A STERN CHASE!

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

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WAR TIME PRICE 1½d.

No. 529. Vol. 12.

"BRAVO, MANNERS!"

30-3-18.

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's.

A STERN CHASE!

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.
None Too Hopeful!

"I'M beginning to wonder whether we've a dog's chance," said Tom Merry, knitting his brows.

"Oh, come now, Tommy! Take a more cheerful view, do!" answered Monty Lowther.

It was not at all in the usual order of things for Tom Merry, the leader of the Shell, to be pessimistic.

But perhaps it was hardly to be wondered at that he should not feel too cheerful at that moment.

Like most of the members of the Form, he had been ready enough to accept the challenge of the Fourth to a series of contests. On the face of it, although the Fourth was a more numerous Form, the chances looked fairly even.

But at present things did not seem to be shaping at all nicely for the Shell.

They had fellows like Tom himself—Talbot and Harry Noble, who were towers of strength all round. They had others like Lowther, Manners, Clifton Dane, Bernard Glyn, Jimson, Thompson, George Wilkins, and Gore, who were useful, some of them more so, some less. The great George Alfred Grundy had his uses, though he was rather more of a nuisance than he was worth. But, besides the few who were determined to keep out of the competition altogether, the Shell certainly had quite a number who were not of much use for anything.

With the Fourth it was otherwise. Jack Blake, George Figgins, Dick Redfern, Ernest Levison, George Francis Kerr, and Richard Roylance were probably the pick of that Form as all-rounders. No three of them might be quite equal to the best three of the Shell; but the Shell had not half a dozen who were equal to the Fourth picked six. Then there were Fatty Wynn, hardly to be classed as an all-rounder, but counting for much at footer and cricket; Clive, D'Arcy, Herries, Julian, Digby, Lumley-Lumley, Brooke, Pratt, Owen, Lawrence, Cardew, Clarke, Lorne, Macdonald, Hammond, Reilly, Kerruish, Koumi Rao, all useful in one way or another—all fellows who might pick up points for their side.

And even the few who were in the rear, such as Bates and Mulvaney minor, and Tompkins and Contarini and Smith minor, and Jones minor and Wyatt and Diggs, were at least keener than the ruck of the Shell, who, for the most part, preferred books or hobbies or chess or loafing to games.

The Shell could not afford to drop ten points for failing to bring any fellow into the lists for at least one event; and the Shell had more than one who refused at present to enter the lists.

Of those in the Fourth likely to give trouble in this way, only Chowle of the New House remained. Mellish and Trimble had been snared into competing, as had Racke of the Shell. Blake and Figgy were not likely to fail to bring in Chowle. The odds were heavier against the bringing-in of the Shell recalcitrants—Clampe, Crooke, and Scrope.

And the Fourth had gained a big lead in the early stages of the competition. That would have mattered less had future prospects been brighter for the Shell.

"Well, I'm not sure Tommy isn't right!" said Manners. "He's not chucking up the sponge; you know that as well as I do, Lowther. But twenty-seven points will take a lot of making up, and that's our leeway now. A stern chase is a long chase, you know!"

"We can't claim anything if Skimmy licks Mellish to-day," said Tom. "Those chaps won't agree to have it count, as Mellish has already competed; and after Baggy's downfall they don't feel so dead sure that Mellish will romp home."

"They'll be sorry they didn't!" returned Lowther, with a chuckle. "Mellish will put it over old Skimmy, you see if he don't! And we shall save points on that, through Blake and Figgy being over-cautious. Look on the bright side, Tommy, do!"

"I fancy Skimmy will win," Tom said. "He's got no real punch; but Talbot says he is really picking up something. And it don't take much punch to settle Mellish. He's afraid of being hurt, and Skimmy ain't. I'd risk points on it like a shot, anyway!"

"You can talk over Blake and Figgy if you try. If you think that, you'd better try"

"I don't want to talk them over!" growled Tom. "This ain't a talking competition. If it was, I'd suggest that we put you up against the whole Fourth, and went to sleep till it was all over. And you'd jaw them blind, deaf, and sick!"

"Thomas, you're rude!"

"You're enough to make anybody—such a cheerful ass as you are, when we're twenty-seven points behind to-day, and likely enough to be fifty behind before the week's out!"

"Twenty of that little lot were for the dormitory jape," said Lowther.

"Well? I suppose I know that as well as you do? They count, all the same!"

"But we'll jolly soon wipe them off!"

"How?"

"Leave that to me, my son!"

"Do you mean that you've a scheme?" asked Manners eagerly.

"Perhaps not precisely a scheme yet——"

"Of course he hasn't!" broke in Tom. "He'll think one out the day after the whole bizney is over. I'm not counting on getting even in that way. What I'm worrying about is the footer. We've agreed to a second eleven match for half the points allowed for the first; and I'm hanged if I see how we're going to raise a second eleven, while, if we do, it will be the scratchiest set of freaks that ever took the field at St. Jim's! I can't see that we have much chance in the first-eleven game, for the matter of that!"

"What's your first eleven?" asked Manners.

Tom had been busy with a half-sheet of notepaper at the moment when he had given utterance to the words which stand at the beginning of this chapter.

"We three—Talbot, Kangaroo, Dane; and Glyn, Wilkins, Jimson, and Thompson from over the way; and, I think, Gore. There are two or three there who might let us down. I can't quite see us licking a team that includes Blake and Gussy and Levison and Clive; Figgy, Kerr, and Fatty; Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence; and Brooke or Roylance, or Koumi Rao or Julian, or Reilly or half a dozen others, they might play at a pinch. They have really two elevens; we haven't as much as one and a half. Sweet prospect, I must say!"

"H'm!" said Manners, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

There really seemed some considerable reason for Tom's pessimism.

"Footer isn't everything," said Lowther oracularly.

"Oh, you cheap ass!" snapped Tom. "Did anybody ever say it was? But how are we ever going to catch up if we lose both those matches?"

"Win other events, of course!" answered Monty cheerfully.

Tom looked at him darkly. Then, as Lowther continued to preserve an absolutely cheerful demeanour, the old sunny smile broke over Tom's face.

"You're right—dead right, old chap!" he said. "There's no sort of use in getting down in the dumps, anyway. It was this wretched second-eleven list that worried me."

"If you talk to the fellows, Tommy, they'll buck up!" said Manners.

"Not so sure!" replied Tom. "It's getting near the end of the season—time when even some really keen chaps are a bit fed up with the game. Chaps like Gunn and Gibbons and Lucas and Frere and Lennox aren't keen!"

"They may not be on footer," Manners said. "I wouldn't say they're not keen on the Form. And I do honestly believe they think a lot of you, Tom—most of them, anyway. That's where you come in. Blake and Figgy are all right as leaders, I dare say; but I don't mind telling you that I don't think either of them is quite up to your mark, old man!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Lowther heartily.

Tom beamed.

"From the look on your speaking old phiz, one might imagine that you were quite unaware till this moment that you had two thick and thin admirers in this study, Tommy!" said Lowther.

At that Tom grinned.

"Well, there are times when you do camouflage your admiration pretty thoroughly!" he said. "But I know——"

"And here comes a third!" said Manners.

CHAPTER 2.
On the Scent of a Mystery.

IT was Reginald Talbot who entered; and Manners was quite correct.

Tom Merry had no warmer admirer or sincere friend in all St. Jim's than Talbot.

It was characteristic of Talbot that he never tried to thrust himself into the comradeship that had bound these three so long. There had been a time when Lowther and Manners had felt just a little bit jealous of him. But they knew

better now. He was the good chum of all three; but he made no effort to push himself into a place as a fourth. He seemed satisfied to share a study with a weird creature like Skimmy and a fellow like Gore, who even now was not exactly the chum everyone would have chosen.

"Anything up, Talbot?" asked Tom, for the handsome Shell fellow looked decidedly serious.

"Yes. I'll tell you in a minute. But first I've a message from Skimmy. He wants his fight with Mellish this evening to be ranked as a Form event. He says, in words of about seventeen syllables—but he means it all the same—that he will not be beaten unless he is knocked out; and, myself, I can't see Mellish knocking anyone out."

"I'm willing enough," Tom answered. "It depends on what Blake and Figgy say. 'Fraid they won't be on. What do you think of Skimmy's chance yourself, Talbot?"

"I fancy he'll win. He has no muscle worth mentioning. He's slow; you can see his punches—if they can be called punches—coming all the way. But they're getting straighter. And he's keen—for once—and he has pluck. Skimmy's all right! More in him than you fellows think."

"What's this feud of his all about?" asked Lowther curiously.

"Ah! Now we're coming to it. I don't know. Skimmy said he couldn't tell me, and I could only let it go at that. But Gore has been at him. I couldn't help hearing. If you ask a fellow about a hundred leading questions, you're bound to get something out of him—unless he plays dumb. And you know what Gore is."

They knew. George Gore had not even now the sense of honour that would respect a secret such as Skimmy's. He would probably stick to any promise of his own; but he would not have any great respect for another's promise.

"I shouldn't say anything but that the bizney seems to me really serious," went on Talbot. "The seven Skimmy is up against are Racke, Crooke, Clampe, Scrope, Mellish, Chowle, and Trimble. They are the worst wasters in the two Forms; and it would be easy enough to believe anything of them except good."

"Quite epigrammatic, Talbot!" said Lowther. "Proceed!"

"Skimmy seems to have stumbled upon them doing something that they didn't want known. They captured him, and, as I make it out, refused to let him go until he had promised to keep it dark. He is keeping it dark, as far as he can; but he's going to do his level best to thrash each one of the seven to get even. It's against his pacific principles, he says; but there's some of the old Adam even in our Skimmy, and his pacific principles don't make him feel at all downcast about having put the kybosh on Baggy."

"What could it have been they were after?" said Tom. "Not the old gambling stunt, I fancy. They wouldn't care much about having that kept dark. Everyone knows about it—except the people who could do anything. And Skimmy wouldn't be likely to tell them."

"It wasn't that," Talbot answered. "There may have been drink in it—there must have been, in fact. For Gore got it out of Skimmy that he had some champagne, though Skimmy was emphatic that he did not take it willingly. Gore pretends to believe that if it hadn't been for the wine, Skimmy would never have given his challenge. But anyway, he's sticking to it once given, which is all that matters."

"I can guess what else there was in it besides drink," said Manners.

"What?"

"Grub!"

"Just what I thought. In fact, I feel pretty sure. And it's serious. It would be a blot on the 'scutcheon for St. Jim's if they were caught out at it, and got public punishment. And they would if they were caught, you know! Everyone who is doing the decent thing about grub is horribly down on food-hogs just now."

"And quite right, too!" said Tom. "Tightening one's belt may not be pleasant; but if it's necessary—and the folk who know say it is—no one has a right to kick. Least of all fellows who have lived on the fat of the land until the last few weeks."

"But where can they be getting it?" said Lowther.

"And where are they doing their gorging act?" asked Tom.

"I don't know where they get it. I should fancy Racke is at the bottom of the supply organisation. As to where they have it—well, I don't actually know that, either. But I think I could give a pretty close guess."

"Anywhere about the school?" Manners inquired.

Talbot shook his head.

"I hate this sort of thing!" said Tom Merry frankly. "We're bound to do something; and yet what can we do without a lot of what you can't call anything but spying?"

We can wait for them to give themselves away," Talbot replied. "They are safe to do it sooner or later. Of course, it may be only a single incident. But, knowing Racke, I don't think that. If he can get the stuff he'll have it; and while he can keep those other rotters out of the competition by feeding them up he'll do it!"

"Well, Baggy and Mellish are written off already," Tom said.

"Which, when you come to think of it, don't help the Shell an amazing lot," put in Lowther.

"You're right. And Chowle won't help us. He'll have to face Skimmy, and we may pick up a couple of points there; but the Fourth will have worked off all their doubtful cases then, and we shall still have Crooke and Clampe and Scrope to deal with," Tom said, wrinkling his brows. "It won't count anything either way that Skimmy should fight them."

"This is the sort of thing that Levison or Kerr would smell out a heap better than we can," remarked Manners. "I don't mean that spying suits them—come to that, I don't know that I quite agree with Tom about its being spying in such a case. But they have the detective instinct."

"And, while we have lots of other and vastly superior qualities, of course, you think none of us has that, Manners?" said Lowther.

"Well, which of us has?"

"I rather flatter myself——"

"My hat, you do flatter yourself if you think you're anything in the Herlock Sholmes line! Well, you might be that—but not Sherlock Holmes—there's a bit of difference."

"You consider that my efforts in the role of detective would be—er—funny?" Lowther said, not too well pleased.

"Simply screaming, old chap!" replied Manners.

Monty Lowther frowned. Seeing how little his chums appreciated his jokes, it seemed to him rather too thick that Manners should make up his mind in advance that his efforts in a serious part would be screamingly funny.

"Better turn Grundy on," said Talbot, smiling.

"Better not let any of the Fourth get wind of it," Tom said quickly. "It's just the sort of thing they would demand to have included in the competition, and where should we be then?"

"More jolly points to the bad," replied Manners sadly.

"Don't I tell you asses——"

"We heard you, Brother Montague!" said Tom.

"I'm quite willing——"

"But we're not!" snapped Manners.

"You're not asked to. I'll put the bizney through on my own!"

"Better get Grundy as an ally," Tom said resignedly. "You might only half mess it up. With Grundy to help you it would be a sure thing."

"Talking about Grundy," said Talbot, "we haven't settled yet what's to be done about this notion of his of challenging the whole Fourth, one after another."

"But we're not talking about Grundy!" howled Lowther.

"We are," said Tom. "Don't go dreaming that we're going to let you make an ass of yourself as a 'tec, Monty! The thing's out of the question."

"Oh, is it? I tell you——"

"What do you think about it, Talbot?"

"Yes; let's hear what you think about it, Talbot! I've got some respect for your opinion. As for these two burbling chumps——"

"I'm not asking Talbot about your idiotic scheme! I'm asking him what he thinks about Grundy."

"If you chaps are going to discuss that ineffable idiot seriously——"

"Instead of you?" put in Manners.

"Yes, instead of me. I'm not so modest that——"

"No one ever thought it of you, old scout! But why shouldn't we discuss one ineffable idiot as well as another?"

Lowther gave Manners a basilisk look.

"Are you fellows going to talk about Grundy?" he demanded warmly.

"We are—we is!" said Tom.

"Then, I'm going!"

"Right-ho! Au reservoir, dear boy!"

Lowther departed in high dudgeon. He seemed to be taking his detective ambitions quite seriously.

"Well, what do you think, Talbot?"

"We might give him his head, if the Fourth agree. Not on his own absurd terms, of course. They might be all very well for a knock-out bizney; but you can't afford four or five to one on Grundy if the decision is to be on points."

"We can't afford odds at all that way," Tom said. "I shouldn't call Grundy a clever fighter—not a clever boxer, anyway."

"But points don't all go for cleverness, and perhaps he's better that way than you fancy. Points include straight punching and lots of other things."

"But he isn't better than Blake or Figgy, or several others in the Fourth as a boxer," objected Manners.

"If it was only Blake and Figgins, I'd say choke him off. But the Fourth are a sporting crew. Most of them fancy themselves as boxers, more or less; and, though they know they can't lick Grundy, they think they are superior in everything but brute strength. Well, I don't. Two or three of them—maybe five or six; but I'm guessing wrong if nearly a score don't want to try their luck. And we must have it clearly understood beforehand that anyone who wants to try his luck must be allowed to. Grundy challenges the whole Fourth. No one could make all of them face him; but no one must be allowed to stop a chap that wants to."

