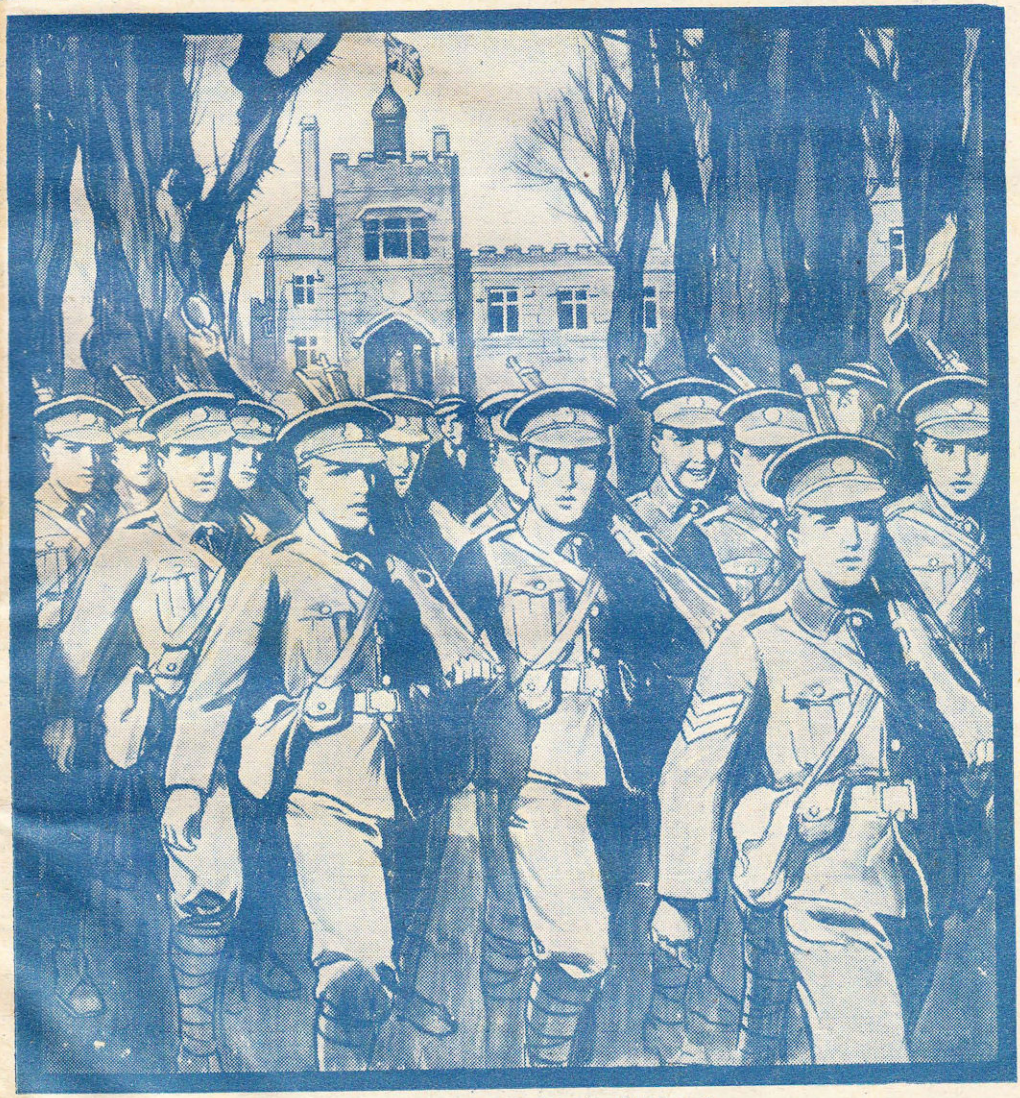

IN KHAKI!

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A MAGNIFICENT, NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

THE ST. JIM'S CADETS!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Volunteers Wanted!

"RAILTON wants Tom Merry and Blake at once," said Mellish of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, as seven fellows, ruddy of face, splashed with mud, lightly clothed, but warm and quite cheery, trotted up to the great gates of the school together at the end of a five-mile run.

The seven were the Terrible Three of the Shell, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, and the four chums of Study No. 6 on the Fourth Form passage, Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby.

"Whaffor?" panted Blake. The run had been done at a good speed; and even one's second wind does not last for ever.

"Ask yourselves—don't ask me!" replied Mellish, with an unpleasant grin. "You know what you've been doing—I don't."

"I don't know of anything we've been doing that means a wigging—do you, Blake?" said Tom Merry, junior captain of the school.

"That's only Mellish's notion of humour," remarked Levison major, of the Fourth, who had just come along with his chums, Cardew and Clive. "There's no row, Tommy. It's something quite different."

"The fact of the matter is that Railton's yearnin' to congratulate you specially on bein' such good little chaps," added Cardew, in his most irritating drawl, and with his most cynical grin.

"Rats!" snapped Blake.

"It ain't anything like that, and if it was it wouldn't be any credit to them," said Mellish sulkily.

Mellish was under the weather. He was stony, and Racke would not lend, nor would anyone else; but Racke might have done without missing it, and that could hardly be said of anyone else but Cardew. Moreover, Mellish had caught it hot from Mr. Lathom in the Form-room that morning for cribbing; and he had been bumped by Kangaroo & Co. for eavesdropping. Altogether Percy Mellish, never very pleasant, was quite at his worst just then

"Not from your point of view, sweet Percy!" said Cardew sardonically. "Now if they had backed a winner—you aren't so dashed often guilty of that, I'll freely admit, but you do try—or won some other idiot's money at banker——"

"The sort of thing you used to do yourself before you joined the Good Little Georgies—eh, Cardew?" broke in Mellish

"Exactly!" answered Cardew gravely. "My only regret is that the—er—G.L.G.'s haven't a ribbon or a badge, or somethin'—so that Railton would become aware of my membership without my obtrudin' my virtue too ostentatiously upon his notice. Then to me also the call might have come, an' I could have stalked along by the side of Merry an' Blake, the cynosure—not sure what the word means, but it comes in all serene just here—of all eyes."

"Weally, you do talk uttah wot, Cardew!" said the Hon. Arthur Augustus, feeling for his monocle in vain. He could not convey fully his strong sense of Cardew's levity without looking at him through that celebrated article.

But, at Blake's urgent instance, the eyeglass had been left behind.

Tom Merry laughed.

"You can come along with us as it is if you like, Cardew," he said. "If we are to go without losing a minute it would be just as well to take you, so that one of us should look decent. But if it's a row you must own up to a share in the offence, guilty or not—just to save our faces, you know."

"It isn't a row," said Clive. "I happen to know what it is—at least, I think I do."

"Are you suah that I am not wequiahed, Mellish?" asked Gussy anxiously. "Railton may have forgotten to mention my name; but if there is sewious business on foot concernin' the Fourth an' Shell——"

"Shell and Fourth, you mean, dummy!" put in Manners politely. "We're the senior Form, and don't you jolly well forget it!"

"You were complimented for your tact an' judgment in the Outram affair, D'Arcy," said Cardew. "You mustn't expect that sort of miracle to be happenin' every day, y'know."

"Miwacle, Cardew? I uttahly fail to compwehend you. There is nothin' in the least degwee miwaculous on my weceivin' compliments on my tact an' judgment, an' I beg that you will not——"

"Cardew didn't mean that, Gussy," interrupted Levison. "He don't express himself too clearly. The miracle was your showing tact and judgment."

"Weally, Levison! Oh, wait for me, Tom Mewwy—wait for me, Blake! I am quite suah that I must also be wanted!"

But Tom and Blake did not wait.

"Had we better change before we go to him, Tommy?" asked the Fourth-Former.

"No, I guess we'll see whether there really is any desperate hurry. If there's time for us to change before we face the music, Railton's sure to say so."

Tom's tap at the Housemaster's door was followed by a hearty "Come in!" It hardly sounded like a wigging.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and Lefevre, the head of the Fifth Form, were with Mr. Railton. All three sat at the table, upon which lay quite a heap of papers, and they looked busy.

"Oh, here you are!" said the Housemaster pleasantly. "I wasn't aware that you were out on a cross-country run. Going pretty heavy after the rain, I take it?"

"We have picked up a little mud, sir," Tom answered. "But we came as we were, as we were told that you wanted us at once."

"The matter is not so urgent but that I can give you time to change," said the Housemaster. "Ten minutes will be enough, I take it?"

"Oh, plenty, sir!" replied Blake, and the two darted off.

"There's no row, Tommy," Blake remarked, towelling himself vigorously in the bath-room, after a hurried cold douche.

"No, it's not a row," Tom said. "But it's something fresh up, and the whole school's in it, more or less. That's why old Kildare and Lefevre were there."

"Sholmes, my dear fellow, you amaze me!" chuckled Blake.

"Jotson, my cheerful ass, you have the brains of a bandicoot!" said Tom, flicking Blake with the wetted corner of a towel.

"Yow! That hurts, Tommy!"

"Is that a deduction, Jotson, or ——"

"It's a giddy fact!" snorted Blake. "You jolly nearly took a piece out of my thigh!"

"Glad I didn't, on the whole. Shouldn't have known what to do with it. Hurry up, my son! We mustn't go over our time allowance."

But they did not exceed that. It was well within the ten minutes when Tom rapped again at Mr. Railton's door, and, in response to the invitation to come in, there entered two very different-looking figures from the mud-splashed juniors of the first appearance.

"Sit down, you two!" said Mr. Railton cordially. "Let's get to business at once. Dr. Holmes has received a reminder that he considers he would do very wrongly to disregard—a reminder that St. Jim's is at present without a Cadet Corps!"

"Yes, sir, that's so," said Tom. "And we certainly ought to have one!"

"We have tried something of the sort, sir," remarked Blake. "There were Grundy's Volunteers, you know. They weren't a huge success, I'm afraid. But then, they didn't go the right way to work to be that."

A smile played about the corners of the Housemaster's mouth, and the two big fellows grinned outright.

"Grundy's a trier," said Kildare; "but he isn't the great organising genius he fancies himself. The Volunteers were a joke. The Cadets are not going to be that. I'm afraid our O.T.C. hasn't done all it might do. We ought to have roped in you juniors, instead of keeping it to ourselves in the two higher Forms. And perhaps we haven't quite filled the bill in other ways, either. We have had some difficulties to contend with. But I can speak for a dozen or so of the Sixth, and Lefevre can answer for as many of the Fifth, that all we can do to help you fellows shall be done."

"We're jolly sure of that, Kildare," said Tom.

"The great point of the organisation to which we shall affiliate," said Mr. Railton, "is that it has the full recognition of the War Office. To St. Jim's any grant is quite a minor matter; but it will make a difference to know that this will not merely be 'playing at soldiers.' All who join will understand from the outset that they belong to the Reserve of the regular Army, and that they may be called upon at a moment's notice for real work. It

may not be exciting or dangerous work; but, on the other hand, it may.

"I am not one of those who feel sure that we shall have a German invasion before the end of the war. I think it possible that the Germans may be kept too busy elsewhere to try that. But one cannot be sure. They may attempt a raid in force, with the object of making themselves as objectionable as may be, although they will be perfectly well aware that no invasion can give them a permanent footing here.

"Now, if such a thing happened in Sussex—not the likeliest locality, I admit; but, there again, one never knows—and our small O.T.C. was called out to aid in repelling it. I think I know of some of you who would be left behind eating their hearts out at having missed it!"

The eyes of Tom Merry and Jack Blake were shining, and their cheeks were flushed. Mr. Railton, who had borne arms himself in the great War, and still suffered from the wound which had caused him to be invalided out, knew how to strike the right chord for them.

"I am not going to ask you two to join up. And I am not going to order you to. That would be arbitrary. I only say that we can't do without you!"

"That's all right, sir," said Tom. "And it's a nice way of putting it, too. We're on—eh, Blake?"

"Oh, rather!" murmured the Fourth Form representative.

"And I am going to give you responsible work to start with. Each of you will canvass his own Form, and hand in to Kildare within twenty-four hours a list of those who will join. It is volunteers we want, remember, not pressed men. Don't let your keenness run away with you. I believe it would be an excellent thing to have conscription for all able-bodied boys of fourteen and over; but the fact remains that we haven't it at present, and we must not try to enforce it illegally."

"Oh, they'll all join up, sir!" said Tom hopefully.

"Pretty nearly all, anyway," added Jack Blake. Blake was Yorkshire, and Yorkshire is practical. Blake could not see Racke and Crooke, Mellish and Trimble, Clampe and Scrope, falling over one another to enlist in the Cadet Corps. And there were others he was not sure of. Cardew was too fond of taking things easily, and the scientific Skimpole might grudge the time to be taken from his study and his inventions, and Grundy would certainly want the high rank he was to hold made clear before he gave in his adhesion—that is, if he understood that discipline would prevent his agitating for high rank once he was enrolled.

CHAPTER 2.

Figgy is Determined!

THEY were hardly outside, after some more talk over the conditions of service, and the like, when Tom said:

"Oh, hang it all, Railton's forgotten something!"

"Well, that's his look-out!" replied Blake. "We don't keep his memory for him, old scout. And don't you be so jolly sure he's forgotten!"

"But I know he has!"

"How do you know?"

"Because if he hadn't, Figgy would have been called in with us."

"My hat, yes!" said Blake.

George Figgins, the great war-chief of the New House juniors, was not a personage to be held lightly. He was too good a sportsman to attempt crabbing such a movement as this because he had not been given an organising job. But if he held aloof from the corps he would not need to suggest to others that they should do so. The New House might take the line that it was a School House wheeze, and that their participation in it was not called for.

"I think I'll go back and give Railton the tip," said Tom.

"Rather you than me!" Blake replied. "It seems a bit like cheek."

"I don't care. It isn't. Old Railton isn't the sort of master one cheeks, and I think he knows how we feel about him."

"Ratty may have——"

"Ratty—— Oh, rats! Catch Ratty interesting himself in a thing like this!"

"Well, if the Head passed it on to him ——"

"I've never heard yet that the old boy was a lunatic! I'm going back, my son!"

"Right-ho! I'll come, too. But you can do the chin-wagging, Tommy."

It did not require much chin-wagging. All Tom said was:

"If you don't mind, sir, it struck us that Figgins is the fellow to look after recruits in the New House. We haven't exactly got a heap of influence there, you know."

A smile lighted up Mr. Railton's face. He knew all about the House feud, and he did not think it sheer wickedness and perversity, as the sour-tempered Mr. Ratcliff did.

"Quite a good idea, Merry," he said. "You might send a youngster across to tell Figgins I should like to see him."

"Figgy mustn't know we suggested it to Railton," said Tom; when they were outside.

"You're jolly careful about Figgy's feelings, old scout!" growled Blake. "But I dare say you're right."

"Hallo, there, young Gibson!" Tom yelled.

Curly Gibson, of the Third, off in a hurry somewhere on an errand of his own, pulled up.

"Well, old Merry?" he asked, safe at the distance.

"Cut across and tell Figgins that Mr. Railton wants to see him at once, will you? "

"Is it for you or for Railton?" asked Curly.

"For both of us," answered Tom.

"Oh, well, I don't know that I mind. I've got to, I suppose, as it's Railton; and I'd sooner do it for you than for most chaps. Only, you know, the Shell can't order the Third about. You needn't get thinking that!"

And Curly departed.

"Do those kids come in?" asked Blake.

"Blessed if I know! Are they old enough?"

"Don't know about that. We didn't find out about the age limit. But my opinion is, Tommy, that Wally & Co. would be worth more than a score like Racke and Crooke and Mellish."

"Well, Racke and Crooke and Mellish don't matter, because they're dead sure not to be in it."

"Just what I thought when Railton was spouting. But, on second thoughts, I think they'd better, for it will do them a heap of good."

"But Railton expressly said that he only wanted volunteers, Blake."

"Well, they'll volunteer all serene. We'll see about that. We can make them, can't we?"

