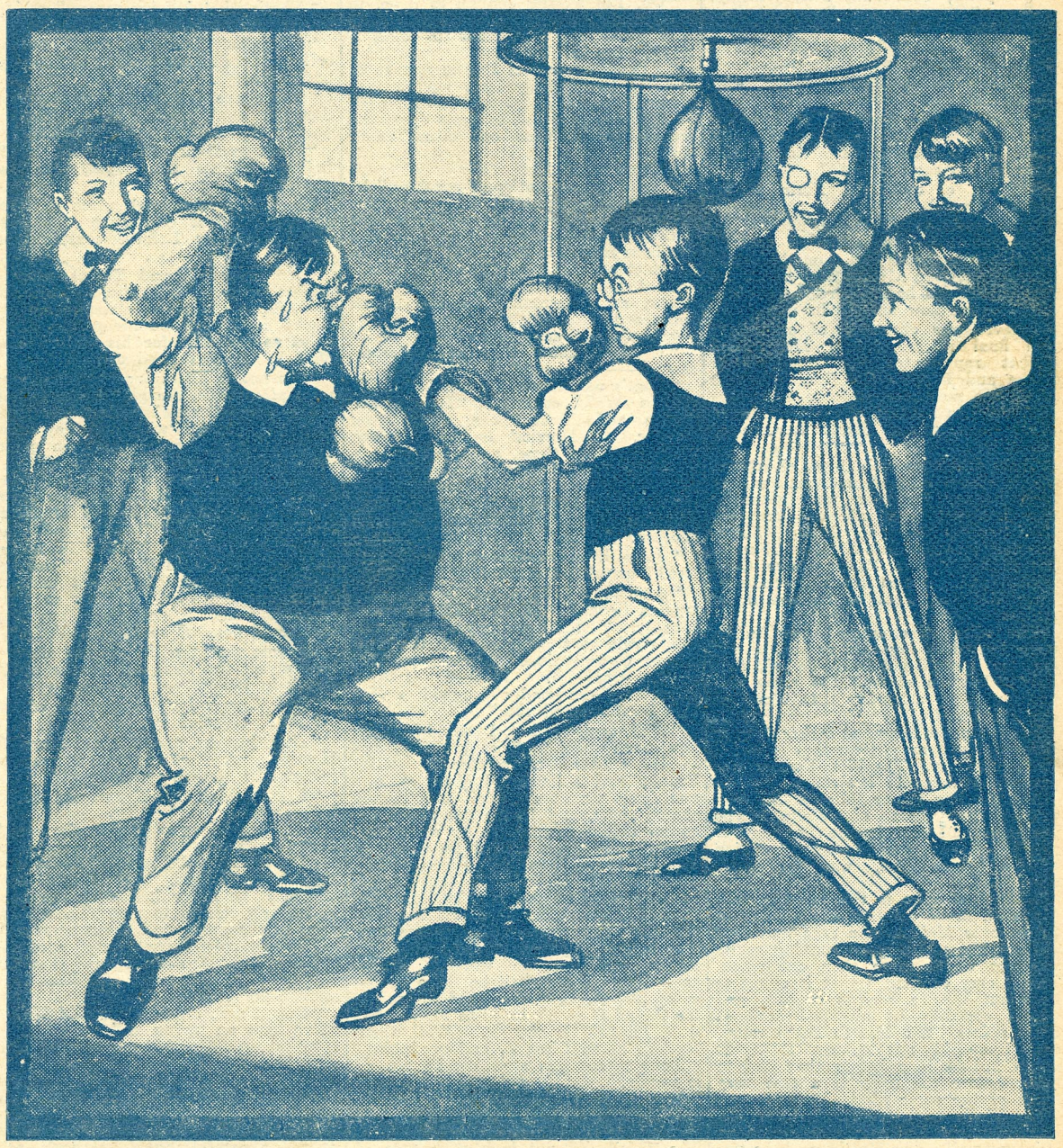
SHELL VERSUS FOURTH!

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

The GEM LIBRARY 1D

No. 528. Vol. 12.



BAGGY VERSUS SKIMMY!

23-3-18.

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

SHELL v. FOURTH!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Contesting Points.

"IT ain't worth more than one point," said Wally D'Arcy firmly.

"Oh, come now," replied Tom Merry, "that's rather rot!"

"If you're going to call the umpires' decidals—I mean, what they settle——"

"You mean decisions, Wally," said Frank Levison.

"How do you know what I mean, kid? Anyway, it's cheek to talk like that. We're here to settle things, and what we say can't be rot!"

Lefevre, of the Fifth Form at St. Jim's, grinned.

The meetings of the committee of management for the series of contests between the Shell and Fourth Forms afforded Lefevre a good deal of amusement, although he seldom let the other members see how amused he was.

Lefevre was chairman of committee and final referee. Tom Merry and Talbot represented the Shell, Jack Blake and Figgins the Fourth. The other two members, and the colleagues of Lefevre in the task of umpiring, were Wally D'Arcy and Frank Levison of the Third.

Those two were only fags, of course. To be chosen on such a committee was high honour for them, for naturally they had not been informed that the chief reason for appointing Third-Formers was that both Shell and Fourth barred having the Forms above them taking too big a part in the proceedings. They did not want to be bossed by seniors.

The alternative seemed now to be being bossed by fags—or, rather, by one fag, for it could not fairly be said that Frank Levison showed the same disposition to be arbitrary that Wally of the Third did.

Frank's attitude was as satisfactory as Lefevre's, and more than that it would be hard to say. The Fifth-Former was proving a first-rate chairman.

And Levison minor followed his lead rather than that of Wally. The youngster had more brains than most of the Third, and, though as fond of fun as his Form-mates, was far more thoughtful.

Wally had come to this meeting with his mind made up that the victory of Racke over Mellish in a race that they did not know they were running really was not worth more than one point. Tom Merry contended that it ought to be counted as a serious contest, and should certainly be awarded at least three points. The Fourth Form representatives did not contest this. It might not be long before they had to bring before the tribunal a case very much of the same kind.

But Wally contested it. Lefevre and Levison minor had as yet expressed no opinion at all. The members of the two Forms concerned had no vote in matters of this kind. They were only on the committee to express their views—or the views of their Forms, which came to very much the same thing—leaving the umpires to decide after hearing them.

"Perhaps you will allow Merry to say what he thinks," suggested Lefevre.

"Oh, I'm willing enough to listen to him, though nothing he says will jolly well make any difference to what I think," replied Wally.

"I don't know that I've any more to say. It has already been agreed that either Form forfeits ten points for each fellow in it that fails to come up to the scratch for at least one event," said Tom.

Lefevre nodded.

"Quite a good notion, I consider," he said. "It's understood, too, that some of them won't come up to the scratch willingly; and, owing to that, provision has been made for the bringing them in by strategy. This particular event was agreed to as ranking by Merry and Blake, as representing the two Forms concerned, I believe?"

"That's so," said Blake.

"I don't know the exact circumstances——"

"That's where you slip up, Lefevre!" put in Wally eagerly. "Now I do. Racke and Mellish ran away from Towser, old Herries' bulldog. These two chaps saw them, and took it as a race, Racke being Shell and Mellish belonging to the Fourth—see?"

"And both being of the Conscientious Objector type," answered Lefevre, smiling. "I see."

"Jolly little conscience about those two!" growled George Figgins.

"And jolly little about the ordinary type of Conchy!" said the Fifth-Former blandly. "I think we may agree to call the recalcitrant members of the two Forms Conscientious Objectors—or, for short, Conchies. Proceed, D'Arcy minor, my esteemed colleague! I fear that I interrupted you."

"Well, come to that, I butted in when you were speaking," said Wally, not to be outdone in politeness. "But Franky and I know all about it, and you don't seem to. Well, old Towser chased them, and Racke got round the corner before Mellish, so by what Tom Merry and Blake agreed he won. I suppose he really can run better than Mellish, because they're both such rotten funks that you may be jolly sure they both ran their hardest when they thought Towser was going to see how they tasted. But what's the best gallop Racke can put up worth? We've agreed that there shall be three classes of events—A, B, and C—and the points for B and C aren't to be as high as for A. That's fair enough. Well, then, Racke's about Class Z, and one point's a heap more than anything he can do is worth!"

Wally paused for breath. Never in his life before had he made so long an oration as that without interruption. The Third did not look with eyes of favour upon long orations.

"My colleague adduces cogent arguments," said Lefevre. "What do you say, gentlemen?"

"Hang about cogent! They're reasonable, and what's more, they're right," spoke Wally in the ear of Frank Levison.

"That's what Lefevre means," replied Frank.

"Why don't he say so, then? I don't believe there's such a word as 'cogent' in the dic.!"

"There are just a few words there that you don't know, Wally. 'Bout a quarter of a million or so, I reckon."

"What good are they? Still, if old Lefevre admits I'm right, I'm not grumbling."

While this aside took place the four members of the committee who were called upon by Lefevre consulted together.

"We give in," said Talbot, after a minute or so. "We raise no objection to D'Arcy minor's classification of Racke as Z, and we accept the single point as sufficient for his victory over Mellish. Is that good enough?"

"It's not to affect anything that may come afterwards, though," Blake added. "Racke was the awkwardest case these fellows had to deal with, and they ought to be jolly glad not to lose ten points for failing to get him in at all! I agreed at the time, and I'm not going back on it now. But everyone knows that Mellish isn't so hard to handle as Racke."

"We'd have had Mellish in before we'd finished," said Figgins. "But the Shell might never have got another chance with Racke. It ain't so jolly often he's caught out doing anything that could possibly be called athletic."

"I vote that the Fourth are allowed four points for what old Towser did!" struck in Wally.

"But Towser isn't a member of the Fourth!" objected Tom Merry.

"He's just as good. He belongs to Herries. And he's worth a score of rotters like Mellish and Baggy!"

"I don't think that Towser can rank," Lefevre said.

"Besides, he never was in the race," Tom Merry observed, with a grin as he saw in memory the rush of Racke and Mellish to escape. "If they'd only known it he never had a chance once they fairly started to run. There ain't a lot of the greyhound about Towser."

"I must rule Towser out!" said the chairman. "Are we agreed that the victory of Racke over Mellish shall score a point to the Shell?"

"I've said so already," replied Wally. "I've kept on saying so."

"Shut up, fathead!" whispered Frank. Aloud he said: "I agree, Lefevre."

"Right-ho! Then enter it up, and Merry and Blake will initial it as being satisfactory and correct."

Frank's face was very solemn as he opened a carefully-ruled notebook, and made the necessary entry. He was acting as secretary to the committee, and had charge of the book of records.

The entries therein, after he had

written a line in his best round hand, read thus:

"SHELL v. FOURTH.

"1. Hundred Yards Race (Class A).—First, G. Figgins (4th); second, T. Merry (Shell); third, J. Blake (4th).

"Points: Fourth (seven and two), nine; Shell, four.

"2. Race between A. Racke (Shell) and P. Mellish (4th). Racke won.

"Points: Shell, one."

On the right hand of the page the points were carried out in parallel columns, and it could be seen at a glance that thus far the Fourth led by nine points to five.

"You can't say 'one points,' ass!" objected Wally.

"I can, and I do," replied Frank, passing the book across to be initialled by Tom Merry and Blake.

"Can he say 'one points,' Lefevre?" appealed Wally.

"Hardly worth arguing about, is it?" returned the chairman. "You were the objector to making the last event points, I think."

"Take care of that book, kid!" said Blake, as he passed it back. "It's easy enough to remember now how we stand, but it won't be so easy later on, and that's the only real evidence."

"You'd better let me take charge of it, Franky," said Wally. "I'm not likely to——"

"Rats!" retorted Frank. "I'm secretary; you're not. You're only the chap who does all the objecting and most of the chinwag!"

— —

CHAPTER 2.
The Conchies.

"WE'RE not goin' to put up with it, dashed if we are!" said Racke, bringing his fist down on the table to emphasise his words.

At the same time that the competition committee was holding its meeting in Study No. 10 another meeting was being held in No. 7 on the same passage, the study shared by Aubrey Racke and George Gerald Crooke.

There were present, besides Racke and Crooke, Clampe and Scrope of the Shell, and Mellish, Trimble, and Chowle, of the Fourth.

These represented the irreconcilable element of the two Forms.

"I don't see why we should," said Baggy Trimble, puffing out his fat cheeks and looking defiant.

"There ain't much use in kickin' that I can see," remarked Chowle despondently. "Racke says he's goin' to kick. But he can't. They've settled his hash already, an' Mellish's, too. Easy enough to say that you won't go in for anythin' when you ain't a bit likely to be asked to. Nobody's goin' to worry about those two after yesterday."

"Towser settled that. Ha, ha, ha!" jeered Crooke.

Racke turned fiercely upon Crooke.

"He'd have settled you, too, if you hadn't rolled into the ditch to get out of the way!" he snarled. "There's nothin' to be dashed well proud of in rollin' into a ditch, is there? It ain't exactly heroic!"

But that sneer fell very flat. There was no one present who, in the same circumstances, would not have done what Crooke did, given the chance. The seven slackers might not agree about many things, but they were of one mind as to discretion being the better part of valour.

"That ain't the question, you know, Racke," said Clampe. "You want to get us to swear that we'll keep outside this rotten competition bizney. Well, I for one would a jolly sight rather keep outside it, an' I'm not sayin' now that I'll come into it of my own free will. I won't run, or jump, or play footer to please Merry an' his crowd. But I fancy that in the long run they'll get me, just as they got you, in some way that I ain't thinkin' about."

"They didn't get me!" roared Racke. "I won't recognise it."

"They'll recognise it, though!" Scrope said, grinning.

"An' that's what really counts," remarked Mellish. "I don't know that I mind a fat lot, either. That beast of a bulldog didn't catch us, and now they won't worry me any more. I'm out of it—without scoring any points for the Fourth, too!"

"Do you mean that I scored for the Shell?" yelled Racke, in fury.

"Well, you did, then; there's no getting away from that. Twice over, too, for they'll take points because you licked me, and if you had stood out they'd have lost ten points on you, so that they really got ten more there."

"I tell you that I don't an' I won't recognise it, you potty idiot! As for the ten points, you could have stood out, too, I suppose, couldn't you?"

"You can suppose what you like," said Mellish sulkily, "but I know jolly well how it would have been. Life wouldn't have been worth living for me till I had come in. You don't catch Blake and Figgins letting a follow off like that!"

"This is how we look at it, Racke," said Crooke. "Whatever you may say, you're bagged. You've scored for the Shell. Question is, that bein' so, whether it's worth our while to buck?"

"Of course it is! Don't be such an absolute ass! It's always worth while to make things awkward for that gang."

"Yes. But aren't they goin' to make them a dashed sight awkwarder for us?" said Clampe.

"Yes, that's the way to look at it, you know, Racke," said Baggy, ever ready to veer with the wind of popular opinion.

There seemed to be six to one in favour of letting the leaders of the two Forms have their masterful way.

After all, it was not as though they asked anything very strenuous of the slackers' brigade.

It did but mean entering for one event, and it was easy to choose an event that did not involve great exertion. Even Clampe could run part of a hundred yards at his own pace without distressing himself too much. And Clampe was about the most hopeless weed in the Shell, though the Fourth could put forward a worse duffer in Baggy.

"You mean that you won't back me up?" snarled Racke.

The other six looked at one another.

"Don't quite see why we should," said Crooke bluntly.

"Unless we get something out of it," added Baggy.