"My hat, you're a tactician, Talbot!" said Manners.

"It sounds different, put like that," admitted Tom. "And there's no fear of Grundy's getting swollen head; he's got

that already. Question is, Will he keep cool enough to do his best?"

"I think so," Talbot replied. "Unless he gets his rag out with the referee, and we must warn him against that."

"Ugh! Did you ever know any good come from warning Grundy?" said Tom. "Still, I'm prepared to risk it, if you are. We need points, and if we can get any out of Grundy it's all to the good!"

CHAPTER 3.
With the Gloves On.

FOURTH and Shell alike crowded to the gym that wet half-holiday. Very few were absent.

But among the absentees were Racke, Crooke, Clampe, Scrope, Chowle, and Trimble. Mellish would have been an absentee also, but for the fact that ever since dinner he had been under close guard. Arthur Augustus, Herries, and Digby had taken charge of him; and they brought him up to the scratch when the time came, though he had made several attempts to escape them.

Percy Mellish liked feeding far better than fighting, and it was gall to him to know that he would be late at the feast of the food-hogs, all because Skimpole, whom he was certain he could lick one-handed, insisted upon trying to defeat him.

The great Grundy came along with Wilkins and Gunn, beaming upon all he met. It was the happiest afternoon Grundy had had since he had come to St. Jim's. At last, he felt, his talents were being properly recognised!

Grundy considered himself equally great in all forms of sport. He did not realise that boxing and long-distance running were the only branches in which he was anything but a duffer.

By dint of continual efforts to "wallop" anyone who dared to oppose him, he had become quite a capable exponent in the fistic art; and his strength and endurance helped him in a long race, where speed was not the chief thing.

"I'm not so dead sure about this, Figgy," said Jack Blake.

"Do you mean Mellish v. Skimmy? I don't see how we could very well help letting it count when Tom Merry pressed it. He's taking a sporting risk over old Grundy, anyway."

"Nunno," replied Blake. "Mellish can lick Skimmy if he tries; and if he won't try he may look out for a warm time with me afterwards! It's the Grundy affair I'm thinking of."

"That will be all right," said the New House leader confidently. "Why, what's to hinder it? We've at least six chaps who are all over old Grundy on points——"

"And we've about sixteen who want to tackle him! If we win six points on, say, four bouts, that's twenty-four——"

"Did you do that in your head, Blake?" asked Kerr, grinning.

"Shurrup, ass! And we can't count on more than four of the six you think safe. Well, if we get twenty-four points by that, and lose two points each on the other dozen——"

"Then we shall be all square, and no worse off for it," Figgy said.

"Why, so we shall! I don't——"

"But it's three points we stand to lose on each," put in Kerr.

"So it is! Ass you were to forget, Figgy! Now I've got to reckon it all over again. If we get twenty-four points we——"

"And lose thirty-six, it looks to me as if we shall be down a few," said Kerr. "Twelve down, in fact. Did you ever see my giddy equal at mental arithmetic, Blake, old son?"

"Hang it all! But Grundy couldn't stand so many bouts in one afternoon," Blake said, brightening up.

"I don't see how we can expect him to. If more than he cares to take on give in their names, the rest must wait till another day," Figgins answered.

"H'm! I must say those Shellfish have made it about right for themselves!"

"Well, it was naturally themselves they were thinking about, old scout," Kerr said. "You and Figgy looked after our interests. I'm satisfied, whatever happens. It's as sporting an event as any we've had or are likely to have, for you must allow that old Grundy deserves all he can score when he has the nerve to take on all comers, one after another."

Something like that seemed to be the general opinion.

Kildare had consented to referee, and he now gave out the conditions of the event.

"Any fellow in the Fourth may accept Grundy's challenge," he said. "But, having accepted it, he stands to win or lose points for his side. You understand? Your name must be given in at the start; and once it's down you face Grundy, or the Shell scores three. Every fellow he meets and outpoints gives the Shell three also. But any Fourth-Former who outpoints him wins six for the Fourth. I don't know how many of you mean to come forward; but it's evident that Grundy cannot be expected to meet the whole Form in a single afternoon——"

"Excuse me, Kildare, but I'm perfectly willing to do that!" put in Grundy, in his lordliest tone.

"Shurrup, idiot!" snapped Kangaroo.

"You may be willing, but it won't be fair to you or to your Form," replied Kildare. "There's a limit, you know. Do all agree here that I shall be allowed to say when that limit is reached?"

That was readily agreed to.

"I think the best way will be that names should be drawn from a hat after they have been handed in," Kildare resumed, when that was settled. "It wouldn't be the thing for the Fourth to send its best, one after another, against a single Shell fellow——"

"I'm ready——"

"Oh, dry up, Grundy! You'll want your breath later on," said Tom. "Do you chaps agree to that? I hadn't thought of it; but it sounds all right now Kildare says it."

So thought Blake and Figgins and the rest of the Fourth. No one wanted to take anything like an unfair advantage.

But Grundy looked as if he was being robbed of half his anticipated glory.

"I think that's all," the skipper said. "I understand that I've something in the way of a comic turn to referee before Grundy starts upon his career of conquest—or otherwise, as the case may be. Meanwhile, the Fourth-Formers who mean to meet him can be handing in their names to Lefevre."

Skimpole looked hurt at Kildare's jocular reference to his combat, and Mellish scowled. But they came forward.

The genius of the Shell had arrayed himself for the fray. His broomstick legs were bare below the knee and down to his socks. His skinny arms were also bare.

"My hat! Look at Skimmy's biceps!" said Blake.

"If you've a telescope with microscopic attachment, I'll try," Kerr replied drily.

"I don't believe there is such a thing," said Blake.

"Perhaps not. But I should think it's a likelier thing to exist than biceps in Skimmy."

Mellish had not made any change in his clothing. He came into the ring as if he thought the whole affair a bore, and took off his Eton jacket as though he regarded even that as unnecessary.

Already there was a stream of Fourth-Formers towards Lefevre. Blake, Figgins, Kerr, Arthur Augustus, Herries, and Digby all handed in their names. Fatty Wynn stood aloof. Fatty had never been ambitious of pugilistic distinction, though he would fight when put to it.

It was not to be expected that any one of those six would stand out. And it was not surprising that Roylance, Levison, Clive, Cardew, Julian, Koumi Rao, Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, Brooke, Reilly, Lumley-Lumley, and Kerruish should all come forward. That would have made nineteen, quite a sufficient number.

But Blake and Figgins began to grow long in the face when they saw how many others were anxious to try their luck. Bates, Mulvaney minor, Lorne, Macdonald, Smith minor, Clarke, Hammond, Wyatt, Jones minor, Robinson minor, Pratt—was there to be no end to the crowd?

"My only aunt!" said Blake. "We're going down with a bump on this!"

"They don't think," said Figgins, knitting his brows.

"Wrong, old scout! They do think," replied Kerr. "They think they're a heap better than they are! I had a bit of a doubt whether there was any use in my standing up to Grundy. But these chaps don't seem to have a scrap."

"Oh, hang it all, there goes Tompkins!" groaned Figgy. "That's the giddy limit!"

"Silly asses!" remarked Fatty. "What do they want to do it for? But it ain't really the limit, Figgy. Mellish and Chowle and Baggy would be that, and they ain't likely to take it on."

"I don't see Chowle or Baggy here," Figgins said, looking round. "And Mellish seems to be having all he wants from Skimpole. Oh, buck up, Mellish!"

But Mellish showed no signs of bucking up.

He had been unable to sneak out of this encounter; and the easiest way seemed to him to let it come to an end before he got hurt.

He did not think Skimmy could really hurt him. But that was where he went wrong in his calculations.

Skimmy had no muscle worth mentioning; but he had bony knuckles, and when those knuckles smote Mellish's engaging countenance they hurt, even through the gloves, though there was little real force behind the blow.

And they kept on smiting. Mellish might have guarded most of the blows had he not become so flustered. As it was, most of them got home.

"Go it, Skimmy!" yelled the Shell, in high delight.

Mellish grew angry, and went for Skimmy. He had more strength than the genius of the Shell, though he was pretty weedy. It is likely that the punch or two he got in hurt Skimmy far more than anything Skimmy had done had hurt him.

But Skimmy did not seem to mind!

He had profited in at least one way from Talbot's coaching. His great mind had fastened on the statement that anything hurt one only as much as one believed it hurt.

That sounded rather like Christian Science, which had been among Skimmy's many fads. He had not found that denying a raging toothache had been very effective. But the hardest punch Mellish was capable of dealing was a much slighter thing than the nasty, jumping pain of a hollow tooth. Skimmy found himself quite able to ignore the damage Mellish could do him.

He was puffing hard at the end of the second round; but he looked a winner all over.

For it was plain to anyone who had eyes to see that Mellish was only waiting his chance to get out.

The temper of the Fourth grew warm.

"Go it, Mellish! Get a move on you!"

"Buck up, you slacker!"

"You're never going to let that ass lick you, are you?"

Mellish scowled. He was going to let "that ass" lick him—unless he had the luck to lick "that ass" by accident—which appeared unlikely.

He had taken too many lickings to be sensitive about another. But he dreaded a Form ragging; and that seemed no improbable thing if he went out without getting the knock-out blow which Skimmy seemed too feeble to hand him.

It was not a chance to get out with honour that he wanted. Mellish cared nothing about honour. He only wanted what looked like reason for stopping.

And in the third round he found it.

Skimmy's right got home on his nose, and red drops began to flow.

"I chuck it!" said Mellish sulkily.

There came a roar of protest from the Fourth. Digby, who had consented to second Mellish, hissed things of quite an unusual kind to come from a second.

"Go on, you funk!"

"You ain't hurt!"

"Stick to it! He couldn't hurt you in a month!"

"You can't chuck it like that!"

"Funk!"

"Do you really mean that you consider yourself licked, Mellish?" asked Kildare contemptuously.

"I can't go on with my nose bleeding like this, can I?" whined the sneak of the Fourth.

"I should say you could. But I can't make you. You're beaten—after the poorest pretence of putting up a fight that I ever saw! Skimpole, I can't exactly congratulate you on a victory like this; but I must say that no one need cavil at your share of the fight, and I fancy, if you stick to it, you'll be equal to something a good deal better than Mellish—in time, of course."

"Say about a hundred years!" remarked Noble, with a grin.

But Skimmy fairly beamed. With five more opponents to meet, he found Kildare's qualified approval encouraging.

"I have always believed, Kildare, that a really active mind, capable of synthesis, and——"

"So have I, Skimmy; but I really haven't time to discuss synthesis just now. Grundy's in a hurry to take the lists against all comers, you know."

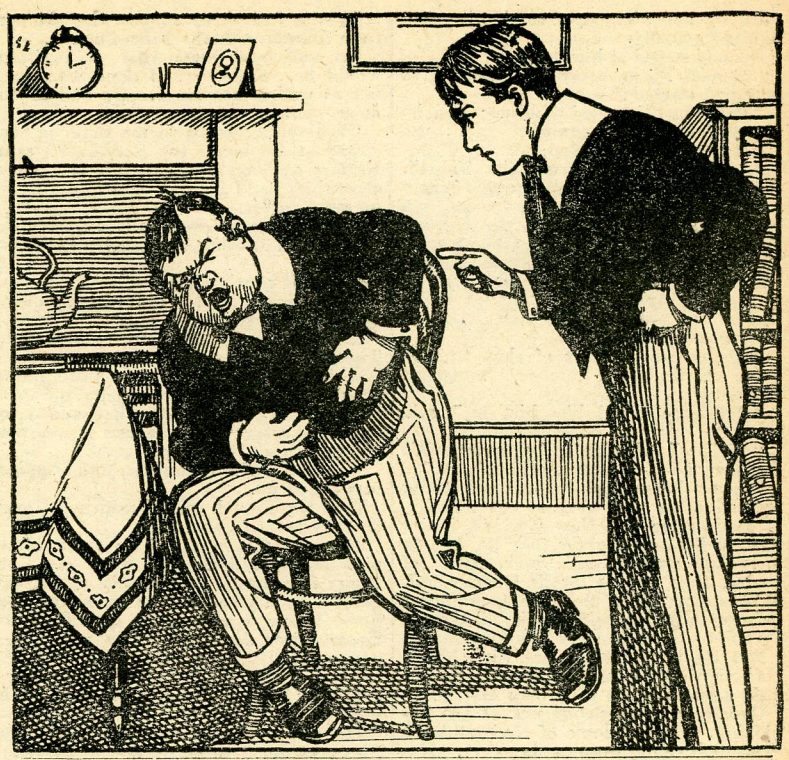
Talbot and the Terrible Three patted Skimmy on the back, and Gore gave him a smack that fairly made him wheeze. Noble, Dane, Glyn, and others congratulated him, and Skimmy beamed upon them all, and felt himself numbered of the warrior clan.

But there was acute resentment in the ranks of the Fourth. Mellish had let his Form down badly, and his Form would not forget it in a hurry!

They let him sneak out, handkerchief to nose, but practically unhurt. And no one—not even Tom or Manners—noticed at the moment that Monty Lowther followed him.

CHAPTER 4.
Grundy v. The Fourth.

"WELL, I must say that there's a rare amount of sporting spirit in the Fourth!" said Kildare, having rattled off over thirty names from the list Lefevre handed him. He smiled as he spoke.



Baggy Feels Ill!
(See Chapter 6.)

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry, also smiling.

"You may well say that, Tommy!" growled Blake. "Chucking away points, I call it!"

"We never expected anything like this," said Figgy dolefully.

"Can't be helped," Dig remarked philosophically. "The Form shows up jolly well, anyway."

"Yes; but how is the Form going to show up when it's all over?" Kerr objected.

"Weally, deah boys, I considah that you should be vewy pleased to find that so few of the Fourth are weluctant to meet Gwunday, who is biggah an' heaviah than any of us!"

"What about points, Gussy?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Honah comes before points, Wynn! I am supwised that your name is absent from the list."

"If you'd be surprised at that you'd be surprised at anything," Fatty answered placidly. "I don't go about asking for lickings."

"My hat, Talbot, you were right!" Tom said gleefully.

"I thought there wasn't much doubt, Tom. They're triers in the Fourth. But I must say Blake and Figgy deserve a lot of credit. They haven't said a word to keep anyone back."

"They'd have liked to, though," said Manners. "Look at their long faces!"

"Where's Monty?" asked Tom, missing Lowther.

"Dunno!" answered Manners. "What's it matter? Kildare's drawing—see?"

"Wyatt!" said Kildare

Grundy grinned triumphantly. The Shell smiled. The Fourth looked none too chippy.

Wyatt walked up. He was not actually a duffer. Few of the Fourth were absolute duffers with the gloves, but he really had no chance with Grundy.

He was outfought and completely outpointed in a single round, and Kildare decided that it was no use allowing a second. Not even the keenest in the Fourth grumbled at that decision.

"Tompkins!" rapped out Kildare.

Even the Fourth grinned at that, though some of them grinned in rather wry fashion.

Clarence York Tompkins had more pluck than Mellish, or he would never have given in his name. But Mellish would have had a chance against him as far as skill was concerned.

