THE THREE MINORS!

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

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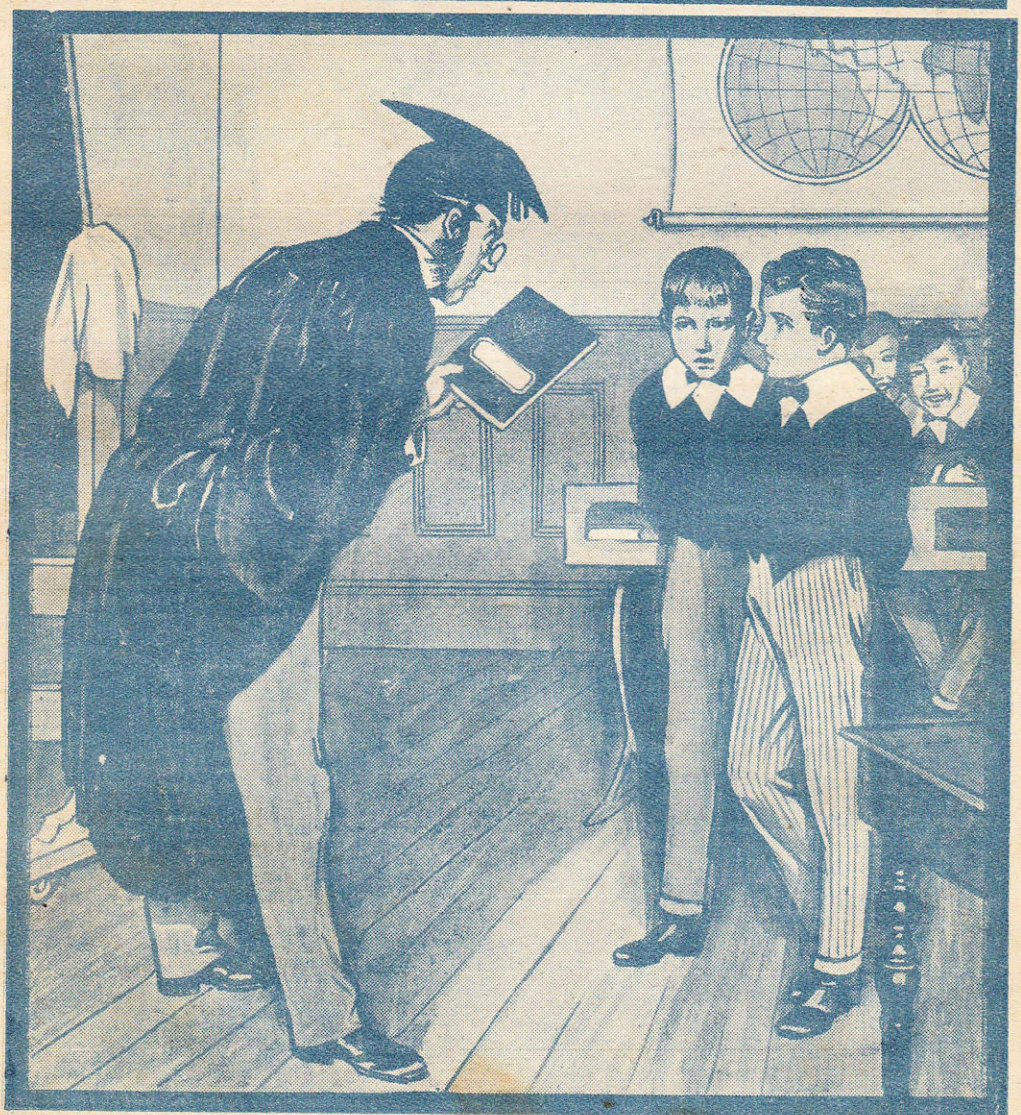


IN THE THIRD FORM-ROOM!

13-4-18.

THE THREE MINORS!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Trouble in the Third.

"I'M fed up!"

It was Manners minor—Reggie Manners—of the Third who made this announcement to such of his Form as were within hearing.