Baggy had struck the right note for the rest. The eyes of all but Crooke gleamed with greed. Crooke had plenty of cash. So had Scrope and Clampe, for that matter. Anyway, they had more than most juniors had. But Mellish and Baggy were always hard up, and Chowle was generally so.

"So that's the game, is it?" said Racke. "You rotters want bribin'? Well, I'll bribe you!"

"You needn't call it by unpleasant names, old sport!" said Scrope.

"I'm callin' it what it is," replied Racke.

"Well, it's for us to say whether we accept it or not, I fancy," Crooke said unpleasantly. "You needn't expect to rope me in, for one. I'm not sayin' that I shall give in to Merry and his precious crew of smugs. But I do say you can't bribe me!"

"Plenty of oof of your own, of course?" retorted Racke. "But it's not cash I mean. It's grub!"

"GRUB!"

Baggy Trimble repeated the magic word with an emphasis that nothing short of capitals can possibly express.

The rest were no less keen than Baggy. The food regulations might not have hit them quite as hard, for they lacked his immense storage capacity.

But rationing had caused them all acute discomfort. They had gone on eating all they could get hold of up to the very last. No voluntary rations for these self-indulgent slackers!

Thus they found the new regime far harder to bear than did fellows who had voluntarily practised self-denial before it came in.

"It's all very well to talk about grub," said Scrope. "But where are you goin' to get it? That's the point."

"Yes—that's it!" said Clampe. "If it could have been had, I'd have had it. I do get all I can, as it is. But there ain't much goin' now."

"You can leave that to me," replied Racke, in a very confident manner.

"Crookey, you must know somethin' about this," said Scrope. "Old Racke's got a hoard—that's about the size of it."

"I don't know anythin' about it if he has," said Crooke. "Of course, we've a stock of some things. We weren't such asses as to give up what the food-control merchants called our hoard. An' you bet the prefects found nothin' when they came round on search! Not so much as a tin of sardines. The cupboard was like old Mother Hubbard's."

"So was mine," Clampe said. "But I'm not out of sardines yet. Have to go easy on them, though—they won't last for ever. So if Racke really has a hoard that he's prepared to whack out——"

"I haven't said so, have I? I'm not givin' myself away, thanks! But I say this—if you chaps will do what I want—stick it out against these rotters who want to ride roughshod over us—I'll stand the whole crowd of you as much as you can eat twice a week!"

"I say, Racke, I'm on!" puffed Baggy, in breathless haste. "You won't catch me giving in—not likely! I say, can we have the first feed now? I'm starving!"

They were all on—that was evident. Crooke may have felt a trifle doubtful. He knew how little Racke's promises were worth. But in this case performance would have to follow promise, or Racke would fail to get what he wanted.

"Of course you can't have it now!" snapped Racke. "I'm not jolly well goin' to risk it here. But we'll find a place all serene—I've one in my mind now that I think will do. An' if I can fix things up, we'll have the first feed to-morrow, while all those idiots are runnin' races, or gapin' at the rotters who run them."

"It's a long time to wait," said Baggy, whose mouth was watering already.

"You can dream about it to-night," fatty," said Crooke.

"What will it be, Racke? I hope you'll manage to get some ham and meat-pies and solid things like that," went on Baggy. "And plenty of really sweet things, too. There's never enough sugar in things now. I don't see what grown men want with sugar; but they keep on supplying it to the Army. Much better to keep it for growing chaps who really need it, like us!"

"I say, Racke, I suppose I'm in this?" said Mellish nervously.

"Didn't I say all of you?"

"Yes; but they had me. It's no good my sticking out now."

"I tell you I don't recognise that silly fool bizney!" howled Racke.

Nobody argued the point this time.

All knew that what counted was whether the competition committee recognised the Racke-Mellish race as an event of the series. And it was pretty certain that the committee would.

But if Racke could get any comfort out of his refusal to recognise it he was quite welcome to that comfort—as long as he kept his promise to stand two feeds a week to the half-dozen!

"Quite right, old man!" said Scrope encouragingly. "After all, what that crowd says doesn't go with us. We won't recognise it!"

"Not likely!" agreed Chowle.

Racke took Mellish aside.

"I want you to keep an eye on Trimble," he said. "You an' he dig together, you know, an' he'll need lookin' after."

Mellish opened his eyes widely.

"What, Baggy?" he said. "Oh, I'll look after him all serene! But it won't be much trouble. Baggy would sell his soul—if he's got one—for grub."

"Of course he would—everyone knows that," replied Racke impatiently. "But he's such a fat, silly fool—anyone can spoof him. Now, you're as cunnin' as any Boche!"

Mellish smiled at that very dubious compliment.

"I'll keep Baggy safe," he said. "I say, though, Racke—smokes as well as grub—eh?"

"Oh, of course! Tell you what, Mellish, we'd better have the smokes first. Baggy won't need so much grub then. It won't take many cigarettes to make him look sea-green; but it needs a wheelbarrow to carry all the grub he'll put away if he's given his head."

"Can't be did," answered Mellish. "Baggy's a soft ass, I know; but he's cute enough where grub's concerned. I thought I'd hidden the little lot I'd collected to help me through the hard times, but that fat beast found it, and scoffed it all at one sitting. You won't catch him smoking till he's had his grub."

The door was flung suddenly open, and the face of the Honourable Walter Adolphus D'Arcy showed itself.

"Hallo, Conchies!" said Wally affably. "Just looked in to tell you that we've decided to allow one point for Racke's licking Mellish in the Towser race. Tom Merry wanted to make it three, but I overruled him."

"Get out of this, you cheeky fag!" howled Racke. "Crooke, you crass idiot, why didn't you lock the door?"

"Why didn't you lock it yourself?" snarled Crooke.

"Don't quarrel, Conchies!" said Wally cheerily. "You can't fight, you know—your principles don't allow it! They don't allow you to run—unless there's a giddy bull-dog after you! Or to play footer—unless you're made to—eh, Baggy? That's one to your address, my fat pippin'—and to Clampe's and Chowle's as well! Or to——"

Racke rushed at the intruder. Wally retreated. Racke rushed on.

"Got you!" yelled Wally.

"Rescue!" howled Racke. "Rescue, you bounders! Yaroooh!"

Wally had not been alone, as Racke had incautiously taken for granted. Wally was far too good a general for that.

Out of sight in the passage had waited a dozen or more of the Third. Reggie Manners was not of the company; but Frank Levison and Curly Gibson and Joe Frayne and Hobbs and Jameson were all there, backing up their leader loyally, as usual.

Racke had been bumped three times before his liegemen, spurred to the fray by fear that the grub contract might fall through, went to the rescue.

Even then they went half-heartedly. A dozen Third-Formers were heavy odds for seven slackers of the Fourth and Shell.

But the fags broke and fled. Tom Merry had put his head out of the door of No. 10, and Wally & Co. did not care to face a rush of the Shell.

They knew that such an enterprise as theirs would be severely and painfully discouraged; and their leader felt that his dignity might suffer if he stayed.

"Ta-ta, Conchies!" he yelled as he retreated. "We'll bump the rest of you another time!"

— —

CHAPTER 3.
Racke Protests.

"LOOK here, Merry!"

"I'm looking, Racke. No good suggesting that I should like it better if you got a new face, I suppose, because with a face like yours, and so much oof as you've got, you'd have been dead sure to have done it before now if there had been half a chance."

"Racke's face is his misfortune," Monty Lowther said gravely.

"And it ain't fair to reproach chaps with their misfortunes, Tommy," added Manners. "You make me feel ashamed of you, really!"

"I suppose you rotters call that sort of thing witty!" snarled Racke. "But that's no odds. I'm not responsible for your being half-baked."

"But we have ofttimes been responsible for your being done brown, Racke," retorted Lowther.

"Will you shut up?" howled Young Moneybags.

"Since you ask me so politely, I'll do my endeavours," Lowther answered blandly.

"I've this to say to you, Merry. You've started some sort of potty competition with the Fourth. Well, I'll have nothin' to do with it!"

"No reason why you should have any more to do with it, Racke," Tom said coolly. "You've done your bit, and as it resulted in a point for us we're not grumbling."

"We don't propose to present you with an illuminated vote of thanks, Racke," added Lowther. "It isn't quite worth that, you know."

"Still, we're satisfied," chimed in Manners. "It was but a point—one single point. But even that was more than we expected."

"I shouldn't let him off so easily, if I were you," said a voice behind Racke. "Make the slacking beggar go into training for the quarter-mile, Class C! If he could keep up anything like the giddy pace he showed when Towser was at his heels he'd win that for you, hands down."

It was Jack Blake who spoke. He and Herries had come up behind Racke and Crooke, who were standing at the door of Study No. 10. The Terrible Three were within, just starting prep.

"Can't quite do that," said Tom. "We bar actually forcing anybody to do anything. The Fourth may go in for such drastic methods; but we don't."

"What do you call settin' a dashed bulldog on a chap?" snapped Racke.

"My dear, good ass, I didn't set any bulldog on you! I couldn't. Towser wouldn't stir a foot for me, or for anyone but Herries."

Racke swung round on Herries.

"You'd better take care of that brute of yours!" he said viciously.

"Old Towser ain't half a bad hand at taking care of himself," replied Herries, with a cheerful grin.

"He ought to be killed off! I can't think what the Head's about to allow animals to be wolfin' precious grub at a time like this!"

"I can't, either," said Blake. "But I suppose your people and Crooke's and Trimble's might make a bit of a fuss if he sent you to a lethal chamber. I can't see why they should myself; but folks are queer, and some of them will make a lot of fuss about any trifle."

"It would be patriotic to kill that brute!" growled Crooke.

"Which? Racke?" inquired Lowther.

"No, you idiot! Towser, of course!"

Burly George Herries clenched his big hands.

"You let me catch any of you rotters fooling round trying to do old Towser in," he said hotly, "and I'll make you jolly well wish you'd never been born!"

"I didn't say that I was going to do anything," mumbled Crooke. "I only said that it would be patriotic."

"Which was as good as saying that he didn't mean to, Herries," put in Lowther. "For who could imagine the dear Crooke doing anything patriotic?"

"They'd better leave Towser alone, both of them!" growled Herries, looking dangerous.

"I'm not talking about Towser!" snapped Racke. "I came here to tell you, Merry, that I protest against your reckoning a pretended race between me and Mellish in the list of events in your potty competition."

"Pretended! My hat! There wasn't much pretence about it!" said Blake. "You ran for all you were worth, and fairly left Towser standing."

"You've protested, Racke," Tom said. "Is that all?"

"No; it's not all! You've put up a list of events decided on the notice-board, I see."

"I have."

"Well, I've torn it down! You're not goin' to include me in——"

"Torn it down, have you?" said Tom, rising. There was a stormy gleam in Tom's blue eyes. "Well, I suppose something must be allowed for the fact that you never had a chance of learning the decent thing till you came here, Racke! It's your own fault, though, that you haven't learned it since you've been here. I shall put up another copy of that list. If you touch it you'll get the bumping of your life!"

"I shall tear it down," Racke said doggedly. "An' every time you put up a list that includes my name I shall tear it down. Leave me out, an' I've no interest in the matter. Put my name there, an' I've a right to take action."

"Right-ho! You've been warned," Tom replied.

"I decline—an' Crooke declines—an' so do Clampe an' Scrope—to have any hand in your childish foolery!"

"Don't leave out Baggy and Mellish and Chowle!" said Blake. "I hear you've nobbled them all."

"Right-ho!" said Tom again. "You've declined. We'll make a note of that for the future. But what's done is done, and anything you say now can't alter the solid fact that you've won a race for us."

"First thing Racke ever did for the Form," said Manners. "He ought to feel bucked about it, though it was but one poor little point."

Now he can retire from the contest gracefully—if there be any grace in him," Lowther said.

"If we'll let him!" put in Herries.

Blake gave Herries a nudge. Manners noted that.

"What do you mean?" asked Tom. "You fellows needn't trouble yourselves to bring Racke and his measly gang in, I should think."

"It all depends," said Herries oracularly.

Blake nudged him again.

"The old ass only means that if we should happen to bring off a big spoof, your Form would all have to be in it for it to count," Blake explained, with what Manners thought a rather carefully assumed air of indifference, after those two warning pokes with the elbow. "You know what we agreed about that."

"Oh, we know," Tom answered. "But you kids needn't suppose you are men enough to wangle a jape that will take in all your uncles. We're too wide for you, my sons!"

"So you think," said Blake. "We'll see!"

"Have you quite finished, Racke?" asked Lowther politely.

"I've warned you——"

"Yes, yes! Anything else to say, I mean?"

"Not that I know of."

"Would you mind going, then? We really don't feel so enamoured of your charms as to say, with my dear old pal, Bill Shakespeare, 'Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I could say good-night until to-morrow,' or words to that effect. In short, if you won't clear we'll send for Towser!"

At that Racke went, gnashing his teeth. Crooke grinned. Towser had not chased Crooke; but perhaps Racke may have had justification for his theory that sprawling in a ditch to be out of the way really was not so very much more dignified than being chased by a bulldog!

"Time for prep, laddies!" said Lowther to Blake and Herries.

"Oh, hang prep!" replied Blake. "Hang it up for a few secs, anyway. Herries has an idea."

"Hang prep by all means, then," said Lowther promptly. "If Railton were only informed of that we might get off prep for the rest of the term. Miracles don't happen every day in the week! Did it hurt much, Herries, old chap?"

"You'll get hurt if you aren't jolly careful!" growled Herries.

"Well, let's hear it, and then let us get on," said Tom. "Lathom may take things easier than Linton does; but Linton certainly won't let us hang prep. And with all there is going just now detention ain't exactly what we're asking for."

"It's a musical competition," explained Herries.

"Help us!" murmured Lowther.

"Orchestral?" inquired Manners.

"Anything and everything!" replied Herries, who was almost as keen on music as Manners was on photography.

"Mine's the tooth-comb," said Lowther. "Tommy's is the penny whistle. Julian, no doubt, will select the Jew's harp, and Reilly or Mulvaney 'the harp that once through Tara's halls.' The bagpipes will do Kerr—unless Macdonald or Lorne bags them—no joke intended. Manners——"

"Oh, dry up, do!" snapped Herries. "I'm serious."

"We'll consider it," said Tom diplomatically. "Can't well refuse, if you challenge. But you'll have the merry dickens of a pull, for we've no conductor or organiser to compare with Herries, you know."

"Lucas is not so dusty," replied Herries, much pleased by the compliment.

"Well, we can settle things to-morrow," Blake said. "There won't be any hurry, for everybody will want a lot of practice before the event comes off."

"That's just where the hurry comes in," objected Herries. "We want to start practice at once, of course."

"Right-ho! But not to-night, surely?" Tom replied.

"I might have a go at the cornet. But I can do that, anyway," Herries said. "What are you screwing up your silly mug for, Lowther?"

Tom Merry's Great Jump.
(See Chapter 6.)

"I was practising, Herries—practising the expression of sad resignation appropriate to the occasion."

"Rats!"

"No, no! It always sounds to me more like hyenas," said Lowther.

"Tommy," said Manners, when Blake had dragged Herries away to prep, "what are those bounders up to?"

"Are you deaf?" asked Tom.

"Don't I wish I was!" sighed Lowther.

"No; and I'm not dotty!" snapped Manners. "Didn't you see Blake nudge Herries to make him shut up?"

"I should have fallen upon Blake's neck in gratitude if I had," said Lowther. "Not that it would have been any good. When Herries gets on to what he calls music not Blake nor any man alive can stop him."

"I don't mean about the music, chump!" retorted Manners. "They have something up their sleeves—some giddy spoof!"