Tompkins had a wild and whirling time till Kildare suggested to Grundy that it was wasting strength to tumble over a novice. One round was enough in that case also; but, to his credit, Tompkins came away smiling still.

"Kerruish!"

That was a trifle better. The Manx junior was quick on his pins, and he kept Grundy dodging after him in the first round in quite an encouraging way, but in the second he got something very like a knock-out blow. Grundy could not help hitting hard.

"Nine down!" groaned Herries.

"Herries!" called Kildare.

"That's more like it!" said Herries hopefully.

"Not so jolly sure!" growled Blake, as his chum went up.

Herries did his Form credit, but he did not win points for it. The burly Fourth-Former might be a trifle quicker than Grundy, but he was slow by comparison with such as Blake and Figgy, and Grundy's defence was better than his.

He fought out three rounds—the maximum number—but Grundy got the decision, and no one questioned it.

The faces of the Fourth grew longer than ever. If Herries could not bring it off, what chance had many of those left?

But they must face the Shell's representative, or forfeit points, and not one of them felt like paying forfeit.

"Had enough yet, Grundy?" asked Kildare genially.

Grundy stared at him.

"Enough?" he snorted. "Why, I've only just started!"

"Right-ho!" replied Kildare; and he dipped into the hat again.

"Roylance!" he called.

A cheer went up from the Fourth. Here at last was a champion who might not only uphold their honour—none had sullied that yet, not even the helpless Tompkins, who had at least taken a pasting manfully—but even score for them.

Like Herries, Roylance had put on proper boxing-garb. He flushed as he walked up through the lane that the Fourth made for him.

"Looks like the sort of chap to take down old Grundy's number," remarked Manners.

"I believe you'd like him to," said Tom.

"Well, I shouldn't be sorry. We don't want it to go quite all one way."

Grundy knew that he had something more like his own weight—not literally, of course, for the New Zealand junior was smaller and slighter than he, but on form—up against him now. But, of course, that was as far as Grundy got. It was not likely that the magnificent George Alfred would admit to himself that any Fourth-Former was his equal.

But Roylance's Form had high hopes. Had they not seen the New Zealander fight a great battle with Tom Merry?

Grundy was over-confident at the beginning. He lost some of his confidence as the first round wore on, however. Not once had he got fairly home on Roylance, whose guard was strong, and whose mobility was far ahead of Grundy's; and twice during that round Roylance's left sent a message home to Grundy's face.

The Shell fellow had the better of the second round, and some of his body-blows were very effective. But in the third Roylance came again.

He fairly waltzed round his heavier opponent, and got in three blows for every one Grundy dealt. It would have meant less in a fight, for George Alfred's way was to go on till he could no longer stand, and it took a lot of punishment to reduce him to that condition.

But it meant much in a three-round contest on points, and even Grundy was not surprised when Kildare gave Roylance the decision.

"Like to stop now?" asked Kildare, as the Fourth yelled applause of their victorious champion, who blushed modestly, and answered no words of praise addressed to him except those spoken by Harry Manners.

"Not likely!" growled Grundy. "Ask me that when I've polished off a dozen or so more of them. You were quite right about that, Kildare——"

"Delighted to have your approval, Grundy!"

"But, all the same, I could lick Roylance if we went all out!"

Kildare had another dip into the hat.

"Julian!" he called.

"Another for the slaughter!" Julian said cheerily.

He put up by no means a bad show, but the decision was against him, and the Fourth were again nine down on points.

Digby and Lorne brought the total to fifteen. Lorne was at least somewhere near Grundy's height, though nowhere near him in weight; but Dig was a full head shorter. He battled manfully, but to no avail.

"Redfern!"

Another chance for the Fourth, for Dick Redfern was a boxer and fighter, too, and very active.

Lefevre stood by Kildare's side, and after the full three rounds the skipper took counsel with the Fifth-Former.

No one could guess what the decision would be. Redfern had done well, but not as well as Roylance. He had taken more punishment.

"Lefevre agrees with me that we can award this bout to Redfern," said Kildare at length. "But it was a very close thing, and I didn't care to decide it on my own."

For a moment Grundy's face darkened, but he said nothing till Kildare spoke to him.

"Isn't it nearly time——"

"I'm going on!" snapped Grundy. "There's something to wipe off now!"

Grundy was not great on mathematics. The twelve points Roylance and Redfern had scored for the Fourth were more than balanced by the twenty-one the seven victories of Grundy had added to the Shell score. But perhaps it was not points Grundy was thinking of.

Another dip into the hat, and Figgins was called up.

Now the Fourth roared exultingly, and Grundy looked grim.

Figgy was a hard nut to crack after nine bouts, and Grundy knew it. But Figgy's suggestion that this would be quite a good place to stop at, giving the Shell fellow a chance of meeting him under fairer conditions, was rejected—not scornfully, but emphatically.

"I'm going on," said Grundy doggedly. "I'm fit for a good deal more yet!"

He was certainly fit enough to give Figgy as much as he needed in the way of opposition. But in the third round the New House leader's freshness told the inevitable tale.

Figgy scored, and the Shell lead on the ten bouts was reduced to three.

"May I have a word with Grundy, Kildare?" asked Talbot, after a brief consultation with Tom Merry.

They both knew that Grundy was more likely to give heed to Talbot than to Tom.

"What have you got to say?" demanded Grundy hotly.

"Only this," said Talbot. "You've done jolly well. We all think so. But you've done more already than any fellow can be expected to do in one afternoon without feeling it."

"I don't feel it. Don't you bother about me!"

"But suppose Blake, or Levison, or Clive comes next? They're all strong and clever enough, and——"

"I'm going on," repeated Grundy. "A dozen is my absolute minimum."

"Are you thinking about the Form or your own vain glory?" asked Talbot, a trifle nettled.

"I'm going on," repeated Grundy obstinately.

There was no more to be said. Kildare had been waiting with a slip in his hand. Talbot moved away, and Kildare said:

"D'Arcy's next."

"Hooway!" cried Arthur Augustus.

"Corporal Grundy wins this one," said Wally of the Third, nudging Frank Levison.

Do you want your major licked?" inquired Reggie Manners behind them.

"Not particularly, kid. But he jolly well will be—you see!"

"Keep him moving, Gustavus! Dodge him!" counselled Blake.

"Oh, weally, Blake! Do you imagine that——"

"Not so much gas!" snapped Dig.

Gussy went up—to defeat! He was really not Grundy's match.

But at the end of this, his eleventh bout, the burly George Alfred was really somewhat the worse for wear, though he would have scorned to own it.

His last victory had given him a margin of six points. On chance—and on chance alone—depended his being able to keep them. If one of the best of the Fourth-Formers was his next opponent the afternoon's game would end in a draw!

The Fourth were in suspense as the skipper drew from the hat. So were the Shell, for that matter; but at worst they stood to lose nothing on the day.

Blake, a redoubtable champion—Kerr, too elusive for Grundy in Grundy's present state—Levison, a clever boxer who could hit hard—Clive, probably just a trifle Levison's superior—even Cardew, who would keep Grundy dancing around and get him blown, out of sheer mischief—any one of those five would have been hailed with cheers by the Fourth.

But any one of the five would have felt that he preferred to meet Grundy in better condition to do himself justice. None of them wanted a cheap win.

It was none of them, however.

"Pratt!" called Kildare.

Pratt would not have lasted the three rounds had Grundy been fresher. He lasted the three, as it was; but he did not score for his side.

Grundy had fought a dozen opponents, and three only of them had outpointed him. The Fourth counted six for each of the three; but the Shell's three points for each of the other nine gave them a clear gain of nine.

And Grundy had done it!

Who could say after that that Grundy was of no use?

CHAPTER 5.
A New Contest.

"WE'D ask you to tea, Grundy, only we haven't any tea, or any sugar, or any margarine," said Tom. "So it would be rather an empty compliment."

Grundy grunted.

"I don't feel much like tea," he admitted. "Some of those Fourth-Form kids can punch. I'll say that for them. You may be satisfied with this afternoon's work, Merry, but I 'm not!"

"Why, what more would you want?" asked Manners.

"I didn't expect any of them to beat me, of course. Mind, I'm saying nothing against Kildare. He was fair enough, as far as his judgment went. But this points bizney is silly rot!"

"But we couldn't have had it on any other terms," explained Tom. "We all know that you carry too many guns for any of the Fourth in a knock-out fight."

"Oh, well, I dare say you did your best for the Form," answered Grundy. "All I've got to say about it is that I should have insisted on the knock-out bizney if I'd been arranging it."

And he went off with his nose in the air.

"Same old Grundy!" said Tom. "Never mind, he's done a bit of rare good work for us this afternoon, and if the rest goes as well—I don't see why it shouldn't, either—this will turn out a first-class dodge for us."

"Where's that chump Monty?" said Manners. "He's missed it all."

"Here's that chump Monty!" spoke the voice of Lowther behind them.

"Where on earth did you get to?" asked Tom.

"Tell you presently. What's happened in the gym?"

"Skimmy's scored two points for us, and Grundy's——"

"Lost us twenty-two, I suppose?"

"Then your supposer has gone all to pot," replied Tom, with a grin of sheer, unalloyed delight. "We're nine up through old Grundy!"

"Wha-a-at? 'Do I sleep, do I dream, or is visions about?'"

"It's a solemn fact. Figgy, Roylance,

and Reddy were too much for him, though the tussle with Reddy was a very near thing. But the old hero put it across nine of them!"

"My hat! Twelve in one afternoon! Well, I'm totally jiggered!"

They turned into No. 10, where war bread and sardines awaited them.

"There's some coffee, thanks be," said Manners.

"My dear chap, what's coffee?" said Lowther. "Let us be thankful for it. But think of Racke & Co. filling themselves up with the fat of the land, and washing it down with mixed liquors, including fizz out of gold-topped bottles!"

"You don't mean that you have——"

"Tommy, if you call it spying——"

"I don't say I do. No; on the whole, I shouldn't call it that. If they're playing the food-hog game they want bowling out, and it's up to us to do it. For the credit of the school that sort of thing must be stopped."

"How did you get on to them?" asked Manners.

"I followed the pugilistic Percy. It seemed to me that there was some motive even stronger than a dislike to getting hurt behind the very feeble show the pugnacious Percy made against Skimmy. And verily there was!"

"He was in a hurry to get off to the feast, I suppose?"

"Call it the orgy, Thomas. There was grub enough for a bigger family than Jacob's."

"Jacob who?" asked Manners.

"Jacob ben Isaac," answered Lowther solemnly. "Pretty hefty family, that respectable gentleman's."

"Never heard of him."

"Manners, you shock me! Are you not the merchant who ran second in the Divinity Stakes last exam?"

"The old ass means the patriarch, Manners," said Tom.

"Why can't he say so, then? And that chap's name wasn't Ben, anyway. Why doesn't he tell a staight yarn, and not get dragging in Noah and Julius Cæsar?" demanded Manners, a trifle ruffled.

"Jacob ben Isaac means Jacob, son of Isaac, my son," said Lowther. "As for telling a straight yarn, you shall have it all in a dozen words, if you like, though it's not my usual way of telling things."

"It certainly is not!" said Manners emphatically. "But it's the way I like 'em told."

"Racke & Co. had a big feed under the St. Jim's House of Commons this afternoon," announced Lowther. "Sixteen words there. Sorry to be so lengthy. I'll do better next time—perhaps!"

"But where did they get the grub?" asked Manners.

Lowther shook his head.

"How did you twig them?" inquired Tom.

Lowther laid a finger on his lips.

"Dummy! Can't you answer a question?" said Manners wrathfully.

"I have told a plain, unvarnished tale. I say no more!"

"But——"

Cardew popped his head in at the door.

"Heard the latest, you fellows?" he asked.

"What is it?"

"Baggy's been ill—disgustingly ill. I haven't first-hand evidence myself, an' can't say I want it. But 'tis whispered rather loudly that the nature an' the gross extent of Baggy's illness affords conclusive proof that—in short, it couldn't have been done on the rations!"

"Just like the Fourth!" said Manners.

Cardew's grin was sardonic.

"Matter of fact, dear boys," he drawled, "there were four of your precious Form in it, an' only three of ours."

The Terrible Three looked at one another. It was plain that the Fourth had got on the track of the mystery.

"Hallo, there!" spoke Levison. "Cardew been telling you about the dear Baggy?"

"Yes," said Tom. "But Lowther found it out before Baggy gave it away to you chaps. You don't expect to score points because a member of your Form has overeaten himself and been beastly sick, do you?"

"You express yourself coarsely, Thomas!" said Lowther reprovingly.

"It's no good going all round a plain fact," Tom replied.

"Worse than plain, old top! Ugly!" said Cardew.

"Blake's coming along to suggest something," Levison said.

Jack Blake, with Herries, Digby, and Gussy, arrived at this moment.

"I've got a new wheeze, Tommy!" he said. "You may not be on, and very likely you won't be, as you know jolly well that all the detective talent at St. Jim's in in our Form!"

"I don't know anything of the sort," said Tom at once.

"Then you are on?"

"Depends upon what it is."

"Well, it's been found out that Racke and all his measly gang are food-hogging."

"Yes. Monty found it out," replied Tom.

"That be hanged for a tale! It didn't need any finding out, matter of that—it's only a way of speaking. Baggy has given the game away, and admitted more than he meant to in his spasms."

"But Lowther found it out while Baggy was only—er—might say getting ill!"

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun, Blake!"

"Well, I'm not going to dispute it, if you fellows say so. It doesn't really alter what I wanted to propose. We've had a word or two with Racke about it. He's the only one who knows how the grub is got, and he won't tell."

"Did you expect him to?" asked Cardew blandly.

"Well, hardly. But he defies the whole school to find out—challenges us, in fact!"

"Racke can't issue a challenge on behalf of the Shell!" snapped Manners.

"Of course he can't, chump! But after that it will be fair play to do all we know how to bowl the rotter out. And I suggest that both Forms take it up, and points go to the Form which does the trick."

"And that will be the Fourth!" said Levison confidently.

"Not so sure," said Tom. "I shouldn't be keen on a dodge of this sort, Blake, if it hadn't been for the way Racke's taking it. But as it is——"

"It's up to us all to do what we can to smash up the rotter's schemes, there's no possible doubt about that," Cardew chipped in.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And to put him through it jolly well when we've bowled him out," Digby added.

"Hear, hear!"

"What's the notion, Blake? Three of your Form against three of us, say?"

"Any way you like it done, Tommy. It's points for the Fourth, no matter what way you take it!"

"Who are your 'tecs?"

"Who are yours?"

"Well, I guess it had better be us three. No; make it four, and we'll get old Talbot to lend a hand."

"Right-ho! You three and Talbot let it be. Now, you chaps, whom shall we pit against the three geniuses here assembled and Talbot?"

"May I suggest Tompkins, Mulvaney minor, Reilly, and Digges?" said Cardew.

"Two wild Irishmen and two howling maniacs!" snorted Manners. "Looks as if they hold us pretty cheap, Tom!"

"You may suggest anyone you like, Cardew; but it doesn't make a scrap of difference. The four I choose, if Figgy agrees, are Kerr——"

"Quite wight, Blake!" said Gussy. "We weally cannot afford to leave out old Kerr."

"Levison——"

"A vewy good choice indeed! Levison is a deep boundah—oh, beg pardon, Levison, I weally forgot you were pwesent!"