"Lucky you!" replied Wally D'Arcy, who was D'Arcy minor.

"Lucky! What do you mean, you silly chump?" retorted Reggie.

"Anybody's lucky who can get like that these days, with prices going up like one o'clock, everything rationed, and everything else short," replied Wally, grinning.

"Reggie don't mean that he's fed up the same way as Racke & Co. were, especially Trimble and Chowle," put in Frank Levison—Levison minor—also grinning.

"There ain't going to be much luck about it for Racke and that gang, if what I hear is right," said Jameson.

"What do you hear?" asked Wally.

"They say the Shell and Fourth are going to give the rotters a joint ragging," Curly Gibson said

"Well, anything with a joint in it ought to suit them, considering how they've been wolfing meat!" observed Watson.

"Oh, dry up!" growled Reggie. "We don't want any cheap wit—if you call it wit—I jolly well don't! I'm not talking about Racke. I've nothing to do with him."

"Not lately, I dare say," put in Butt slyly.

"I'll punch your fat head if you aren't careful, Buttercup, so you mind that! It's not Racke and his measly gang I'm talking about. It's those two I'm fed up with!"

And Reggie pointed an accusing finger at his two best chums—the other two minors—Wally and Frank.

"What's the matter with us, young Manners?" asked Wally defiantly.

"Everything!" replied Reggie comprehensively and scathingly.

"All right, my son! Keep out of our way, then! I fancy we can worry along without you."

"Not half so well as I can get along without you!" returned Reggie, with his nose in the air.

"Well, get along! We sha'n't miss you!" said Frank Levison.

Frank was generally a peacemaker, but he did not feel inclined to try mollifying Reggie just then. The attitude of Manners minor during the last two or three weeks had rubbed Frank the wrong way.

"That's all very well, but it ain't the thing!" said Manners minor. "Young D'Arcy calls himself skipper of this Form——"

"And I'd jolly well like to see anyone who says I'm not!" snapped Wally. "Do you say it, young Manners?"

"I say that you ain't much of a skipper, any road. The Form footer's gone all to pot while you two have been fagging for the Shellfish and the Fourth trumps and their silly competition!"

"Oh, no harm in the competition!" said Hobbs. "I like that all right. I don't mind owning that. But——"

"The Form footer gone all to pot!" said Wally scornfully. "Who was it said a fortnight ago that he was sick to death of footer, and wished he needn't go on the playing-fields again till the cricket season came? Who was it stood out of the last match because he said his leg was bad? Who——"

"So it was!" howled Reggie. "I showed you the bruise—a whacking one, too! I'll bet a shilling to a ha'penny you never had a bigger one!"

"Must have been horribly bad!" said Wally, with deep sarcasm. "Jolly dangerous thing to do, riding over to Abbotsford to see the soldiers with a leg like that, I should say!"

"It's my eyes I see with, not my legs! Got you there, funnyface!"

"Crumbs! I didn't know he was so smart! Be careful, young Manners, or you may cut yourself!"

"Blessed sight more likely to be cutting you!" growled Reggie.

"Wish you would! You're only a nuisance. I never saw such a chap for grumbling at everything!"

"The point is——"

"But the blade's better for cutting with!" put in Frank.

"You trying to be funny now, with a face like a moulting owl!" Reggie snarled.

"That ought to be a big help!" Frank retorted. "All the same, I'd rather have a face like that than one like a tin of condensed milk gone sour!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared some of the Third.

There was really nothing particularly the matter with the face of Manners minor, except when it was clouded by the sulky look that it wore now. But there was still less with the face of Frank Levison, which had the advantage over Reggie's of not looking at all sulky. It did not take very much to make the Third cackle, however. Anything personal and not at all polite was apt to do it.

"What is the point, young Manners?" demanded Wally.

"The point is that you've left your own Form to go sucking up to the old fogies in the Shell and Fourth!" Reggie answered.

"Yes, that's it!" said a voice that sounded like Kent's.

"Everybody knows it!" spoke another, which Wally and Frank knew to be Piggott's.