"May have," said Tom. "I'm not worrying. They won't find it so easy to spoof us, old scout!"

Manners only grunted.

He might have been even more convinced that there was something in the wind, and Tom and Lowther might have felt less easy, if they had known that a New House contingent, consisting of Figgins, Kerr, Redfern, Owen, and Pratt had spent half an hour between tea and prep in Study No. 6 on the Fourth Form passage, and that Levison major, Clive, Julian, Reilly, and Mulvaney minor, as well as the four inmates of the study, had taken part in the consultation.

CHAPTER 4.
A Dormitory Raid.

"HERE they are!" said Digby.

It wanted yet fully half an hour to the time when the rising-bell would clang out its unwelcome summons to St. Jim's, and as yet it was not fully light.

But quite a considerable number of juniors appeared to have adopted early rising principles suddenly. For across the dusky quad there came stealing a dozen or so New House fellows, and just within the door of the School House there awaited them twice the number.

Every fellow there belonged to the Fourth. Figgins led the visiting crew, with Kerr, looking particularly wide awake, and Fatty Wynn, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles to get the sleep out of them, close behind him. Redfern & Co. were on hand, and Clarke and Pratt and Robinson minor.

As for the School House Party, it numbered all but a few slackers. Baggy Trimble had been left to snore, and Mellish had not been roused. Their help and that of two or three more was not wanted. But everyone who was at all keen was there.

"Done the job over there, Figgy?" asked Blake.

"Oh, rather! It was dead easy. Our Shell crowd are rather a job lot; the real New House notables are in the Fourth, and don't you forget it, my son! That's what's going to bring our Form out well on top."

"Well, we've a few useful members ourselves," remarked Levison.

"I'll grant you that," replied Figgy affably. "Tommy and the rest still snoozing?"

"They were two minutes ago, when I looked in," said Julian.

"My hat! There's Cardew!" said Figgins, in seeming astonishment.

"Yaas, I'm here, Figgins!" drawled Ralph Reckness Cardew. "Any objection, dear boy?"

"Not at all! But I didn't think anythin' earthly could get you out of bed half an hour before time."

"I didn't think Levison anythin' earthly when he did," replied Cardew. "I told him at the time that it was an infernal trick, by gad, to seize a defenceless chap by the leg an' yank him out like a sack of coke. But I refrained

from squealin'—Clive helped me to refrain by puttin' his hand over my mouth. An' I really don't mind so much now, though I'm a bit disappointed with the sunrise. It ain't all it's cracked up to be, I must say."

"Ass! The sun hasn't risen yet," said Clive.

"Not? I'm very glad to hear it. May never have another chance of seein' the phenomenon, by gad! Lead on, MacFiggins!"

"You fellows got the binders ready?" asked Figgins.

"What do you think?" retorted Blake.

And he led the way with Figgins, closely followed by Kerr, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Herries. Behind them came the rest. Fatty Wynn, still rubbing his eyes, brought up the rear.

"I'll take Tommy," said Figgins, as they halted before the closed door of the Shell dormitory.

"Right-ho! Manners for mine!" said Blake.

"I bag Lowther!" came grimly from Herries.

"Fancy I'd better take Talbot," Kerr said. "It isn't often anyone fairly scores over old Talbot."

"An' I'll have Gwunday, bai Jove!"

"I say, Gustavus, Grundy's a bit over your weight!" objected Blake. "Try something easier, old scout! We mustn't risk any hitch. Leave Grundy to Reddy, and take on Skimmy!"

"Weally, Blake, I considah—oh, wats to you, you gwinnin' chump!"

"Can't be bothered with Grundy. Racke's my mark," Dick Redfern said.

"It's all right. I want an easy one. Skimmy will do for me," came the voice of Fatty Wynn. "I never do feel up to much exertion before brekker—or afterwards, either, now that we get so jolly little."

It was necessary to fix up beforehand the details of the attack; and, like a good general, Figgins passed down the line giving his orders.

For this was really Figgy's wheeze; and, though he had not told his School House comrades so, it had been planned originally as a House jape.

"Levison, will you take Noble?"

Levison nodded assent.

"Dane for you, Clive."

"I'm on, Figgy!"

"Gore's yours, Cardew!"

"Yaas, if you say so, dear boy. But an easier one would suit me just as well, by gad! Make it Scrope, now; there ain't much real kick in Scrope."

"I said Gore! Julian, you'll take Wilkins."

"I will, colonel!"

"Reilly, Crooke's your mark."

"Bedad, I'm on to him!"

"Owen goes for Finn."

"So I will, Figgy!"

"Lawrence for Glynn—Kerruish for Gunn—Roylance for Gibbons—Hammond for Boulton——"

So Figgins went on down the line, and when he reached the end he had left out no one, and had repeated no name. It was all mapped out in the mind of George Figgins, who did not pretend to be as brainy as his chum Kerr, but was unmistakably all there in a job like this.

There were a few Fourth-Formers over when every victim had been allotted. These were formed into a squad to stand by and give help where needed, and to Digby was assigned the command of the squad.

Then Figgins stole back to his place in the front, and Blake, by his side, cautiously pushed open the door of the Shell dormitory.

"Oh, look out, you——"

It was Manners who tried to give that warning. But Blake and Dig and Pratt were on him before he had half got it out.

Manners had been sitting up in bed. He had awoke early, with a queer feeling in his mind that something was up. No doubt both that and his early waking were due to his suspicions of the evening before.

Something that sounded like voices in the corridor had come to him as he lay there. He was not sure but that it was mere fancy, and had more than half a mind to turn over and woo sleep again.

But then he had heard the tramp of feet, and had sat up. He did not want to give a false alarm. That would have meant chaff, and Harry Manners knew well enough that he had not the same capacity for taking chaff coolly that Tom Merry possessed.

Then the door had opened, and he had given the alarm—or, at least, tried to. Before he could get out more than four words Digby had thrust him down on to his pillow, and Pratt was holding a hand over his mouth while Blake did something to his struggling arms.

When Blake had finished that part of his job Manners found that his arms were drawn up and his wrists fastened to the knobs of the bedposts. Again he tried to give the alarm as Pratt took his hand away. But before he could get out anything Dig had whipped the pillow from under his head, and had planked it down right over his open mouth.

Meanwhile the rest were hard at work. So swiftly and neatly did some of them accomplish their tasks that several members of the Shell were tricked up to the knobs by loops round their legs and wrists, before they were fairly awake.

Tom Merry was one of these, and Lowther was another. But Kerr had to call for help to deal with Talbot, and four were needed to overcome the resistance of George Alfred Grundy.

Grundy had not the least idea what was happening, but that only made him him struggle the more determinedly.

"Yaroooh! Wharrer doing? Stoppit, you silly asses!"

Grundy howled as well as struggled.

Others howled. "Yaroooh!" and "Stoppit!" and "Wharrer doing?" resounded on all sides.

A few kicked. Not many got the chance of doing that, and those who did made the discovery that boots are not half bad things to have on if one must kick, for to kick with bare feet is at least as likely to hurt the kicker as the kicked.

Racke kicked first and howled afterwards. For his foot caught the rail of the bedstead, and the rail was by long odds the hardest.

Gore gave a good deal of trouble. He writhed up once; but Cardew called for help, and then sat on Gore's chest, while the aides fastened the binders, as Figgins called the loops provided for the job.

Frere very nearly spoiled the whole thing for the Fourth. Robinson minor, to whose kindly offices Frere had been assigned, did not know where to find him, and when he did find his bed found no one in it. Frere had dodged out and under the next bed.

He had fairly reached the door when he was caught. But Dig pounced upon him there, and he was given the frogs'-march back to his bed, and fastened up like the rest.

CHAPTER 5.
A Forced Agreement.

IN ten minutes it was all done.

Every inmate of the dormitory was tricked up, and the Shell had suffered defeat all along the line.

"Is that how you like it done, duffers?" chanted Figgins.

"Yooop! You ass, Figgy! These beastly ropes are cutting right into me!" howled Tom Merry.

"They will if you pull at 'em, Thomas! Slipknots, you know, old scout. The harder you pull the tighter they get—that is, if they've been put on properly. And I shall scalp the chap who hasn't done his work as it should have been done. The Fourth, Thomas, are expected to show a high standard of efficiency."

"But what does the silly rot mean?" asked Talbot, wisely lying still.

For there was no more absolutely efficient fellow in the Fourth than Kerr, and Talbot had no hope that the binders had been put on him carelessly.

"A score by the Fourth over the Shell," replied Figgins coolly.

"Quite comfy, Talbot, old scout?" inquired Kerr.

"I won't go so far as to say that. But I'm not so uncomfortable as I should expect to be if I wriggled, so I'm not going to wriggle, old chap," replied Talbot.

"Wise man!" said Kerr. "Look at that chump Scrope trying to rack himself!"

"Isn't Racke being racked?" asked Monty Lowther. "I can't see him as I lie, and I'm not going to twist my neck, lest worse might befall me. Tommy, old son, I really think we had better admit a score, and be released. We'll allow them a point for this."

"A point!" said Redfern. "You fatheads don't get off like that! We shall claim twenty points, at least."

"Rot!" ejaculated Tom. "Only twenty points are to be allowed for the winners in the Form footer match. You can't make out that this rotten jape ought to count as much as that."

"It ain't altogether what it ought to count, you know, Thomas," answered Figgy. "It's a matter for arrangement, and the arranging's got to be did before you're released—see?"

"We've got to agree to allow you twenty points, or else you will keep us here, you mean?" said Tom. "You can't, my boy! Rising-bell will go directly, and if we miss prayers and brekker——"

"You won't miss brekker. Someone will be sure to be sent up to you when it's found you're all absent," Levison said, with a sardonic grin.

"Well, we can stand impots all round for being absent from prayers," said Kangaroo.

"Can you stand having Kildare or Darrel coming up and finding you in this condition, helpless victims of the skill and strategy of the Fourth?" Kerr inquired, grinning.

"Impots all round for you cads, that means!" snarled Crooke.

"If you tell who did it, of course."

"Well, I shall," replied Crooke. "You needn't make any mistake about that, Figgins!"

"Is it likely we're going to put up with this, an' let you rotters go scot-free?" asked Racke bitterly.

"I think it is. I don't think the Shell in general will agree to sneaking, and the fellow who does sneak won't be exactly popular."

"Well, I don't care a rap about that!" snapped Crooke.

"Being used to it—eh, dear boy?" said Cardew.

"There won't be any sneaking," said Tom firmly. "I'll see to that. We'll pay you bounders back in your own coin; and whatever points you squeeze out of us for this bizney, we'll jolly well double them when we've got you in a hole!"

"But you've got to get us there first, dear boy," said Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah!"

There was a good deal in that argument. Tom saw it. The Fourth would not fall easy victims to a return trick.

They would be on the look-out. Nothing on the same lines would be of any use, and whether anything quite different could be worked was for the future to show.

A bright thought occurred to Clifton Dane.

"'Member the agreement, Blake?" he said.

"As how?" returned Blake.

"The whole Form, or else it didn't count."

"Well?" said Figgy.

"There are Shell fellows over your side, Figgy."

"We've come out to get information, it seems, Kerr," remarked the New House chieftain sarcastically.

"If you haven't got them——"

"Do we look like potty idiots, Dane?"

"Yes, you do!" yelled Grundy. "Raving lunatics, I should call you! What's the sense of this sort of rot? It ain't a game. It's sheer childish foolery. If I——"

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The brazen notes of the rising-bell floated out over St. Jim's.

"Look here, Figgy——"

"I'm looking, Tommy! Waiting for you to agree, you know."

"We'll call it ten points," said Tom desperately.

"Better call it fifty! No good startin' the biddin' too low," said Cardew.

"We simply won't look at ten," Blake added.

"It ain't a square do," objected Kangaroo.

Figgins turned upon him a wrathful face.

"I didn't expect that from you, Noble," he said. "I thought you knew how to play the game. Why isn't it a square do?"

"Because you've a day-boy in your Form. We can't get back on you the same way. It wouldn't count, Brooke being out of it, and the agreement being for the whole Form."

"There's something in that, Figgy," said Manners.

"There's nothing at all in it—not a giddy scrap," replied the New House leader. "'Cause why? 'Cause you hadn't the brains to think out a dodge like this for yourselves. And now we've shown you how, you wouldn't have a dog's chance of catching us the same way, not in a week of Sundays!"

"All right, Figgy. Don't get on your ear," said Tom. "We admit you've scored. Is that good enough?"

"It's something to go on with," answered Figgins, a trifle mollified.

"The question is, how many points we've scored," Blake said.

"Isn't that for the umpires to decide?" asked Talbot mildly.

"Oh, hang it all, what's the good of talking civilly to the sweeps?" hooted Grundy.

"If Grundy gets abusive, there are plenty of brushes about," said Figgins. "See if the bristles will make marks on his hide through his pyjamas, some of you."

"You dare!" howled Grundy.

It appeared that they did dare. Redfern used the stiffest hairbrush he could find, and Grundy squirmed and writhed at each stroke, getting himself tangled up worse than ever with the binders.

"Oh, chuck that!" said Tom, laughing. "Ten points is a jolly good offer, Figgy, and time's getting on."

"Part of that's true, and part isn't," replied Figgins, grinning. "Time is certainly getting on. If you lose much more of it I don't see how you're ever going to wash before prayers. Not that that would bother most of you, I suppose. I've noticed that the standard of cleanliness in the Shell ain't much to brag about."

"Ten's as many as the umpires will allow," argued Tom. "A jape like this isn't really important, you know. It's not like a footer-match."

"It's not," agreed Kerr, "for there's only one side in it."

"But it is!" contradicted Blake. "Because when we meet the Shell-fish at footer there will be only one side in it—little us!"

"The umpires won't kick up a fuss if you and Talbot back up what Blake and I say," said Figgins. "As soon as you promise that, we'll let you loose."

"Better hurry up and promise, or you'll miss brekker as well as prayers," said Levison. "And you wouldn't like missing brekker."

"See here, Figgy, ten's a whack! And when we've bowled you out——"

"But you aren't going to bowl us out, Tommy! We'll see to that! Make it twenty, and promise that you won't argue it before the umpires, and it's a go!"

"Why don't you promise, Merry?" snarled Racke. "What does your pifflin' competition matter? It's rough on the rest of us who don't take any stock in the dashed bizney——"

"What did I tell you last night, Racke?" put in Herries.

"And what did I tell you fellows?" said Manners. "I warned you that these kids——"

"These what?" snapped Figgins. "Give me a brush, someone!"

"These fellows," amended Manners. "Yoop! Chuck it, Figgy! That hurts! I warned Tommy and that ass Lowther that you had something up your sleeves. But the silly owls took no notice!"

"Been all the same if they had," said Digby. "We can spoof you infants every time."

"We'll make it a dozen points, Figgy!" said Tom desperately.

"Nothing doing," replied Figgins.

"I say, Tom Merry, better let the bounders have all the points they want!" said Lennox. "There will be a rotten row if we do miss prayers!"

"I calculate that's hoss-sense," agreed Buck Finn. "After all, what's a few points, more or less, matter when we can lick the galoots at anything we durn please in a fair way?"

"Might as well let them have their twenty," Gore said. "We'll soon pick up that number when we get fairly going."

"I beg to differ!" spoke a still, small voice. "I consider that it would be a gross mistake to capitulate to methods of terrorisation such as these. I am not sure that the competitive and emulative spirit is not to be deplored, although undoubtedly, in one form or another, it has played its part in the great process of evolution. But——"

"Chuck up the sponge, Tommy!" groaned Lowther. "Give the bounders all the points they want! Give them anything they ask for! Mortgage your inheritance, pawn your last shirt, take all that Racke has in his wallet; but don't—don't force us to lie here and listen to a lecture on evolution by Skimmy!"