"Don't mind me," replied Levison.

"Roylance——"

"Woylance is a vewy bwainy chap, an' I am quite willin' to act with him, Blake!"

"Act? But this isn't a play, duffer! We're not going in for amateur theatricals, chump!"

"Weally, Blake, your language is—— But nevah mind! Of course, in a mattah of this kind a fellow of my tact an' judgment——"

"Must be left out, or else he'd put the kybosh on the whole thing, for a dead cert!" said Blake grimly.

"Wats! I insist——"

"Insist all you like! I wouldn't have you at any price. Cardew's my fourth choice."

"I'm not keen, Blake, dashed if I am!"

"That's your worst fault, my son. But I trust to Levison to make you buck up."

"You may!" said Levison tersely.

"Well, as the dear Racke is the quarry, I won't say no," Cardew said.

"There you are, then, Tommy! You three and Talbot against Kerr, Levison, Roylance, and Cardew. Can't see the game ending in your favour, can you?"

"I don't see why it shouldn't," Tom replied.

"But I don't see how it's going to," Manners said, when the Fourth-Formers had cleared out.

CHAPTER 6.
Lowther Starts.

"WHERE are you off to, Monty?" asked Tom. "Don't you want any tea?"

"I do. But, unfortunately, as there isn't any——"

"There's coffee."

"I don't like Manners' coffee."

"Make it yourself, then!" snapped Manners.

"Unfortunately, old chap, I like it even less when I make it myself."

"Well, Tommy can——"

"But that's the worst of the three!" said Lowther.

And he went.

It was to Study No. 2 on the Fourth Form passage that he made his way.

That apartment had as inmates Baggy Trimble and Percy Mellish.

Lowther found Baggy alone, however—which was what he wanted.

There had been an understanding between Racke and Mellish that the sneak of the Fourth should look after his stable companion, and see that he gave nothing away. Not that Baggy was liable to spasms of generosity with his own belongings, or that he ever had much to be generous with, or that Racke would have minded if he had given away his podgy head.

It was for the dark secret they shared that Racke feared. Also he had wanted to keep Baggy out of the competition. Of that all chance had gone. Baggy had taken part in an event without knowing it.

But the secret still remained, though a trifle the worse for wear through what Baggy had disclosed—in more senses than one—that afternoon.

Mellish, however, had never suffered from a too acute sense of duty. He saw no cause for bothering himself particularly in the present case. Baggy was staying in the food-hog crowd because he would certainly have given the whole game away if he had been kicked out.

It had occurred to Mellish that he was quite as well able to give the game away as Baggy; and he did not see why he should take unnecessary trouble.

Besides, Baggy really was not pleasant company that evening, and as Mellish had shared in the orgy—and was not feeling quite well himself—there was no secret for him to ferret out.

There was not much for Lowther to discover, for he had contrived to see more of what was going on in the storehouse below Pepper's barn than he had told his chums. A knot-hole in one of the floor boards had given him a view of proceedings.

But Lowther had a notion that, much as Baggy had already yielded up, he might yield up more under skilful questioning—Lowther's. The yielding would have to be done in a different manner, of course.

"Come in, if you want to," spoke a doleful voice, following upon the tap at the door which Lowther gave.

"Hallo, Baggy de Trimble! I hear you haven't been very well," said the humorist of the Shell, looking as sympathetic as he could.

"I've been bad—frightfully bad—horribly!" groaned Baggy. "I thought I was going to die. I ain't sure now that I sha'n't."

"Sure to!" replied Lowther cheerily.

"W-w-w-what? Do I look as ill as all that?"

"You look a beee-autiful shade of pea-green," said Lowther. "But it wasn't so much that as the fact that there isn't any reason to suspect you of being immortal, any more than the rest of us."

"I wish you wouldn't come here and talk rot!" said Baggy peevishly.

One hand was pressed to his well-filled waistcoat. Now he clasped both in front of him, with an air of suffering resignation.

"You've got nothing to grumble about, you know, Baggy," said Lowther.

"Oh, haven't I, though! If you'd seen what——"

"Thanks, no! Spare me the 'orrible details, I prithee, sweet Baggy! But there are plenty of people who might say, like the cabman, that they only wished they'd got 'arf your complaint!"

"What cabman? There wasn't any cabman, nor yet any cab!"

"The cabman to whom the old lady was——"

"But there wasn't any old lady!"

"How do you know? You weren't there."

"I don't know what the dickens you are talking about!" said Baggy crossly.

"The story isn't in Dickens. This is it. An old lady saw a man——"

"I don't want to hear any of your potty stories!" groaned Baggy.

"But you are going to hear this one. It bears upon your sad case. The man was drunk and incapable."

"If you say I'm drunk, Lowther, I'll have you up for libel! I can, you know. Or slander, or defamation of character!"

"Not that one, anyway, Baggy. Your character is quite beyond the reach of defamation. The man, as I said, was drunk and incapable."

"Well, I ain't. I may have been si——"

"'Shush! There are things which are better veiled——"

"But I wasn't drunk, anyway. I didn't have anything but pop. It was the por—I mean, the war-bread that turned me up. That's what it was. The beastly war-bread they give us at meals in this mingy place; and not much of it, either!"

"And the old lady said, 'Poor fellow!'" went on Lowther. "'Lor', mum,' says the cabman, 'I on'y wish I'd got 'arf 'is complaint!'"

Lowther made a dramatic pause. Baggy groaned, as if he felt ill again, as it is very likely he did.

"There are people who might be glad to have half your complaint, Baggy."

"Then they're potty, and they're jolly will welcome to all of it!"

"If acquired in the same way," Lowther continued. "In fact, what has merely made you feel uncomfortable was——"

"Uncomfortable! Is that all——"

"Don't wriggle when I'm talking to you, Baggy; or squirm! After what has happened to you——"

"I wish you wouldn't talk about it, Lowther! I wish you'd go away!"

"I propose to impart some moral instruction to you before doing that, my pippin! What has merely made you feel uncomfortable, I say again——"

"Groooh!" groaned the hapless Trimble.

"Might have served as a feast for an indigent family of, say, nineteen—or nineteen and a seventh. Let us follow the great example of the Food Controller, and talk in sevenths, though I fear me much, Bagley de Trimble, that not sevenths of a pound, let alone sevenths of an ounce, would——"

"G'away!" moaned Baggy.

"Conscience is working in you, I see."

"If it's conscience that made me so beastly si——"

"Shush!"

"I wish I hadn't got one, that's all! But it wasn't. It was the por—I mean, the war-bread! I don't believe the pork in it was good, and I think Racke ought to have something done to him for it! He didn't take any himself, I noticed that."

"Very wrong of Racke," said Lowther blandly. He felt that he was really getting on the track of the secret now. Others might have thought that he had gone rather a long way round.

"He's a rotter!" said Baggy viciously. "I've a good mind——"

"That can hardly be accepted as a veracious statement, I fear, Baggy," said Lowther, shaking his head sadly.

The tousled poll of Mulvaney minor was thrust in at the door.

"Shure, Baggy darlint, it's time for yer cod-liver oil!" said the Irish junior.

"Ouch! Grooooh! You beast, Mulvaney! Yurrrrggg!"

Mulvaney minor and Lowther left together in a hurry.

"That's twice I've fetched him that way," announced Mulvaney, with a wide and cheerful grin. "It makes him ill agin, an', shure, he desarves it, the fat baste!"

From inside No. 2 came sounds best left undescribed.

It occurred to Monty Lowther, as he made his way back to the Shell quarters, that he had not got much out of Baggy after all. But he considered that he had made a start.

CHAPTER 7.
The Shell Second.

"FOUND out everything?" asked Manners, when Lowther came back.

"Did I say I was going to find out anything?" snapped Lowther.

"Oh, no! But Tommy and I are detectives, you know. Ours is the deductive department. We sit still and think it out."

"While Monty wanders round looking for clues," added Tom.

"I've been to see Baggy," confessed Lowther. "I had to come away. You'd have come away yourselves. The disgusting pig was going to be ill again!"

"I shouldn't have come away," replied Manners.

"Oh, well, if you like that sort of thing——"

"I don't. I shouldn't have stayed, either."

"You must have done one or the other, chump!"

"Not at all, fathead! I shouldn't have gone."

"May we come in?" asked the voice of Kangaroo at the door.

"Entrez-vous!" answered Lowther, bowing politely.

It was Clifton Dane who came in with Noble. Both were looking quite serious.

"You don't mind a chap making suggestions, Tommy?" said Kangaroo.

"Not at all! Glad to have them when the chap's you, old scout! When he's Grundy, 'nuff said!"

"Old Grundy scored for us this afternoon. But that isn't what I want to talk about," said Harry Noble. "It's about the Second Eleven."

"Oh!"

Tom Merry made a wry face. That Shell Second Eleven was a weight on his mind.

"It's pretty hopeless" said Lowther. "Their reserves will simply walk over it."

"Still, the game has to be played," answered Kangaroo. "And, points apart—we aren't likely to pick them up, I'm afraid—we don't want our lot to be a laughing-stock."

"Fortunately," remarked Lowther, "it would be beneath the dignity of the great George Alfred to play for a Second Eleven."

"Not so sure of that," Dane said. "I've heard that he means to skipper it, and show Tommy how things really should be done!"

"It won't make much odds if we let him," Tom said. "He couldn't rot up our second team!"

"He's not going to be allowed to risk doing it, if you agree to our suggestion!" said Kangaroo determinedly.

"Let's have it, Kangy."

"What's your First Eleven?"

"Here's the list. Self, Manners, and Lowther, Talbot, you two and Glynn, Jimson and Thompson, Wilkins, Gore."

"And the second?"

"Haven't worked it out yet. Can't see a team among the rest."

"Well, we've been talking it over in our study, and our notion is that you should put a member of the first in

charge of the second, and play, say, Gunn or Frere in the first. Neither of them is a duffer. I've seen Gunn show up quite well on the wing."

"It would be Gunn, I fancy. Frere's too slow. But what's the point of it? The second is booked for a big licking, anyway; the first may pull through, with luck."

"Notion is that the chap who captains the second should keep 'em up to the giddy mark, get them to take it seriously, and put a little backbone into them."

"It ain't every chap in the first who could do that," said Tim thoughtfully.

"I know that. Gore couldn't, or Wilkins, or Jimson, or Thompson. I'll go further, and say, to be frank, that I don't think Lowther could."

"That is being rather rude than frank," remarked Lowther.

"Anyway, you can't be spared. We haven't another centre-half as good as you are, or anything like it. You're better there than anywhere, to my mind."

"That's better," Lowther said.

"And Tommy can't be spared, or Talbot. Either of them would be a rare good man for the job; but it can't be did. Now, if you think I can——"

"I'm not going to think about it. I know you can't," said Tom.

"Right-ho! That leaves three—Dane here, Glynn, and Manners."

"Strike me out," said Manners, grinning. "I'm not a first-rate footballer myself, but when it comes to asking me to take an interest in what Gibbons and Lucas and Finn call footer—well, I'm off it! As for coaching the cripples——"

Manners gave an expressive shrug.

"That leaves Dane and Glyn," said Kangaroo.

"Can't spare Dane," answered Tom.

"Then it leaves Glyn," replied the Australian junior.

"But will he take it on?"

"Yes, Tommy, he will. Any one of the three of us was ready."

"You're good chaps!" said Tom warmly, for he knew that for any one of the chums of Study No. 11 to stand down from the first team meant a real sacrifice.

"We're keen on this competition bizney, and we don't admit that the Fourth second team can knock our second team into a cocked hat," replied Clifton Dane.

"But is Glyn up to that sort of thing?" asked Lowther doubtfully.

"We think so. Try him, and see. The fellows like him, and he knows the game better than most people think. Let him choose the team, after a practice or two, Tommy. Of course, there isn't much choice——"

"I don't think there's really any," said Tom. "If Grundy's to be kept out——"

"There's no if about that!" said Clifton Dane.

"You have the skipper himself, Frere, Lucas, Boulton, Gibbons, Finn, Lennox, Walkley, French, and about three more over the way—hardly shining lights."

"But none of them quite hopeless," Noble replied.

"Well, no, I suppose not, if you put it that way."

"You'll talk to them a bit yourself first, Tommy?"

"If you think it's any use, Kangy."

"Sure it will be. The Form's keener than you think."

"Right-ho!"

"Makes a chap feel a bit more hopeful," said Tom, when the Colonial chums had gone. "Why did you refuse it, Manners?"

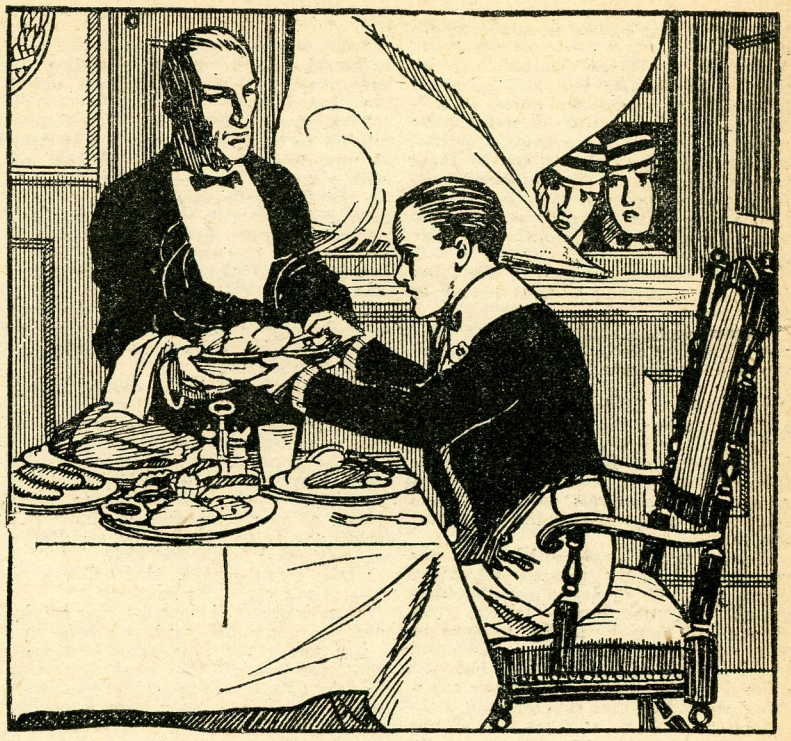
"It wasn't because I couldn't bear to stand down," replied Manners flushing. "It's my rotten temper. I couldn't trust it. I never see very much of any of those chaps, and I don't care much for any of them—except, perhaps, Frere. And they don't care much about me. I should think them awful idiots to start with, and I'm not class enough at the game for them to have much faith in me. See, Tommy?"

"I see," said Tom.

"I wouldn't have minded taking it on," remarked Lowther.

Tom did not answer that. He rather fancied that of the two Manners would have made the better job of it. It would have been too much of a jape in Lowther's hands.

But probably Bernard Glyn really would be better than either of them.



Racke Dines!
(See Chapter 10.)

CHAPTER 8.
Racke's Friend.

THERE was quite a crowd at footer practice next day, although the Shell and Fourth stalwarts were not practising together, as they usually did. It had been arranged that until after the matches in the competition had been played that method should lapse.

Tom had talked to the thirteen fellows or so from whom the second eleven would have to be chosen, and had found them keener than he had dared to hope. Perhaps, after all, they might be coached into a side that would not disgrace the Form. It was hardly likely they could win. The best chance of that would be if the Fourth second string took the game too easily. But they would probably be out for scalps.