Tom shook his head.

"I think not—not after what old Railton said. Besides, they'd be no use."

"But it would be for their own good," persisted Blake.

"You're jolly keen all at once to do Racke & Co. a good turn, aren't you?"

"I shouldn't be if I thought they'd like it," confessed Blake.

"We can't fly straight in Railton's face, you know, old chap."

"It ain't—as long as he don't know about it. How can you fly in a chap's face when his back's turned?"

"Hallo, deah boys! What was it?" asked Arthur Augustus eagerly.

Gussy, Herries, Dig, Lowther, and Manners were all waiting for the two.

"Cadet Corps," said Tom briefly.

"Rather rot, don't you think?" rejoined Lowther. "We sha'n't have much time to spare for the 'Weekly' ——"

"Bother the 'Weekly'! It's the footer I'm thinking about," put in Herries. "It will cut into that above a bit."

"It's my photography I'm thinking about," confessed Manners. "Not that the idea's a bad one. We ought to have done it before."

"It's a wippin' idea—absolutely wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically.

"Gussy's thinking about the uniform," said Lowther, with a grin.

"Let's hope it's classes it will cut into," said Dig optimistically. "We might ask the Head to let us off German, for one thing. As we shall be getting ready to fight the mouldy Huns when our turn comes, we don't want to waste time mugging up their mouldy language. Besides, old Schneider is really an awful beast!"

"Of course you don't mind going to the Head with the suggestion, Dig?" said Tom.

"Well, I'd make one, like a shot. I don't quite see going alone. I can't talk the hind-leg off a donkey, as some of you chaps can."

"But our respected Head is not a donkey, Dig," observed Lowther gravely.

"Eh? Who said he was, ass?"

"You seemed to infer that he was, ass, in your reference to hind-legs."

"Rats! Anyway, I don't infer it about you!"

"Thanks, Dig! I am glad you are not rude enough for that."

"No; I say it straight out!"

"Weally, Dig, it seems wathah late in the day to be debatin' the question whethah Lowthah is an ass! As a question, indeed, it weally cannot be said to exist. There can be no question about it—none whatevah!"

"And, just to please Tommy and Railton, I've got to join a Cadet Corps that includes that—and that!" said Monty Lowther, with a scornful toss of the head in the direction of Gussy and another in that of Digby.

"Weally, Lowthah, I am surpwised at you! Where is your patwiotism?"

"My—er—which?"

"Patwiotism, I said," replied D'Arcy, with dignity. He looked at Lowther through his monocle as if the humorist of the Shell were some creature of an inferior species.

"Eh? Spell it, will you, Gustavus?"

"P-a-t-r-i-o-t."

"Oh, that! I catch on now. Is it unpatriotic to object to tailors' dummies and thick-headed chumps as fellow-members of the Corps?"

"Dry up, Lowther!" growled Blake. "Wait till Gussy's your superior officer, and you'll get the guard-room for yours, if you try on that sort of chat!"

"Hallo, here's Figgy!" said Tom. "Railton hasn't kept him long."

The face of long-legged George Figgins fairly beamed.

That was partly because he had been called in for a special interview with Mr. Railton, no doubt. The New House thought a lot of Railton. The School House could not return the compliment by thinking a lot of Mr. Ratcliff, and their rivals did not expect it of them. It is no use expecting impossibilities, and Mr. Ratcliff's methods were not of the kind to make him popular.

Blake and Tom Merry did not grudge Figgins his feeling of satisfaction, and had no notion of detracting from it by telling him that they had suggested his being called in. Figgins & Co. were only the enemy in a purely Pickwickian sense. They and Tom Merry & Co. were at heart the best of chums.

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Figgins. "But perhaps you chaps haven't heard about it?"

"Depends upon what it is, Figgy," replied Tom, looking innocent and as ignorant as possible.

"Rats, old son! You can't have me like that! But isn't it a spiffing notion? I've told Railton that he can depend on every New House fellow in the two Forms, of course."

"Oh, have you?" said Manners. "Well, if I'd been you, Figgy, I wouldn't have opened my mouth quite so wide as that."

"Eh? Which of them do you think is going to kick when I say they've jolly well got to come in?" demanded the New House leader wrathfully.

"I should fancy you might have a bit of trouble with Clampe and Chowle, if you ask me," Manners replied.

"I didn't ask you; and I'm not jolly well going to have any trouble with Clampe and Chowle!" retorted George Figgins. "It's Clampe and Chowle who are going to have trouble if they don't toe the line!"

"You can't force them in, you know," Tom said mildly.

"Oh, can't I?" snorted Figgy. "That's all you know about it, Tommy, my son! I jolly well can, and I jolly well will! They didn't want to play in that extra-special House match, you insisted on having, if you remember. But did they turn out or didn't they?"

Tom went red. Figgins had played up like a true sportsman in the matter of what he called "that extra-special House match." He had put into the New House team two rank duffers to balance the two the School House side had been obliged to include through Tom Merry's brag. That had been a really good deed on the part of George Figgins; but Tom would have preferred him to let it lapse into the limbo of the past. It was not often Tom Merry bragged; and he had suffered more than a little through that particular indiscretion.

"This ain't the same," remarked Blake. "Railton says we're not to go in for compulsion."

It was rather inconsistent of Blake, who had been all in favour of pressing "volunteers" a few minutes earlier. But perhaps Blake thought that, with Racke, Crooke, Mellish, Scrope, and Trimble to be taken into account, and Grundy, Cardew, Skimpole, and possibly one or two more likely to take considerable persuading, for various reasons, Figgins, who had only two troublesome members to deal with, was getting rather too big a pull over the School House.

"They'll volunteer all serene," said Figgins. "I'll see that they do!"

And from that resolve no one could move him. George Figgins had his full share of obstinacy. He called it firmness, of course.

"Well, ta-ta, kids!" he said. "I'm off to tell Kerr and old Fatty, and start in at once. Bet you anything you like we get a bigger percentage than you School House bounders do!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Willing and the Unwilling.

"I HEAR that there's a Cadet Corps to be started here. Well, you can put me down!"

It was George Alfred Grundy of the Shell, who spoke thus, putting his head into No. 10 Study, which was crowded.

"We're continually doing it," said Lowther sadly. "In fact, if I were not such a stickler for literal accuracy, I should say we are always doing it! But we knock off occasionally for meals and classes and footer and things!"

"Eh?" said Grundy, rather puzzled. "Always doing what?"

"Putting you down, old scout! But you have a way of bobbing up again. You may bump him and thump him, may do what you will, but he bobs up again, same old George Alfy still!"

"I wouldn't say too much about bumping if I——"

"Well, it isn't very tactful," admitted Lowther. "It must be rather a sore point with you. What licks me is why you keep on asking for it!"

"What will lick you is that!" roared Grundy, putting a shoulder-of-mutton fist under the nose of the humorist of the Shell.

"It might," said Lowther thoughtfully. "Anyway, I shouldn't lick it. It's quite fairly clean—you're not so grubby as some chaps, Grundy, but—well, you know, even when you were Grand Master of the Vehme the chaps didn't take kindly to kissing your lily-white hand in token of homage, and I never——"

"I'm not talking to you! You're a silly ass!" roared Grundy. "Did you hear me, Merry?"

"Couldn't be off it, old fellow. You don't exactly whisper. Do you want me to put down on paper that Lowther's a silly ass? It doesn't seem really necessary to me. And it isn't very original—lots of chaps have said it before!"

"No! I mean did you hear me say that I'd join the Cadet Corps?"

"Oh, yes, I heard that. But I felt sure of it all along. We couldn't get along without you, Grundy!"

Grundy's rugged face fairly beamed at that. A very little flattery went a long way with the great George Alfred; perhaps it was because it was very little he ever got.

"Something's worrying me, Tommy," murmured Lowther.

"What is it, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus unsuspiciously.

"Whether we have a vacancy for a general. I'm not sure that a Cadet Corps has a general—not dead sure, that is. And it's no use at all offering Grundy lower rank than that!"

But it appeared that Grundy knew rather more about the matter than Lowther did.

"There will have to be a sergeant," he said. "We can raise a platoon anyway, and that means a sergeant. You can put my name down for that, Merry! I suppose some of the chaps who call themselves seniors——"

"Well, they are seniors, aren't they?" put in Digby. "What else should they call themselves?"

"Oh, you dry up!" snapped Grundy. The great George Alfred never forgot—or let others forget—that he had had to leave Redclyffe for "whopping a prefect." Any disgrace which practical expulsion might be held to have entailed upon him was, in Grundy's eyes, more than wiped out by the glory that had led to the disgrace. The whole affair had left him with a lofty contempt for seniors, though he did not treat Kildare or Baker or Darrel with much of it!

"Better wait till you're sergeant before you begin issuing commands to me, Grundy!" said Dig, with a grin.

"As I was saying, some of the chaps who call themselves seniors will be bagging the sub-lieutenant's job——"

"'And dukes were three a penny'!" chanted Lowther.

"I'm not talking about dukes, you idiot!"

"That was a quotation, Grundy—from the Gondoliers," explained Lowther blandly.

"Shakespeare, I suppose? You're always trotting out some of his rot. I don't think much of Shakespeare myself. If I cared to go in seriously for plays and poetry and all that twaddle, I could lick his head off!" said Grundy.

"Meanwhile, you might explain how many of our despised seniors you consider it will take to make a Cadet sub-lieutenant? Please do, Grundy! Don't cut it short—you are so interesting!"

And Lowther leaned forward, and put the tips of his fingers together, and gazed up into the rugged face of Grundy with an expression of the most rapt and soulful attention.

"That's right!" said Grundy scathingly. "Look as potty as you are! It might be a job for some people, but——"

"How many seniors—or alleged seniors—to a sub-lieutenant? That is the question, Grundy," said Blake. "Lowther's face is only a side issue—like a monkey-cage at a circus, you know."

"Yes, it's uncommonly like that—but not the cage so much," replied Grundy. "One, of course! I thought you had a little more sense than Lowther, Blake!"

"I thought I had quite a lot more," said Blake.

"Well, you haven't. You fellows are like a lot of silly kids! It would never do for any of you to hold rank as sergeant. But I dare say that with Railton as captain, and Kildare as sub-lieutenant, and Merry and Talbot and Figgins and Noble, say, as corporals, we shall get along very well."

"You've forgotten to name a sergeant, Grundy," said Manners, winking at Tom.

"No, I haven't! Didn't I tell you I'd take on that job? I don't say that the four I have picked out are my final choices as corporals; but I think they ought to do very well. I'll consider it. Sorry I can't stay any longer now; but, of course, though you chaps can't settle anything, you can talk it over without me. There's no harm in talking it over—none at all," said Grundy graciously.

And he went.

"My hat!" gasped Herries. "The cheek of that brazen image is colossal—positively colossal!"

"Good word, old scout!" Dig said approvingly.

"Good? It's the only word."

"Then it's no particular credit to you. I thought you'd chosen it."

"Old Grundy seems to know something about it, though," remarked Tom.

"I am glad to hear that he has shown signs of intelligence," said Lowther. "It's a surprise, but——"

"Well, did you know that a platoon—which means sixty-four men—has to have a sergeant and four corporals?" Tom asked him.

"Can't say I did. But it isn't exactly important knowledge, is it?"

"It's rather more to the point than Shakespeare, or Gilbert, at the present moment, my son. But you'll learn—you'll learn! Get old Grundy to give you a bit of coaching, and you may do us credit yet!"

"My hat, Tommy! It's something new for you to be backing up Grundy. Why don't you resign the junior captaincy, and let him have a shot at it?" asked Lowther, in surprise.

"It wouldn't be for me to nominate my successor if I did resign," said Tom. "Of course, it's rot Grundy's taking it for granted that he's going to be sergeant and choosing his corporals. But it would be just as big rot if I or anyone else did the same thing, you know."

"Oh!" said Lowther, rather blankly.

"Tom's right," said Talbot. "This isn't a game; anybody who thinks it a game had better stay out. Of course, there will be plenty of fun in it; but we're not in it for the fun—that's what I mean. Tom's the right chap to be sergeant; but I suppose it will rest with Railton to choose. And if he chooses someone else, then Tom doesn't let on by as much as a word that he don't like it—that wouldn't be discipline."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom.

"You are quite wight, Talbot—absolutely wight!" chimed in Arthur Augustus warmly. "If I am not a corpowal—I do not anticipate anythin' highah at pwesent, but I considah I have a wight to expect that—but if I am not I shall not gwumble, I assuah you."

"That's a good thing, Gustavus," said Blake. "You won't have to grumble."

"You mean that I shall be——"

"Not at all! I mean you won't. But you're not going to grumble, so it's all right!"

Some of those present had looked rather doubtful when Talbot spoke out. But a moment's thought showed them that he was right. They did not want to be merely playing at soldiers. They wanted to be soldiers in the making. And discipline is the watchword of the Army.

"Let's get to work on the canvassing," suggested Tom.

"Wait a moment! Better look at the list first," said Manners. "I've the Shell one here, and Blake has the Fourth, with marks against the names."

He spread out his list on the table. Manners was always an uncommonly useful sort of fellow when something practical needed to be done. There were names ticked off on his list. There were others with query marks against them. And a few had double query marks. Not until everyone had been sounded could it be taken for granted that there would be refusals; but, all the same, a double query mark pretty well expressed what Manners felt as to the chances of roping in Racke and Crooke and one or two more.

"You've got Gore doubtful," said Talbot, looking over his shoulder.

"Yes. But he didn't seem very doubtful. Said he wouldn't. Wasn't over and above civil, either."

"Tick him off. I'll answer for Gore," Talbot said quietly.

"Right-ho! What you say goes, old scout. But you're the only chap who can do anything with Gore when he's obstinate."

"Then there's Skimmy."

"Well, Skimmy ain't very likely, is he?"

"Scratch those double queries out, and put a tick! I'll answer for Skimmy, too."

Tom looked hard at Talbot. He himself took this business seriously enough; but he had to confess that he lacked something of Talbot's deep earnestness.

But then he understood. He knew Talbot better than any of the rest. A boy in years still, Reginald Talbot, after all he had seen and suffered, was a man in mind and heart. For months past he had been more than commonly quiet. He had not moped. He was as keen as ever on games. But japes had not seemed to appeal to him much; and his chums had seen less of him.

Tom knew now. Talbot's heart was in the trenches, and his body would have been there had it been any way possible for him to enlist! Men were there who had been his comrades of old—comrades in a dark path, it is true; but Talbot was very loyal, and his influence had helped to bring more than one of them into better courses. John Rivers—Marie's father—was out there; soldier of the King now, instead of cracksman. And Talbot, with high courage equal to any strain that could be put upon it, fretted at the leash.

This Cadet business, taken in dead earnest, as Talbot took it, would be a real relief. He would be fitting himself for a soldier's work, if ever his chance came—the chance he longed for!

And as Tom's hand rested a moment on his chum's shoulder some new sense of the seriousness of the thing came to him. He had been keen enough before, but perhaps not quite in Talbot's way.

There would be nothing lacking in future. And Tom's mind was made up that, if he could have his way with Mr. Railton, Talbot, and not he himself, should wear the three stripes of the sergeant's rank.

"I'm off to see Racke and Crooke," he said. "No use worrying about the fellows we know will join—like converting the converted. Best to go for the doubtful cases first, I think."

"Would you call those sweet specimens doubtful cases?" asked Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"Well, no, if you put it that way. I suppose there's very little chance of roping them in; and I'm not sure that I'm keen on having them. But they may as well have an early opportunity of saying 'No.'"

"Mellish is going to join," said Blake unexpectedly.

"What?" asked Tom, hardly able to believe his ears.

"Does he know it?" inquired Lowther, tumbling more quickly.

"Not yet. But he will after I've interviewed him," Blake replied.

"See here, Blake——"

"Oh, you leave me alone, Tommy! Railton put the canvassing for my Form into my hands, and I haven't asked you for help, that I know of."