"If you give in now, and make the morning wash a lick and a promise—you're used to that—you may just manage to get to prayers in time!" grinned Blake, looking at his watch.

"Bettah give in, deah boys! You are fairly beaten, an' you should have the gwace to acknowledge it like Bwitons!" urged Gussy.

"I thought Britons never knew when they were licked, D'Arcy," said Roylance.

"Oh, well—in a mannah of speakin'! But——"

"Don't give in to the rotters!" roared Grundy. "They daren't keep us here and make us miss prayers, to say nothing of breakfast! If you give in, I shall contest your right to the leadership of the Form, Merry! I never did think much of you as a leader, though you have your merits apart from that!"

"That ought to be enough, Tom!" said Lowther. "Most of us think you ought to give in. Grundy don't, and Skimmy don't. Do you want anything more to prove that it would be absurd to hold out longer?"

"What do you say, Talbot?" asked Tom.

"May as well chuck it, old chap! They've got us set!"

"Manners?"

"If you'd listened to me last night——"

"Never mind that! What do you say?"

"Oh, may as well chuck it!"

"Kangaroo?"

"Don't seem much good sticking it out, Tommy. We'll get home on them one day before long, and wipe the points off!"

"All serene, Figgy! We give in!" said Tom.

"And you and Talbot promise to back us up when we ask twenty points from the umpires for this victory?"

"Honest Injun!" groaned Tom.

"I promise, Figgy!" said Talbot.

"Oh, you silly fatheads!" roared Grundy. "Didn't I tell you they'd never dare——"

"Wouldn't we?" snorted Figgy. "Don't unfasten Grundy, you chaps! Leave him to it!"

"I—I—oh, see here, Figgins, Blake, Kerr, you can't do that! Merry's given in. You can't——"

"But you haven't given in. You can't slink out of it like that!" said Herries.

"Rot! If the other chaps are to be let loose——"

But there was no longer any question of that. The rest were being loosed. Skimpole made no further protest.

No one touched Grundy.

"Gunn! Wilky! Come here, you funks, and——"

"Can't, old chap," said Gunn. "We've made it pax. Besides, we've got to wash, and there ain't much time."

"Oh, hang you! I tell you, I—I—oh, I give in, Figgins! A chap must wash before brekker, I suppose!"

"Very glad to hear that that's a habit of yours, Grundy," said Cardew, as Arthur Augustus and Digby cut the bonds that had held Grundy's plunging arms and legs. They had to be cut, for he had got them so tangled that they would have taken a long time to undo.

"Let me get at them!" roared Grundy, as he rolled off the bed.

But the New House contingent had gone. They had their own Shell representatives to release in time for prayers.

"Better get on with the washing, old scout!" said Gunn, towelling himself vigorously.

And George Alfred Grundy thought that on the whole he had better get on with the washing.

CHAPTER 6.
Struggling for Points.

"I DON'T think much of it!" said Lefevre, shaking his head.

"Oh, crumbs! I think it was no end of a wheeze!" said Wally.

And Frank Levison's grin seemed to

suggest that he, for once, agreed with Wally rather than with the Fifth Former.

"We didn't think much of it, either, Lefevre," admitted Tom ruefully. "But there was an agreement that japes should count. And we aren't contesting the twenty points."

"We've a right to them, you know," Blake said.

"Oh, you can have them! I'm not standing in your way," replied the chief umpire. "But I don't see how you can stick up an event like that on the notice-board, and I hope there won't be many more of the same sort. I gathered that the competition was an all-in one; but I didn't bargain for sheer lunacy!"

"Easy enough about entering it up," said Figgins. "Stick it down 'Form Score,' twenty points to the Fourth, young Levison. That'll be good enough for the notice-board. And I fancy the whole school will know all about it before the day's over."

"Well, the Shell's got a heavy handicap to start the afternoon with," Lefevre said, smiling. "What do the points read now, Levison?"

"Twenty-nine to five," answered Frank readily.

"It will be less than that before to-day's out," Tom Merry said resolutely. "Figgy, old son, I hadn't made up my mind to beat you in the long jump; but after this I'm bound to—simply bound to!"

"If you can!" answered George Figgins.

The long jump was the first event of the three to be decided that afternoon. A dozen fellows had entered. But, as far as St. Jim's knew, Talbot was the only one of the dozen who stood any real chance against Tom Merry and Figgins.

Blake and Herries, Kangaroo and Dane, Levison and Redfern would all do pretty well, no doubt. Grundy, who had insisted upon entering, and had been allowed to do so, since he would not be standing in the way of anyone else, was not believed to be capable of clearing a dozen feet. Thompson of the New House was no duffer; but his chance of getting first, or even second, was practically nil. The one dark horse was Roylance, the new Fourth Former from New Zealand.

His form was quite unknown. He had modestly suggested that he should be allowed to compete, and Figgy and Blake had readily agreed. There was only one long-jump event, whereas the foot-races were in classes.

No one else had sought to enter. There is little glory to be gained in taking a certain licking; and the fellows of both Forms who were not of athletic tendencies preferred to make their efforts in events less conspicuous than the long jump, where everyone can see exactly what everyone does.

There were two other events that afternoon. One was the mile, Class A, for fellows who had won prizes at former sports; the other was the hundred yards, Class B, open to anyone who thought himself good enough, whether he had ever entered for a race before or not.

Not many would start for the mile. But the other event had drawn so big an entry that it would have to be run in heats. There was a Class C hundred to come, but that was generally regarded as a duffers' event.

Levison major had qualified to enter for the mile by coming in second to Talbot in the race for the Cross-country Cup. But he had never distinguished himself either in a sprint or at the long-jump; and his chums were inclined to think he was trying too much.

He did not think so himself. The

slacker of old, with his wind and stamina impaired by smoking and other excesses, was now a keen, athletic, wiry fellow, who scarcely knew what fatigue meant. There was not a fellow in the Fourth more thoroughly fit than Levison in these days.

From the crowd that gathered in the playing-fields, eight members of the two Forms were missing. Skimmy, though Talbot had coaxed and Gore ordered him to come along, had his own plans for the afternoon. But no one—not even Talbot or Gore—missed Skimmy; and no one particularly noted the absence of Racke, Crooke, Clampe, Scrope, Chowle, Mellish, and Trimble.

The competition, entirely unofficial though it was, had begun to attract attention. And Mr. Railton, himself an old athlete, and always keen on sport, had volunteered to act as judge in the long-jump.

The dozen competitors came along in their overcoats, lightly garbed beneath that covering. Grundy showed up the tallest of them by an inch or two, even with Noble and Figgy there. But George Alfred did not look like a jumper, as some in the crowd remarked.

"Better jump in alphabetical order," suggested Mr. Railton. "The best of three attempts in each case to count, and all clearing sixteen feet to be eligible to try again."

"Sixteen feet!" growled Grundy to Wilkinson. "A kid's jump! Why don't he make it twenty-four?"

"Well, kids can jump!" replied Wilkins, grinning. "So can goats. But I fancy one reason why he didn't make it twenty-four, old scout, was because that's a few inches above the world's record! Eh, Gunn?"

"Dunno!" confessed William Cuthbert. "But I reckon it's a few yards above Grundy's best, anyway."

"Rats!" snorted Grundy.

He had never practised long-jumping, but he had a notion it must be easy enough. And he always believed that he could do anything that anyone else could.

Blake was first. His best effort was an inch or two over sixteen feet, qualifying him for another try.

Clifton Dane came next. He cleared eight inches more than Blake at his first jump, and preferred to let that stand, reserving his energies for the next round.

Figgins followed his example. Figgy had not the lithe grace of the Canadian. His style was all his own. But he was a hard man to beat. His first attempt was close on seventeen feet.

And now came the great Grundy. He divested himself of his overcoat with a lordly air, and handed it to Wilkins. He ran up to the take-off and launched himself into the air.

But not far into the air, and with considerably less than the spring that a decent long-jumper requires. Even constant practice will not give that spring to the fellow in whom it is not; and Grundy had never practised at all.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My foot slipped!" said Grundy, as laughter sounded all around him. "I—I—— Here, I say, you needn't measure that!"

Kildare and Lefevre, who were doing the measuring, mercifully forebore. Mr. Railton frowned at the gigglers, and shook his head.

"It was about eight feet," whispered Gunn to Wilkins. "I knew how it would be! You or I could walk round Grundy at this game, Wilky. But we know we're no use against those chaps, and he hasn't the sense to know it."

"He'll do his best," replied Wilkins. "I'll say that for old Grundy—he's always game to do his best. But it's no use. Elephants can't jump!"

"It ain't his best!" Gunn said shrewdly. "S'pose you or I never looked at our Virgil in prep, but made a shot at it in Form next day? Would that be our best? Linton wouldn't say so, I know. Same way with old Grundy; he thinks he can lick other chaps at things he's never even tried to learn to do."

Grundy's second attempt was no better than his first. It was obvious that if he cleared sixteen feet it would only be by a miracle. But he doggedly persisted in trying a third time.

"I'll do it this time, you see!" he told his faithful followers.

But he didn't.

He took a long run, and came up to the take-off place like a steam-engine. Then he plunged forward, catching one foot against the other, and came down heavily on his nose.

"Yaroooh!" howled Grundy, holding his nasal organ, from which a red stream flowed, as he got up. "That don't count, does it, sir?"

"Next!" said Mr. Railton inexorably.

And Grundy withdrew to bathe his nose and explain to Gunn, who was kind enough to go along with him, how it had happened.

Herries could not quite manage sixteen feet, and had to retire. But he got very near it, and was in no way disgraced. Levison, who followed him, did sixteen feet two inches at his first attempt, to the surprise of many who saw. Like Dane and Figgy, he declined to jump again till the next round.

Tom Merry was well over sixteen at his first jump. He took the other two, being short of practice, and with each managed a few inches more.

Tom jumped, as he did most things athletic, in almost perfect style.

"He'll take some licking!" said Figgy to Kerr.

"You're the man to give him it, old sport!" replied the Scot.

"Not so sure. But I'll do my best."

Kangaroo was not quite the jumper that a fellow with his nickname should have been, perhaps. But he was pretty useful, and the last of his three efforts reached sixteen feet seven inches.

Redfern, coming next, disappointed his supporters. Like Herries, he could not reach the distance, though he failed by little.

"Did seventeen-three yesterday, as you chaps know!" he said to Owen and Lawrence, as he put on his coat again. "Never mind; there wasn't much chance of a place in the first three for me, even on that."

Now came Roylance, of whose form nothing was known, though his active build promised well.

"My hat! He's like a blessed bird!" said Tom to Talbot.

The Fourth were roaring applause. At his first jump the New Zealander had

passed the best of Tom Merry's three. And Tom's style was not better than Roylance's. Neither made the mistake of rising too high in the air. They both seemed rather to skim the ground.

Redfern had a comrade in misfortune. Talbot, usually capable of a jump within a few inches of Tom Merry, was not in anything like his true form, and had to stand down. Thompson's failure to do more than fifteen feet, surprised no one; some were surprised that he did as much.

The first round had weeded out nearly half the competitors, leaving seven in—Tom Merry, Noble, and Dane of the Shell; Blake, Figgins, Roylance, and Levison of the Fourth.

All but Blake and Noble did seventeen feet or more in the second round; and by agreement the five who had covered that distance were allowed to try again in the third.

Dane, at his third jump then, did seventeen feet five inches. Figgy, also at his third, beat that by two inches. Levison thrice covered just over seventeen feet. Three good jumps for a fellow whom no one had thought of as among the best; but, as Levison ruefully told his chums, not good enough. So it proved, for Tom Merry and Roylance were both close upon eighteen.

"Do you wish to go on, Dane?" asked Mr. Railton.

"That's as you rule, sir," replied the Canadian. "But I'd like to try my luck again if Figgins and Roylance think it fair."

"Oh, certainly, as far I'm concerned!" said Roylance at once.

And Figgins nodded. It meant giving the Shell two chances instead of one; but the Fourth were sportsmen.

Dane again did seventeen feet five inches. Figgy, putting all he knew into it, jumped in succession seventeen feet nine inches, seventeen-eleven and close upon eighteen-two.

"If they are over that I'm done!" he told those around him. "It's the best I ever did."

Tom beat it at his first jump, with eighteen-three. Then Mr. Railton called on Roylance.

"Eighteen-three!" said Kildare, picking up the tape; and the Fourth cheered wildly.

"Eighteen-four!" said Kildare a moment later; and it was the turn of the Shell to cheer.

"The best of the next three now," said Mr. Railton.

Tom was first. He did eighteen-three again; then improved it by an inch.

He felt that it was not good enough. He told Manners so.

"Then it's up to you to do better!" replied Manners promptly.

"I'll try!" said Tom.

The Shell almost held its breath as he took his last jump. Then they craned forward to see what he had done.

He had beaten his last jump by inches, that was plain. A mighty cheer went up as Kildare called:

"Eighteen-eight and a half! Record for a St. Jim's junior, I fancy."

Roylance's face was set hard. He was keen as mustard to do the best he might for his Form; but he had never reached that mark yet, and he knew himself Tom's inferior in age and strength, though the difference might be slight.

"Eighteen-six!"

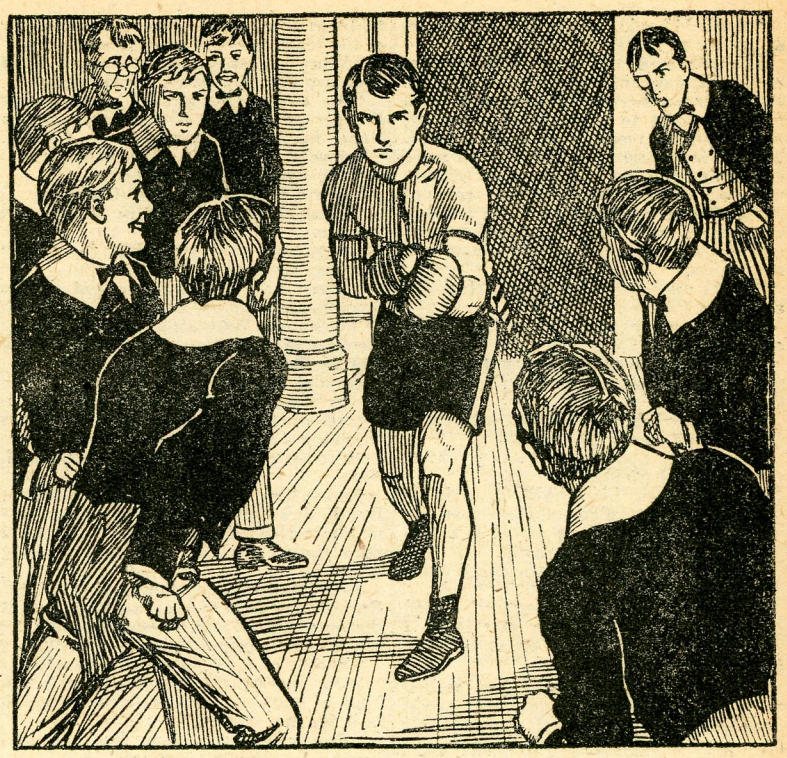
"He'll do it yet!" shouted Blake.

"Oh, good man, Roylance!" cried Figgins.

"Eighteen-six again!"