Tom and Talbot chose sides, and the members of the sides were given, as far as possible, the chance of showing what they could do in the positions they fancied.

It surprised everyone but Kangaroo and Clifton Dane that Glyn elected to take goal.

"I must say it isn't a bad place for a skipper," Tom said. "But didn't know he could."

"You'll see," said Kangaroo.

"You bounders have something up your sleeves," remarked Gore.

And, as a matter of fact, they had.

The centre-half of the Shell first team—otherwise Montague Lowther, Esq.—was not among the players. He said that he had business in Rylcombe.

And the Fourth pitch was less fully attended. There were quite a number of fellows in the Fourth who were clean outside the second eleven of the Form, and Figgins did not worry about them. The Shell could not possibly raise a third eleven, though the Fourth might have done.

Among the absentees were Cardew and Levison. They also had business in Rylcombe.

Lowther and the two Fourth-Formers did not go out together, nor did they see one another on the road. Cardew and Levison biked the short distance. Lowther walked.

After Cardew and Levison had started Racke came out of gates, stared up and down the road, and then walked off in the Rylcombe direction, moving more briskly than he usually did.

Lowther saw him as he rounded a bend ahead. Just before he reached the village he saw him again.

Racke was talking to someone—talking earnestly—and the man to whom he talked was a stranger.

It had been agreed among the amateur detectives that, in the circumstances, shadowing Racke was all in the game.

Young Moneybags was guilty of gross illegality in procuring supplies of food far in excess of the rations. How he got the stuff was a mystery; and it was their business to find out, for the sake

of St. Jim's, as well as to gain points for their respective Forms in the competition.

Lowther had not started out to shadow Racke. He had merely meant to make some guarded inquiries in Rylcombe. Monty flattered himself that he was the very man for guarded inquiries. The amateur detective is apt to think that an easy branch of an exacting business; but, in point of fact, it is by no means easy to make inquiries, likely to lead to getting useful information, without arousing suspicion.

As it chanced, however, Lowther found out something without having to ask anyone.

It really was chance. Racke's back was turned to him, and in the mud of the road Lowther's footfalls were not audible.

"Right-ho! I'll be along this evening at half-past five, Berry," said Racke.

And he spoke as to one markedly inferior in rank. Racke was the sort of fellow from whose tones one might get some notion as to his estimate of the importance of the person he was speaking to.

Yet the man with whom he talked was well-dressed and prosperous-looking. There was nothing about him that suggested the tradesman. Racke had always had a very lordly manner of addressing tradesmen. He looked more like a church dignitary, and yet not quite like that, either. There was something about him that suggested an archdeacon or a dean, and yet it was not exactly anyone of that sort you would take him for, Lowther thought.

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Berry; and he lifted his hat.

Then Lowther passed them, and a muffled oath came from the lips of Racke.

Lowther caught that. And he heard what Mr. Berry said, and had witnessed his action. Quite certainly Mr. Berry was not a pillar of the church, or even what the world calls a gentleman. One gentleman may lift his hat to another, but it is usually to a man much older than himself. The man who lifted his hat to an unlicked cub like Aubrey Racke was someone who did it because it was expected of him by Racke—someone over whom Racke could exercise authority.

The amateur detective quickened his pace. Loitering would not have paid him, even if he had cared to attempt it.

"You dashed fool, Berrymore!" snarled Racke, when the other Shell fellow was well out of earshot.

"Sir!" said Mr. Berry, alias Berrymore, in tones that were half-apologetic and half-protesting.

"What did you raise your silly tile, and call me 'sir,' for, when that bounder was listening with all his ears?"

"You have always insisted on my doing so, sir. When I say insisted, however, I do not mean to suggest that there has been at any time any reluctance on my part to mark my sense of the difference between our stations in that manner. I hope I know my place, sir!"

The tones were smooth and servile. Mr. Berry—or Berrymore—had a voice that was quite a good voice in its way, and he spoke with quite a good accent. Yet somehow his voice was not pleasant. It did not ring true.

"I should jolly well hope not!" said Racke.

"May I point out, sir, that it was agreed that my name, while in this neighbourhood, should be Berry?" said the man humbly.

"Well, you confounded idiot, what does it matter when there was no one to hear?"

"But the moment before, when you addressed me as Berry, according to agreement, there was someone who might have heard, sir!"

"Oh, yes! That's so! It's dashed difficult to remember, Berry! I've been so used to orderin' you about, an' all that, y'know. But we must be careful. To the Rylcombe silly jossers you're to be a great scientific sharp, y'know; and any acquaintance between us is due to your knowin' my pater. Nothin' in my comin' to your place when that's understood."

"Nothing at all, sir! Quite the most natural thing in the world, especially as you have always been so greatly interested in science."

"Don't you try to be dashed funny, Berry!"

"Sir!" said Mr. Berry—or Berrymore—in reproachful accents.

Racke grunted. It was impossible for him to point out any defect in the manner of this man, who was willing to be as servile as was demanded of him. But in being so he had tripped up, and Racke was not going to let that pass.

"Didn't you see that that fellow wore a St. Jim's cap?" he snarled.

"I have observed several young gentlemen wearing similar caps, it is true, sir; I was under the impression that they were scholars at the local Grammar School. I have never seen you wear anything but what I may term a gentleman's hat, sir—not the cap of a mere schoolboy!"

And Racke knew that he had never taken home his school cap. Even at St. Jim's he very seldom wore it.

"Well, just you be careful in future," he said—"about that an' about everythin'!"

"Certainly, sir! You may rely absolutely upon my discretion."

Racke grunted again, swung round, and started back for St. Jim's without another word.

Mr. Berry—or Berrymore—went in the opposite direction.

Lowther, gazing into a shop-window in the village street, saw him pass, and next moment saw Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper by his side.

There was no love lost between Mr. Pepper and Lowther; but just now the humorist of the Shell was quite pleased to see the village miser. For Mr. Pepper was an inveterate gossip. Talk was cheap; and, after less than a year in the place, and in spite of the fact that no one liked him, Erasmus Zachariah had at his finger-ends the pedigree and history of all the village-folk, and a good many of the St. Jim's and Grammar School boys. He often pretended not to know some of them, but that was a pose. He knew anything and everything likely to be of any use to him in dealing with them.

"Nice morning, Mr. Pepper!" said Lowther.

"For the time of year, and taking of everything into consideration it might be worse, Master Lowther," replied the miser.

"Stranger, eh?" remarked Lowther, nodding towards the retreating figure of Mr. Berry, or Berrymore.

"Is he, sir?" returned Mr. Pepper.

"Isn't he?" said Lowther.

"I don't know, Master Lowther! How should I?"

"You know whether you've seen him before, surely?"

"Oh, yes! I know whether I've seen him before. I don't know whether you have."

"Then you have?"

"I may have," replied Mr. Pepper cautiously.

"If you have, he's not a stranger to you."

"But he might be to you, sir; and I naturally thought you were talking about yourself."

"You know who he is, then?"

"Well, Master Lowther, I might know."

"You mean you do?"

"Well, speaking in a friendly manner, I might say that I do, sir."

"My hat! It's like getting blood out of a stone to get anything out of you!" said Lowther impatiently.

Now, Monty ought to have pumped Erasmus Zachariah without letting that gentleman guess that he was being pumped. But as Erasmus Zachariah had vastly more craft than Monty Lowther, that was not easily done.

"What did you want to get out of me, Master Lowther? I'm a poor man, and it ain't often I can afford to be as generous as my heart would prompt me to be, in a manner of speaking.

It certainly was very much a manner of speaking when Mr. Pepper talked of the generous promptings of his heart. The Rylcombe people firmly believed that that organ had unaccountably been omitted from Mr. Pepper's anatomy.

"Oh, nothing!" said Lowther crossly.

"Well, well, sir! I don't grumble at that," said Mr. Pepper.

And he went on his way, with a cunning gleam in the narrow, greenish eyes that were screened by the overhanging grey eyebrows.

Lowther, with a snort of impatience, started back.

Levison and Cardew caught him up on the way, and dismounted from their bikes to walk with him, a compliment which he received with rather less than his usual urbanity.

"You don't seem too merry an' bright this mornin', dear boy!" observed Cardew.

"Don't I?"

"What were you gassing with old Pepper about?" asked Levison.

"Find out!" was on the tip of Lowther's tongue. But he thought it best not to speak the words.

"I merely asked him the name of a man who passed," he said.

"Oh! Was there anything interesting about the chap?"

"Not particularly that I know of."

"The only stranger we saw was that tenant of Pepper's," said Cardew. "You remember I asked old Trumble who he was?"

"That would be the same chap, I think," Levison said.

"May have been," said Lowther, with sudden indifference. "Name was Berry, wasn't it?"

"So it was!" said Cardew. Strawberry or Raspberry, I don't know which."

"Probably Bilberry," replied Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardew laughed. But Levison gave Lowther an inquiring glance.

"Well, if you're on the 'tec track, that chap won't be a fat lot of use to you, I fancy, old scout!" said Levison. "He's rented the Hollies, which belongs to that very poverty-stricken merchant, Mr. Pepper, we heard. And he seems to be a scientific johnny of sorts."

"Oh, I dare say," said Lowther, yawning.

He did not tell the two Fourth-Formers that he had got the name "Berry" from Racke, not from Mr. Pepper; and they did not tell him that they were keenly interested in Mr. Berry.

CHAPTER 9.
In the Last Moment.

SATURDAY afternoon found the Fourth still well in the lead as to points.

Grundy had had another campaign, taking on, one after another, nine of the Fourth. The result had not been to Grundy's satisfaction, though no one else in the Shell grumbled. Points were evenly divided. Jack Blake, Levison, and Koumi Rao had been given decisions against the burly Shell champion; he had got decisions against half a dozen of the less expert opponents pitted against him.

It was evident that if Grundy's original proposition had held good the Shell would have been down very badly indeed. Grundy had based it on the theory that no Fourth-Former—not even Figgins or Blake—was his equal in boxing skill. He had not sufficiently considered the difference between skill and force. Even now he felt that more ought to be allowed for punching power, though he refrained from grumbling at Kildare's decisions.

Then the mile, Class B, had been brought off. A Shell fellow had come in first—no other than Lowther. He pretended not to be surprised, but he was. However, he had run a good race, and had shown quite a fair turn of speed at the finish, when Clive, who had gone too much all out in order not to let Manners get ahead of him, found himself with not enough left to meet Lowther's challenge. Grundy, of whom something had been hoped in this race, had suffered from his boxing exertions; and third place was snatched from him by Julian. Thus the Fourth were only one down on the race, taking four points as against the five Lowther had won for his Form.

The Fourth were thus still leading by fifteen points when Saturday afternoon came, bringing with it one of the chief events—the Form First Eleven footer-match.

If the Fourth won this their rivals would be thirty-five points behind—which looked very much like being right out of the hunt. And the betting fraternity was offering odds on the Fourth, who had the majority of the St. Jim's junior eleven in their ranks.

"My hat! If they aren't fairly asking for it!" said Jack Blake to Kerr, just before the teams lined up. "Everybody's been talking about the hefty way Glyn shapes in goal; and yet Tom Merry's put Gore there! I don't say Gore's a duffer, mind you. He's come on a lot these last few days. But he ain't a patch on Glyn."

"Tommy's got something up his sleeve about Glyn," said Kerr. "There are one or two wily birds in the Shell, my pippin!"

"If the silly ass thinks their second will have a dog's chance with ours, however well Glyn may keep goal, he's dead off it!" snorted Figgy.

"Perhaps the inventive Bernard has thought out some wheeze which makes it absolutely imposs to score while he's between the posts," drawled Cardew. "Somethin' in the electric line, by gad!"

"Then, sure, they'd be after wantin' him all the more to-day, an' annyway, they couldn't be for doin' it, because it wouldn't be fair at all, at all," said Reilly.

However that may be, Gore was down to keep goal for the Shell team, and a few minutes later, after Tom had tossed with Blake and lost, he took his place between the posts. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane were at back—a pair very hard to pass, strong kickers both withal. In the half-back line were Thompson, Lowther, and Wilkins. Forward Gunn and Manners figured on the left, Tom Merry in the centre, and Talbot and Jimson on the right.

That forward line looked a bit out of balance, for Talbot was beyond question better than Manners, and Jimson, who had a very fair turn of speed, was rather better than Gunn. But Gunn preferred the left, and Jimson simply could not play there.

The Fourth lined up thus: Goal, Wynn; backs, Figgins and Kerr; halves, Roylance, Clive, and Brooke; forwards, Koumi Rao, Levison, Blake, Redfern, and D'Arcy.

Whereas Tom Merry had been able to pick his team without difficulty, because the field of choice was so limited, Figgy and Blake had had no end of trouble. They had been obliged to leave out such stalwarts as Owen and Lawrence, who were certainly ahead of the two New House fellows in the other team, and such useful men as Julian, Reilly, Hammond, Kerruish, and Cardew. Four of these five had played for the St. Jim's junior team at one time or another, and Cardew had come on a good deal of late—when he cared to try. Then there were Herries and Digby, who were standing down through slight strains.

It was evident that the Fourth second team would be real hot stuff.

But it was with the first team that the Shell joined issue to-day, and Tom was not worrying about the match to come.

There was little wind; but Blake elected to take the advantage of what little there was, and at three o'clock to the minute Lefevre, who had consented to referee the game, blew a shrill blast on his whistle, and amid spasmodic cheering, Tom put the ball to Talbot.

Talbot went down the field at a rare pace. But Roylance tackled and held him up, and a long kick by Figgy sent the play surging into the Shell half.

Clive got the ball, and put it neatly to Levison just as Tom Merry got to him. Levison slung it well across the field to Gussy, who went off at a fine pace along the inside of the touchline, and ran round Thompson, leaving him standing. Dane dashed in. Gussy touched the leather nicely to Redfern.

Redfern, confronted by Kangaroo, coolly backheeled to Blake. Blake shot.

"Hurrah! Goal!" yelled some enthusiasts in a hurry.

"Oh, well saved, Gore!" shouted Tom Merry.

It really was a good save; but even better was the cool way in which Gore tipped the ball over the bar when Levison sent in a high shot a moment later, and Blake was fairly on the goalkeeper. Gore scowled at Blake as he picked himself out of the net; but the scowl faded from his face before Blake's cheery smile and his generous:

"Jolly good, old scout!"

Nothing came from the resultant corner; but for the next twenty minutes the Fourth seemed to be having it all their own way in everything but the most important thing of all—scoring goals.

Not one fell to them in that time, although Gussy and the fleet Indian on the other wing several times brought the ball up the field in fine style, and the three inside men were at the top of their form.

The halves were doing good work, too, sharing in the attack to such an extent that it seemed as though the Fourth had eight forwards.

The other side had not got together. Gunn and Manners were feeble in the few chances they got, and Jimson was no better. Wilkins was the only one of the three halves who shone as yet.

But behind them Kangaroo and the lithe Canadian junior were putting up a great game. Again and again they relieved the situation when it looked desperate. And George Gore did not fail his side.

Half an hour went by without any score. Then Tom and Talbot got away together, and, passing from one to another, took the ball down to the Fourth goal. Fatty fisted out Tom's shot; but Jimson, out of his place and well behind his leaders, had the luck to score with what was more like a random kick than an actual shot.