"Besides, Tom Mewwy, Mellish is weally a beastly slackah, an' it will be suah to do him good," said Gussy.

"I ain't so keen on doing Mellish good. He never did me any," Dig said frankly. "But I think he ought to be made to join up. We shall have lots of drill, and all that, and I don't see worms being allowed to slink out of it just because they are worms!"

"That's the way to look at it," agreed Herries.

The chums of Study No. 6 were of one mind in the matter, that was clear. At such times it was of little use for anyone outside their own immediate circle—even Tom Merry or Talbot—to argue with them.

"Right-ho!" Tom said. "You stand on your own feet, old chap. I don't want to butt in!"

That speech mollified Blake at once.

"Well, Tommy, old scout," he said, "we've got to reckon with Figgy. Can't have the New House bounder crowing over us, you know. Figgy will make good his brag of one hundred per cent., I rather fancy. I want to do the same for my Form. It's your look-out what you do in yours, of course."

"Then you mean to have Trimble, too?" asked Manners.

"Oh, rather! I'm not going to stand Baggy as an unconscientious objector at any price!"

"Sweet creature Baggy will look in uniform!" chuckled Lowther.

"What about yourself? Not that you need to look any bigger ass than you do already, I must say!" was Blake's parting shot.

CHAPTER 4.
Some Kickers!

"PUT your name down here, Mellish!" said Jack Blake, indicating a line on a sheet of foolscap.

"I suppose I may know what I'm signing for first?" said Percy Mellish, who was by long odds the biggest rotter in the Fourth, with the single exception of his stable companion, Baggy Trimble. And it would have been easy to make out a case for Baggy's superiority to Mellish—if only one could have thought of a single good quality with which Baggy might be credited!

Blake snorted. He had entered Study No. 2 alone, but D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby stood just outside.

"I don't see that it's at all necessary," said the Fourth Form leader. "It ought to be good enough that I tell you to sign. But you can look."

"Cadets? Hanged if I'm going in for any muck of that sort!" snarled Mellish.

"Any what?" roared Blake. And the roar was echoed from those outside. Having made up their minds about the movement, the chums of No. 6 were not at all likely to put up with abuse of it from a worm like Mellish.

"Well, it's rot! Playing at soldiers! Not for me, thank you!"

"Playing at soldiers be hanged!" snapped Blake. "You'll jolly soon find that you're not playing when you get under military discipline, I can tell you, my tulip!"

"That's why I'm not joining!" retorted Mellish. "I get fed up with school discipline, and I'm not taking any more, thanks!"

"But you are!" Blake roared.

Baggy Trimble was trying to execute a strategic retreat. The dislike Mellish had to military discipline could not exceed Baggy's. Indeed, the very thought of marching and drilling and trench-digging gave Baggy the shivers.

But the three in the passage would not let Baggy pass.

"Who's going to make me?" demanded Mellish, with a spiteful gleam in his greenish eyes.

"I am!"

"Well, you'd better start in right away!"

"I will! Come in, you fellows! Mellish has to be persuaded."

"Baggy seems to need a bit of that, too," said Dig.

"Here, I say, you know, you can't make me join a Cadet Corps, you know! I ain't old enough!" burbled the fat slacker.

"You're about the same age as we are," said Herries, driving Baggy before him as he advanced into the room.

"Yes—at least—well, anyway, I ain't strong enough!"

"Oh, you will get stwongah, Twimble!" said Gussy encouragingly. "Dwill an' all that is no end stwengthenin', you know. Buck up, deah boy! Nevah say die!"

"I should die jolly soon if I had to drill every day and carry a beastly rifle and a rotten pack!" whined Baggy.

"You really think you'd die?" asked Herries.

"Yes. Don't I say so, you fathead?"

"That don't prove anything. But if you believe it will make you peg out, it's more of a patriotic duty than ever. Think how much better St. Jim's will be without you!"

"Think how much grub would be saved!" chimed in Dig. "Why, your kicking the bucket might win the war! Every little helps."

"But I don't want to win the war! I don't care about the war! 'Tain't my bizney!" howled Baggy.

"He doesn't want to win the war! Bump the rotter!" cried Herries.

"Half a jiff! Here's Mellish asking to be bumped first. Baggy can wait," said Blake. "After all, no power on earth is ever likely to make Baggy an efficient. In the long run, he'll have to be kicked out. But it's different with Mellish. He's a weed, but he's not hopeless."

It may have been this very limited compliment, or it may have been the prospect of a bumping if he held out; but, anyway, Mellish began to reconsider his decision—if anything Mellish meant could be called a decision.

"Look here, Blake! If you'd come to me in a decent way——" he whined.

"Oh, I'll be as decent as you like! I'll gush—as well as I can. Mr. Mellish—Lord Mellish—your Grace—will you do your humble and obedient servants the favour of appending your illustrious——"

"Dry up! I didn't mean rot like that! I suppose nearly everyone else is coming in?"

"Rather!"

Still Mellish hesitated. He was thinking of Racke and Crooke.

He dipped his pen in the ink. After all, the services of Racke and Crooke could hardly be called profitable service. And that was what it came to. Mellish was no fool, and he knew that. Poor and mean-spirited, he could never be better than a hanger-on of the wealthy Racke and the well-to-do Crooke. He ran their errands, and sometimes ran some risks in doing so. Mellish hated taking risks. He put up with their sneers. And every now and then they tossed him a so-called loan, much as one might toss a bone to an importunate dog. It is true that Mellish never repaid these loans, and that Racke and Crooke knew he would not repay—they knew he could not.

"Oh, I'll sign!" he said. "I'm not keen, but I may as well be in it."

And he signed.

Blake turned to Baggy, who was staring open-mouthed at Mellish.

"Oh, you are a silly chump, Mellish!" snorted Baggy. "They can't make you. There ain't any compulsion for Cadets, and I don't care if there is! I shall be a Conscientious Objector!"

"You'll be bumped!" said Herries grimly.

"Yow-ow! Lemme be! You can't——"

"Wrong, Baggy—wrong! We can, and we will!"

"Oh, stoppit! Stoppit, I say! I'll appeal to Railton!"

"Much good that's going to do!" snapped Dig. "Why, Railton will be the corps captain!"

"The Head, then! I—I——"

"The Head says that it's his expwess wish that ewewyone shall join up," said Arthur Augustus, surveying the squirming Baggy through his monocle with infinite contempt. Gussy could not understand funk. If there had been a call for boys of fifteen to go out and man the trenches, without a day's training, Gussy would have responded with something like joy.

"Yah! You think I'm going to believe——"

"Go and ask them!" snapped Blake.

But that did not suit Baggy. He wanted to slack; but he did not want to advertise himself as a slacker to the authorities.

"I—I—— Look here, if Mellish is going to join, I suppose I may as well," he said dismally.

And he signed.

Blake was quite pleased.

"Baggy's no use," he said. "But he counts one; and we're not going to let those New House swankers have it all their own way!"

From which it will be perceived that Blake, sound as he was, had not yet come to look at the matter in the proper light—the light in which Tom Merry and Talbot saw it. But it would not be long before he did, for the right spirit was in him.

Julian & Co. signed as one man, though on four lines. Bates and Macdonald, Mulvaney minor and Tompkins, Lorne and Jones minor, Smith minor and Wyatt, and Contarini and Lumley-Lumley, needed no argument.

"It's going swimmingly," said Blake, as they stopped before the door of Study No. 9.

"Oh, come in, if you feel like it!" drawled Cardew, in reply to a tap.

The four entered. Cardew was alone. Clive and Levison might go out on such a beastly day as this was, but Cardew pretended that he was afraid of getting wet. It was the merest pose; but Ralph Reckness Cardew was fond of posing.

"Take a seat," said Cardew, with languid politeness. "Pleased to see you, I'm sure. Nice day—I mean, beastly day—isn't it, by gad?"

"A seat each?" snapped Herries.

"Yaas, deah boy, of course."

"Then you'll have to get up, for there ain't chairs enough."

"On second thoughts, don't take a seat each—take one among you! You don't look the least bit fatigued, I must say. It's a standin' wonder to me how you fellows keep on keepin' on bein' so dashed vigorous! Is this a deputation?"

"Not exactly," answered Blake. "But you can call it so, if you like."

"My dear man, why should I call it anythin'? I'm not runnin' it, y'know. What's it all about, if the question's permissible?"

Cardew was in his most obstinate and provoking mood, that was easily to be seen. The four began to wish that they had left him until later, when Levison and Clive were there. Cardew's chums could not always influence him, but when they could not it was tolerably certain that no one else could.

"You've heard about the Cadet Corps?" said Blake.

"I've heard about Cadet Corps, certainly. Muscular an' vigorous youths like you four, playin' hard at bein' soldiers. Quite a dashed nice amusement, by gad, for anyone whose tastes happen to lie that way! Mine don't. To let you into a rather open secret, Blake, I don't care much about playin' at anythin'. Born tired, I think. Not my fault—what? You've heard about the effete an' worn-out aristocracy—eh? Well, I'm one of them. I'm not braggin' about it, of course. Sometimes, when I'm feelin' unusually energetic in the brain-box—if any—I feel quite sorry for myself, y'know. Not my fault, I'm sure you'll agree."

Cardew's slow, even drawl went on, and the faces of his four visitors began to look almost fierce. But they did not interrupt him. It was best to let Cardew have his say out, in spite of any impatience one might feel with him.

He paused now, and Gussy chipped in at once.

"But it is your dutay to join up, Cardew," said the swell of the Fourth, using his monocle without any visible effect upon Cardew. "What is an awistocwacy worth if it fails to give a lead to the othah chaps, don'tcherknow?"

"I never said it was worth anythin', did I, dear boy?" drawled Cardew. "Between you an' me, I doubt whether it is. The future lies with democracy—includin', of course, such of the other gang as, like yourself, have the virtues of the democracy, the vigour of its boundin' youth—it does bound a bit, doesn't it?—and——"

"Look here, Cardew," snapped Herries, "we haven't jolly well come here for your gas!"

Cardew yawned behind a slim, white hand.

"Sorry!" he said politely. "My mistake. I'm always makin' them, as that weird bird Goggs says. I really thought you had. In the absence of Clive an' Levison, gas is about all you're likely to get here. Unlimited supply of that, by gad! I find that talkin's the one thing I can do without gettin' bored. 'Fraid the other chaps get bored now an' then, though. You bored, by any chance? If so, say so. I don't mind!"

"We want you to join the St. Jim's Cadet Corps, Cardew," said Blake, with as much patience as he could muster.

"Can't be did," replied Cardew. "I've told you that the notion of playin' at soldiers hasn't any attraction for me."

"We're not going to play at soldiers, you idiot!" said Dig wrathfully.

"Not? Well, I'll take your word for it. But I thought that was the—er—raison d'etre of a Cadet Corps. My mistake again, no doubt!"

"Levison and Clive are joining up," Blake said.

"Of course! It would appeal to them. They're out runnin' now, plasterin' themselves with mud, an 'enjoyin' it. They play footer on positively horrid days. But they don't force me out, y'know."

"Do you mean that you won't join?" demanded Herries.

"I've been tryin' to make you understand just that."

"You are a w'etched slackah, Cardew!" said Gussy hotly.

"I'm a bit of a slacker, I know. Not exactly wretched, though I don't find life as interestin' as you chaps do."

"And you ought to be bumped!" roared Digby.

"Well, I don't doubt that you four—all so dashed vigorous an' all that—could bump me. But some of you would get hurt before the operation was put through," drawled the dandy. "An' I shouldn't do what you want after you'd finished."

"Oh, come away!" growled Blake. "It's not a scrap of use talking to him!"

"Ta-ta!" said Cardew as they went.

CHAPTER 5.

Talbot Takes a Hand!

THE four repaired to Study No. 10 on the Shell passage, which was for the time being General Headquarters.

There they found the Terrible Three and Talbot, with Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn, from the New House.

"Got 'em all—every man-jack! One hundred per cent. from the New House. Shell, and Fourth, Blake, my bonnie boy! How's that suit you, eh?" chortled Figgy.

"It's jolly good!" said Blake generously.

"But you wouldn't have done it here," added Herries.

"Oh, wouldn't I? I'll admit that this House is a scratch sort of dog-kennel," replied Figgins, with more confusion than politeness. "But anything can be done if you go to work the right way—anything! Can't it, Kerr?"

"Well, almost anything, Figgy," answered Kerr, with native Scots caution and also with a broad grin.

"What way did you go to work with your rotters?" asked Tom Merry.

"We've only two—Clampe and Chowle—and they aren't quite so bad as the School House ruffians, though they're bad enough," replied Figgy. "Chowle was bumped three times, and then he caved in. Clampe was a bit more trouble. Fatty had to sit on his head."

"Is Clampe still alive?" inquired Lowther. "A dead Cadet, you know, Figgy, wouldn't——"

"Oh, rats! Old Figgy's way is the right way!" cried Dig.

"Lend us Fatty, will you?" asked Herries.

"I'll come, all serene," said Fatty kindly. "I could sit on Trimble's head for a week. There's Mellish, too; I don't mind——"

"But Mellish and Trimble have both signed!" said Blake.

"What's the difficulty, then?" asked Manners.

"Cardew! The silly ass won't take it seriously. Says it's playing at soldiers."

"That's a pity, Blake," said Talbot. "You can't get Cardew in the same way as Figgins did Clampe and Chowle. He's a different kind."

"I know," Blake said. "We worked it Figgy's way with Baggy and the dear Percy. Percy wasn't bumped at all, though—only threatened—and Baggy was only bumped a few."

"I don't like it," Tom remarked, shaking his head. "You know what Railton said, old scout! There will be trouble over this compulsion bizney."

"I suppose you've taken 'No' from Racke and Crooke and Scrope like a lamb?" rapped out Blake.

"I don't know that I was lamblike. But they refused, and I just told them what I thought of them and came away."

"Tommy was quite eloquent," said Lowther, grinning. "He told the sweet trio that they were dingy, smoky, blackguards, a disgrace to any decent school, and funks in grain. He said, moreover, that we didn't want them, and that inviting them to join was only a matter of form. He added that they would only rot up the thing if they did join. He went on to say——"

"Cheese it! That's enough! I withdraw my charge," said Blake. "Tommy wasn't lamblike at all. I couldn't have talked to them better myself."

"But that sort of thing won't go with Cardew," Talbot said gravely. "And we do want Cardew, you know."

"We want all the rotters," said Figgins.

It was an unexpected speech, and they all stared at him—all but Kerr and Fatty, who understood. In a general way, no one was more down on rotters than George Figgins. He was absolutely straight, and downright almost to a fault

"What in the wide world for?" asked Lowther.

"Oh, you chaps are unpractical bounders! Haven't you counted up the Shell and Fourth? If we let them stand out, how are we going to get a platoon? A platoon's sixty-four, you know, not fourteen or thirty-four, as you seem to have been vainly imagining."

"Better not have a full platoon than have fellows in it who are no good to it," said Tom thoughtfully.

"We're bound to have a full platoon, fathead!" snapped Figgins.

"See here, Talbot, you go and talk to Cardew, will you?" said Tom.

"And to Racke & Co.!" added Figgy.

Talbot shook his head.

"I'll do what you want, Tom, though I don't believe I have the least influence with Cardew. But it would be worse than useless for me to tackle the others. It would only make them more set to refuse."

That was true. Racke and Crooke hated Talbot poisonously. It was not too certain that Cardew liked him much. Cardew's mocking manner jarred upon Talbot at times, and Cardew knew that, and mocked the more for the knowledge.

Talbot went off at once, while the rest sat down to count up lists, and discuss the important matter of getting a full platoon.

"Come in!" drawled Cardew, and Talbot went in.

"I've come to ask you to change your mind about the Cadet Corps," said Talbot, without any beating about the bush.