Everyone saw Roylance shake his head slightly in reply to something Levison said to him. It seemed as though he knew himself beaten.

But that last jump of his was not the effort of a fellow who had given up hope.



Grundy v. Anyone!
(See Chapter 10.)

For the moment all thought he had brought off the trick. But then it was seen that Kildare and Lefevre were taking more than usual care, checking fractions of an inch by a second measurement.

"Eighteen-seven-three-quarters!" said the skipper. "Well done, Roylance!"

"Congrats, Merry!" said the runner-up, smiling now.

And while the Shell cheered Tom Merry, the Fourth shouted loudly for Roylance and Figgins. For, after all, second and third places gave the Fourth six points, and they had lost only one on the event!

CHAPTER 7.
The Food-Hogs.

"OH, crumbs! This is something like!"

It was Baggy Trimble who spoke those words, his eyes almost bulging out of his head with excitement and greed.

The seven Conchies had gathered in the storehouse under Pepper's barn—otherwise the St. Jim's House of Commons—which Racke had rented from Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper in order to make it the headquarters of his "Sporting Club."

That organisation had had a brief but not uneventful career.

Mr. Pepper, whose leanings were towards the windy side of honesty, had also let the storehouse, which was partly underground, to Ralph Reckness Cardew, just as he had let the barn above it to Tom Merry, and also to George Alfred Grundy; and Cardew's tricks there, in conjunction with Ernest Levison and Sidney Clive, had brought vengeance upon the heads of Racke & Co., as well as upon those of himself and his chums.

Whatever Racke & Co. had been guilty of, they were most assuredly not guilty of making weird noises in their secret meeting-place—the crime for which, on circumstantial evidence, they had suffered.

But the punishment they had got then had given them a distaste for the place, and for weeks Racke had not been near it at all. He still had the key, however, and at last the storehouse had come in usefully again—from Racke's point of view, anyway.

It was all very well to risk gambling in studies at the school. In the event of being bowled out by a master or a prefect, that meant heavy punishment.

But it had the advantage that it could go on with the full knowledge of other fellows of one's own standing.

All the Shell and the Fourth knew that Racke and Crooke and their followers gambled.

But they could not stop it. To report it was the only way of doing that, and to report it was against the code of schoolboy honour.

The present enterprise was a different matter. The Shell and Fourth might not have reported that, but they would have dealt with the offenders in such a way that they would have been sore and sorry for a long time thereafter.

For in a time of shortage, when everyone had been put upon rations, the spread which Racke had provided in the storehouse under Pepper's barn was an offence alike against the law and against all decent feeling.

None of the seven seemed to consider it so, however.

"By Jove, Racke, you're doin' us well!" said Clampe.

"Ra-ther!" Mellish agreed. "Look at that ham! I haven't seen anything like it for a dog's age!"

"An' that pie!" said Crooke. "If you buy a meat-pie these days there ain't any meat in it, an' the crust is made of anythin' but proper pastry. But that's a real pie, or I'm no judge."

"Spiffin'!" said Scrope, looking almost as greedy as Baggy.

The pie and the ham alone represented very considerably more food than twice the number assembled would have had any right to consume at a sitting, but they were mere items in the spread. There were many other things, and more especially things which were strictly rationed. There were delicate rolls of bread, brown outside, but white within; there were cold roast beef and tongue and chicken; there were even tarts and mince-pies.

"Licks me how you got 'em, Racke!" remarked Chowle.

"Ah, money talks!" said Racke oracularly.

"It's talked to some purpose to get together a spead like this!" replied Clampe.

"Must have been a bit difficult gettin' all this stuff here," said Crooke.

"Don't you know how it was got here, then?" asked Mellish.

Crooke shook his head. Though he was more in Racke's confidence than the rest, this spread was as much of a surprise to him as to any of them.

But for the moment no one cared much about the mystery.

"Ain't we going to begin?" asked Baggy impatiently. "I'm starving! I went without my dinner so as to leave room——"

"That's a lie, Baggy! You wolfed every scrap you could get, and you'd have licked your plate if there hadn't been anyone looking!" said Mellish.

"Didn't he lick it? I thought everyone knew so well by now what a dashed pig Baggy is that he didn't have to bother about keepin' up appearances!" said Clampe insolently.

"Not before us. But he daren't let the masters see him gratifyin' his natural instinct to eat out of the trough!" rejoined Chowle.

Baggy paid no heed to Mellish, or Clampe, or Chowle.

Baggy's heart, Baggy's whole soul—if he had one—were concentrated upon the lovely sight before him. It was not often that Baggy mused upon early death, but when the dreadful thought occurred to him that this might, after all, be nothing but a beautiful dream, he did feel that to awaken to reality would kill him!

Racke's agent, whoever he might be, had done the thing in style.

There was plenty of crockery and cutlery. There was wine, sherry and hock, with some bottles with gold-foil tops. There was ginger-beer, in case anyone did not care for wine.

"Well, let's make a start!" said Racke with unusual geniality.

Crooke turned Baggy off the packing-case upon which he had seated himself. There were not enough seats to go round.

"Here, stoppit, Crooke! I've as good a right as you——"

"To sit on the floor? Of course you have, Baggy, an' you're quite welcome, by gad!" said Crooke, with heavy humour. "Spread your coat out, an' it will do for Mellish an' Chowle, too. There's only four chairs."

But Mellish and Chowle preferred to spread out their own coats. They made no objection to sitting on the floor; and Baggy, though he grumbled under his breath till he got a plate on his lap, forgot all about his grievance the moment he lifted the first mouthful—somewhere near a day's ration—to his watering mouth.

"My word, this must have cost you quids an' quids, Racke!" said Clampe, wiring in at pie.

"You fellows would be staggered if I told you how many," replied the founder of the feast, opening a bottle of sherry.

"What's it matter to old Racke? He's simply rollin' in money," said Scrope.

"An' so he deserves to be, while he has this generous notion of the proper way to treat his pals!" pronounced Crooke. "Princely, I call it—simply princely!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Mellish.

"Royal's the word," said Clampe.

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Scrope and Chowle.

Baggy said nothing. His jaws were too busy for speech.

Racke might have known what all this sycophantic applause was worth. Perhaps he did know. With all his faults, Aubrey Racke was shrewd enough in some ways. But he liked it, all the same.

He did not eat much himself. One might have thought him quite unconcerned as to the rationing which was troubling a good many St. Jim's fellows—even fellows who were by no means food-hogs.

Racke had grumbled enough at first. But if these precious pals had given the matter a little thought they might have remembered that he had said nothing lately.

Something mysterious was afoot. But Racke knew how to keep a secret; and if this one slipped out it would hardly be because his tongue was too loosely hung.

"Sherry or hock, Clampe?" he asked.

"Oh, sherry, old sport! Hock's the kind of stuff that hasn't flavour enough in it for me, thanks."

"Sherry for me, too, Racke," said Crooke.

It was sherry for all, except Trimble, who said he would rather have ginger-beer until he had laid a foundation—wine went to his head when taken on an empty stomach. Baggy had finished dinner not much more than an hour earlier, and already one might have thought that any void it had left must be filled. But Baggy regarded himself as merely making a start.

Racke grinned sardonically as he watched them piling in. It was all very well for poets like Shakespeare to talk about grappling friends to one's soul with hooks of steel. But Aubrey Racke had a notion that the fleshpots would be far more effective in the case of these pals of his.

He did not worry as to whether the game was worth while, either. He had money to burn; and he hated Tom Merry and all Tom's chums with a venomous hatred.

They were very keen on these sports. Racke meant to do all he knew how to spoil them.

This was only a beginning. There would be more to come—when he had thought over his plans.

Meanwhile the great thing was to keep these fellows together, as allies and possible tools.

They were a pretty scratch lot; but they would serve—they would have to serve—his ends.

The banquet was nearing its end when there came the sound of someone pushing at the door.

"Oh, you idiots! Didn't you wedge it up?" snapped Racke.

Crooke sprang to his feet. He meant to oppose the opening of the door by putting himself against it. But at the same moment the same idea seized upon Clampe.

The two collided in their haste, and both sat down heavily. At the same moment the mild, bespectacled face of Herbert Skimpole appeared.

"You burblin' idiot!" snapped Crooke.

"You footlin' chump!" barked Clampe.

"Dear me! What a very disgraceful scene!" said Skimmy, blinking.

CHAPTER 8.
Skimmy's Great Resolve.

"GET out of this!" roared Racke.

"Pardon me, Racke, but that is neither polite nor even barely civil! Failure in such matters is, however, a small thing compared with what, if I may trust the evidence of my own eyesight, has been perpetrated here. This is nothing less than a disgraceful, sordid, and unpatriotic orgy! Are you not aware——"

"We know all we want to, thanks," answered Scrope. "Cut, you lame lunatic, before you are kicked out!"

"He'd better!" growled Crooke from the ground.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Mellish uneasily. "If he goes away from here and blabs——"

"Yes, that's it," chimed in Chowle, as big a funk as Mellish. "It's going to be jolly awkward for us if the goggled ass lets on."

"Shut the door, an' let's make the image promise he won't!" suggested Clampe.

Baggy Trimble said nothing. He went on eating. Baggy was breathing hard by this time, and the perspiration was streaming down his fat face. But he went on.

Racke shut the door. This time he remembered to wedge it against any further intrusion.

Skimmy did not look in the least afraid. Whatever Skimmy might be, he was certainly not a funk.

"I shall promise nothing whatever," he said, in severe tones. "I will not enlarge upon the enormity of the offence you have committed—an offence against the laws of the realm, and, what is worse by far, against the greater laws of true altruism."

"Shut up!" said Racke fiercely. "We're not goin' to put up with your pifflin' gas about altrusim, by gad!"

"Patriotism," went on Skimmy, unheeding Racke, "may or may not be a gross error. To some great minds it is all one whether a man is a Briton or a German—he is still a man. For myself, I must confess that I have not yet been able to climb those heights of cosmopolitanism. I feel that England still has claims upon me which, say, Baden, Lapland, or Bulgaria has not. I cannot—— Yaroooooh! Wharrer doing?"

Skimmy never finished that philosophic explanation of his principles. If he had not taken so long to apologise for his patriotic feelings—which really needed no apology—he might have had a chance to express his honest disgust at the gross food-hogging exhibition upon which he had accidentally tumbled.

But down on the ground, with Racke sitting on his face and Clampe on his legs, he had no chance to express anything at all except pain.

Weird sounds, as of someone in mortal agony, came from beneath Racke.

"You'll choke him, you ass!" said Crooke, in alarm. "I shouldn't mind that as far as Skimmy's concerned, hang him! But it would be a bit of a job to get rid of the body, y'know."

Racke shifted himself to Skimmy's chest. That was not pleasant for Skimmy. But he could at least breathe to some extent now; and his face, which had been going purple, began to look more normal.

Six of the seven glared down at Skimmy venomously. They did not look upon his intrusion as a joke. It would be no joke for them if he told what he had seen. They did not look upon it as an accident, as it was, for Skimmy had come to the barn to rehearse an eloquent speech which he had intended to deliver at the next session of the St. Jim's

Parliament, and had heard voices in the storehouse.

"There's only one thing for it," said Racke. "You're a silly lunatic, we all know; but I don't think you're a liar. Give us your promise not to say a word about this to anyone, an' we'll let you go scot free!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" gasped Skimmy. "My principles——"

"Come an' sit on the silly, fatheaded chump, Baggy!" said Racke, with a malevolent grin. "I rather fancy that may make him forget his principles."

Skimmy groaned. Baggy was nearly three times his weight—even fasting.

"Oh, there's no hurry. I haven't finished yet," mumbled Baggy, with his mouth full of ham.

"You can bring the dashed hambone with you, an' gnaw it here," said Racke.

Baggy glanced at the other dishes. Not much was left. He collared a remainder of pie, and, with that in one hand and the hambone in the other, crossed over.

"I must say you chaps cleared things off pretty sharp," he grumbled. "It's hardly fair on a fellow like me, who's a slow eater. Besides, bolting grub is bad for your digestions."

Racke got up. Skimmy tried to get up; but Baggy plopped right down upon him.

"Oooooooch!" said Skimmy. And his eyes closed behind his spectacles. He believed himself in the death agony.

"You can sit there till he gives in!" said Racke vindictively.

"I don't mind if I sit here all the afternoon," said Baggy. "I say, open a bottle of pop for me, will you, one of you chaps? Oh, if the cham's going to be opened, I'll have some of that—in a tumbler, please, Racke! I never did care for those small glasses!"

"This is—— Yoooop!"

Skimmy had been about to remark severely that it was a disgraceful orgy. He had no chance to do so, however, for Baggy lifted himself about six inches, and then let himself drop again.

"Yoooop!" was the only remark of which Skimmy felt capable after that.

"That's the dodge!" said Crooke, in high glee. "Do it every time he begins to gas, Baggy!"

"Oh, rather!" replied Baggy. "But I want some cham, you know. This sort of thing is very exhausting."

"For Skimmy, I should think," said Mellish, with a grin.

Two of the champagne bottles had been opened, and each of the seven had a glass now that Baggy was handed his. But Baggy's glass was not a tumbler. Racke considered it rather a waste to let Baggy have any at all.

"Give old Skimmy some," grinned Scrope. "He must be dry. He, he, he!"

"I absolutely—— Yoooop! Don't, Trimble; you drive all the breath out of my—— Yoooop! I have registered a—— Yoooop! A vow against intoxicants—— Yooop! Oh, dear!"

Perhaps the champagne had got into Baggy's head already, though Baggy had all the makings of a bully in him at best. He was rather overdoing it with Skimmy, as Mellish saw.

"I shouldn't bust the silly ass completely, if I were you, Baggy," he said. "Not that it matters about you being hanged. But there would be trouble for the rest of us, sure as eggs."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" groaned Skimmy, in real pain.

"Here, drink some of this. It will do you good," said Racke, holding a glass close to his face.

Skimmy shook his head resolutely.

"You're jolly well going to!" Racke said. "Hold his nose, Clampe!"

"I don't want to hold his silly nose," growled Clampe.

But Crooke was more obliging.

"Grrrrgh! Oooooch!" spluttered Skimmy, as the fizzing liquid found its way down his throat.

It was a blackguardly trick, and rather a pointless one. Skimpole's principles were all against champagne, or any other intoxicant. But the stuff was not exactly abhorrent to Skimpole's palate when it reached it; and it seemed to have an immediate effect upon Skimpole's spirit.

He sat up with gleaming eyes as Baggy, at Racke's command, rolled off him.

Perhaps it was not the wine after all. At most he could but have swallowed half a glass. But Skimmy was unused to anything of the sort; and the Conchies put it down to that when he said:

"On second thoughts, I will give you my promise to say nothing! I am fully convinced that if you mean to make a practice of this sort of thing you will, before long, be detected, and receive exemplary punishment. It would be contrary to my principles to lay information against you, and the resultant inquiry would have disastrous effects upon the philosophic calm which I endeavour to preserve. I therefore give you the required promise; but at the same time I give you warning that I intend to fight and castigate singly each and every one of you! You quite understand?"

They stared at him in utter amazement.

"My hat!" said Clampe. "I do believe the image means it!"

"I most assuredly mean it!" retorted Skimmy.

"It's the cham talking," said Mellish. "When he gets away and cools down he won't want to fight anyone, you bet. But he'll keep his promise, I think."

Racke looked at Skimmy queerly.

"You can't fight!" he said derisively. "Any kid in the Third could lick you. As for standin' up to me or Crooke here, or Clampe, it's the silliest dashed rot! But we'll take your promise—or, rather, your oath. Do you swear not to let on a word about this?"