Fatty was badly downcast at his mistake. But Figgins and Kerr gave him cheering words, though one attempt Figgy made to buck him up failed of effect.

"You may not get another shot all the game, old chap," Figgy said.

"I should hate that," replied Fatty. "And, anyway, you couldn't properly call that thing a shot."

The Shell supporters roared applause at it, however. It had scored, and that was what mattered most.

But even they could not deny that on the run of the game the Fourth had better deserved the first goal.

The Fourth scored the second goal though. Jack Blake got a chance at very close range, and Gore had no time to get to the pile-driver into the corner of the net which came from it.

And the Fourth had the next. It was Clive's goal—a real beauty—which would have done credit to a pro centre-half. It came in at a nasty dropping curve, and Gore thought it would go over the bar, and tried, too late, to stop it.

Before half-time Levison had also scored—another really good effort, put in at an awkward angle when a shot appeared to Gore unlikely.

At half-time the Fourth led by three to one, and some of the Shell players had almost given up hope. Their language was pessimistic, anyway, as the team drew together at one side of the dressing-room.

"I'm a rotten failure!" groaned Manners.

"You ain't half as bad as I am," said Gunn.

"But you've really had no chances," Manners told him.

"That was partly my fault," said Thompson. "I'm a regular dead-beat."

"I'm the worst of the bally lot of you!" growled Gore.

"And I don't feel too happy myself," said Lowther.

"My goal was a fluke," candidly admitted Jimson.

"But you scored it, that's good enough," said Tom quickly. "As for you, Gore, you're talking dashed rot! You've done well—jolly well! No one is going to slang you if they get three more, if all of them are such hot shots as those."

"I sha'n't give them a chance to slang me," answered Gore grimly. "I shall go up to our study and get old Skimmy to hang me! He'd be glad to get me out of the way, and it would be interesting to him as a scientific experiment. I don't suppose he's ever hanged anyone yet!"

"As for you two on the left, you've been over-anxious," Tom said. "You didn't get the ball often, and when you did your only notion seemed to be to sling it across to us, whether we were marked or not. You've got a jolly good half against you; but you might have a shot at diddling him now and then. Have more confidence in yourselves!"

"What I feel," said Gunn, "is that no one has any confidence in me."

"You're wrong!" Tom said sharply. "I have—we all have. Do your best, both of you, and don't be too much afraid of a mistake. After all, Brooke isn't quite so hard to pass as Roylance, and

more play on the left will be for the good of the side."

He spoke to Gunn; but his hand was on the shoulder of Manners all the time, and Manners understood. Those two fellows, both rather more quiet and thoughtful than most, went back much bucked.

So did Thompson, to whom Tom said a few words aside. Thompson really had shown pretty poor form; but, then, he was about the weakest player on the side, and he could only do his best.

Talbot had a word with Gore and Jimson, and the Shell took the field again, resolved at least to die game.

The slight wind was with them now. It did not make a great deal of difference; but it helped Kangaroo's long kicks, and there was certainly an improvement in the forward line.

But with only twenty minutes to go, the Shell were still two down, and the game seemed as bad as lost.

The Fourth did all the cheering now. Every now and then Bernard Glyn's voice might be heard in encouragement, and Grundy kept on roaring instructions to everyone. But most noise came from a group of a dozen or so near the Shell goal—a group which included most of those who would be playing in the Fourth second team.

The game lacked only ten minutes of full time when Tom went down before a charge just after he had put the ball to Talbot's feet.

Jimson was somewhere behind, out of sight. Manners was well marked. Gunn was too far away.

Talbot had a lone hand to play, and he played it!

Levison was close by. He dodged Levison. Ball at toes, he swerved round Clive. Brooke came across too late; already Talbot was nearing Figgins and Kerr.

It looked as though he meant to dash right in between them—in which case they would certainly have held him up, leaving Fatty to clear.

But suddenly he swerved in his flight, as a swallow swerves, and was past Figgy—past Kerr, too—rushing down on Fatty!

The two backs went hard after him. But Kerr was outpaced, and even fleet Figgy found the handicap of having to turn before he could start too big.

Fatty waited—a tower of strength—strong of nerve, ready of eye and fist.

But Talbot was too much for Fatty. He drew him when close on goal, dodged, and put the leather nicely past him.

Fatty Wynn had done all that a goalie could do. He had made no mistake—except letting the ball go past! But he had only made that because Talbot was too clever for him.

Glyn and Grundy led the roar of Shell applause which brought back half a dozen fellows who were leaving the field in despair.

Eight minutes to go when Blake started the ball rolling again, and D'Arcy fairly got away on the wing. But he held on a second too long, and Clifton Dane whipped the leather fairly from his feet, and sent it, by a long cross-kick, to Jimson, quite unmarked for the moment.

Jimson made ground, and passed in to Talbot. Talbot sent the ball on to Tom. But Clive got it, and again the Fourth went for goal.

Lowther deftly took the leather from Blake, and tapped it to Tom's feet again. But there was no chance for Tom to get through on his own, and Talbot was closely watched. Tom slung it out to the left.

Manners and Gunn had been performing quite creditably; but as yet no opportunity of distinction had come their way. Now they had it, and they took it.

The ball went to Gunn. Manners deliberately let it go, and his judgment was not at fault. Gunn gained twenty yards, and drew Brooke. Then he put the sphere back to Manners, and Tom got a lovely pass. He shot hard. Fatty fisted out.

But Manners was running in. The ball looked to be passing right over his head. He jumped, and got his forehead to it.

"Bravo, Manners!" roared Tom.

"Goal!" yelled Glyn.

And goal it was, though no one had expected it. Least of all Fatty!

If Tom or Talbot had been where Manners was Fatty would have looked for that which had actually happened. But he had not guessed that Manners would reach the ball, or that if he reached it he would head it in like that. And just above Fatty's outstretched finger-tips the sphere passed, and the whistle went for time, and the Shell had snatched a draw when defeat seemed almost inevitable!

"It was all luck," said Manners modestly.

"It was our left wing!" cried Tom, fairly hugging him. "You, too, Gunny! You did just the right thing at the right time. And old Monty was in it as well. Jolly well played, all of you! As for Kangy and Dane and Gore, I haven't any words good enough for them!"

"Ten points each or a replay, Tommy?" asked Blake. "No good talking about an extra half-hour. We're all too baked for that."

"Ten points each and a replay, I should say," said Lefevre.

And so said the two linesmen—who were Wally D'Arcy and Frank Levison, Lefevre's fellow-umpires of the competition.

"Well, it's no odds which," Tom said. "Yes, I think the points should count; the match was too jolly good to be left out of the records."

And so it was agreed. But the replay coul not take place just yet. The Second Eleven match was fixed for the next half-holiday, and for that which followed the St. Jim's Junior Eleven had a game. And the Second Elevens would not hear of playing their match while the cracks of both Forms were engaged elsewhere.

There had never been any room for doubt that the competition had caught on. But now excitement ran higher than ever. If the Shell had lost that game there would have been little chance for them. Theirs was still a stern chase; but they had higher hopes now. The form shown in the last half-hour of that game did not make out the replay by any means a gift for the Fourth.

CHAPTER 10.
Racke's Man.

"LOOK here, I jolly well won't!" gasped Chowle.

Chowle was next on the list of the opponents of the redoubtable Skimpole, and in spite of Skimmy's newly-won fame as a warrior Figgy and Blake and the rest of the Fourth's leaders were willing to risk two points on the issue.

Undoubtedly Chowle could lick Skimmy if he only cared to stand up to him and put in all he knew. That was the opinion of the Fourth.

Chowle was no fighting-man; but before he had joined up with the Racke gang he had shown at times a certain amount of cleverness with the gloves. He disliked being hit hard; but he was fairly quick, and could put in a fair punch himself if he did not get rattled. And, as Kerr said, there was no reason why anyone should get rattled when facing Skimmy.

Chowle's reluctance was put down mainly to his fear of offending Racke.

For two or three days he had managed to dodge those who were trying to bring him up to the scratch; but he had had no chance this Saturday evening. Figgy & Co. were resolved that Skimmy should not again wait in vain in the gym—not so much that they minded Skimmy's loss of time as because it exposed the Fourth to derision.

So Chowle had practically been a prisoner since tea; and now, in spite of his protests, they encouraged him to march to the place of battle. Kerr encouraged him with a bat, Reddy with a cricket-stump, and George Figgins with a strong hand on his collar.

"You jolly well will!" said Figgins determinedly.

"And you'll jolly well win!" rapped out Kerr.

"Or you'll jolly well get the ragging of your life!" added Reddy.

"Hear, hear!" chimed in the chorus.

"I—I ain't afraid. But I don't feel very well," whined Chowle.

His pasty face was almost as colourless as his hair. Chowle was not quite an albino, but his hair had scarcely any colour, and his eyes had a suggestion of pink. He looked now rather like a white rabbit in a deadly funk.

"Baggy's complaint—gorging," said Kerr briefly.

"Rats!" snarled Chowle. "How can a chap gorge these days, I'd like to know?"

"So would I!" said Fatty Wynn pathetically.

But Fatty was too staunch to mean that quite as it might sound.

"Come along!" said Figgins masterfully.

And Chowle had to go.

As he was being escorted to the gym Cardew and Levison came out of the School House together.

"Hallo!" said Levison. "They've got the pink-eyed rabbit this time!"

"Pity to miss that little entertainment, dear boy," said Cardew lazily. "We can postpone this expedition to Monday."

"We won't do anything of the sort," replied Levison. "Racke's gone out, I know; and it's up to us to get on his track."

"Gone to see the scientific johnny, you think?" said Cardew, with a yearning eye towards the gym.

A combat between Skimmy, eager for the fray, and a fellow who ought to be able to thrash him, but apparently funked him, was just the kind of thing which appealed to Cardew's sardonic sense of humour.

"I don't believe in that chap's being a scientist at all," said Levison, as they made their way towards the gates. "He don't look it. More like a big pot in the church, and yet not quite like that either."

"He don't strike me that way. He reminds me of a chap in Dickens, by gad!" Cardew said.

"He might be a butler—a real tip-top butler," Levison said thoughtfully. "Some of 'em look almost like bishops. But they run fatter. Who was the chap in Dickens, Cardew? Have I read the book"

"Think you must have done. Anyway, you were unflatterin' enough to compare me to a fellow in it who wasn't altogether the clean potato."

"I know now—it's 'David Copperfield,' and the chap who reminded me of you a bit was Steerforth. A nice fellow in a way, and yet a wrong 'un."

"Tha-a-a-anks, dear boy!" drawled Cardew.

"I don't mean that you're a wrong 'un, ass! But I've got it now. This chap is a bit like Steerforth's man—Littimer, wasn't his name?"

"I believe so. An' it's my impression that this chap is Racke's man. Don't you remember how he used to brag at one time about havin' a man all to his own cheek at home? Beastly nuisance, I call the chaps—I have been jolly glad to do without mine since they were all wanted for the merry old war!"

"You had one, then?"

"Yaas, when I was at home—at my granddad's, y'know."

"You've never said so before. I remember that old merchant of Lord Reckness' used to potter round us when we were staying with you—till we began japing him, and you told him he wasn't wanted."

"Lots of fellows have them. Silly bizney, I call it — not democratic, y'know."

"You're a merry sort of democrat—I don't think!" said Levison.

"Oh, but I am, dear boy, really—in principle. One chap as good as another chap, y'know—an' a dashed sight better!"

"And you really think——"

"Pretty sure of it, old scout."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Only just thought of it."

"Well, if he is Racke's man, that's how the grub was got in. But it licks me how he could have got it."

"Not at all. Dead easy, that. Money, igenuous youth—money! Racke reeks with it, an' Racke's a rotter!"

"I don't believe——"

"That the Food Controller an' his myrmidons can be dished, diddled, an' done? Then you're too innocent to live! Hundreds of ways, dear boy—hundreds of them!"

"Could you find one?"

"Plenty!"

"Well, I won't ask you why you don't," said Levison, "for, of course, I know. But I'd like to find out how Racke and this rotter of his are doing it!"

"We're goin' to, aren't we? I thought that was the merry programme."

"A score for the Fourth if we do!"

"A big score, dear boy. But I'm not so dead sure, y'know, that the Hon. Montague hasn't his little suspicions."

"Lowther's no good at this game," Levison said. "We'll win in a common canter against that crowd. Wonder whether old Pepper's in it?"

"Not in it. He's too fly," replied Cardew. "But he may know somethin'—there ain't so very much the dear Erasmus don't get on to. He probably makes the supposed scientific sharp pay through the nose for the rent of that rabbit-hutch he calls the Hollies."

"Here we are at the place," Levison said, lowering his voice. "I'm not so keen on this game as I should have been at one time; but it's all in a good cause."

"No light in front," remarked Cardew. "Let's mooch round to the back."

A lighted window showed there on the ground floor, although as yet it was barely dusk.

"See—window's a little way open!" Cardew whispered. "Watch me shift it up a piece without disturbin' anyone—unless their eyes are fixed on it, which ain't likely."

"You can't do it," said Levison.

"I can, an' I will!" returned his chum.

And he did. Ever so gently he pushed up the sash a few inches, making no sound. Then he lifted the blind.

There sat Racke at a table covered with good things. And there stood the scientific gentleman, in correct evening-dress—which waiters may share with dukes—waiting upon Racke!

The two did not stay. The blind was dropped again. They stole away.

"My hat!" said Levison, when they were clear of the Hollies.

"Silly, swankin', potty food-hog!" was Cardew's comment.

They ran against Blake as they went in at the School House door.

"News for you, old scout!" said Levison eagerly.

"Good, I hope?" growled Blake. "That cur Chowle has let us down! He was all over Skimmy at first; but Skimmy kept on keeping on like a Briton—I'll say that much for Skimmy! He punched as if he'd got a week to get there in and a fly to kill at the end of it. Still, he punched; and when Chowle got home on him he just blinked and then punched some more. And Chowle began to didn't like it, you know."

"After which," Lowther took up the tale from behind, "our warlike champion punched yet some more, carefully taking aim each time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Chowle began to emit hollow groans. They should not have been hollow, either, for at not very long last Chowle not only threw up the sponge, but also, a la Baggy——"

"Spare us the 'orrible details, Lowther!" protested Cardew.

"Then the rotters did have another banquet this afternoon?" said Levison.

"Looks like it. By the way, have you fellows seen Racke?"

"Several times," replied Cardew blandly.

"Quite as often as we want to," added Levison.

"But I mean——"

The two detectives paid no heed. They passed on with Blake, to concert plans for bringing Racke to book.

"Well, anyway, the Shell's scored two more points, Tommy," said Lowther.

"Yes," said Tom. "But I wonder what those two bounders have been after? Monty, my son, we must pull up our socks and get on with the 'tec bizney!"

THE END.

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

CADET NOTES.

His Majesty the King, accompanied by the Queen and Princess Mary, paid a visit recently to St. Saviour's Grammar School in Bermondsey, and inspected the school and the pupils at their work. They were met and saluted on their arrival and departure by a guard of honour supplied by the school Cadet Corps, which was inspected by his Majesty, who expressed his appreciation of their smart and soldierly appearance. The incident ought to, and undoubtedly will, have the effect of adding to the strength of the school corps.