"Waste of time, dear boy!" said Cardew. "It isn't an absolute dashed certainty that I possess anythin' worth callin' a mind, except, of course, in the polite fiction way. And, though always polite, I'm sure, you're not given to fiction, Talbot. You're so dashed earnest an' solemn, you know! It makes me ache to look at you."

Talbot was irritated, but he would not show it. He knew well how much good stuff there was under the seeming frothiness of this fellow.

"You don't do yourself justice, Cardew," he said quietly.

"Oh, I leave that to other people, by gad! An' trust that they will temper it with mercy, y'know."

"You really ought to join."

"As there's no one else present, an' I know you prefer plain speakin', Talbot, may I remark that I don't see that it's for you to tell me what I ought to do? It's takin' a little too much on yourself, I think."

It was just what Talbot had expected. Cardew resented his interference. His tone was unmistakably hostile now.

Talbot felt that he had done all that could be asked of him.

"Very well, Cardew," he said. "I won't press you farther. I'd like you to understand, though, that I came here in quite a friendly way."

"Dash it, Talbot, I'm sure of that!" said Cardew, in a less mocking tone. "I say—don't think me rude—how old are you?"

"Rather nearer sixteen than fifteen," was the reply.

"Oh! Not fifty, by any chance? I feel quite that myself, at times; but there's somethin' about you when you're in dead earnest that gives me a dashed juvenile feelin'. So long, if you won't stay!"

"It's no go," Talbot reported.

But Cardew joined up next day, with Levison and Clive. Probably they had persuaded him.

He would not admit that, however.

"It's for the fun of the thing," he said. "It is funny, y'know. The deadly seriousness of some of you chaps is the most humorous thing I've seen for a dog's age! An', on the other side, there's Baggy. Baggy in khaki will be a sight for gods an' men an' little fishes; an' by joining I get the maximum opportunity of revellin' in it. An' Grundy, too! Grundy's comic turns always appeal to me. I regard the bizney as a variety show, an' the drill an' all that as the price of admission. Don't glare at me, Merry, old scout; everyone can't think alike. 'Tot homines, tot sententiæ,' as some old Roman ass said. An' them's my sententiæ—take 'em or leave 'em!"

"That chap's more than half potty!" remarked Dig, when Cardew had lounged away.

"No more potty than you are, Dig," said Blake. "It's only his silly way. I say, Merry, what about those Third Form fags? We sha'n't get a full platoon if we don't take some of them, you know."

"I'll go and ask Railton," said Tom. "The kids are keen enough, anyway; and some of them must be near enough fourteen to be let in at a pinch."

The Shell and Fourth numbered sixty-two, all told. As Racke, Crooke, and Scrope were standing out, the number was whittled down to fifty-nine. The appointment of five N.C.O.'s from these would cut it down further to fifty-four, of course.

Wally & Co., of the Third, were no end keen, and full of indignation that they had not been allowed to join up at once. Wally and Reggie Manners had discussed the possibility of getting birth certificates and altering the dates; in such a cause a little wangle like that, they considered, would be harmless, if not actually laudable.

But Frank Levison and Joe Frayne pronounced it off, and Hobbs and Jameson and Gibson thought it too risky, so the scheme had not materialised.

Perhaps a bit of information which Frank had got from somewhere had as much to do with killing it as anything; neither Wally nor Reggie thought a birth certificate cheap at three shillings and sevenpence!

CHAPTER 6.
Racke's Plot!

"WELL, of all the silly, fat-headed chumps I ever saw, you chaps are the worst!" said Crooke.

Clampe and Chowle, of the New House, had looked in upon Racke and Crooke, with whom was Scrope. The School House called those three "the Civilians" now. As Lowther had remarked, calling them "conscientious objectors" would be dead off, as there was not the smallest particle of evidence that any one of the trio possessed a conscience.

Racke and Crooke and Scrope were smoking comfortably, and beguiling the hours with that intellectual pastime known as banker.

Clampe and Chowle were in Cadet uniform, and had been beguiling the hours with much drill.

St. Jim's had always had drill, of course; and for the great majority of the newly-enrolled Cadets there was a good groundwork to base anything new upon.

Clampe and Chowle and Mellish and Trimble had not often been able to wangle out of the school drill, though they had done so whenever possible. But they had shirked it in every way they could think of, and they were a long way behind the rest. So they had been constituted an awkward squad, and were being given frequent extra drill to enable them to catch up to the rest.

"Don't rub it in!" answered Clampe, rubbing his heated face.

"No, better rub it off!" said Crooke, with a grin. "You're in a positively disgustin' state of perspiration, ain't he, Racke?"

"They both are," Racke said. "Anyone might take them for common workmen, by gad! I wouldn't lower myself to perspire like that."

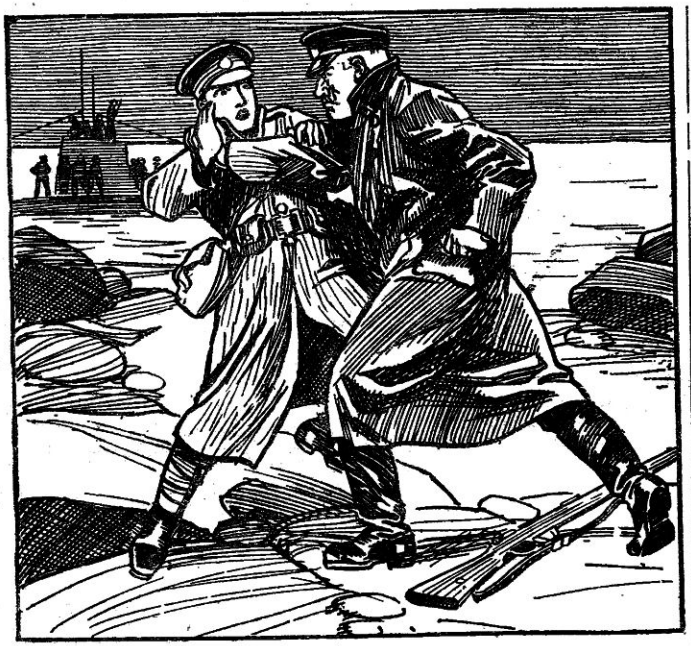
"You jolly well would, though, if you had what we've been gettin'!" Chowle replied, sinking into an armchair. "Pass a fellow a smoke, Crooke!"

"I wasn't fool enough to let myself in for it," sneered Racke. "It licks me how you fellows came to let that bounder Figgins talk you over."

Clampe and Chowle looked at one another. Hitherto they had maintained with their School House friends the fiction that they had been persuaded verbally, in the belief that Racke and Crooke had already given in their adhesion. But now they felt that the truth had to be told, even though it entailed the admission that they had lied before.

"As a matter of fact——" began Clampe, and he looked at Chowle again.

"We weren't actually talked over," continued Chowle. And he waited for



From the Submarine!
(See Chapter 12.)

his panting partner in misfortune to continue the confession.

"It was more in the way of being forced into it," Clampe added.

"Yes, that's the word—forced," said Chowle.

"Pony up, Crooke! You owe me a quid!" cried Racke triumphantly.

"What for?" growled Crooke, never keen on parting with money.

"I bet you two to one that's how it was, and that these silly asses would let it out sooner or later without our askin' them."

"So you did; I remember now," Crooke replied, with a scowl at the two blades from the New House. "I think those two rotters ought to shell out for me. They told us a whole pack of lies!"

And Crooke's face took on an expression that would better have become that of the late lamented George Washington.

But Crooke must have had a bad lapse of judgment if he had laid a bet on the true-speaking of any of his own shady crowd. They were not given to telling the truth, even to one another.

Scrope cackled. He had had no drill, and he had not lost a quid. He felt very superior for the moment.

Clampe turned on him fiercely.

"Stop that silly row!" he howled. "You'd have been in it if Merry had played the same game as Figgins. Racke an' Crooke might have held out, but you never would have done!"

"Well, Merry didn't. An' if he didn't, you may take it that it was because he funked it," answered Scrope. "He didn't let any of us off through kindness of heart, you bet!"

"You ought to see Baggy!" put in Chowle. "Talk about Clampe an' me sweatin'! We're nothin' to Baggy! I'll bet he's wet through to the shirt! Kildare got quite ratty with him. He was pretty snappy with the lot of us before we'd finished. But Baggy's a hopeless case."

"We don't want to see Baggy!" growled Crooke. "You chaps are enough for us. You fairly reek—like beastly haymakers on a blazin' hot day!"

"An' all to be ordered about by Kildare!" sneered Racke. "I should have thought takin' orders from Monteith would be enough for you, without goin' out of your way to be trampled on by our House skipper!"

"Well, Kildare's captain of the school. A chap wouldn't so much mind him," said Scrope. "An' we have to knuckle under to Railton, anyway. But, Sergeant Talbot! Oh, my hat!"

"An' Corporal Merry! Great Scott!" chimed in Racke.

"An' Corporal Grundy! They're in Grundy's section, or whatever the asses call it! Just fancy being bossed by Grundy!" chortled Crooke.

"An' all the fags are in their section!" went on Scrope. "That's because old Grundy's such a known duffer that they gave him the riffraff to handle, I suppose. But even the fags ain't in the awkward squad!"

But it would have been grossly unfair to Grundy had any such arrangement been made, and, of course, it had not been. The fags had wanted to be in the same section, and the four duffers had got into it by chance. It was not known by the rank and file, but it was nevertheless a fact that Tom Merry, Grundy, Figgins, and Blake—the four corporals—had drawn lots for their sections. And Grundy had openly exulted at getting what was recognised as being a scratch section. He'd make them buck up and look lively, he said.

It did not appear that he had as yet succeeded in making Baggy Trimble buck up and look lively. A discreet knock at the door had come just as Scrope finished speaking, and Baggy and Mellish, both in uniform, had been admitted.

Mellish looked rather less completely washed-out than any one of the others. Grundy said he had hopes of Mellish. But unfortunately, Mellish did not share those hopes. He was already quite fed-up.

As for Baggy, no words are strong enough to do full justice to his forlorn state. A very little exercise was enough to make Baggy perspire. He began to puff almost before he had begun to move. He hated stooping, unless the objective was a keyhole. Swedish drill seemed to the hapless Trimble the most diabolical set of devices ever invented.

"Wuf-f-f-f!" he snorted. "Yow-w-w!" he groaned. "Come out of that chair, Chowle, and let a chap sit down! You got away before I did, and it ain't possible that a skinny beggar like you should feel it as much as I do! Ow-yow! I ache all over! A very little more would have killed me!"

"Pity Kildare stopped, then!" growled Crooke.

"What are you chaps grinning at, I'd like to know? If there was any notion of fair play in this beastly place, you'd be in this with us! I don't see why you shouldn't be forced to come in now. What's sauce for the—— Ow-yow!"

"An' what is sauce for the Ow-yow, Baggy?" asked Racke, with a sneering smile.

"Compulsion, of course—being jolly well made to join up!"

"But you didn't have compulsion," replied Racke. "Railton especially barred that, I hear!"

"Oh, did he?" snarled Mellish.

"Oh, didn't we?" burbled Baggy. "We had compulsion, right enough. And 'tain't fair that you chaps shouldn't have had it, too. No, I'm not going to smoke, Scrope! I should only be ill after that rotten drill; it's shaken me all up inside. I expect you want to make me ill!"

"You'll go before that happens, Trimble," said Racke. "We can't have prize pigs bein' ill in our study."

"Not jolly well likely!" agreed Crooke. "Shall I kick him out now?"

"Ow! If you kick me, Crooke, something serious will happen. I ain't in a state to stand it!" moaned Baggy.

"Let him stay," Racke said.

There seemed to be something in Racke's mind. He shuffled cards in an absent-minded way, and kept a wary eye on Clampe and Chowle and Mellish all the time One might have thought that he had a scheme ready, and was only waiting to be asked to tell it. And one would not have been far wrong.

"Look here, Racke, you can say what you like; but it was jolly well compulsion in our House!" said Chowle irritably. "You couldn't call it anythin' else! They were all on to us—Figgins & Co., Redfern & Co., Pratt, Thompson, Clarke—the whole rotten crowd!"

"That's where you were asses," said Racke quite calmly. "It was only compulsion if you were weak enough to let it be. You should have held out."

"Oh, you silly chump! What could we have done?" groaned Clampe.

"That's a dead easy one," replied Racke. "I could answer it in three words, an' I will, too. Appeal to Ratty!"

For a moment the New House victims of the press-gang sat silent. Baggy and Mellish looked disappointed. Crooke grinned. Scrope was puzzled.

"I don't see that we were likely to get any change out of Ratty," said Clampe slowly. "He's an old rotter, an' he cares no more about fair play than—oh, than you do, Racke!"

"Besides, he don't exactly love us," added Chowle.

"Oh, you fatheaded chumps! Does he

love Figgins? Wouldn't he catch at a chance to punish Figgins an' all that crowd for terrorisin' you two harmless suckin'-doves? An' ain't he half a Pacifist? If Ratty had his way the war would stop to-morrow!"

"Which would be nasty for the chaps who are makin' millions out of it—eh, Aubrey?" sneered Crooke. Racke and Crooke were chums, after their fashion; and certainly Crooke would have had no scruples about handling as much money made by profiteering as might come his way. But Crooke seldom missed the chance of a sneer at Young Moneybags, who would never have seen the inside of St. Jim's but for the profiteering activities of Messrs. Racke & Hacke.

Racke took no notice of Crooke. He was watching Clampe and Chowle.

"By gad!" said Clampe. "There's somethin' in that!"

"Everythin' in it!" answered Racke, with conviction.

"It don't help us, though," whined Baggy. "Ratty won't——"

"Yes, he will, you silly fat duffer! If you'd the brains of a flea you'd tumble to it that nothin' would suit Ratty better than kickin' up the merry dickens of a fuss about the whole bizney. An' it will be better for him to have four cases of persecution than only two. Besides, this will give him a chance to interfere in Railton's House, an' the old alligator always clutches at that."

"By jingo, there's somethin' in it—there's a heap in it!" cried Chowle.

"How would you go to work, Racke?" asked Clampe.

"I? Oh, I should never have had to. You don't catch me submittin' to compulsion."

"Don't rub it in! I mean, if you were us," returned Leslie Clampe sulkily.

"I should go to Ratty straight away, an' lay my complaint. Don't say anythin' about Mellish an' Trimble till you're asked. You'll be asked. Ratty won't miss such an openin' for makin' trouble over here."

"By gad, you're deep, Racke!" said Clampe. "Chowle, are you game to come? The Ratty-bird won't be pleasant, of course; he never is. But he can't very well cane us for submittin' to the tyranny of a whole mob, an' who cares a hang about his jawin'?"

"I'll come," replied Chowle. "But I think Mellish an' Baggy ought to go to Railton at the same time. I don't see doin' their——"

"I'm jolly well not going!" bleated Baggy. "I don't trust Railton."

"Don't spoil the whole bizney by anythin' so idiotic as that." Racke warned the two. "It will work better if Ratty goes to Railton. You take my tip!"

"Come along, Chowle! There's time to catch the beggar before prep," said Clampe.

They went. Baggy waddled away, groaning dismally. Scrope lounged out, and Mellish followed him. Mellish was quite fed up with drill; but he was not sure that he was keen on being included in this scheme. For Mellish was also rather fed up with being considered a worm, and to pose as the victim of tyranny was to look even more of a worm than usual.

But when it came to a choice of ways, Percy Mellish generally let things slide, and took the wrong one in the event.

"What's the game, old man?" asked Crooke, when he and Racke were left alone together.

"Can't you see?" snarled Racke. "Have you forgotten the things that outsider Merry said to us when we told him we weren't on?"

"Hadn't thought much about them," confessed Crooke. "It's not the first time we've had the rough side of Tom Merry's tongue."

"Does that make it any better? See here, Crooke, I'm on for smashin' up their giddy Cadet Corps!"