"I am not sure that my principles will allow of my making oath. But I give you my promise, though I should not do so but for my conviction that your detection is safe to come about by the instrumentality of others."

"You chaps agree?" snapped Racke.

They agreed. Skimmy might be all kinds of an idiot; but there was not one among them who would not have taken Skimmy's word in preference to that of any of his own pals.

"Right-ho! Clear out, you tame lunatic, an' let me know when you want to fight me!" said Racke.

"I will certainly do so," answered Skimmy politely.

"Yah! It's all talk. Who're you going to fight first?" sneered Baggy Trimble, contorting his fat face.

"You!" replied Skimpole tersely. "To-morrow!"

The wedge had been taken from the door. Skimmy was suffered to go.

"He don't really mean it. And I ain't afraid of him if he does," said Baggy. But he seemed to be getting more comfort from his doubt of Skimmy than from any reliance on his own courage.

CHAPTER 9.
Doing Their Best.

MEANWHILE the two other events of the afternoon had been worked off on the playing-fields.

Tom Merry, Talbot, Noble, Dane, Blake, Redfern, Kerr, and Levison turned out for the mile. This event provided a thoroughly good race, which is not always the case with the mile. Within a furlong of home no one was hopelessly out of the running; but just after that Figgins dropped right out. He was better at a sprint than at the longer distance. Then Noble, Redfern, and Blake failed to stay the pace when the spurt came; and within a hundred yards from home Talbot, Kerr, and Dane went ahead of Tom Merry and Levison.

Those three looked certain of places; and the Shell spectators were jubilant.

"It's Talbot's race!" shouted Monty Lowther.

"Oh, come on, Tommy, come on, do!" howled Manners. There was not so very much between Tom and the Fourth Former ahead of him; and it might yet be that the Shell would fill all three places, and annex all the points.

But Tom could do no more than he was doing, and that was not quite good enough. He glanced at Levison, running beside him; and even as he glanced Levison shot ahead of him like a flash, and there came a wild shout from Cardew.

"Number nine to the front! Buck up, Levison!"

"My word, he is bucking up, too!" said Clive, in high delight.

Levison had left his spurt till rather late. But he made amends for that now.

When the rest had lammed on pace for the run-in, and three of them had been left behind, Levison had also put on speed. But he was not then putting in all he knew. He still had a reserve to draw upon, and he drew upon it now.

He had left Tom behind. He drew up to Dane, still running well, but a yard or two behind Kerr, who, in turn, was just led by Talbot.

He passed Dane, and the Fourth gave a mighty shout as he ran neck and neck with Kerr, with only fifteen yards or so to go.

Whether Kerr or Levison pulled off the race mattered very little to most of the Fourth, though, of course, there was the old House feeling to be reckoned with.

The thing that mattered most was whether either of the Fourth-Formers could get ahead of Talbot.

Ten yards to cover—five yards—and still they ran side by side, and Talbot was but a short stride ahead. The white tape stretched before them, and the shouting was loud in their ears.

Then, in the last second Levison shot ahead, threw himself at the tape, and won literally by inches!

Talbot, who up to that very last second had looked like the winner, was only just ahead of Kerr. Tom came in, unplaced, with Dane, some ten yards behind the three.

"Didn't you know he was so close up, Talbot?" growled Grundy.

"I knew they both were. I thought there were one or two more as well," said Talbot quietly. "I did all I knew how, and no one could have done more—not even you, Grundy!"

"Oh, well, you ran a good race! I couldn't have done much better myself," admitted George Alfred.

"Congrats, Levison!" said Talbot. "You had most left in you at the finish, and that told."

"You left your spurt till jolly late, though, old scout," said Clive.

"I was hanging on to Tom Merry, and I hung on a few seconds too long. Then

something seemed to tell me that the time had come, and I went all out, without bothering any more about Tommy."

"You'll be no good for the hundred yards now," said Smith minor, shaking his head solemnly.

"Well, that will give you a better chance of winning it," returned Levison.

But Levison's was the last of four heats in the hundred, and he won his heat from rather a scratch field, and qualified as one of the eight for the final.

Roylance had run second to Clive in his heat, and both were among the four Fourth-Formers in the final. Digby was the other, but Dig had rather surprised himself by getting second to Levison.

The four from the Shell were Wilkins, Gore, Manners, and Gibbons. No one greatly fancied any of them for a place.

Roylance had run second to Clive in surprise to anyone. It was only by virtue of his being a new-comer at St. Jim's that he fell into Class B. He had admitted frankly that he had won prizes in New Zealand. He would have liked better to measure his form against the best. But wins elsewhere did not count; he had to go into Class B, and the Shell suffered for it.

He won almost hands down. But four fellows fought out the issue for second and third places with grim determination. The four were Manners, Wilkins, Clive, and Levison. And, contrary to all expectation, the Shell secured both places. Manners was second and Wilkins third. Levison's hard work had told upon him, or he might have beaten both of them. Neither Digby nor Gore did at all badly, though they never quite looked like winning.

"Well done, indeed, Manners, old chap!" cried Talbot heartily.

He felt a hand on his sleeve at the moment he spoke, and turned to see Skimmy—Skimmy, in a dishevelled state, and with wild eyes behind his spectacles.

"Not so bad, Wilkins!" remarked Grundy patronisingly. "I told you that it would be all right if you took my tip about the start. A good start is half the battle. But you might have been first if you had thrown yourself forward a bit more at the start. No use half doing things!"

"I might have been last if I'd done that," answered Wilkins, with a cheerful grin. "The other chaps would have been at the tape before I got my nose out of the turf, you see. As for being first—well, I dare say I'd have managed that if Roylance and Manners had waited for me. Jolly good, Manners—eh? We did the Shell a turn there, I think."

"I think we did, old scout," said Manners, every whit as delighted as Wilkins. Neither of them was a fellow to whom athletic success had ever come in any big measure, and what would have been a small triumph to Tom Merry or Jack Blake, Talbot or George Figgins, was a good deal to them.

"Talbot, my dear fellow——"

"All right, Skimmy—presently!"

"But presently will not do, Talbot. I desire your friendly aid at once!"

There was plainly something up with Skimmy. Talbot had never seen him look like this.

"Oh, if it's urgent!" said Talbot.

"Yes; I may say that I consider it very urgent."

"Right-ho! I'll come along."

Away from the crowd Skimmy said impressively:

"Talbot, my dear fellow, I desire you to give me immediate instruction in the art—or should I say the science?—of boxing!"

Talbot stared. This was a very strange request to come from Herbert Skimpole.

"Eh? What are you going in for boxing for, Skimmy?" he asked.

"I have a fight to-morrow, and I judge it best to learn beforehand all that is necessary to enable me——"

"My hat! You must think it's easy to learn!"

"Most assuredly, my dear fellow! My brain——"

"Brains are useful; but biceps and a few other things count in boxing, old top!"

"No doubt. But——"

"Who's your opponent?"

"Trimble."

Talbot's face broke into a smile.

"Oh, I think I can coach you enough to enable you to lick Baggy!" he said.

"And after that, my dear Talbot, I have to engage in six other encounters," went on the genius of the Shell.

"Wha-a-at?"

"It is so, Talbot. I am aware that this must be surprising to you, knowing, as you do, the eminently pacific views which I entertain. But it is necessary. I fear that it will involve some interruption of my studies—which I naturally regret—but——"

"Who are the other six?" asked Talbot. He certainly was astonished.

"Racke, Crooke, Clampe, Scrope, Mellish—— Dear me, I fear I forget the other unpleasant person's name; but he is a New House boy, with almost colourless hair and pink eyes—at least, they have the——"

"That's Chowle, of course! Look here, old chap, what have that gang of rotters been doing to you?"

"I regret to say that there are circumstances which forbid my telling you that, Talbot. But I am quite serious in my resolve to fight them all—individually, and not collectively, of course—and to defeat them!"

"And you want me to begin coaching you at once?"

"Such is my desire."

"Come along, then! You haven't allowed yourself much time; but I think I can put you up to enough to give you a chance against a duffing funk like Baggy by to-morrow!"

CHAPTER 10.
Two Champions of the Shell.

"I'LL admit Baggy's no blessed good; but he can lick a scarecrow like Skimmy," said Blake. "Skimmy can't hurt him, you see. Skimmy's got no muscle."

"Then you're willing to have it count as an event?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, rather! Certain score for the Fourth, I should say. And we're piling up the points quite nicely, Tommy! You chaps will have to buck up, or you won't be able to see the dust behind us."

"We haven't really started. Well, if you're agreed, Blake, get Baggy into the gym, that's all. I fancy you'll have more trouble with your warrior than we shall with ours. Skimmy's in deadly earnest, Talbot says."

Blake grinned. The idea of Skimpole in deadly earnest about a fight struck him as amusing.

"We don't want a crowd," said Tom. "Just you four and we three and old Talbot. They're both shy birds, and I fancy they'll put up a better show if there aren't too many there."

Baggy was in his study, and, luckily, Mellish was not there. Racke had entrusted to Mellish a species of guardianship over Baggy; but Mellish was disposed to take his trust lightly.

As for the competition, Baggy, who was rather obtuse at best, never even thought of that.

"Skimmy?" he said. "Poof! I can lick him with one hand. Yes, I'll come."

And he waddled along with Blake to the gym.

They found the Terrible Three, Talbot, and Skimmy already there. Dig, Herries, and Arthur Augustus came along a minute or two later.

Skimmy looked very determined. Baggy, once inside the gym, found his courage oozing.

"I—I say, Blake, I think I'll go and hunt up Mellish," he said. "I—I'd like him to second me."

"Oh, I'll do that!" replied Blake cheerfully.

"Thanks! But—but I might hurt Skimmy, you know. He's such a weed!"

"Well, that's all in the game, and nobody's going to blame you. You ought to be glad at being on such a good thing, really, for Skimmy can't hurt you."

"You—you think he can't, Blake?"

"Jolly sure! He can't hit hard enough to kill a fly!"

Gloves were put upon unaccustomed hands. The combatants faced one another. Talbot rapped out "Time!"

Skimmy hit out straight at Baggy's nose. Baggy gave a howl of pain, and lashed out right and left at Skimmy. That hero took three or four blows without a wince, and then, with a slow and deadly deliberation that would have given him away completely to anyone who knew anything about the game, he punched with all his might at Baggy's jaw.

All Skimmy's might did not mean much, but it was more than Baggy fancied.

"Yooop!" he howled. "That hurts!"

"Such, I may remark, was my intention," said Skimmy mildly.

"Stoppit! Look here—— Oh, don't, Skimmy! Yaroooh! Ow-yow! I—I give you best!"

"You can't, you funk!" hissed Blake. "Go on! Hit him! You're bigger than he is! Buck up, you bloated wash-out!"

But Skimmy got in another on Baggy's jaw, and Baggy dropped as if shot.

He would not get up. And, as Tom Merry pointed out, seconds were not supposed to kick their principals back into the ring. So Blake and the other Fourth-Formers had to stand there and hear Talbot count their craven champion out.

"Points for the Shell!" cried Tom, when the fatal word had been pronounced.

"About one point, I should say!" returned Herries warmly. "Same as for Racke. "'Tain't worth more."

"A rotten frost, I call it!" said Dig.

"Yaas, wathah! Weally, Twimble——"

Baggy was sitting up now. There was an expression of absolute dismay upon his fat face.

"But—but you can't!" he burbled. "Racke said I wasn't to. I—I—— He won't stand—— I mean, you can't——"

"What's that about Racke not standing something?" snapped Talbot.

"I—I—— Oh, nothing of the sort, only——"

At this moment a horde of fellows burst into the gym. Among them, conspicuous in vest and shorts, was the great Grundy.

"My hat! Oh, I say, you fellows, it was too blessed thick to leave us out of this!" cried Levison, spotting the situation at a glance.

The gloves were still on the hands of Baggy and Skimmy, and the winner stood in the attitude of a conqueror.

"Why, what's the game?" asked Clive.

"It's all over," said Tom, grinning. "First boxing contest—Bagley Trimble, Fourth v. Herbert Skimpole, Shell. And Shell takes the points, old scout!"

"Oh, I say!"

"Rotten to keep us out of it!"

"Let's have it over again!"

"Why not? They ain't either of them marked."

But Grundy pushed his way to the front.

"Never mind about those duffers," he said. "Here I am, willing to take on the whole Fourth, one down, t'other come on! Five points to my side for every chap I lick, and fifty for the Fourth, if any chap can lick me!"

"Well, of all the giddy cheek!" gasped Manners.

"My only Aunt Matilda!" chuckled Blake. "If this isn't rich!"

"Have you, by any chance, been appointed sole controller of the competition, Grundy?" asked Tom quietly.

Grundy, who had struck a very warlike attitude, suddenly straightened himself up. He glared at Tom.

"Look here, Merry, are you going to raise absurd objections to my doing the Shell a good turn?" he asked. "After yesterday, I consider that it's up to me, and I'm ready. Come on, any of you!"

But no one came forward. They did not funk the great George Alfred; but there really was not a fellow in the Fourth who had much chance against him, and hard-earned points were not to be thrown away in that fashion.

Then a bright idea struck Kerr.

"Can't do anything to-night," he said. "Things like this—really important things—mustn't be rushed. But I think we might fix up something in the way of a Grundy v. the Fourth contest, if Tommy will agree. We can get Kildare or Darrel to ref, and have each bout decided on points."

"Good egg!" said Blake.

But Tom Merry looked very doubtful. Grundy might be—and Grundy was—able to lick any fellow in the Fourth, bar accidents. But there were at least half a dozen who were his superiors in cleverness.

"We'll see," said Tom. "We don't want to bar any reasonable suggestion; but we can't have Grundy taking everything on himself."

"Rot!" growled Grundy. "What's the good of waiting? Come on, Blake! I don't care a scrap whether it's on points or——"

"It may be on points, but it won't be with points to-night," said Tom resolutely.

"Are you bossing everything?" howled the would-be champion of the Shell.

"No. I'm only seeing that you don't," answered Tom. "Come on, Skimmy, old bird! Herries, why hadn't you got your band here to play, 'See the Conquering Hero Comes'?"

THE END.

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

CADET NOTES.

THERE are many reasons why boys desire to join Cadet Corps, some of which have been referred to in these Notes in our previous issues. A new and very good one was brought to our notice the other day by a lad who responded to the invitation to apply for information and advice about joining. He said that as he did not belong to any kind of boys' organisation he found himself without friends and companions, and time hung heavily on his hands in the evenings, etc. He was anxious to find some suitable friends, and thought that if he joined a good Cadet Corps this would give him a fine opportunity to make acquaintances and companions. There must be many other boys in the same position in various parts of the country, and they could not do better than follow the example of this lad. A letter or card addressed to the headquarters of the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments, Judges' Quadrangle, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C. 2, will receive attention, and produce the desired information by return of post.

* * * * * * *

Certainly the spirit displayed by some of the boys who write inquiring about these corps is extremely gratifying. Here is an extract from a letter received recently, which is well worth bringing to the notice of our readers:

"I am thirteen years, but I am overwilling to join the Cadets. Please do you mind sending me full particulars of the Cadets in my district. I am only little, but I have as much pluck and patriotism as many big blokes."

Unfortunately, in that particular instance there was no existing corps to which the anxious "Would-be Recruit" could be referred, but we hope that steps may be taken to form one in his district before very long.