* * * * * * *

Among other attractions which are offered to boys belonging to Cadet Corps, there is one which at the present time ought to appeal strongly to every lad available for membership. Every corps affiliated to the Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs is entitled to enter the shooting competitions arranged by the society for Cadet Corps, three times a year. There are prizes of medals and ammunition, and it is hoped in the future to increase these prizes considerably by means of a fund which is being raised for the purpose. At a time like this, when the need for some efficiency in the use of the rifle is so great and so obvious, this ought to be a considerable attraction to lads to recognise their duty to the country in the matter.

* * * * * * *

General Sir R. Scallon, K.C.B., and Captain the Honourable R. Norton, from the War Office, recently inspected the 3rd Battalion of the City of Glasgow Cadets. There were on parade 13 officers and 295 boys, belonging to the three battalions mentioned, and General Scallon was very much impressed both by the number of the boys on parade and by their general appearance and efficiency in drill. But Glasgow ought to do much better. 300 boys in so large a city, good as it is, is far from what ought to be achieved. We hope that all our readers residing there will make up their minds to join the movement, and apply for information as to headquarters, etc., to the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments, Judges' Quadrangle, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C. 2.

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There is an erroneous idea entertained by some boys, and perhaps more often by their parents, that lads who become Cadets are called upon for active service earlier than boys who are not so trained. This is quite inaccurate, and Mr. Percy Harris, M.P., who is the honorary secretary of the C.A.V.R., authorises us to say that there is not a word of truth in the suggestion that boys who have been in Cadet Corps go out earlier to the Front than boys who have had no training. The regulation that they should not go overseas until 19 applies to all lads joining the Army. The only difference in the status of a boy who has been in a Cadet Corps is that on joining the Army he has more chance of early promotion and qualifying for a stripe. Besides, it is of great assistance if he desires to go into the Royal Flying Corps or other special services, and this ought to set the rumour at rest. We hope our readers who wish to enter the R.F.C. and other special services will note what Mr. Harris has said, and take steps to join the nearest corps without delay.

* * * * * * *

The Shakespeare Fair in aid of the equipment funds of the 3rd Cadet Battalion of the Essex Regiment, which was held a few weeks ago, was very successful. It was opened by the Earl of Scarbrough on one day, and by the Lord Mayor of London, who was accompanied by the Lady Mayoress and the Sheriffs, on another day. Essex is well supplied with Cadet Corps, but there are nothing like the numbers in these corps that there ought to be. The fair realised a sum of about £250, and this should prove very useful to the 3rd Battalion in their efforts to extend and improve the corps. Readers in that district should note this.

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The movement to form a Cadet Corps for the Borough of Hammersmith is making excellent progress, and we are glad to know that quite recently the Hamersmith Licensed Victuallers' Association attended a meeting of the Hammersmith Borough Council and handed over to the mayor a cheque for £350, as a contribution to the fund for raising the corps. The Mayor of Hammersmith (Alderman H. Foreman) is honorary commandant of the corps, which ought soon to be a large and flourishing body. Readers residing in that part of London should not fail to join up. Further particulars can be obtained on application to the C.A.V.R.

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Sir William Gentle, the Chief Constable of Brighton, who is the honorary colonel of the 1st Sussex Battalion Yeomanry Cadets, is actively interesting himself in efforts to further the Cadet movement in Sussex. Presiding over a meeting held at Southwick the other day, he mentioned that the battalion which he commanded had provided over 500 men for the Forces since the outbreak of the war. It was decided to form a corps for Southwick and Kingston-by-Sea.

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 Mertons' 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 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. He makes up his mind that the only thing for him to do is to run away, as returning to Highcliffe means certain expulsion. Then he meets Peter Hazeldene, who has run away from Greyfriars.

Flip's Sister.

THE next hour or two was a very miserable time for Flip Derwent.

He could not talk Hazel round, and he knew that there was little use in going to Cliff House for some time now. He might, by luck, have contrived to see Flap soon after tea; but when half-past six had once gone, the only chance of seeing her without Miss Primrose or anyone in authority knowing was to fetch her down from the dormitory by some dodge.

The way to do that was easy enough to think of, but it was not easy to bear with Hazel until the time for it came.

Flip had made up his mind to one thing that must and should be done. At whatever cost to himself he was going to stick to Hazel.

For Marjorie's sake, and for the sake of the promise he had given to her, he would do that. That, at least, seemed a clear duty, where nothing else was very clear.

What would happen to Hazel if he were left to himself Flip hardly dared to think. There were times during the next hour when he wondered whether his comrade was sane. Hazel's talk ran much on self-destruction. He did not actually threaten that he would make away with himself. But he talked of suicides he had heard and read of, and told Flip that the ancient Romans had seen no disgrace in it. He quoted a line or two about "the old heroic Roman way."

Flip said it was all rubbish to make it out heroic. Most suicides, he thought, were simply funks. There might now and then have been a case for which some justification could be made out, but at best it was nearer cowardice than heroism.

Perhaps what he said had some effect. After a while Hazel ceased to talk at all. He seemed to have fallen asleep.

But he was awake when Flip thought the time had come for him to try his luck at Cliff House.

"You've got to promise, or I shall bolt directly you start!" he said suddenly.

"All right. I promise," answered Flip. "I don't suppose I shall see Marjorie. And Flap won't be thinking about you. Matter of that, I may not see her to-night; but I can't clear out without seeing her some time. I think you are an ass, though, Hazel!"

"I know I am, and worse!" groaned Hazel. "But I'm dashed if you're much better!"

Flip made no reply to that. It was really not easy to answer. He went, trusting to find Hazel in the shed when he returned.

He knew which windows were those of the girls' dormitory. Cautiously he climbed the garden wall, dropped inside, and went close up to the house.

Then he began to whistle softly an air that he knew Flap would recognise at once.

It belonged to their old childish days in the far-off island home, and as he whistled it somehow Flip felt such a lump coming in his throat at the thoughts it aroused that he had to stop. That lump would not let him whistle.

Just as he ceased, however, the sash of a window above was raised, and Flap's voice said softly:

"Is that you, Flip?"

"Yes."

"What's the matter?"

She did not ask, "Is anything the matter?" There was no need to ask that. Not because he happened to be there at so unusual an hour. Flip had done more risky things than that, in her knowledge. But because of that strange, mysterious sense she had of trouble to Flip whenever real trouble touched him.

He remembered that now. He was rather apt to forget it.

Poor old Flap! She must have been worrying horribly, he thought.

But no inkling of the black truth could have come to her, unless news of his absence had reached Cliff House.

"Everything—at least, pretty much everything!" he answered bitterly.

Then he wished he had not said so much. But at best she was bound to know the whole disgraceful truth in a few minutes.

"I'll come down," she said. "We can't talk like this."

Her voice shook a little, but she held up bravely. But he had been sure she would do that. Flap had pluck.

He heard the sash lowered, but he did not hear the voice of Phyllis Howell in the dormitory.

"Flap, my dear, you're most certainly not going down alone! I don't see that your going down will help your brother much if he is in trouble, as he seems to be. But I know you'll go, and there will be a big row if you are caught. I'm not fond of rows, but I'm going to take my share of this one if it ever comes!"

"Oh, don't go, either of you!" pleaded Clara Trevelyn. "I sha'n't come. I daren't! And I don't see what——"

"Nobody asked you to come, Clara!" said Phyllis sharply.

"Oh, didn't anybody? Well, I'm coming, then! And I'm not a bit more afraid than you are. And I'd do as much for Flap as you would. So now then, Phyllis!"

And Miss Clara slipped out of her warm bed.

Marjorie did not speak. She was asleep. She had hardly slept at all the night before, and had dropped off from pure exhaustion while the other three were still wakeful.

No one else happened to be awake. The adventure—a far more desperate one in their eyes than in the eyes of the boys, naturally—need not be known to anyone else if they were lucky.

In a few minutes all three were dressed and well wrapped up against the cold. Then Phyllis led the way, by what Clara said was quite the most dangerous route, as it led right past the door of Miss Primrose's sitting-room. But it avoided the servants' quarters, and the household staff was much more likely to be stirring at that hour than the mistress of Cliff House.

But they were outside now; and Clara, who had been holding her breath in fear, gave something like a strangled hiss.

"Oh, don't make that silly row!" said Phyllis sharply. "You cut along and talk to your brother, Flap. I'll stay here and take care of this flapper."

Into the last word Phyllis threw quite a lot of contempt. But it did not annoy Clara enough to prevent her from being very glad to catch hold of Phyllis' arm and hang on to it hard.

"Flip! Oh, I knew something was dreadfully wrong, but I didn't know what it was, of course!"

"You haven't heard anything, then, old girl?"

"No."

"Who's that with you? Behind there, I mean."

"Only Phyllis and Clara. They wouldn't let me come down alone."

"Not Marjorie?"

Flap thought she detected a note of disappointment in his voice.

She knew Flip thought a lot of Marjorie, but she had believed it was only as a sister or a chum. Now she doubted.

But Flip was thinking of Marjorie because of Hazel. He was fond of her; but he would not have expected her to come down and bid him good-bye. It was for Flap's good-bye he cared. There might come a time when some other girl had a bigger place in Flip Derwent's generous, wayward heart than his sister. But that time was not yet.

"Marjorie was asleep, and we wouldn't wake her. She's terribly troubled about Hazel."

"You girls ought not to have brothers!" said Flip, almost roughly. "We aren't worth what we cost, by long chalks! Look here, Flap, whatever Marjorie hears about Hazel tell her not to worry. Tell her I said so."

"Why, has anything happened, Flip? Do you mean——"

"I can't tell you another word. I wouldn't have said that only it's too beastly rough on Marjorie, who feels so much, and is one of the best ever—— Oh, I know you feel them, too, and there's no one better than you are, dear old girl! But you've more pluck than she has."

"I'm not sure, Flip. And I'm ever so much more selfish than she ever could be, for whatever has happened to Hazel, I don't feel that I care a scrap about it, except for her sake. It's you that matters, Flip—you! What is the trouble?"

"It's pretty black, Flap, and you'll think me a rotter when you know it!"

"I couldn't think you that; and you could never be that!"

"Not an out-and-outer, perhaps; more the silly fool kind. But a rotter all the same. It's a long yarn, but I'll cut it as short as I can."

It was a very honest, straightforward tale that he told. Not everything came into it, because there was not time to tell everything. But the things Flip omitted were not those which told against himself. He said little about Pon & Co.; but he made no attempt to deny his own folly.

And the girl took it finely. There was rare good stuff in these two!

"I'm not going to say that I don't blame you, Flip," she said.

"I don't want you to say that," the boy replied. "But you can't blame me half as much as I blame myself."

"And I'm not going to say much about the curs and cowards who left you like that! But I will say this—that I'm sure that one of them must have been mixed up in it all. That man Chiker didn't tie you up and shut you up on his own. Someone must have bribed him to do it!"

"But who could? And what for?"

"Someone who hated you—to get you into trouble. The whole thing was a trap!"

"Well, it couldn't have been Pon, if that's what you're driving at. I had a row with him; but he didn't hate me. We were perfectly friendly before that."

"I think it was Gadsby. But I think Ponsonby was even more to blame—in a way. You had been his chum, and he deserted you—the wretched coward!"

"Only what you all seem to think I did with Merton, Flap," said Flip.

His sister had never heard him speak so humbly before. Philip Derwent had always been just a trifle too much on the cocksure side.

"We don't think so now. None of us ever did—not in the way you mean. It was really because we all liked Merton and Tunstall, and detested Ponsonby."

"Well, that's all over."

"I'm not so sure. You must set to work to find out things, and I shouldn't wonder if among the things you find out is that there has been a plot to keep you and those two apart!"

Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors at The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, England. Subscription, 8s. 10d. 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 30th, 1918.

"But how am I to find out anything, old girl?"

"When you are back at Highcliffe——"

"But I'm not going back! Didn't you understand? I'm going to do a bolt—it's the only thing to do."

"You can't, Flip! You mustn't! Think what father would say, and the others! You must go back and face it!"

"It will make no odds. I'm booked for the sack. Where's the use of going back to be kicked out?"

"Even if it's so—and perhaps it won't be—you ought to go. It's the only manly way."

Flip knew that. If it had not been for Hazel, he would have gone. He had known what his sister would say; but somehow he had not counted upon how it would affect him.

But for Hazel, he would have gone back—to face the sneers of Mr. Mobbs, the scorn of his schoolfellows, the Head's lecture, the casting out that would surely follow.

He would have said no word to get Pon & Co. into trouble. He would have faced the music on his own.

But there was Hazel!

He did not fear much; but he did fear going back on Hazel!

The consequences might be disastrous. Peter Hazeldene was in such a state of mind that it was unsafe to leave him to his own devices.

There might be some way of trapping him, and getting him back to Greyfriars. But that would have been treachery, and to Flip treachery was impossible.

He squared his shoulders, putting both hands on Flap's.

"Flap," he said, "it can't be done! I'm not funking it. I'm not staying away for the sake of those rotters—I shouldn't let them in at the worst. I could shut up and say nothing if the Head asked too much. I'm not funking the fellows, though they have got it into me that I kicked Pon when he was down, or some rot like that."

"You're not funking anything, Flip—don't I know that? But what is it that keeps you back?"

Flip hesitated. If he could only have told her just what it was, he fancied she might see it as he saw it.

But he had made a promise to Hazel. Already he had gone a little outside of it—for Marjorie's sake. Some fellows might have argued that, having cracked it, so to speak, one might as well go farther, and smash it altogether.

But Flip did not look at it that way.

"I can't. That's just all about it. It isn't my secret," he said.

"Flip, it's Peter Hazeldene!"

"By Jupiter, Flap, I'm almost afraid of you! It's just as though you could read my thoughts! But that's saying more than I ought to say, and I mustn't speak another word."

"If—if you are doing this for anyone else, Flip—and for Marjorie's brother, Flip—and I know now that you are—I won't say another word! It may be wrong—but it's the sort of wrong thing no one who feels as I feel could be angry with. But—oh, you will write and let me know where you are—what you're doing—won't you? And—and Marjorie, you know——"

"I'll write, old girl—of course, I will! Keep your pecker up, and tell Marjorie to keep hers up. And if you hear anything of Merton and Tun, let them know I wasn't a renegade, though I was all sorts of a dashed fool! Now I must go."

Her face was pressed to his, and he could feel the tears on hers; but neither of them broke down.

"Phyllis and Clara are here," said Flap. "Won't you say good-bye to them?"

"No, I'd rather not. I should have to say it to you again then, for it must be you last. And I don't suppose they care a hang about what becomes of a waster like me."

"They do, Flip! And Marjorie——"

"Oh, Marjorie's quite different! She cares too much—about lots of people that aren't worth it all. Give her my love, and the message."

"I shall give the other two your love, too, Flip!"

"Well, you may. If they don't mind I needn't. Tell 'em to send it back by parcels post if they haven't any use for it. Of course, it will be a heavy parcel, but that can't be helped."

He kissed her once more, and went—slipped into the gloom and disappeared. The joke was a poor enough one; but it was like Flip to leave with a joke on his lips. He was of the breed that knows how to die laughing.

And, being also of that breed, Flap understood.

So did Phyllis when she got the message. It is doubtful whether Clara did.

"Whatever trouble that brother of yours has got himself into, Flap," said Phyllis Howell, "I can't help believing he'll come out of it all right in the long run! I like him better now than I ever did before—there!"