"That can't be done by gettin' those four slackers out," growled Crooke. "They'll shove in four more Third-Form fags, an' go on better than ever."

"But it gets Ratty up against the whole bizney. That's somethin' to be goin' on with. An' I'm not stoppin' at this, you bet, my pippin!"

CHAPTER 7.
Trouble!

"YOU will come with me to Mr. Railton," said Mr. Ratcliff, in his most acid tones. "This matter must not be allowed to rest here. I have the most rooted objection to any form of compulsion. I will not tolerate the introduction of such methods into this school. But your folly in dallying so long with the matter surprises—indeed, amazes—me! Why did you not appeal at once? Why did you wait until days had passed, and you had actually got into uniforms, before you had the sense—— Pah! You are really little better than imbeciles!"

Clampe and Chowle did not relish that sort of talk. It was scarcely flattering. But they could stand it. In a few minutes they anticipated taking off for ever the uniform they had already grown to hate.

"Are Figgins and—er—the rest of them to come, too, sir?" asked Clampe.

"You may leave the management of this affair entirely to me. I have no use for impudent suggestions from self-convicted weaklings!" snapped the Housemaster.

But, after a moment's reflection, he sent for Figgins, Kerr, Fatty Wynn, and Dick Redfern. The selection was an easy one; and it had the additional merit, in the eyes of Mr. Ratcliff, of including all the juniors whom he most heartily disliked.

The four came. It was easy for them to guess what was wrong, and they looked daggers at the traitors. Even from Clampe and Chowle they had expected better things than sneaking.

It was now the hour of prep, and none of the School House fellows were in evidence as Mr. Ratcliff marched his very mixed band through the passages to Mr. Railton's study.

Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, happened to be there.

Messrs. Ratcliff and Selby, though very much alike in their ways, were by no means chummy. They glared at one another now. Each considered the other an intrusive person.

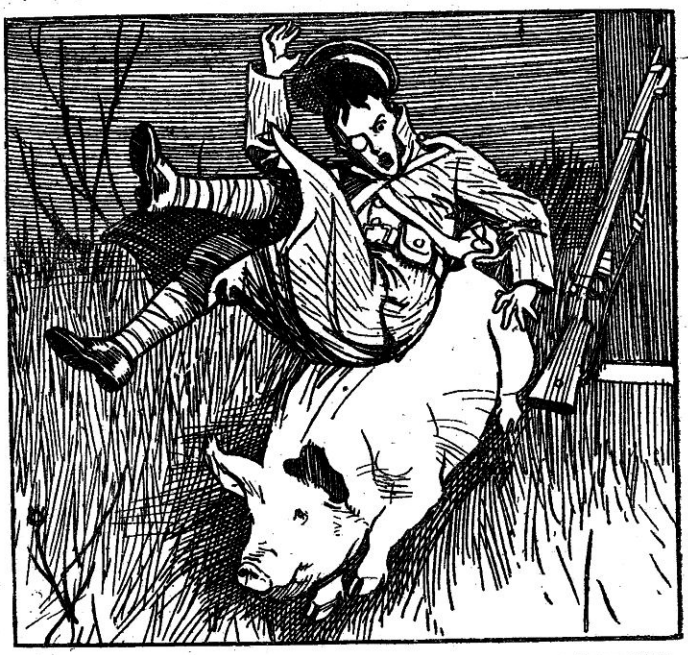
Mr. Ratcliff had pushed his way in without waiting for his impatient tap at the door to be answered. If he had waited, no doubt the Housemaster and Mr. Selby would have settled their business before he entered. As it was, he heard the concluding words spoken by Mr. Railton.

"The Head's authority is paramount, Selby! It was not I, as you appear to think, who arranged that the boys from your Form—only a few of them, however—should miss classes on Friday afternoon for a route march. It was Dr. Holmes. To him your complaint, if you really think that you have a complaint, must be presented. I cannot deal with it. And, if you will excuse plain speaking, I am surprised that you should try to throw obstacles in the way of the Cadet training."

"Oh, very well—very well, indeed!" replied Mr. Selby, in his most grinding voice. "I will not say that I am grateful for your so-called plain speaking, Railton, for that would not be true."

"I did not expect gratitude," said the School House master quietly.

"But I will say that I am not surprised



"Who Comes There!"
(See Chapter 11.)

at anything you do or say!" went on the Third Form master, his temper most thoroughly lost. "You refer me to the Head. What is the use of that? The Head is a mere figure-head; his authority is usurped by you."

"You had better repeat that to Dr. Holmes!" snapped Mr. Railton. "I do not care to answer such an absurd speech."

"Wait, Mr. Selby, if you please," struck in Mr. Ratcliff, seeing the chance of securing an ally. "I also am here on this Cadet business. I think that it would be well if——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Ratcliff, but I have said all that I have to say to Mr. Selby!" the School House master interrupted him.

"Are you ordering me out of your room, Railton?" snarled the master of the Third.

"Certainly not! Stay if you choose."

"You boys can come in," grated Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Railton frowned. He had had not the least idea that there were any boys in the passage; and that the conversation between himself and the crusty Third Form master should have been even partially overheard annoyed him extremely.

But the four New House juniors who marched in, headed by Figgins, had the discretion to betray by no sign whatever that they were moved to mirth by what they had heard. Possibly they were not. Their sympathies were entirely with Mr. Railton.

"Where are Clampe and Chowle?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Don't know, sir," was the cheery response of George Figgins.

"We're here, sir," spoke the still, small voice of Cyril Chowle, and the two malcontents entered.

"Are there any more to come?" asked Mr. Railton, pursing his lips.

"Yes! I desire the presence of Merry, Blake, Mellish, and Trimble," answered the New House master sourly.

"Would you oblige me by asking Merry and Blake to come here, Kerr? Clampe, if Mr. Ratcliff permits, you might request the presence of Mellish and Trimble."

Kerr went, with a grin. Already Railton had sorted them out, it seemed. He must have guessed something of what was coming.

Mr. Ratcliff nodded to Clampe, and Clampe departed sullenly. He was not so sure now that this dodge of Racke's devising was so very smart.

"Will you take a seat, Mr. Ratcliff?" said the School House master politely.

"Thank you, but I prefer to stand!"

"Perhaps you will, Mr. Selby?"

"I will not, sir!" snapped the irate Third Form master.

Mr. Railton arose, and stood with his elbow upon the mantelshelf. Not a word more was spoken by anyone until the whole company had gathered.

Which were the sheep, which the goats, depended upon one's point of view. But the two parties separated themselves naturally. Tom Merry and Jack Blake took their stand at once with Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and Redfern. Mellish and Trimble sidled to places behind Clampe and Chowle, who would on the whole much have preferred to be behind Trimble and Mellish.

A whimsical accident caused the four objectors to be in khaki, while the six on the other side were all in ordinary attire, not having been detained for extra drill.

The First Article of the
"ST. JIM'S GALLERY"
Series is unavoidably held over till next week.

CHAPTER 8.
Mr. Ratcliff is Not Satisfied!

"NOW, Mr. Ratcliff, what is your complaint?" asked Mr. Railton.

"I have a very grave charge to bring against these boys!" snapped the New House master, indicating the half-dozen by a wave of his hand.

"Including the two from my House?"

"Certainly! I have yet to learn, Mr. Railton, that a charge brought against boys in your House constitutes an offence in your eyes!"

"You are not likely to hear from me that it does," was the quiet reply. "But, of course, the charge must be substantiated before I can take action upon it."

"Oh, it shall be substantiated—have no fear as to that! I charge all six of these boys with having used methods of tyranny and oppression in connection with this Cadet Corps business!"

Into the last three words Mr. Ratcliff threw all the biting, withering scorn of which he was capable. But it did not appear to impress anyone much—not even Mr. Selby.

Mr. Railton looked at the six.

"I am sorry to hear this," he said. "You should beware of introducing wrong methods into a right cause. But I beg your pardon, Mr. Ratcliff; I must not say more till I have your charge plainly stated."

"I consider that I have already stated it quite explicitly!"

"I beg to differ. Your complaint is very vague and general. Three of these six boys are Cadet corporals. Has it any reference to their conduct in that capacity? If so, how do the other three come in?"

Mr. Ratcliff sniffed unpleasantly.

"I know, and I desire to know, nothing whatever of the—er—I suppose I must say rank in your—er—corps of the juniors I have summoned hither," he said. "My complaint is that, by physical violence or threats to use physical violence, they compelled unwilling boys to join it!"

"Merry and Blake, I warned you that nothing in the way of compulsion was permissible!" said Mr. Railton sternly. "If I forgot—as I believe I did—to give you the same warning, Figgins, perhaps Mr. Ratcliff may accept it as some excuse——"

"I shall certainly do nothing of the kind!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Indeed, I am not sure that it can be asked of you. Figgins has plenty of common-sense. He should have known better."

Blake had been nudging Tom, trying to make him speak. But Tom remained obstinately silent. So Blake spoke up.

"Tom Merry's out of this, sir," he said. "He didn't do anything of the sort. And he warned me that you had said we weren't to. Whoever's to blame, he isn't."

"Oh, cheese it, old chap!" muttered Tom.

"You admit your own guilt, Blake?"

"Yes, sir. I thought it would do Mellish and Trimble good to join up. And they weren't really bullied. Mellish wasn't touched. But we did bump Baggy Trimble a little!"

"And Redfern wasn't in it, sir," said Figgins. "We three were, I own. And I think Clampe and Chowle ought to join, though I don't believe they will ever be much use!"

"I was outside the door," said Dick Redfern. "And I was willing to take a hand. You know that well enough, Figgy!"

"And I didn't really try to stop Blake, sir," said Tom Merry. "I suppose I could have stopped him if I'd tried."

"Not you, Tommy!" said Blake, in a very audible aside.

"Your charge is not disputed, Mr. Ratcliff," said the School House master gravely.

"I should think not, indeed! If any of them had the impertinence——"

"Even a criminal is allowed to plead to a charge. I do not look upon these boys as anything worse than misguided enthusiasts. But I cannot understand why Mellish and Trimble should have made their appeal to you. I am their Housemaster."

"We—we didn't, sir!" bleated Baggy.

"We never said a word to Mr. Ratcliff, sir," added Mellish, with a very good simulation of pained surprise.

Clampe and Chowle glared at them. As Mellish and Trimble had known all about the appeal unto Cæsar—otherwise Mr. Ratcliff—beforehand, there was some justification for the idea Clampe and Chowle had that they were trying to "slink out."

"I heard of the case of Mellish and Trimble from the two complainants from my own House," said Mr. Ratcliff, beginning to wish he had left Mellish and Trimble out.

"Then I may take it that you are preferring a complaint against Blake to me, seeing, of course, that it rests with me to deal with him?"

"Well—er—yes. But I shall insist upon Blake's being punished. And I consider that Merry——"

"Merry is not concerned. Whether I punish Blake or no is entirely a matter for my judgment."

"Mr. Selby, I appeal to you!" said Mr. Ratcliff hotly.

"Mr. Selby has no locus standi. The matter is of no concern to him."

"I suppose I may be allowed to express an opinion, Railton?" roared the master of the Third

"By all means, at the proper time and in the proper place. This is neither the time nor the place. I will not be betrayed into what would easily become a heated argument in the presence of the boys."

"Oh, upon my soul! This is too much!" shouted Mr. Selby.

And he whisked out of the room.

It occurred to Tom Merry and Blake that it was quite a good thing no methods of compulsion had been needed with the Third.

Mr. Railton looked at the four black sheep.

"I am speaking as Cadet captain now," he said quietly. "Clampe and Chowle, I take it that your complaint to Mr. Ratcliff was dictated by your desire to drop out of the corps?"

"Yes, sir," muttered the precious pair

They did not feel too proud of themselves under Mr. Railton's searching glance.

"You may consider yourselves discharged. We can contrive to manage without your valuable aid, I think," said the School House master.

"Mr. Railton, I protest!"

"Against what, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Against your indulgence in sarcasm at the expense of these boys!"

"I must ignore that protest. I think we have finished, Mr. Ratcliff. You are, of course, the only judge of the fault that Figgins and Kerr and Wynn have committed. I fear that a recommendation to mercy on my part would not——"

"You are quite right. It certainly would not influence me in the slightest degree!"

"Then I will not waste my breath. Would you mind opening the door for Mr. Ratcliff, Merry?"

Tom did not mind a bit. In fact, he was pleased to do it.

"But I wish to know before I go what

is being done in the matter of Mellish and Trimble," said Mr. Ratcliff, ignoring the open door.

"Justice will be done, you may be sure. That should be enough," said Mr. Railton coldly.

"Do you consider that you are setting a good example to these boys in snubbing me in that abominable manner?" hooted the New House master.

"I consider that any further discussion would be setting a very bad example to the boys, Mr. Ratcliff. Therefore, I decline it."

"As your colleague—as, equally with yourself, a master of this school, I demand to know——"

"You are not my colleague in the administration of this House, sir!" snapped Mr. Railton, losing his temper at last.

"If you are going to get violent, Railton, the only possible course is for me to retreat before worse comes of it!"

"It would undoubtedly be the wisest course, Mr. Ratcliff!"

"But I tell you plainly that I am not satisfied!" rapped out the visitor, as he flounced from the room.

His flock followed him. Four of them went with squared shoulders and uplifted chins. Reddy knew Mr. Ratcliff far too well to imagine that he would escape the wrath to come. But those four could bear whatever came their way, and they would not have changed places for anything with Clampe and Chowle.

There was silence for a moment in the room after the door had shut behind them. Then Mr. Railton said:

"Do you lay any complaint, Trimble, or you, Mellish?"

It was on the tip of Mellish's tongue to deny having any complaint to make. But he waited on Baggy, and Baggy was too desperate to let the chance slip past him. Baggy felt that anything would be better than another drill with the awkward squad.

"I—I was forced into it, sir," burbled Baggy. "I—I—I really don't think I'm a fit and proper person to be a Cadet!"

"I don't think you are, Trimble. You are released," said Cadet Captain Railton.

Still Mellish waited.

"Now, Mellish!"

No, when it came to the pinch, Mellish could not stay in. He had no friends in the corps, and Racke & Co. would cut him adrift if he held on.

"I'm sorry, sir!" he whined. "I wouldn't have complained to you myself. But as it's come to this I think I'd better clear out. It isn't really quite in my line."

"I fear it is not, Mellish. I wish I could think you realised all that confession implies! You are released, and you can go now. You also, Trimble."

"Oh thank you, sir!" said Baggy, with an oily smirk. But Mellish went with hanging head. He felt ashamed. His shame would not long endure, though. The curse of Reuben was on Percy Mellish. He was "unstable as water."

"I'm awfully sorry, sir!" said Blake penitently. "I know you won't think I'm trying to beg off a licking; I'd rather have it! But I'm above a bit sick to think that I've landed you into all this fuss."

"You consider that you have earned a licking, Blake?"

Mr. Railton's face was still stern, but the corners of his mouth showed that he had all he knew how to do to suppress a smile.

"Oh, yes, sir! And Figgy and the others are booked. It wouldn't be fair if I got off!"

"I had considered—or had thought of considering, for I would not reduce you hastily, Blake—whether both you and Figgins ought not to lose your stripes. But you have saved them, both for yourself and Figgins! You have done very wrongly. I am glad you were not also guilty, Merry! You can go. The rest is between Blake and myself."

Tom waited for Blake in the passage.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Railton's laying it on thick," thought Tom.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Three across each hand! But I suppose it had to be done!"

Blake seemed to agree with that sentiment.

"Railton's a brick, Tommy!" he said cheerfully, as the two went off together. "What's a caning? But losing your giddy stripes—whew! That would matter!"

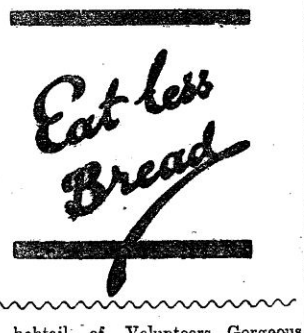
"The corps has two enemies the more," said Tom soberly. "Mind, I'm not rubbing it in, old chap."