* * * * * * *

In this connection, we would like to say again to our readers who live in towns or places where there is no Cadet Corps existing, that it would assist us very much in taking steps to form one if they could get a number of boys to join with them in sending a letter to us, stating that they would be willing to become members of a corps if opportunity offered. This ought not to present any great difficulty, and, in fact, is already being done in a number of cases. Here is a specimen letter which we were delighted to receive from a lad in a small town in the West of England, who wrote:

"In reply to your letter, I am sending you the signatures of lads willing to join a Cadet Corps. I do not think that there would be any difficulty in raising a larger number when once the corps started. I should be pleased if you would give the matter your consideration."

And then followed the signatures of eight boys. In this case we have been able to make use of the letter, and steps are being taken to start the movement in the town as desired.

* * * * * * *

Our readers living in Glasgow who are not already members of a cadet unit should be interested to know that the Glasgow battalion of the Boys' Brigade has now been officially recognised as a cadet organisation. The Brigade is a very large and numerous body, comprising no fewer than fifty-five companies, and they have now been granted recognition under the name of the "Glasgow Cadet Companies, the Boys' Brigade." It is intended to have a formal inspection of the brigade shortly by General Sir Robert Scallon, and boys residing in the city who are not already connected with any other corps should rally round, and help to increase the strength of this active body.

* * * * * * *

We mentioned in a recent issue the active steps that are being taken to form a Cadet Corps in the County of Worcester. Since the note was written, we learn that the movement has made considerable progress, and that three cadet units have already been formed in the county—at Pershore, Stourport, and Kidderminster respectively. Any of our readers residing in either of those towns should take steps to join the newly-formed companies, and can obtain the necessary information on inquiring at the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments, address as above.

* * * * * * *

Leicester Cadet Corps continues to carry on its work as actively as ever, and has recently had a week's recruiting campaign. In the course of this, the "Cadet Training Film" of the Central Association was displayed at the Cadets' Training Hall every evening in the week, and a speaker explained the objects and work of the corps. A number of new recruits were secured by these means, and all our readers in Leicester ought to get into communication with this corps, and become members of it.

* * * * * * *

The Imperial Cadet Yeomanry, affiliated to the Yorks. Hussars, have passed through as many as 1,700 cadets since the outbreak of war. The corps is one of the oldest in Yorkshire, and has a brilliant record for efficiency, which has enabled it to gain official status as as Officers' Training Corps. The training given consists of full cavalry drill, scouting, signalling, map-reading, field-sketching, and shooting. The regiment will go to camp at Whitsuntide and again at midsummer, and during the Whitsuntide training Colonel Sir Charles C. Wakefield's and Colonel Stanyforth's Challenge Cups will be competed for. The regimental headquarter are Fenton Street Barracks, Leeds, with squadron headquarters as under:

A Squadron, Leeds.—Fenton Street Barracks.

A Squadron Detachment.—Drill Hall, Wakefield.

B Squadron Detachment.—Belle Vue Barracks, Bradford.

C Squadron Detachment.—Westminster Chambers, Harrogate.

Lads of good social position and education, and not less than 5 feet 3 inches in height, are invited to apply.

* * * * * * *

St. Peter's, Worcester C.L.B., K.R.R., Cadet Corps, needs recruits. The parade-room is the Mission Hall, Wyld's Lane, where recruits will be cordially welcome from seven to nine any Wednesday evening. Any information can be obtained from G. Hughes, 49, Fort Royal Hill, Worcester.

* * * * * * *

The Leek St. Luke's Cadet Corps, formed quite recently by the Rev. W. S. T. Parker, curate of St. Luke's Parish Church, Leek, is going strong. Recruits come in at every parade, and prospects generally are of the brightest.

* * * * * * *

The First Cadet Battalion, 15th County of London Volunteer Regiment, with headquarters at Streatham Hall, 344, High Street, Streatham, S.W., is already at battalion strength, but has room for recruits aged 12-16, who should apply at headquarters on any evening between seven and ten. This battalion offers exceptional facilities for cadet training, with a full staff of sergeant-instructors and the use of a miniature rifle-range, also of a gymnasium, at which members may learn boxing, etc., under expert tuition. The subscription is 6d. per month.

* * * * * * *

The Whitby Cadet Batteries held a church parade on a recent Sunday morning, when there was a large muster of the corps and its officers. The corps is doing excellent work, and the members have an enjoyable time. Needless to say there is still room for more recruits.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 8.—Manners Major.

THE Terrible Three did not earn that name till after they came to St. Jim's—or, at any rate, did not receive it. It might be going too far to say they had not earned it, for they were incorrigible young japers at Clavering.

That was where their friendship started. When Tom Merry turned up there in his little velveteen suit, looking the cheap idiot he certainly was not, he was put into a study with Manners, Lowther, and Gore. Gore, who ruled the roost in the Form, did not take to Tom; but Manners and Lowther did. And it was Harry Manners who taught Tom Merry to use his fists.

It seems queer now. Manners, though he has plenty of pluck, has never been a great fighting-man. Tom is capable of standing up to many grown men. And yet Tom learned the rudiments of boxing from his chum. But he soon went beyond Manners, and could teach him a good deal now.

There has been less occasion for Manners to fight than for Tom. Harry Manners has never aspired to leadership. Both he and Monty Lowther have been loyally content to follow Tom. Then, too, Manners is rather of a quiet disposition. In some ways he is distinctly more reserved than either of his chums. He has not Tom's sunny cheerfulness, or Monty's joking lightness. In Form he is ahead of either of them, taken all round, and probably Mr. Linton has no better mathematician among his pupils.

This is not to say that Manners is brilliant, even in his best subjects. He is a sticker, with a good but not particularly quick brain.

Indeed, he is not brilliant at anything. He is far below Tom's form at any game, and does not equal Lowther, who himself is hardly among the foremost. Nevertheless, Manners is useful. The plodding type that does its best always and never slacks may not win many matches, but it helps to give a side ballast.

As an amateur photographer he has made quite a name, and he thoroughly deserves his fame. Photography is more than a hobby with him. Lowther may call it an obsession, but that is not quite the nicest way of putting it. Manners cherishes a real devotion to the art, and nothing riles him more than any attempt to decry it, or any risk of danger to his beloved camera.

It is not difficult to rile Manners. There are queer kinks in his temper, as his chums know. His feud with Roylance showed him at his worst. It was a very one-sided feud, for the junior from New Zealand had no wish to be Manners' enemy. There was more bitterness and unreasonableness in it than there ought to have been. Tom and Lowther saw that, and tried to talk their chum round. But Manners was not to be talked round. He can be very obstinate.

That all came right at last, and he showed up well at the finish. He and Roylance are the best of chums now.

But in other matters—smaller matters—Manners has often shown a certain shortness of temper and a capacity for going on being grumpy when there really was little excuse for it. He hotly resented the intrusion of Philip Ignatius Parker into Study No. 10, and rather went out of his way to make Parker uncomfortable. His wrath flared up against Lumley-Lumley in the days when that youth was a rank outsider; and twice he went for Lumley-Lumley, and got into black disgrace with Mr. Linton for a supposed assault upon a boy only lately recovered from a severe illness. There was more excuse for him in this case, for he had been taunted almost beyond endurance; but his obstinate pride stood in the way of his explaining to the master, as he might well have done without laying himself open to a charge of sneaking.

Yes, he has his faults. But, for all his faults, what a good, manly, loyal fellow he is! What a staunch chum, what a self-sacrificing brother!

The ties that bind the Terrible Three are very strong. Manners and Lowther were chums before they knew Tom Merry. It may be that now Tom stands first in the affections of each, but that does not mean that their mutual friendship has slackened. They are not much alike. In fact, in many ways they are very unlike. But in the things that matter most they feel the same, and usually act in the same way. I can recall only one instance of both of them definitely falling away from Tom Merry, though, of course, there have been other quarrels, as there will be between even the best of chums.

That one instance was when Tom was up against Jack Blake. The two were staunch

at the outset, black as the case looked against Tom. But they fell away later, and Tom fought the fellow who had been a dear chum—though never quite as dear as those two—without a second. You may be sure that many a time since Harry Manners has thought of that, and reproached himself with it. His is in many ways a deeper nature than Lowther's, though the japing Monty has his depths, and Manners is apt to remember things longer.

He was more staunch than Lowther then. He never believed the charges made against Tom, but that made it rather worse than better that he should stand aloof.

They were both loyal when Tom's double caused Tom to be held guilty of going to the dogs, and almost everyone believed. They went farther than their own convictions would have taken them when Tom stood so finely by Talbot, and if they did not go all the way that Tom did, it was because he did not ask them to. They shared with Tom the burden of guilt that was really Wally D'Arcy's, partly out of regard for Wally, and partly out of detestation of the tyranny of Mr. Selby. All three even lied to the Third Form master, but they drew the line at lying to the Head!

Manners' courage cannot be questioned. There was a time when he was much misunderstood on that score. Through a complication of circumstances, he was convicted—as it seemed—of gross cowardice when Cousin Ethel was in danger from a bull. The story he told was believed by few. Tom and Monty believed it, until they got what seemed convincing proof that their chum had lied. Then they also fell away, and Manners was an outcast. Yet he had told nothing but the truth; and that he had pluck in plenty was shown by his dash into a burning house to save a youngster. All came right, and an extra special camera was presented to him as a souvenir of his heroism. Not that Manners would call himself a hero, by the way.

His photography has figured prominently in more than one story. It served to trip up the scheming Levison when he was trying to rob Bernard Glyn of the credit and profit of an invention. It got him and his chums out of trouble with Mr. Ratcliff. Manners had secured a photo of Ratty in the very act of spying, and in the face of that the acid-tempered master dared not go on with his persecution of the Terrible Three.

And there was the time when the Head offered a prize of five pounds in a hobbies competition. Manners had a very good chance of winning that, with his exhibition of photographs, the work of long and loving care. Through Levison's spite that exhibition was completely wrecked. Figgins was suspected of the dark deed, and the suspicion led to very strong feeling between the two Houses. But it came out at length that Joliffe, nephew of the shady landlord of the Green Man, had done the deed, prompted by Levison; and in the event, Tom Merry's model aeroplane, which owed its effectiveness to a suggestion made by Manners, won the prize, which was some consolation to Manners.

But perhaps the best of all the Manners' yarns are those which also concern his minor. It is not necessary to say much about Reggie Manners here, for he will be dealt with later. But one must make it clear that he is a terribly spoilt child. There is good stuff in him, but I do not think that he will ever be the equal of his brother. He has Harry's faults, but he lacks some of Harry's best qualities. He is capable of being as resentful as his brother, and far sulkier, and he is by no means as ready to make amends when he is proven wrong.

A difficult youngster to deal with, and not the less difficult for Harry, because it is Reggie, and not the elder son, of whom their father thinks most.

Reggie is the very apple of his father's eye. If Reggie went wrong at St. Jim's, it would not be Reggie's fault, of course. Had he not an elder brother to see that he did not go wrong?

And we have read how Harry Manners did his level best, sticking to the cub when his chums advised letting him go his own way as hopeless, sacrificing himself in every way possible, losing his temper sometimes, but never wholly losing patience for long.

Cutts of the Fifth took up Reggie, and was fast making a complete little rotter of him. The youngster of thirteen or so who has got into smoking and gambling habits is not likely to pull himself up. Manners major pulled Manners minor up at heavy risk to himself. Before that, even, he had allowed the guilt of Reggie's attack upon Mr. Selby to fall upon his own shoulders, thus facing the risk of expulsion for the ungrateful, rebellious fag. He came, indeed, very near being expelled; but in the nick of time Reggie owned up, and saved the situation.

That time Reggie really was guilty. But later, when Harry underwent still more for him, he was not—at least, he was not guilty of the theft of which he was suspected. He had gone pretty far in other directions, encouraged by Racke, who had his knife into Manners major.

Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors at The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, England. Subscription, 7s. per annum. Agents for Australasia: Gordon & Gotch, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Wellington, N.Z. South Africa, The Central News Agency, Ltd., Cape Town and Johannesburg. Saturday, March 23rd, 1918.

But it was quite as much for his father's sake as his brother's that Harry Manners allowed the stain of crime to rest upon him. It was after Mr. Manners had come to St. Jim's on receipt of the news of Reggie's expulsion, that Harry, to save his brother, but more than that, because he had been cut to the very quick by the reproaches of his father, made his false confession of guilt.

The younger son, it seemed, was everything to the father—the elder nothing. Harry had been accused of wrecking Reggie's life. He was so stung, so reckless in his pain, that he cared little if his own was wrecked. Since Reggie was so important, since Reggie had all the affection that he should at least have shared—well, let the worst come!

Mr. Clifford has written many fine stories, but few, I think, finer than "A Son's Sacrifice," the second of the three in which all these things were recounted. Almost as good, however, and perhaps even more to the taste of many readers, were the quite recent yarns in which, Reggie again being the cause of trouble, Harry Manners persisted in making an enemy of Dick Roylance. There is no need to tell that story over again, but I feel sure that it is one you will all remember.

These two fine series of yarns dealt with the graver side of Manners' nature. He has a lighter side—you all know that! He can enjoy a jape as much as anyone, and can keep up his end when japing is afoot. But he is not really quite as keen as Lowther on such things, or quite as keen as Tom Merry on games—just as neither of his chums is quite as keen as Manners on work!

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 has been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Gadsby, who is plotting against him with Vavasour. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a serious accident to one of 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 real taste for it at the outset, takes to gambling. He is made reckless by failing to hear from his chums, who seem to have thrown him over. As a matter of fact, Gadsby and Vavasour have intercepted and kept back a letter from Tunstall to him. There is also a coolness between Flip and his sister; the Cliff House girls consider that Flip did not back up Merton staunchly. They are gated owing to an anonymous letter, and thus no full explanation is possible between the twins. Flip goes with the nuts to a gambling den at Courtfield, quarrels with Pon, and is knocked senseless just as the warning "Police!" is heard. Flip comes to himself in a cellar, bound hand and foot. He is let out, however.

Hazel, the Runaway!

"LET me alone!" snapped Hazel. "It's all your fault that I've run——"

He stopped short with a gulp.

He tried to free himself from Flip's grasp. And Flip could not guess that he had not meant to let out so much as that.

It was not all Flip Derwent's fault, of course. That was absurd. Only a weakly, passionate fellow like Peter Hazeldene would have made such a charge.

Flip had been in no way concerned in the trouble which had brought Hazel to this pass.

But he had let Hazel down, though he had never intended to.

He had promised help. They were to have met earlier in that very day, and Flip would have handed over to the Greyfriars junior part of the remittance he had been hoping to get—if it had come.

It was probably at Highcliffe now, waiting for him. But until that moment he had not thought about it, or about Hazel. And that was hardly to be wondered at, seeing what he had gone through in the last twenty-four hours.

He kept his grip on Hazel. If he could prevail, Hazel should go back to Greyfriars. However bad matters might be, they could scarcely be past mending. Wharton would help; or Vernon-Smith. And, at worst, Mr. Jerry Hawke would not dare to push things to extremes, Flip thought.

"Run away?" he said. "Oh, you ass, Hazel!"

And he said that quite honestly, with no thought for the moment of the fact that he was doing the same foolish thing.

"What else was I to do?" asked Hazel, between a growl and a whine.

"Anything!"

"But there wasn't anything that could be done. You were my last hope!"

"And I failed you—I know I did. Rough on you, old chap! But I couldn't help it. I'm in the very dickens of a mess myself!"

"You?"

"Yes, me! Surprised—eh?"

"I'm not. I knew Pon and that gang would land you somehow."

Hazel's tone was different now. The sulkiness had gone out of it. Flip was a comrade in misfortune.