The girls got back to their dormitory undetected. Clara was very cold and rather grumpy; but Phyllis and Flap lay awake talking in whispers for two or three hours, long after Miss Trevlyn had sought and entered the Land of Nod.

Flap was not as depressed as might have been expected, for—and it is usually the case with those who have courage—the known trouble was not so hard to bear as the unknown, dimly guessed at trouble.

But she might have worried more if she had suspected what Flip was doing that night. For once the mysterious warning did not come to her, however. Which may have been because what Flip did, though she would have regarded it as dangerous, did not strike him in that light.

Getting His Own!

HAZEL was asleep when Flip got back.

"Hallo! Oh, I say, where am I?" he muttered when awakened.

But he had remembered everything before Flip had time to explain, as his next words showed.

"Did you see Marjorie?"

"No. She was asleep. The other two came down with Flap; but I didn't talk to them."

"Best not!" growled Hazel. "I don't think much of girls, anyway, and I wouldn't trust anything to either Phyllis Howell or Clara Trevlyn. They don't like me, either."

That was probable enough. Devoted as all the three were to Marjorie, it was hardly to be expected that they should be keen on Hazel, who caused his sister no end of trouble.

"I'm glad Marjorie was asleep, anyway," Hazel said, his voice a little softer, as it generally was when he spoke of his sister. "As you didn't see her it's all right. And, of course, I counted on your promise, even if you had seen her."

"She'll know to-morrow, I suppose."

"Yes, but it's not so much her knowing that matters. She's got to know. But I couldn't stand seeing her."

That was Peter Hazeldene all over. He was still thinking more of himself than of Marjorie. All the same, it seemed to Flip that it was just as well that Marjorie had not had a chance to talk with her brother. His state of mind would have frightened her.

"Hazeldene, you haven't any cash, of course?" said Flip.

"Is it likely? Not so much as a blessed halfpenny!"

"I've a little. It won't go far for the two of us, and we must share and share alike. I've been thinking of the money that's waiting for me at Highcliffe. That would be no end useful, and I don't see why I shouldn't collar it. It's mine—no one there has any right to it."

"If you think you're going to get me to take it and slink back to Greyfriars, you're dead off it!" snapped Hazel.

Flip had still had some lingering hope of that. But he saw now it was no good.

"All right, old chap; I'm not going to argue with you," he said.

"If you weren't such a dead-straight chap, I should think you had something up your sleeve, and reckoned that you were going to trick me into going back," Hazel went on sulkily.

"Well, I'm not. Not clever enough."

"It ain't quite that, either. It all depends on the fellow. Wharton might be clever enough, but he's too straight. I wouldn't trust the Bounder. In his way, he's straight enough, too; but you never know where to have him, or when he's going to have you."

"They've both a good deal better headpieces than I have," Flip replied.

"I don't know about that. Being clever don't save a fellow from being a fool always. I think being straight does oftener—my sort of fool, anyway."

It was evident that Hazel had been pondering over things, and it was characteristic of him that he should have been doing it when it seemed too late. That rather annoyed Flip's more practical mind. Flip could see now lots of ways in which he might have steered clear of the trouble he had got into. But it did not seem any use thinking about them.

"I'm not going to sponge on you, either, Derwent!" said Hazel, with a sudden flash of spirit.

"We'll share. That won't be sponging."

"What have I got to share with you?"

"I had your grub, old sport."

"About sixpennyworth—at war prices!"

"Worth as many pounds to me. The way I was feeling then, I mean."

"Well, you must have wanted it. I'm glad I had it. But there's a thing that stands between us—that bizney with your cockatoo."

"Oh, hang it!" said Flip. "If I didn't forget all about old Cocky when I was talking to Flap! But, of course, he'll be all right."

"You're not answering me! I played you a low-down trick there."

"Drop it! That's all done with, and no harm came of it."

"I can't forget it, if you can. And I wasn't alone in it," Hazel said.

"Oh, I know all about that. Bunter and Gaddy and Vav were all in it."

"I think you take things a lot too coolly, Derwent!"

"And I think you make a dashed sight too much fuss about them, Hazel!"

"If you were me——"

"I'm not. And if I were, I think I should see just the same that if it's too late to lick a chap for what he's done, it's too late to bear malice about it."

"It's not too late to lick me," Hazel said sullenly. "And you can do it all right."

"You want me to, eh?"

"I fancy I should feel easier about it if you did. But I might not. And I dare say I should hate you for it."

"There's no danger. I'm not on. Look here, Hazel, let's talk about something more sensible. The first thing I've to do is to get my remittance. I shall do that all serene. But afterwards? Which way shall we go?"

"I don't care. We might go to London. Easy enough for a fellow to lose himself there!"

"But he won't get away from himself, which is what you really seem to want, Hazel."

"I didn't know you ever thought about things like that," said Hazel.

"Things like what?"

"Oh, psychology. Thinking about yourself, you know, and all that. Introspection, they call it. Most chaps don't. All the better for them. Wharton does a bit, but not in a miserable way. He thinks out why things are right or wrong, and whether he should do them or not. I do them, and think about them afterwards. But I thought you didn't worry at all, and I should never have guessed you'd say that—or see it."

"I didn't think it out; it happened into my mind, Hazel. It's right, though. You talk about cutting me——"

"I never did!"

"You were talking about not sharing, and that comes to the same thing. But you don't want to get away from me half as much as you want to get away from yourself."

"I don't want to get away from you at all," confessed Hazel. "What I feel is that I shall be a beastly drag on you, and that you will wish before long you hadn't run against me."

"Sure, I sha'n't. We'll go through this together, and the end of it all may be better than we think. Anyway, it won't be the worse because we've stuck it out together, will it?"

Hazel's only answer to that was a hand that reached out to Flip's in the gloom.

"We certainly won't go to London," Flip said. "Smoke and houses world without end! That's not my style. I think we'd better work west, into Sussex. Perhaps we can strike some decent little country town and find a job. There are munition works in all sorts of places these days. You aren't as strong as I am, but I guess you could put in a day's graft six days a week all righto for a bit."

"I'd try, anyway. I say, Derwent, about this Highcliffe bizney. Don't you think it's too risky?"

"How?"

"If you're caught——"

"I don't mean to be caught. But if it came to that, I should only be coming back, as far as they knew. It wouldn't be burglary."

"Seems a bit like it, to me."

"Rats! It's my own property I'm after."

"If they caught you, and I waited and waited, and you didn't come, I don't know what I should do."

Hazel's selfishness was uppermost again.

"They won't catch me," said Flip reassuringly.

"I wonder whether those rotters will ever be brought to book?" Hazel said, after a brief silence.

"Who?".

"I mean Gaddy principally, though I don't doubt Pon and Vav were in it, more or less."

"In what?"

"Working this low trick off on you, of course. Do you mean to say that you haven't tumbled to it?"

"Well, I have my suspicions. And my sister thinks the same as you do."

"So would anybody. Gaddy hates you like poison."

"Can't say I love Gaddy; but he's too cheap to waste a lot of hating on. No, I don't suppose they'll ever be bowled out."

"I'd show them up, if I were you."

"Don't see how to. Don't know that I would if I could."

Silence again—for quite a long time. The hours were slipping away.

"Derwent," said Hazel suddenly, "you're a good fellow. "I've never known a better, not even Wharton."

"Drop it!" Flip said. "Time we were moving. Highcliffe will be dark now—anyway, dark enough for my purpose."

The road was dark enough for anyone. They stumbled along it, hardly able to tell whether they were on it or off it. In a little while Flip found Hazel clinging to his arm.

It did not anger him. There were things about Hazel that were annoying. But just now Flip felt that Hazel's dependence upon him helped him rather than hindered. It gave him something to think about besides his own plight, which was by no means pleasant to think about.

Later it might be different. It was not hard to imagine a fellow of Hazel's sort becoming a horrible burden. But Flip was resolute to bear that burden—for Marjorie's sake, and also for Hazel's own. Through all the sullenness and wrong-headedness of Peter Hazeldene there shone gleams of better things, and Flip had glimpsed them.

The dark mass of the Highcliffe buildings loomed up before them.

"Bunk me over the wall, and wait here, old chap," said Flip.

"I'd rather come with you."

"Can't be did, dear boy!".

"But suppose you're caught?"

"They won't be able to hold me. Hang about, and I'll be with you again before morning. That is, unless they sit on me, or tie me up. And they won't do that."

Hazel protested no more. He gave the needed help, and Flip dropped down inside the wall.

He had no very definite plan of campaign. He knew how Pon & Co. got out; but that knowledge was of small use. A comrade inside would be needed.

No use, either, to throw up stones at the Fourth dormitory windows. He could not rely upon help from anyone there.

He tried two or three of the class-room windows; but they could not be got open. At last, however, he managed to push back the bolt of one, though he broke a knife-blade in doing it.

He stood inside. All was dark and silent as the grave.

There was no funk in him, but he did feel that his chilled blood was running more freely and that his heart was beating faster as he made his way through the dark corridors towards the hall, where the letter-rack was.

He would not have risked lighting a match there, even had he had one. He felt the rack. There was no letter in it at all.

That did not dishearten him. It was likely enough that he would find it in No. 6.

He stole upstairs with the caution of a Red Indian on the war-trail.

The old familiar study had the rather musty smell that an unoccupied and shut-up room soon gets. Before he had pulled down the blind and switched on the light, Flip knew that Merton and Tunstall had not returned.

Then he laughed at himself for the thought.

"Feel as if I'd been away thirty-six days or so, instead of about as many hours," he murmured.

Even as he spoke his hand clutched the expected letter, which someone had brought up and put on the mantelshelf.

And even as he clutched it the door opened softly, and a voice spoke in cautious tones.

"Hallo, Derwent!'

The Way the Caterpillar Looked at It.

IT was Rupert de Courcy who had looked in.

"My word, you startled me, De Courcy!" said Flip.

"No doubt. Thought it might be the dear Mobby, perhaps?"

"Can't say I was thinking particularly about Mobby."

"I shouldn't. He's not an agreeable subject for meditation. By gad, I don't know why we let such Huns live, while we're doin' our best to wipe out the Huns who have had the misfortune to be born in Hunland! Not that I object to wipin' them out—the only dashed thing to do with them, by gad! But why not include the genial Mobby an' a few more that we know?"

The Caterpillar was busy as he spoke, stooping at the door.

He straightened himself up, and Flip saw that he had placed the tablecloth along the bottom of the door.

"Light shines out into the passage a trifle too much," he said. "Must have been a wretched draughty hole, dear boy. But you chaps are such a dashed vigorous, robust, healthy crew that I dare say you never even felt the draughts."

"Can't say I ever noticed them," Flip answered.

He could see that the Caterpillar's attitude was no unfriendly one, and it did him good to hear De Courcy speak of the old comradeship of himself, Merton, and Tunstall in the present tense, as though it still existed.

"Come back, dear boy?" asked Rupert de Courcy, taking a seat on the table.

"Only a flying visit," replied Flip, with rather a wry grin. "To get this, you know."

He held up his letter.

"Sinews of war?" asked the Caterpillar.

"Cash," said Flip.

"Same thing. You're wonderin' how I happen to be about this time of night, naturally? Knowin' me for a well-conducted youth, an' all that. Toothache explains it. Came down to get this stuff."

He held up a small bottle.

"Sorry," said Flip.

"Don't worry, dear boy! There are worse troubles than the toothache. An' you seem to have lighted on some of them. Don't tell me anythin' if it don't suit your book, but if you like——"

"Too long a yarn to tell it all," said Flip. "If it wasn't for that I'd be glad to."

"I rather fancy it might be to your advantage to spare the time, Derwent," De Courcy said.

His tone was graver than Flip had ever heard it before. But it was unmistakably friendly.

Still Flip hesitated. He was thinking of Hazel, waiting outside.

"If you don't like the notion of yarnin' in here, I'll come out with you," the Caterpillar said.

"Suppose you're dropped on to?"

"I'll chance that. No great odds, anyway."

"What about your toothache?"

"That's no odds, either."

"If you like to come, then. I wouldn't have asked it of you. I didn't really suppose that anyone here would care about having anything to do with me after what they were saying I did to Ponsonby."

"What were they saying? But never mind that till we are outside."

(To be continued next week.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"A DRAWN GAME!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's story continues the narrative of the Shell versus Fourth competition, and tells of how Grundy's boxing campaign against all comers from the Fourth ended—how the Shell Second Eleven, captained by Bernard Glyn, fared in the footer match—how Grundy did not approve of Glyn's captaincy—how the rival detectives of the two Forms got on in their efforts to solve the mystery of Racke's grub supplies—how Mulvaney minor and Tompkins distinguished themselves in the three-legged race—with many other things. The "drawn game" of the title does not refer either to the competition as a whole, or to the footer match, I may add. You can wait till next week to learn to what it does refer.

THE INCREASE IN PRICE.

Last week's notice will have prepared you for this. We are only doing now what most papers have already done, after going on for as long as possible at the old figure. Paper difficulties grow more acute with every week that passes, and there are other expenses to consider. I have not the least fear that any of my loyal readers will grumble; and as for the rest—well, if they do drop out we shall save paper on it. But not much—there are so few of them!

NOTICES.

Back Numbers, etc., Wanted.

By David Scott, 29, Kinnoull Causeway, Perth—"G." No. 518—clean.

By H. B. Muskett, 104, Bree Street, Johannesburg, South Africa—No. 407 of GEM—3d. offered.

By J. Adams, 14, Cambridge Street, Camberwell, S.E. 5—"M." Nos. 81, 83, 119, 133, 190, 364—4d. each offered.

By J. Young, 12, Cumming Street, Pentonville Road, N. 1—cheap football—not more than 6/-.

By Jas. Stewart, 53, Mount Street, Glasgow—"Wun Lung's Secret," "Saving Talbot," "Frank Nugent's Secret," "Tom Merry Minor," and "The Cad of the Sixth."

By J. Sugden, 53, Garfield Avenue, Manningham, Bradford—any back numbers before 400—and "Boy Without a Name."

By E. Brannigan, 10, Rowena Crescent, Battersea, S.W. 11—"Remove Eleven on Tour," "Sportsmen of St. Jim's," "Bunter the Boxer," "Schoolboys Never Shall be Slaves"—2d. each offered.

By K. De Vall, 102, Gillott Rd., Edgbaston, Birmingham—"Figgins' Folly," "Boy Without a Name," "After Lights Out," "Postal Order Conspiracy," "Rivals and Chums"—clean—state price.

By Robert Dickson, 2, Preston Street, Kirkham, near Preston—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out."

By J. Horwich, 66, Chaworth Place, Dolphin Barn, Dublin—"School and Sport," "Boy Without a Name"; "G." Nos. 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 36, and 40; "Scallawag of the Third," "Surprising the School," "Bully's Chance," "Fishy's Fag Agency," "Wun Lung's Secret"—2/- offered for all.

By W. Brompton, Sea Scout, Coastguard Station, Swanage—"Terrible Three's Air-Cruise," "Raiding the Raiders," "A Rank Outsider," "The Rival Schools," "Tom Merry v. Jack Blake," "Saints v. Grammarians," "By Request of the Head," "Manners Minor," "The Great Sports Tournament"—2d. each offered.

By A. E. Hamblin, 4, Prospect Road, Hungerford—"M." numbers before 250—2d. each offered.

Your Editor