"Ratty and Selby? Rats to Ratty and shucks to Selby! Those two old files would have been against it anyway. Selby's a funk, and we all know it; and Ratty's a beastly Pacifist at heart!"

CHAPTER 9.

A Day off Classes.

"THIS is just where we score!" said Racke to Crooke. "The giddy Cadet Corps go off for a day's rotten navvy work, or somethin' of that sort, with a tag, rag, an' bobtail of Volunteers—Gorgeous Wrecks from Wayland an' Rylcombe—grocers an' pawnbrokers an' chimney-sweeps. An' Lathom an' Linton, bein' deprived of the greater part of their flocks, take a day off, too! Good egg!"



"Are you certain about that?" asked Crooke doubtfully. "I thought the most likely thing was that the two old fossils would toss up to see who should have a holiday, an' the one who lost would take the lot of us. After all, there are seven of us. It ain't very likely that the Head will quite see givin' a holiday to seven chaps. You were a bit too clever over those four idiots, old chap! Strikes me we should have been better off if they'd stayed in. There would only have been the three of us then, an' we might have been overlooked."

"I got it straight from the horse's mouth," answered Racke. "Linton an' Lathom are goin' off somewhere together. I heard 'em talkin' about it."

"They might send us in with the Fifth, though. That would mean Ratty, an' Ratty's no catch!"

"They can't do it. We aren't up to the Fifth work; an' look at Baggy! No; we shall get off. You needn't trouble about feelin' grateful to anyone, Crooke; it won't be out of kindness to us!"

"I wasn't thinkin' of it," said Crooke, grinning. Then he bawled: "Come in, whoever you are!"

D'Arcy minor appeared, in full cadet uniform, and looking every inch a soldier, if a young and small one.

"Oh, I see, you ain't started smoking this morning yet, so it don't matter who comes in!" said Wally affably.

"This is not a monkey-house, though," replied Racke. "So you can hop it, kid!"

"I didn't come here for a friendly visit—I ain't on terms of that sort with shirkers!" Wally said, with a disdainful sniff. "I brought you two a message."

"Well, give it to us an' go—before my boot-toe gets movin'!" growled Crooke.

"If your boot-toe gets playing tricks I shall drop the butt-end of my rifle on it!" retorted D'Arcy minor. He advanced his weapon as he spoke.

The St. Jim's Cadets were happily not dependent upon the generosity of a sorely-worried War Office for rifles. The rifles were there—had been there before the war—and the platoon numbered several crack shots.

"Do you know which is the butt-end?" sneered Racke.

"Oh, I guess so! This ain't!" snapped Wally, giving Racke a far from gentle prod with his weapon.

"Yow! You little rotter! Is that beastly thing loaded?" inquired the cad of the Shell, going quite pale.

"Not sure! Doesn't matter anyway, because it won't go off unless I want it to. And we ain't allowed to shoot shirkers—not yet. Later in the war, p'r'aps!"

"You had better deliver your message an' bunk, unless you want to get hurt!" said Crooke threateningly.

"I ain't afraid of getting hurt here! But I haven't any more time to waste on you measly shirkers. You're to take classes in our Form to-day, Railton says!"

"Wha-a-a-at?" stammered Racke.

"In the Third?" asked Crooke dazedly.

"Yes, and a jolly sight too good for you sweeps!" replied Wally, grinning. "But never mind, all the chaps in the Third that really matter will be away. My crowd are all in the corps, and so are two or three more."

"Hanged if I'll go!" said Racke, gritting his teeth.

"We might have known that Railton would get home on us some way!" said Crooke savagely.

"'Tain't really Railton. It was the Head that fixed it up. And Scrope and Mellish and that fat cad Trimble are all just as sick as you two are. Clampe and Chowle, too, I expect, but I haven't seen them. Well, ta-ta, my pippins! Give my love to dear old Selby, and tell him he can split my whack of canings between you! I sha'n't be needing them to-day—important business elsewhere! You'll howl, both of you—dear old Selby canes me lots!"

And Wally went, whistling blithely.

Racke and Crooke looked at one another, and groaned in concert.

This was awful! The Common-room would make it a jape for days to come. Turned down to take lessons with the fags of the Third!

But there would have been no use in protesting, even had the arrangement been Mr. Railton's. As for disputing the matter with the Head, that was out of the question. The less Racke and Crooke saw of the Head the better they were suited.

"Oh, dash it all!" exploded Racke. "Lessons with the Third! And just look out there!"

Down below, in the quad, the Cadets were forming up for their march to the station. The two saw Wally run out and take his place in the line between Frank Levison and Reggie Manners, with Joe Frayne on Frank's left, and Hobbs and Jameson and Gibson and Harvey in the rank behind them. Grundy, very important with the two stripes on his sleeve, said something to Wally—some-

thing about keeping them waiting, probably—and even without hearing the reply the two knew that Grundy was not answered as Grundy would have been answered at an ordinary time by Wally of the Third. The great George Alfred was of some importance now, if he had never been before.

"They look jolly cheery about it!" growled Crooke, almost enviously.

"Perhaps you'd like to be with them!" snapped Racke.

"Well, I ain't so dashed sure that it wouldn't be better than old Selby's Form-room!"

Mellish, watching from another window, was very sure that it would be. Mellish hated the notion of the Third Form-room and the grinning crowd of fags, and the tyranny of Mr. Selby, every bit as much as Racke and Crooke did; and he had the additional mortification of divided wishes about the Cadet Corps.

But Baggy Trimble, having got over the first shock of disappointment, was resigned. Baggy was not one of Mr. Lathom's brightest pupils, but he felt that among the Third there must surely be opportunities for him to shine.

The Cadets stood at ease, waiting the words of command which would set them on their march. They looked very fit and soldierly, on the whole. Here and there among them might be seen a weedy form and slouching shoulders. Drill had not yet pulled Skimpole up, though he had somehow escaped the awkward squad. That was through Talbot's gross favouritism, the now released members of that squad had said. But it may have been because Skimmy, who had brains enough if he chose to use them in the right way, had really tried.

There were Victor Railton, a fine, erect figure in his khaki, and Eric Kildare, as spick and span as any officer of the Guards, and Reginald Talbot, with the three stripes on his arm; and Tom Merry and Grundy, and Blake and Figgins, each wearing the two stripes of corporal's rank! And as the eyes of Racke and Crooke swept over the platoon they saw many another of the fellows with whom they were at constant feud—the dark, keen face of Ernest Levison, once one of their band, now gone over completely to the enemy; the shrewd visage of Kerr, the aristocratic features of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the smiling countenance of Monty Lowther; Manners, Clive, Cardew, Noble, Julian, Dane, Herries, and the rest—all were there.

"By gad! I wish the Huns would land an' mop the lot of them up!" snarled Racke.

"Wouldn't get a chance. They'd cut an' run," said Crooke. But he knew, and Racke knew, that that was not true.

"Attention! Shoulder arms! By the right! Quick march!" rapped out Cadet Captain Railton, and the corps moved off with a capital swing.

Perhaps Grundy's section was not quite in step with Corporal George Alfred Grundy, but as they were keeping step quite nicely among themselves, no one but their corporal noticed that.

It was time for classes. As the Cadet Corps stepped out merrily through the sunny, frosty morning, bound for a day in the open air by the seashore, Racke, Crooke, Scrope, Mellish, and Trimble went miserably down to classes in the Third Form-room, and Crampe and Chowle came across from the New House with crawling pace, escorted by a jeering party of New House fags, who seemed not in the least conscious of the honour that the presence of members of the Shell and Fourth might have been held to confer upon their Form.

Mr. Selby seemed neither honoured

nor pleased with his recruits. He did not, as Trimble had vainly imagined, let them share the labours of the Third. He set them special tasks, with what they considered a fiendish delight in picking out difficult passages of Latin prose and horrible quadratic equations.

Before the morning was over every one of the seven had felt the weight of Mr. Selby's displeasure and the sting of Mr. Selby's cane. Trimble was whacked thrice, and Racke, who attempted impertinence, twice.

And the afternoon was even worse than the morning. Mr. Selby's breakfast had not agreed with him too well; but at lunch he consumed viands that he knew to be unsuited to his internal processes, and the Third and their visitors suffered in consequence.

CHAPTER 10.

Cardew Plays the Giddy Ox!

"WHAT do you think of trench-digging now, Cardew?" asked Levison major, with a grin.

"Trench-diggin', as practised by his Majesty's Gorgeous Wrecks——"

"Cheese that! You'll have some of the Volunteers hearing you, you ass!" snapped Clive.

"His Majesty's Gorgeous Wrecks an' Callow Cadets," went on Cardew unheedingly, "really ain't half as bad as I expected. The point about it is——"

He stopped to cut a mouthful of cold

beef with his pocket-knife. Cardew did not look much like a sybarite at that moment. He was regarding his chunk of cold beef as if he had a positive affection for it. A morning on the flats by the sea had given everyone first-class appetites.

"That you don't really dig the trenches," he went on, talking with his mouth full—"that's a tremendous advantage! A trench, when not really a matter of military necessity, is merely a nasty and superfluous ditch. A breastwork don't take it out of a chap like a trench would, you know."

"Especially when you see to it that it's the other fellows who do all the real work, even at that," remarked Levison, with a grin.

"By gad, that's too bad, old man! Look at my hands! One of them's very nearly blistered!"

He exposed two hands, still white and soft, very different from the calloused paws of Levison and Clive, who had really been putting their backs into the digging, and who did not at any time go in for manicuring operations.

"You've been slacking, Cardew!" said Sidney Clive seriously. "Talbot's getting above a bit fed up with you."

"To tell you the truth, old chap, I'm above a bit fed up with Talbot," replied Cardew equably. "Just a trifle too much on the naggin' side—what?"

Talbot was the non-com. in charge of the working-party to which the three chums of Study No. 9, with Julian & Co., and Redfern & Co., and several others belonged.

"I don't see that you can say he's nagged anyone," answered Clive gravely.

"Oh, by gad, can't I? He's nagged me!"

"He told you that you were slacking. It was true, and it wasn't nagging."

"He told me several times. That's what I objected to. If he had only mentioned it once, I might have taken it as a friendly an' chatty remark. Repeated, it became deucedly borin', an' gave me a distinct impression that Talbot was takin' himself an' his job too dashed seriously! Is there any more beef, Levison?"

"Not for you," replied Levison. "The slice you're ogling belongs to this child's ration, and it's going to be put where it will do more good than inside a slacker!"

"Talbot's doing his duty," said Sidney Clive, who took the whole business as seriously as Talbot did—and rightly so.

"Hang it all, old scout, we're only playin' at things! You know that—I know that—Talbot knows it. You can't pretend all this diggin' really matters a scrap to anyone!"

"I must say that all you've done don't," laughed Levison.

"Talbot ain't playing at anything—I'm not—Levison's not—and you jolly well ought not to be!" said Clive hotly. "It's sheer rot to talk like that, you know!"

"All the fault of you chaps," answered Cardew blandly. "It was you who persuaded me to join. Blake an' that crowd implored in vain. Talbot wasted his eloquence. But when the pals of my manly buzzom——"

"Rats!" growled Clive.

"Put it to me as a pal, what could I do?" went on Cardew. "I capitulated—good military word—what? Well, then, after that you can't blame me if I take things a bit easy. I'm here to please you, y'know."

"Well, you're jolly well not doing it!" Clive rapped out.

"The regret is mine. But there are so many dashed funny side-shows, old man! They take my attention off the harmless an' unnecessary diggin'. Grundy struttin' about like a rooster who has the gross delusion that he's laid every egg in the basket; that fat auctioneer chap from Wayland labourin' with many grunts, an' 'lardin' the lean earth' with his perspiration as he labours; Talbot an' Clive an' Merry an' Levison an' several others fairly bubblin' over with zeal——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Levison. "That's enough, and a bit over, of your silly gas!"

"If there is any cheese, I shall be delighted to—er—cheese it. I did not know it was on the menu," said Cardew.

He had annoyed Talbot that morning, and he knew it. There was an imp of the perverse in Ralph Reckness Cardew; at times his best chums did not know how to take him. To-day he was worse than usual. It was almost as though the strong sea air had gone to his head.

Things came to something like a climax within an hour of lunch. Away to the right a working-party of the Volunteers were putting in hard digging. Around Cardew the St. Jim's working-party to which he was attached strove in emulation of them. But Cardew's share in that striving amounted to nothing worth mentioning.

Talbot did not often lose his temper: but he lost it for a minute or two in that altercation. Neither Levison nor Clive heard the beginning of it; it was Talbot's voice, raised in unusually sharp tones, that caught their ears.

"Have you the glimmering of a notion what military discipline means, Cardew?" asked Talbot angrily.

"Oh, I think so—yaas, I fancy I have. Floggin's gone out now, hasn't it? But that's the Army—we're not the Army. Is it really worth while to drag the rather absurd notion of military discipline into this very pleasant little game we've agreed to play, do you think, Talbot?"

"If you regard it as a mere game, the

best thing you can do is to get out of it!" snapped Talbot, thoroughly roused.

"An' if you take it as sober earnest, the one thing for you to do is to report me for shirkin' an' insubordination, I should say, Talbot! I don't know, though. I suppose naggin' is in keepin' with the traditions of the sergeant."

"Oh, I'll report you fast enough!" snapped Talbot, as he strode away.

"You silly ass!" said Clive witheringly.

"Getting yourself reported to Railton on the first field-day!" snorted Levison. "It's a giddy disgrace to the study!"

"Oh, it's not a serious matter, dear boys!" replied Cardew lightly. "Railton's somebody at St. Jim's—he has the power of the cane there. Out here, he's merely a player among players. We're all pretendin', an' if Railton pretends to be angry, I'll play up. That ought to suit him."

But talk of that sort suited neither Levison nor Clive. The South African junior was really angry.

So was Cadet Captain Railton. Insubordination was bad enough; but Cardew's attitude only increased the offence. He persisted in his light way of taking the whole business—which became less than nothing if taken in that way. There was an implied understanding, if not an actual ultimatum, that the St. Jim's Cadet Corps would know Cardew no more after that day. Meanwhile, as his commanding officer sternly told him, he would be expected to live up to the obligations imposed upon him by his uniform until he had doffed it.

"It's all right, Clive, old scout," said Cardew, when Clive spoke some home truths to him. "You won't lose your chance of gettin' promotion to lance-corporal—'arf o' nothin',' as the dear Kipling says—because a chap from your study has been kicked out, y'know!"

That made Clive furious. The four lance-corporals had not yet been appointed. Talbot, Tom Merry, Figgins, Blake, and Grundy had managed to pass the necessary exam. for non-commissioned rank. Four of them had accomplished it by assiduous cramming of "Infantry Training." The exception was Grundy. He could never have crammed enough in the time. But it turned out that he had picked up a good deal at Redclyffe, and had improved his knowledge by a kind of honorary membership of a village Volunteer Corps during the holidays. He was no end keen, and in some ways he was the best-grounded of the five.

Clive was studying "Infantry Training" hard. So were some of the others—Kangaroo, Gussy, Manners, Gore, Gunn, and Kerr among them—not all of them fellows one would have picked out as likeliest to be keen. But none of them was keener than Clive, and he meant to come out near the top in the competitive exam, and fill the post of lance-corporal under Blake, in whose section he was.

So it was little wonder Clive was angry. Levison, who was not cramming the manual, took it more philosophically. But Levison was not pleased. There were times when he and Clive both resented Cardew's way of taking trouble in order to be misunderstood. There was nothing complex about Clive; and, though Levison's was a nature less easy to understand, posing was not much in Levison's line.