"Well, they have. They've landed me so heavily—or I've landed myself, for I'm not going to make out that it's all their blame—that there's nothing for me to do but what you're doing."

"And yet you called me an ass for bolting!"

"Well, it's different. You owe money. It can be paid somehow, I suppose. It's only a case of getting people to wait a little longer. They'd have to."

"That's all you know! They wouldn't! But what have you done that's worse than my crimes?"

"I don't know that I've done anything worse. I shouldn't call anything that I have done—or anything you have, as far as I know—a crime, though we've both been the worst kind of silly fools."

"Then why am I a silly ass to bolt, while you're not?"

It was a fair question. Flip felt that. And, of course, it was not exactly an easy question to answer. But Flip was sure there was an answer to it.

"Well, you see——"

"Shush!" hissed Hazel. Flip felt him tremble with fear. "There's someone coming!"

They drew back together into the gloom. Heavy footsteps sounded on the road.

"Old Tozer!" whispered Flip. "Nothing to be afraid of there!"

Hazel's teeth chattered.

"Oh, isn't there?" he whispered back. "They may have found out by now that I've bolted!"

P.-c. Tozer had passed on. P.-c. Tozer was not exactly a brilliant detective. But as he knew nothing as yet about either of the runaways, he was not greatly to be blamed for not spotting them, perhaps.

"Do you mean that they don't know yet?" Flip asked.

"Some of the fellows do, I dare say—or guess, any road. But I don't think they'll report it yet. They won't be sure. I've missed calling-over, of course; but nothing more may be thought about me by anyone but Browney and Bulstrode, or any chap they may tell, till bed-time, anyway."

"Lucky bargee!" replied Flip. "You can slip back as easy as winking, and nothing worse than a caning to come to you for being out. No one's to know that you had made up your mind to bolt."

"I'm not going back!" said Hazel doggedly. "I don't know what I'm going to do; but I won't go back! I'd kill myself first! I've thought about doing that more than once. What's life worth, anyway? If one could only go to sleep for ever and forget it all—all the silly things and the wrong things, all the trouble one has given other people, all the beastly bitterness one has felt! Oh!"

He was in deadly earnest—for the moment, at least. There were strange things below the surface of Hazel's weak, wayward nature.

Perhaps he felt more intensely than many better fellows did. There was real remorse in him now.

It was a hard problem for Flip to face. On what he said much might hang, and he realised that.

No good calling Hazel names; no good lecturing him.

Wharton or Tom Brown might have had a right to do that. They had always run straight; and both of them had helped Hazel in greater or less degree.

But Flip was a fellow-sinner. He had to remember that. He realised that it gave him a hold upon Hazel's sympathy—if he could only say the right thing! But what was the right thing to say?

He blurted out the first notion that occurred to him; and it is possible that the most tactful words would not have served better.

"It's always seemed to me a cowardly way out, and beastly rough on one's folks!" he said.

"Well, I am a coward! And who is there that cares about me?"

"There's Marjorie. And I don't believe you're a coward, really, Hazel. I've heard of more than one plucky thing you've done."

Silence for a moment.

Then Hazel said:

"Yes, there's Marjorie. No chap ever had a better sister! She's worth ten thousand of me! But it would be better for her if I were dead. She'd grieve for a bit; but afterwards she'd be better off. No one to worry about, you know."

The words came slowly at first, and then in a gush of passion.

"Hazel, I let you down badly, I know. Let me make up for it now. If I go back it's the sack for me—that's a dead cert. But I'm willing to go—if you'll go back to Greyfriars and tell Wharton everything. I have lots of faith in Wharton. He'll see you through."

"He's done with me! Besides, how can I go back? Your facing the music at Highcliffe won't help me—though it's no end good of you to be willing. If you were at Greyfriars, and we could face it together, it would be different."

"You didn't hear all I had to say. There's a letter waiting for me at Highcliffe—I'm almost sure of that. It has a remittance in it, and you're welcome to every penny of it, old chap. You shall have it, too, whatever happens! They can't keep back my letters, I suppose."

"But how do you know it's waiting? What do you mean? When did you bolt?"

"Can't say exactly."

Dark as it was, Flip was sure that Hazel was looking hard at him, staring in utter bewilderment.

"Can't say when you bolted? You're talking riddles, Derwent!"

"It sounds queer, I know; but the yarn's too long to tell now. It would only be wasting time. I haven't been inside the Highcliffe gates since just after dinner yesterday. I went over to Lantham then to play a match with our First. And things happened. It wasn't all my fault, but I'm booked. It's the sack, anyway. I didn't mean to wait for it; but I'll go back to be kicked out, if it will help you."

Flip did not say he would go back for Hazel's sake. It was not entirely for Hazel's sake. It was because of the promise he had given Marjorie, and because of his own broken promise to Hazel. He felt that he owed Hazel that. And, for all his folly and his obstinacy, Hazel appealed to him more than ever before. It may have been because he felt that he and Hazel were in the same boat. Both of them had made an awful hash of things, and they could do no better than face their troubles together. That would be better for Hazel, if not for Flip.

"What have you done, Derwent?"

The words came in a queer, strained whisper. Till that moment Hazel had fancied that Flip had only just left Highcliffe. Now he was ready to fancy anything.

Flip had been away well over twenty-four hours, and he was still hanging about in the neighbourhood. He must have been in hiding, Hazel thought; and the Greyfriars junior was in such a morbid, miserable state that it came naturally to him to dread the worst.

He shrank from Flip as though he feared

that there might be blood upon his hands, or some terrible guilt upon his soul.

"Come a cropper, that's all. I haven't stolen anything, if that's what you're fancying; and I certainly haven't done anything worse than stealing. If you must have it, I was fool enough to go to a gambling-den at Courtfield last night. There was an alarm of police, though I believe now it was all a do. Someone hit me on the napper, and when I came to I was tied up and locked in a cellar. I got out this morning. That's all. Sounds a likely sort of tale, don't it? If I tell the truth, I'm sacked, and shall be thought a liar in the bargain. If I refuse to tell anything—well, what can the old man do but sack me?"

Hazel breathed a great sigh of relief.

"I—I thought it might be worse than that," he said. "I—I hardly know what I did think."

"You believe it, then?"

"Of course I do! I know you well enough to be sure you're straight, old man. And I know Pon & Co. well enough. You needn't tell me that they led you into it——"

"I don't intend to tell you or anyone that," said Flip. "That's just what I don't mean to tell. I'm not going to crawl out—even if I could—by putting the blame, or part of it, on other chaps. I played the goat, and I've got to pay for it!"

"No, you needn't tell me," repeated Hazel, almost as if talking to himself. "I know Pon & Co.—to my cost! They left you in the lurch—you needn't tell me that, either. They would—it's their rotten way! I wouldn't spare them. Derwent!"

"Oh, I'm not laying myself out particularly to do Pon and Gaddy and Vav any good!" Flip said coolly. "A chap can't sneak—that's the long and short of it. Come along with me, Hazel. I'll trot over to Greyfriars with you. It doesn't matter to a day or so when I go back to Highcliffe, as things are. If I could get a word with Wharton——"

"I'm not going back to Greyfriars!"

"You are, old chap!"

"I'm not! If you think you can force me, you'll find yourself jolly well mistaken, I can tell you! And you can't call in anyone else to help. If you won't split on Pon and those rotters, who let you in, you can't split on me!"

"Go back, Hazel, old fellow! It's best, I'm sure. And think of Marjorie!"

"I won't go back! I'm a rotter and a funk; but you mustn't think I'm going to let you sacrifice yourself for me!"

"There's no real sacrifice. I don't care much. I'm booked, whatever happens. By going back, I can do you a good turn, that's all. And I reckon I owe it to you."

"But you can't! Nothing you can do will help me now!"

"Rot! Come along to Greyfriars, old chap; or come to Highcliffe with me. I may be able to sneak in and get my letter. You'd feel happier going back with the cash in your pocket, I dare say."

"Do you think I care a scrap for nobody but myself?" demanded Hazel hotly.

"Of course I don't! But——"

"I can't and I won't go back! I can't face Wharton and the rest. My life there was a misery to me. I've done with it! Oh, I wish I were dead—I wish I were dead!"

And Hazel burst into passionate sobs.

It was no good plying him with arguments until he had recovered his calmness. Flip saw that.

"Look here, old fellow," he said, "this is dangerous for us both. Suppose anyone came along?"

"There's a shed in the field behind us," said Hazel, pulling himself together with an effort. "Let's get in there. We can talk without any risk of being heard."

They were safely inside the shed in a moment or two. Hazel had ceased to sob; but he sat with his head in his hands, silent. Flip's hand fell on his shoulder, and he let it stay there.

"By Jupiter, I'm hungry!"

It may have been ten minutes later that Flip broke the silence with that remark.

"Oh, I say! What a selfish beast I am! And I've got grub in my pockets all the time!"

"Have you? That's first-rate news, Hazel! Hand some of it over, there's a good chap!"

"You can have it all, and welcome! I feel that I don't care if I never eat a mouthful again!"

"I'll have some of it. I haven't had a scrap since this morning."

It was handed over. Hazel refused to share it; and, indeed, there was no special need of it in his case. There really was in Flip's.

"Now I feel better," said Flip, in about ten minutes. "I should like a cup of good, strong, hot coffee, I'll admit; but I can get along without it. Let's get off, Hazel!"

"Where?"

"To Greyfriars, of course!"

"I'm not going! I'd die first!"

He meant it. But he was so unstable that Flip still hoped that he would change his mind before morning.

"Well, we may as well hang together, I suppose!"

"If you'll be bothered with a rotter like me!" said Hazel bitterly.

"Rats! We're in the same boat. No good calling each other, or ourselves, or anyone else, for that matter, pet names. But I must see my sister before I go. And I suppose you want to see yours?"

Flip felt a shudder go through Hazel.

"I can't face Marjorie—I can't!" the Greyfriars junior muttered.

"Well, I'll own that it won't be all beer and skittles for me telling Flap. But I'm bound to."

Hazel caught him by the arm.

"If you say a word about me——"

"I'm not giving anyone away. But I think you ought——"

"I never did what I ought, and it's too late to begin now. Derwent, if you won't promise not to say a word about me, I'll——"

"What will you do?" snapped Flip, his patience going all at once.

"I'll bolt while you're talking to them—I swear I will!"

(To be continued.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"A STERN CHASE!"

By Martin Clifford.

A stern chase is, according to the old saying, a long chase. The Shell have fallen badly behind in points in their contests with the Fourth, who lead at the stage to which the end of this story carries us by 49 to 20. Thus, even without the dormitory jape, the junior Form of the two is on top; and the chances of the Shell do not look too rosy.

The Shell, ably led by Tom Merry and Talbot, stick to it, however. Whether they manage to get on terms, I am not going to tell you. To know that you must wait—possibly longer than next week.

And what of Racke and the other foodhogs? Oh, you may count on hearing more about that affair, and about the mystery of how Racke got the grub, and of Skimmy's feud with the seven. Skimmy has already beaten Baggy. It would be wrong to say "thrashed," for Baggy had not patience to wait for that—he threw up the sponge before he had fairly begun to be hurt! Mellish is Skimmy's next opponent—what do you think will be the result of that Homeric combat?

THE PAPER SCARCITY.

A notice on another page will tell you that in future you must pay three-halfpence for the GEM. Don't grumble! Think yourselves lucky that it can go on at all under present conditions. Again and again the quantity of paper we are allowed to use has been cut down, and the result of this rationing has been that a number of journals issued from this office have ceased to appear at all. Some of you will recall "Pluck" and the "Boys' Realm" and the "Greyfriars Herald." They have gone, with a score or so more in which you are not so likely to have been interested. And others will have to go, while those which remain must do what nearly all other papers have done already—raise their prices to cope with the additional expense, every week growing greater.

It is the war, of course. And because of that, grumbling is not only useless, but silly. We must put up with the hardships which the war brings us. And you boys and girls ought to think of this. If we fail to win the war, some day, sooner or later, we shall have it all to fight over again, and, though it may hardly seem possible, to fight under worse conditions. It is partly for the sake of you who are young now, and the others to follow you, yet unborn, that our men man the trenches and face the dangers of the seas. So accept your share of what must be borne with all the true British pluck you can muster.

NOTICES.

Back Numbers, etc., Wanted.

By R. P. Linnell, 15, Park Street, Bridgtown, Cannock, Staffs—any Nos. in Vol. 1-8 of GEM.

By Thomas Morgan, 6, North Bank, Llandilo, Carmarthenshire—"Linley Minor," and "Victims and Victors," also any "Magnet" before October, 1916—half-price offered.

By J. G. Bell, Riverside Cottage, Knoatrop, Leeds—"Remove Eleven on Tour"—clean.

By Henry Scott, 34, Grove Street, New Balderton, Newark—GEM, Nos. 1-400—state price first, please.

By Harold Makin, 12, Whitby Street, The Brook, Liverpool—"G." and "M." before change to white covers—2d. each offered.

By H. Brown, 29, Castle Street, Clackmannan—"Sportsmen All."

By A. C. Whordley, 52, Moat Road, Walsall—"School and Sport."

By C. E. Adams, 195, Sydenham Road, Sydenham, S.E. 26—No. 26 Sexton Blake Library.

By Frank Hurt, 19, Stanley Avenue, Queenboro', Kent—GEM, 1-420.

By C. Padgham, 19, Stanley Avenue, Queenboro', Kent—"M." 1-400; "G." 1-420.

By E. Walsh, care of Mrs. Darcy, 6, Bath Avenue, Haddington Road, Dublin—"Mystery of Painted Room"—also numbers of "M." containing "Twice Round the Globe" and "Mysteria."

By F. E. Smith, 47, Claremont Road, Sparkbrook, Birmingham—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "Wingate's Folly," "Wingate's Cuum," "Postal-Order Conspiracy," "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "Saving Talbot," "Loyal to the Last," "Bob Cherry in Search of His Father," "Wun Lung's Secret," "Schoolboy Policeman," "Tom Merry Minor," "Tom Merry's Trip to Paris," "St. Jim's Airmen," and "G." and "M." 1-150.

By J. Anderson, Stork Hotel, Rawrah, near Cockermouth—"School and Sport," "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out"—2s. offered for the two.

By James Elder, 63, Montague Street, Rothesay—"G." and "M." Nos. before August, 1912.

By G. Nettleton, 46, Claremont Road, Moss Side, Manchester—any back numbers of GEM—write first.

By E. Lupton, 256, Moss Lane East, Moss Side, Manchester—back numbers of GEM—write first.

By Alex. Laggan, Norene Crescent, Carfin, via Motherwell—"Figgins' Fig-Pudding"—3d. offered—any "G." or "M." numbers before 1916—2d. offered—also "Boys' Friend" Library issues of 1913, especially school yarns.

By T. Buchanan, 11, Lochlea Road, Newlands, Glasgow—"G." and "M." Nos. 1-500; also "Boys' Friend" Library, 1-400—state prices.

By T. Brown, 80, New Town, Ashford, Kent—"M." Nos. 83, 119, 172, 179, 190, 239, 253, 254, 305, 392—2d. offered for double numbers.

By Miss Minnie Morrison, 78, Hallscraig Street, Airdrie—"M." Nos. 108, 152, 162, 200, and 283.

By Leslie Caw, 535, Catherine Road, Forest Gate, E. 7—"M." and "G." Nos. 1-10—write first—1/6 offered.

By Pat Halfordy, Hillside, Bergville, Natal, South Africa—"M." Nos. 364-498—must be clean.

Your Editor