The sun had dropped like a red ball of fire beyond the cliffs to the westward when the two platoons—Volunteers and Cadets—set out on their march to the little branch-line station at which they had to entrain for Wayland. Hardly one of them, from the patriarchal greengrocer, who was the oldest man among the veterans, to the youngest of the fags, but was honestly wearied out by honest, hard work. But very few indeed had failed to find the day enjoyable.

They marched at ease now, and pipes were going among the front platoon, which, it is scarcely necessary to say, was not the Cadet platoon. Through the gathering gloom they strode along the narrow lane, with songs and jests. But Cardew, in his place between Levison and Clive, was unwontedly silent, and his chums did not feel much like singing.

Then something happened. It was not the fault of anyone in particular, and it had no immediate really serious result. But it had a very important indirect result.

Down the lane came the clip-clop of hurrying hoofs, and a light showed dimly through the gloom.

"I say, though, that gee's travellin'!" said Cardew. They were the first words he had spoken for at least two hours.

A shout sounded ahead. A female voice cried out in alarm. Then the ranks of the Volunteers broke quickly. The men got out of the way, some of them by flinging themselves bodily against the high, grassy banks.

Right down upon the Cadets behind them plunged a frightened young horse, harnessed to a market cart, and some got a glimpse of a scared girl's face and of two small hands tugging vainly at the reins.

It all happened so quickly that not one of the men ahead—not half a dozen of the boys behind—grasped the fact that the horse was running away. Most of them scuttled before what they imagined to be sheer reckless driving.

But some were quicker of intelligence, and two, at least, were quicker to act.

No one saw what happened with sufficient clearness to be sure of it. But in a moment, as it seemed, the horse stood stock-still, save for the trembling that shook it, in the road, and the girl was clambering down, and George Alfred Grundy lay on his back, with an iron-shod hoof within an inch of his head.

Grundy and another fellow had pulled up the horse. Who the other fellow was no one seemed to know. He, apparently, had not been hurt, while Grundy was badly shaken, though he pretended he wasn't.

The girl's few words of thanks quite made Grundy blush. Perhaps the experience of being thanked by a young lady in breeches and leggings—for a young lady she unmistakably was, and quite an amateur driver — helped to confuse Grundy. Anyway, he was almost surly about it when once she had gone. And it was evident that he meant it when he said it was nothing, though his tone might seem to imply that if George Alfred Grundy did not do things like that every day, it was only because the chance of doing them did not come his way.

Word was passed that it must be quick march now if they were to make the station in time. And quick march it was. But they didn't make the station in time, for all that. While they were still a quarter of a mile away they heard the train rumble across the bridge beyond the station, and knew that they had lost it.

"An' it's the last twain on this pottay little bwanch to-night!" groaned Gussy, who ached all over. "What on earth shall we do, deah boys?"

CHAPTER 11.
Sentry Go!

"WE shall have to march it," said Tom Merry.

"Have you any notion how far it is—er—corporal?" inquired Cardew, who did not feel at all like a long route-march at that moment.

"Must be over twenty miles," said Blake. "Nearer thirty, if we have to strike a main road before we can get our heads turned for home."

Cadet Captain Railton and the Volunteers' commanding officer were consulting. Such a march for boys and for men well over military age after a hard day was not an enterprise to be lightly undertaken.

Some of the Volunteers knew the locality, and from them came practical suggestions. Since no better might be, the best course was undoubtedly to find quarters of some sort for the night. Rations would also be needed, but no difficulty on this score was anticipated, for there were friendly farmers close by.

An attempt to fix up matters at the station fizzled out. The place was locked up and deserted when they got there. The stationmaster lived a mile away, and when he was found he would not even begin to hear of anything in the way of a cheap special—or even a dear one! Arthur Augustus was one of the five who interviewed him, the other four being Herries, Corporal Blake, and two of the Volunteers. Gussy did all the talking. He used the most cogent arguments. He pointed out that, as there would be absolutely no traffic on the branch for the next twelve hours, it would be quite an easy thing to wire for a train to come along from the junction and pick up the two platoons. But the stationmaster was obdurate. He would not even go back to the station and wire to ask whether the scheme was possible. He said he knew it wasn't.

"I was vewy neah bein' wude to the man," said Arthur Augustus, as they came away. "Aftah I had demonstwated to him so cleahly that the thing was not only possible, but weally quite easy, his obstinate wefusal to entahtain the pwoposal struck me as the vewy limit in cheek! But I wefwained."

"Just as well," said Blake cheerily. "After all, it is quite possible that the stationmaster knows a bit more about it than you do, Gustavus!"

Meanwhile, foraging parties were out, and within an hour or so the quartermaster-sergeant—a Wayland architect—had the satisfaction of announcing that all arrangements were complete. Some of the Volunteers, chiefly the more elderly men, were being billeted upon farmers. The rest were to occupy a deserted farmhouse not far from the seashore, and the Cadets had assigned to them a big barn in a field which sloped down to the beach.

No one grumbled. Most of them thought the whole thing a lark. And no one felt more certain of this than Wally & Co. of the Third.

"My hat, Franky, kid; this is spiffing!" said Wally. "Plenty of straw in the barn! We can be as warm as toast, and sleep like tops. Bacon coming along for supper—eggs, too, very likely! We shouldn't get bacon and eggs for supper at St. Jim's!"

"Jolly take-in for old Selby, too!" chirped Levison minor. "Won't he be raging mad when we aren't there for classes to-morrow morning? I hope we stay here all day, and miss the jolly train again at night!"

"I hope the grub will soon come!" said Reggie Manners.

"So do I!" chorused the rest of the fags.

And it was not they alone who felt peckish.

"What's the matter, Cardew?" asked Levison, seeing by the dim light of a stable lantern that his chum's face was unusually pale.

"Nothin', dear boy. What should be?" returned Cardew lightly.

"Rats! You're as white as a sheet!"

"Haven't I been duly admonished by Captain Railton, after bein' nagged by Sergeant Talbot, an' isn't all that dashed well enough to make a chap look off-colour?"

"Rot! It wasn't that. Look here, Cardew, I believe—I'm sure—that you helped to stop that gee, and hurt your arm in doing it!"

"My dear man, you wouldn't detract from the glory of the magnificent Grundy by hintin' that I had a hand in that, would you?" drawled Cardew. "He would never forgive us."

"Grundy's a better chap about forgiving things than either you or me, old fellow," said Levison quietly. "I'm not sure that he isn't one of the best I know in that way. He never bears malice. I suppose you mean that you don't want to talk about what you did, or to have it talked about?"

"I don't admit that I did anythin'!" replied Cardew obstinately. "An' if you as much as hint to anyone else—even Clive—that I did, you an' I will quarrel, Levison!"

So Levison kept silence for the time being, though he had little doubt. He did not want to have a row with Cardew. Someone might be needed to keep the peace between him and Clive, who was still sore and angry.

In the lee of the big barn, sheltered from the breeze that came off the sea, a camp-fire was built, and soon the grateful odours of bacon and coffee reached the eager nostrils of the St. Jim's Cadets. The farmers had responded nobly to the requisitions made upon them, and the supper would be on a scale that it was as well the Food Controller should not hear of. But all felt that they had earned extra rations, and no conscience was troubled.

"My aunt! It's the best grub I ever tasted!" said Kerruish of the Fourth, as he dealt with eggs-and-bacon and farmhouse bread.

"Rather! I never 'ad anything that came near it!" answered Hammond.

They voiced the general opinion; but almost before the meal was over some of the fags were nodding. "Last Post" was sounded by the buglers, the fire was left to die down, and the wearied Cadets retired to the barn.

But not all of them. There were guards to be posted. Fatigue was no excuse for the neglect of such a plain duty as that.

Away to westward Tom Merry was in command of a guard of six—Lowther, Manners, Noble, Dane, Kerr, and Owen—with two posts. Their guard-house was the front room of a cottage. To the east Blake had a one-post guard. He had picked out D'Arcy major, Herries, and Cardew. Levison had offered to take Cardew's place; but Cardew had scowled, and Blake had frowned.

The guard-house for these four was less comfortable than the other one. But it was not so bad, after all—an unused cowshed, with the back to the sea, and mangers that made quite decent beds.

Gussy took the first two hours on sentry-go. He was full of enthusiasm, as well as of bacon and eggs and bread and coffee, and quite warm to start with. He paced up and down, with his rifle on his shoulder, and felt that this was indeed life.

But pacing up and down was not exercise brisk enough to keep in one's bodily heat for long, and before an hour had passed, Arthur Augustus had begun to feel sure that his time was more than up, and indignant that Blake and the rest had all gone to sleep—as he felt sure they had—and forgotten about the relief.

"It's up to me to stick it out, howevah, even if they leave me heah all night," he murmured. "But I considah that it is vewy w'rong indeed of Blake to be so extwemely wemiss in his dutay!"

He paused, and the sound of someone or something moving came to his ears through the gloom.

His heart beat fast, but not with fear. He cocked his rifle, quite forgetting that it was not loaded. He peered through the gloom in vain.

It is difficult to locate sounds in the darkness. Gussy felt sure that this sound came from in front. But Gussy was wrong.

"Halt! Who comes there?" his voice rang out.

The answer should have been "Friend," but the answer wasn't "Friend!" It was a grunt that might have been anything or nothing.

"Bai Jove, that sounds wemarkably like a Hun!" murmured Gussy.

His heart beat a trifle faster, but there was no tremor in his voice as he called again:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

Next moment something rushed between his legs from behind, and he was flung forward on his face. It would not have surprised him if he had had a bayonet or a bullet in his back; but as he struggled to arise he became aware of a sour, warmish smell, and was just in time to see a large white pig disappear into the gloom.

"Bai Jove, a beastly gwuntah! Well, it was not so very supwisin' that I took him for a Hun. There weally is not a heap of diffewence. I think it would be bettah not to mention this to Blake, or any of the west. They would chip me dweadfully."

But, Gussy being Gussy, and the last fellow in the world to keep a secret for so small a reason as that, it was pretty certain that Blake and the rest would hear.

The long two hours came to an end at last. Blake and Herries appeared. Herries relieved Gussy, and Blake had heard all about the pig before the guard-house was reached again.

CHAPTER 12.
Cardew on Guard!

CARDEW was not asleep. He had strained his right arm painfully in helping to stop the runaway horse—for he had been Grundy's unknown coadjutor, as Levison had guessed.

Anyone else but Cardew would have explained matters, and have let someone better physically fitted for guard duty take his place. But that was not Cardew's way. As he said afterwards, his arm was too painful to let him sleep, and he might as well, he considered, put in his time on sentry-go or in the guard-house as keeping other fellows awake by tossing about in the barn.

Arthur Augustus was not disposed to sleep, either. Blake dozed off, making up his mind to awaken at ten minutes to one, in time for the relief then due. Cardew and D'Arcy sat and talked in low tones. Gussy gave Cardew lots of grandfatherly advice, which might have been eminently useful had there been the slightest prospect of its being taken. But there wasn't.

Suddenly to the ears of both there came a booming sound.

"Guns!" said Cardew. "Stow the jawin'-tackle, D'Arcy! Somethin's happenin'!"

"An air-waid, pewwaps!" said Gussy. "Shall I wake Blake?"

"Do—if you think a Cadet corporal is likely to be able to do anythin' particularly useful to stop an air-raid," replied Cardew sarcastically.

But Blake woke just then. He was rubbing his eyes when the booming sounded again.

"From out at sea," said Cardew. "It's easy to tell that by the sound. A submarine gettin' it in the neck, let's hope!"

"It don't seem very likely, off this coast," Blake said.

"Well, I'm not prepared to argue the matter. We never shall know. We're never told anythin'—not even now we're in khaki!" replied Cardew mockingly. "Don't snooze off again, Blake, unless you want to find me bored dead an' stiff when you wake; an' that might upset the relief. D'Arcy's more than a chap can be expected to stand alone."

"Shurrup!" growled Blake. "I'm listening for the guns!"

"Well, if my voice is likely to drown them, I'll shut up, certainly!"

All three listened, but they heard no more. Somewhere out in the Channel something had happened—one of the many dramas of the sea in war-time—a tragedy, perhaps. But it did not seem probable that any direct word of it would ever come to them.

The time for relieving guard came at last, and Blake accompanied Cardew to the post. Herries also had heard the guns, but had seen nothing. They were very far away, he said, and it had not seemed to him that he could do any good by concerning himself about them.

Cardew was left alone. He smiled bitterly as Herries and Blake disappeared together in the direction of the guard-house.

"Now, to be perfectly in the picture as the slack an' heedless Cadet who won't take the game as anythin' but a game, I ought to go to sleep on my post," he told himself. "Pity my arm won't let me."

He did not do himself justice. It was not his painful arm alone, it was not the cold, that kept him from sleeping. As he paced up and down alone in the gloom, now growing less intense as a moon in its last quarter showed itself on the eastward horizon, he was thinking hard.

He realised that, after all, he did not want to be dismissed from the corps. His going would anger Clive and annoy Levison; and Clive and Levison were the best chums he had ever had. And it wasn't such bad fun, even taken seriously, this business. Quite possibly it was better fun taken seriously, he fancied. But it had never been much in his line to take things that way.

Gazing out to sea, he saw something that made him rub his eyes and tell himself he must be dreaming. A shape, vague and indistinct at first—so vague that he could not feel sure he had not imagined it—and then resolving itself into something familiar in a queer sort of way, familiar as is something seen oftener in pictures than in reality—the conning-tower of a submarine, surely!

He was about to fire his rifle—his was loaded, though only with blank cartridge—when he heard the sound of a step upon the shingle, and saw dimly a burly form.

"Halt! Who——"

"Donnerwetter! Another word, and you die!"

Strong hands were at his throat. The rifle had been stricken from his grasp;

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ere was no strength in his injured ght arm.

"Ach, swinehound, I haf you! A ord, and you die!"

Cardew writhed partly free. Desperaon gave him strength to do that. But was not the desperation of fear.

Clear and loud his voice rang out. He elieved that the words he shouted would e his last; before help could come hose great Hunnish hands would have hrottled him!

But he had his duty to do, and he did it without fear or faltering. If Ralph Reckness Cardew had died then he would have died a death that many a better fellow might have envied him!

"Guard! To me! The Huns!"

Then the fingers gripped, and he felt himself choking. He knew no more.

Up over the shingle came the men of the submarine, fast sinking now in deep water but a few yards from shore. Down over the frozen turf raced Kildare and Figgins and Blake and Herries and Gussy.

Lucky that Kildare was there, though it may be that Blake did not deem it so! The skipper was acting as orderly officer, and had just reached the guardhouse with Figgins on visiting rounds when the shout came.

A bullet whizzed past his ear. A revolver spat again, and struck sparks from a stone close by Gussy's feet. But Gussy raced on, unheeding. And hard ran Kildare and Blake, Figgy and Herries.

"Surrender! We have you covered!" yelled Kildare.

"Kamerad!" sounded the voice of a man of the submarine's crew.

"Donner und blitzen!" roared the officer—he who had seized Cardew—as Kildare's hefty fist took him full in the face, and he crashed down.

Through the gloom the Huns saw rifles and khaki-clad figures. They had escaped submerging once for all by running their vessel ashore; and, except for the officer in command, there was no lust for fight in them. They thought they had struck a military camp; had they known that the khaki-clad figures were mere Cadets, the rifles unloaded, they would have put up a struggle. But their officer was down, with Kildare and Herries on top of him—and they surrendered!

. . . . . .

It was a rare exploit for a Cadet Corps, and St. Jim's found itself famous—or more famous, as any St. Jim's fellow would have put it. Kildare and the rest got lots of credit; but it was Cardew who got most, of course. If anything could have made the fellows more proud of him, it would have been the fact—let out by Levison—that he had shared with Grundy the stopping of the runaway horse. But that was not needed, and Cardew was really angry with his chum for letting it out.

For three or four days his throat showed the marks of the Hun officer's savage grip. A very little more, and he must have been throttled. But a miss is as good as a mile—indeed, Cardew said that, from what he had seen of her, the miss who had been run away with was better than many miles; miles, especially on march, were weary things at best, in his opinion!

He stayed in the corps, of course. And equally, of course, Racke & Co. stayed out. The prospect of meeting Hun submarine crews was not one calculated to make them change their minds, by any means.

"Swankin' idiots!" snarled Racke. "An' Cardew's the giddy limit, with his dashed pretence that he hasn't done anythin' in particular! Never mind, Crooke, we're not such fools but that we know ourselves well out of games of that sort. An' we'll dashed well make the swankin' Cadets sit up some time before long, you bet!"

But how Racke tried that, and what success he had, must be told in a later story.

Messrs. Ratcliff and Selby were not pleased. Mr. Ratcliff was severe with the heroes from his House, and Mr. Selby went to the Head and did his best to persuade him that boys in the Third Form ought not to be employed in such dangerous enterprises. But no one—the Head as little as anyone—minded Ratty and Selby!

THE END

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"MANNERS' VENDETTA!" by Martin Clifford.)

THE EDITOR'S CHAT.

For Next Wednesday:

"MANNERS' VENDETTA!"

By Martin Clifford.

There is lots of character in Harry Manners, and most of it is good.

But he is imperfect, like the rest of us, and deep down in him there is a vein of obstinacy and hardness that is seldom shown.

It is shown in next week's story, and in some which will follow it.

A new boy—Dick Roylance, all the way from New Zealand—comes to St. Jim's, and he and Manners fall foul of one another. It is not because Roylance is a rotter; he is a particularly nice fellow, indeed. It is not without any shadow of justification on the part of Manners, either; he has his reasons, even though he is in the wrong.

I am not going to tell you more of the story here. But I may add that I think Mr. Clifford never does better work than when he gives us these yarns—so full of human nature—which show good fellows going wrong and pulling straight again. For my own part, unreasonable as Manners shows himself, I have not found that he loses my sympathy. He is wrong; perhaps he is wilfully wrong; but he is not meanly wrong, and one can forgive him his sulkiness.

NOTICES.

Football—Players or Places in Teams Wanted by:

A. West, 114, Wellfield Road, Streatham, S.W. 16, wants place in South London team—wing, centre-forward, or back—age 15½.

Leonard Wait, 72, Marsh Lane, Bootle, wants to join team in Bootle or Seaforth.

Players wanted—13-14.—J. E. McAvoy, 89, Bristol Street, Hulme, Manchester.

H. Smith, 1, Lancaster Road, Wimbledon, wants place in team—anything but goal.

J. Partington, 75, Gassiot Road, Tooting, S.W. 17, wants to join local club—16-17.

Players wanted by Durban F.C.—14-16½.—W. H. Green, 227, Durban Road, Grimsby.

A. Kerslake, Jun., 253, Southampton Street, Peckham, S.E., wants to join team—17½—good goalkeeper.

G. H. Elam, 100, St. George's Road, Peckham, S.E., would be glad to act as hon. sec. to Peckham or Dulwich F.C., or other sports club.

Correspondence Wanted by:

Reg. Mortimer, 12, Balmoral Crescent, Queen's Park, Glasgow—with a London boy in Glasgow fond of music, especially the violin—age 14 to 15.

H. Foondler, 56, Barkerend Fold, Barkerend Road, Bradford—with boy readers interested in stamp-collecting.

Harry Coulton, 9, New Street, off Canal Street, Derby—with boy readers, 15, interested in coin and stamp collecting—would also like to know of a book on the Cadet movement.

Joseph Spooner, 110, High Street, Silverdale, Staffs—with boy readers 11-13.

Miss Eileen F. Seeligsohn, 26, St. George's Road, Yeoville, Johannesburg, South Africa—with a girl reader of 12-14.

R. Moyle, 49, Peel Street, West Melbourne, Australia—with readers in any part of the Empire.

Syd. Weston, 85, Canrobert Street, Bethnal Green, E. 2—with any boy keen on going on the stage.

R. J. Fish, 16, Fairmount Road, Brixton Hill, S.W. 2—with boy readers interested in stamp-collecting.

A. Sleigh, 19, Erskine Road, Walthamstow, E. 17—with boy readers interested in stamp-collecting.

Willie Wade, 16, Sharp Street, Burnley—with boy readers anywhere.

Israel Sindler, P.O. Box 61, Oudtshoorn, Cape Province, South Africa—with boy reader, 13-15, in England or Colonies.

Gordon Taylor, 184, Bathurst Street, Hobart, Tasmania, with boy readers, 16-19, anywhere.

Your Editor

GUSSY!

By MONTY LOWTHER.

If ever you find you've a "halfer" to spare,
And for some entertainment you sigh,
Just watch our tame Gussy a-combing his hair,
Or, better still, choosing a tie!

It's "Blake, where's that bottle of Eau-de-Cologne?"
And "Digby, where's that brilliantine?
I wanted that hairbrush, and now it has gone.
Oh, you've got it, Blake! Pway don't be mean!

"I say, Hewwies, deah boy, is my parting stwaight?"
And Herries grunts: "Straight as a die!"
And Blake growls: "You'll never get done at this rate!"
As Gussy starts choosing his tie!

That tie! It is chosen from two hundred kinds,
(That is not correct, Lowther. I only possess one hundred and seventy-one.—A. A. D'A.)
They put Joseph's coat in the shade!
It drives those poor chaps nearly out of their minds
Ere Gussy's selection is made!

"Blake, deah boy, this one with the gween bahs and spots,
Shall I wear, or this one with the pink?
I'm doubtful of this one with the heliotwope dots,
It's weally too gaudy, I think!

"You perceive, Blake, this shirt I am wearing is gween,
And this gween tie would harmonise well;
But on bahs and spots I am not vewy keen.
Still, weally, one nevah can tell!

"Don't yell at me, Blake, for it fluttahs me so;
I'm quite at a loss what to do!
And B-r-r-r-i's not intelligent, Hewwies, you know!
Bai Jove, I'm not finished, Blake——Gwooh!"

"Don't huwwy me, Blake!—Oh, wats, Dig!—Pway wait.
Or just start, and I'll follow you!
No, that one won't do—it's a tie that I hate!
On the whole, I think I'll wear the blue!"

So under the circs, p'r'aps it's hard on old Gus,
As soon as he reaches the gates,
To be bumped in a puddle by little us,
While his pals suffer similar fates!

THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA.

FOR NEW READERS.

The twins are Philip Derwent, of Highcliffe, and his sister Philippa, of Cliff House. They have a cockatoo named Cocky, which been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Gadsby, who is plotting ag him with Vavasour. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a serious accident to on Merton's eyes in a fight with Ponsonby. In their absence Flip gets too friendly with Pon, and the rest of the nuts, and, without any taste for it at the outset, takes to gambling. He has been to the Cliff House hockey field to see his sister, Flap, but has not seen her. On the way he has fallen in with Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars, and they walk back together.

(For information about the other characters in this story, see "The Magnet Who's Who," included in the Christmas Number of the "Magnet." Recent numbers of the GEM have given a list, but there is no longer room for that.)

(Now read on.)

Bunter Lets Out Something.

THE two walked away together; or, rather, Bunter trotted along by the side of the Highcliffe junior.

Flip did not seem disposed to waste a word upon him now. Bunter had got the worst snub, but it was Flip who felt the snubbing most. All three of the chums of Study No. 6 had been in the way of making a pet and a comrade of little Mollie Gray; and Flip was very fond of the staunch kid.

"I know now!" said Bunter suddenly.

"Eh? What do you know?" snapped Flip.

They had gone a quarter of a mile without a word, so that it was just a trifle surprising that Bunter should make that exclamation.

"Where I've heard the post-girl's name before," answered Bunter.

"What on earth—oh, hang the post-girl!"

"I don't see why you should say that, Derwent—I'm sure she's a very pretty girl!"

"Well, I don't want her hanged, if you come to that. Go and ask her for a smack of the face! I dare say she'll oblige."

"Do you know a cad named Gehazi Gittins, Derwent?"

"No, but if he's the girl's father you have my permission to go and ask him whether he objects to your paying his daughter attentions. He'll probably use his boot. But I don't mind."

"He isn't her father, fathead! Might be her brother, though. Sure you don't know him, Derwent?"

"I don't know Ahab Gittins or Hezekiah Gittins or whatever his silly name is from Adam, Bunter. Is that enough for you?"

"Oh, I thought you might, that's all. I say, Derwent, where's Cocky now?"

Flip turned on him fiercely.

"I shouldn't mind your talking rot so much if you wouldn't mix it to such an extent!" he snapped. "What's this Gittins chap to do with Cocky?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all, Derwent! Of course he hasn't anything—I—I—it was the merest accident—I was thinking about the post-girl, you know, and—"

Flip was looking at him so keenly that Bunter found himself getting badly flustered.

"I had a curious dream the other night, Bunter," said Flip.

"You were in it, and Cocky was sitting on your head. It's queer you should start talking about Cocky and this Ezra or Naaman—dash it!—Gehazi Gittins, I mean—dashed queer! What has Gehazi to do with my cockatoo? It isn't possible—but you're a rogue, I know, though you are a fat fool—it doesn't seem possible—yet——"

Suspicion had taken hold of Flip, ordinarily quite an unsuspicious fellow, though keen enough.

Before his level gaze Bunter's face gave Bunter away.

Bunter had been in the kidnapping of Cocky—Flip was sure of that now. Why Bunter should have been in it was a mystery, for it had happened before the fat rascal's trick in conjunction with Harold Skinner. If it had been since, the motive would not have been so hard to find.

But Flip was sure Bunter had been in it. And this fellow with the absurd Scriptural name, too—the post-girl's brother, as Bunter deemed. The girl herself could hardly have been; but Flip would not have been greatly surprised to hear that she also had been an accomplice!

"Now, then, out with it!" snapped Flip.

"I—I—oh really, Derwent, you're mistaken! It was only a—a random remark."

"There will be a random punch or two in about half a jiffy if you don't own up!" said Flip grimly. "Now then?"

He seized the Owl by the collar.

"I—I—it wasn't me! It—I—you—Gaddy——"

"Hallo, Derwent, what are you doing with my porpoise?" came the voice of Peter Todd.

"I won't say he don't deserve it—most generally he does—but I'm the proper person to administer chastisement to him, you know."

But Not Everything.

"I DON'T quite see that," replied Flip, not in the least relaxing his hold. "You Greyfriars chaps have rather a way of sticking up for a rotter just because he happens to be a Greyfriars rotter. But I don't see, myself, why he shouldn't get it in the neck if he deserves it."

"That," said Peter blandly, "is just the question—whether he does deserve it."

There were four other members of the Remove with Peter—Tom Dutton and the three Colonials.

Tom Dutton, being deaf, had not the least idea what the argument was about, except that it concerned Bunter. But Tom had no objection in the world to seeing Bunter lammed, though he was always loyally ready to back up to the cry of "Remove to the rescue!"—that is, of course, if he heard it.

Squiff, Tom Brown, and Piet Delarey had a natural bias towards Flip, as being a fellow-Colonial. But that did not mean that they would refuse to back up Peter in any case.

"Well," said Flip, "I think he does."

"But that," replied Peter judicially, "is only an opinion."

"Give the rotter a hiding, Toddy!" burbled Bunter. "I'll hold your jacket. You can, you know. Anyway, if five of you can't, you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourselves!"

"And if five of us did pile in on one chap just because he was dusting down a fat image, I suppose we shouldn't have anything at all to be ashamed of?" asked Delarey sarcastically.

"No, of course not! Ain't he Highcliffe?"

"That does not seem a sufficient reason for executing him, porpoise. I think it's just possible that he may have some better reason for his attentions to you."

"It's just because I'm Greyfriars! If he caught any of you alone he'd treat you the same!" mumbled Bunter.

That was not a judicious speech. With thin-skinned fellows it might have got Bunter disliked. But Tom Dutton could not hear, and the faces of the other four reflected the grin that appeared on Flip's. Flip knew as well as they did that he could not handle any one among that very hefty quintet as he was handling the Owl.

"Do you mind telling us what it's about, old scout?" asked Squiff.

"Not a bit," answered Flip readily.

Peter Todd's dry, lawyerlike way rather annoyed him. He did not know Peter very well, and at present was disposed to undervalue him. But he liked Squiff.

"Bunter let out something just now that made me fancy he had been mixed up in rather a nasty affair a little while back," he said.

"I didn't! I was talking about the new post-girl's brother. His name's Gehazi. I can't help them giving him a silly ass of a name like that, I suppose, can I?" Bunter burbled. "I don't know anything about Derwent's silly old cockatoo! I'm not an entomologist."

"A which-er?" inquired Tom Brown.

"An entomologist—chap who's dotty on birds. Don't you know your own language, Brown?"

"Not the way you talk it, Tubby. You mean an ornithologist, don't you?"

"Well, what's the difference, anyway? I mean I don't collect birds. What should I want with his cockatoo?"

"That's one of the things I want to know," said Flip.

"Has the cockatoo disappeared again, Derwent?" asked Peter.

"No; he's at Cliff House. Safe enough there, I think. This fat worm ain't so frightfully popular at Cliff House. It was the day of the fight he went. I dare say you fellows will remember. It made us three late."

Flip winced as he spoke. "Us three" had fallen quite naturally from his lips. Himself and Merton and Tunstall he had meant. Now he wondered whether ever again he would say "Us three" and mean the same trio.

"But that's some time ago," said Peter.

"I know it is. But I never found out who stole Cocky. And he might have got lost altogether. He was up on the downs when he was caught. You chaps may not see that it matters much; but I don't look at it like that."

"We don't either," said Piet Delarey. "It was a caddish trick, whoever did it!"

"It was not so long ago but that the case may still be considered open," pronounced Peter Todd. "But where does the porpoise come in?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out, if you'll let me!"

"Well, I'll let you," replied Peter gravely.

Flip Derwent looked grim for a second, and then grinned.

"He mentioned Gadsby's name."

"I didn't!" howled Bunter. "I said 'by gad!'"

Bunter had had time to think, and seemed to him very like wasting a precious opportunity to give Gadsby away without first blackmailing him.

"Sure it wasn't by 'Gadsby'?" asked Squiff.

"No, you silly ass! Nobody says 'by Gadsby,' do they?"

"Derwent seems to suspect that he might have to do it in the matter of Cocky's abduction," remarked Delarey.

But Bunter could not grasp that.

"Do you say 'by gad,' Bunter? I shall have to teach you better," said Peter Todd.

"Oh, really, Toddy! The Highcliffe chaps say it."

"But you are not a Highcliffe chap," Peter objected.

"No, thank goodness!" said Flip fervently.

"What had Gadsby to do with the affair?" Tom Brown inquired.

"Nothing at all. Haven't I said so? It's just a silly mistake of Derwent's!"

"And this chap Gittins—what had he to do with it?" asked Flip.

"Oh, how should I know anything about Gittins? I never even knew there was such a person till you told me."

"By Jupiter, Bunter, Ananias couldn't have taught you much!"

"Ananias couldn't have taught him anything, Derwent," said Peter. "My porpoise could have given Ananias three-quarters in the mile, and then whacked him to the wide. I'm not saying I'm proud of it, mind you. But if there's a lying competition on, I have always a candidate to enter; and he's a pretty certain winner, too!"

"You and Gadsby and a merchant named Gittins, Bunter," said Squiff, almost as thinking aloud. "Nobody else, of course?"

"That's all you know, Squiff; because Hazel—— I mean, I don't know anything about it; and I'm not going to stay here any longer! It's a perfect scandal that you chaps should let me be handled like this by a Highcliffe cad!"

"A Highcliffe what?" demanded Flip, slapping Bunter's head.

"Yow! Help, Toddy!"

"I will—I'll help Derwent if you're not civil, though I don't know that he really needs help."

(To be continued next week.)