"That's a lie, Manners minor, and you know it!" snapped Wally. "We haven't sucked up to anyone. We're joint umpires for the Shell versus Fourth competition with Lefevre of the Fifth, that's all. We were asked to take on the job. We didn't ask for it. And everybody is satisfied with us. If they grumbled we'd jolly soon chuck it!"

"It's an honour for all the Third, really," Frank added. "It's getting the Form recognised——"

"Who wants the Form recognised?" hooted Reggie. "Who wants to be patronised by Shellfish and Fourth frumps? I don't! I'd jolly soon——"

"What's the matter with you, young Manners?" said Wally. "It's jealousy—beastly, rotten jealousy, and nothing else!"

Reggie came near to foaming at the mouth at that retort. It hurt him because it was true. He had never admitted to anyone that he resented being passed over in this way; but he had felt from the first that he, with a brother in the Shell, had at least as good a right to the post of umpire as either Wally or Frank, each with a brother in the Fourth. No one else in the Third had a major in either of the contending Forms, as it happened, and Reggie had never stopped to think whether the two had been appointed on account of their majors or on their merits.

"Jealous!" panted Reggie. "Why, if they went down on their bended knees——"

"Wally's major wouldn't, I fancy!" said Frank. "It would spoil the lovely 'ewease of his twousahs,' you know. I don't think the rest would. But we could ask them, if you like."

"They don't want Reggie. They wouldn't have Reggie at any price! Reggie's the sort of umpire that might have been given away with a pound of tea, when tea used to be cheap!" Wally said scathingly.

"They wouldn't have me because they couldn't get me!" howled Reggie.

"Well, if you don't want the job I don't see what you're making all that noise about it for!" remarked Joe Frayne, with sound common-sense.

"It's a giddy slight to the Form, that's why I'm making a noise about it!" howled Reggie. "It's silly swank, that's why I'm making a noise about it! It was just the same when they gave young D'Arcy a job in the elections for the St. Jim's Parliament. He swanked round like a peacock with two legs——"

"I never saw a one-legged peacock!" said Frank.

"I mean two tails, you young fathead! Wally's a silly swanker, I say! You don't matter so much. You're just about half of nothing at all, and everybody knows Wally leads you by the nose anywhere he wants you to go! Just the same with Frayne! But the rest of us ain't D'Arcy minor's puppy-dogs, and we jolly well won't put up with it! Will we, you chaps?"

It was a very silly speech. Reggie was pouring out all the accumulated bitterness of weeks, saying things that he would be certain to be sorry for when he got over his sulky mood.

But, silly as it was, it found support and applause in the Third.

No one applauded it more loudly than Piggott. But he was not the only one who seemed to find it to his taste. Even Curly Gibson and Jameson and Hobbs, though they did not applaud, said no word to show that they disagreed.

Wally gave the whole crowd a scornful glance.

"Oh, you are a gay crew!" he said. "Twopence-halfpenny would be dear for the crowd of you! You don't know what Franky and I were planning——"

"And we don't care!" hooted Reggie. "Who wants you to plan for us?"

"If there was anything, we ought to have been told, I reckon Wally," said Hobbs.

"Well, you jolly well won't be told now! It's all off! I wouldn't get up a competition against the Fourth or the Shell with such a measly gang to back me! I——"

Wally stopped suddenly. He had let it out without meaning to.

Perhaps it was only a wild dream. Most likely the Shell or the Fourth would have turned up their noses at the suggestion of a competition between the winning Form of the two and the Third. But, though he could hardly have hoped that the Third could come victorious out of such a trial, Wally had cherished that dream. Wally was ambitious—for himself and for his Form.

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Reggie shrilly. "Fancy the Shell or the Fourth in a competition with us! Ha, ha, ha! Fancy us standing up to old Grundy! We'd look nice wrecks when he'd done. wouldn't we? Fancy——"

"You would!" said Joe Frayne pointedly. "If you dared stand up to him. But nobody would catch you doing that, I bet! But Wally ain't you, you know!"

"I'll punch your fat head for you, Frayne!" yelled Reggie.

"Just touch Joe, that's all, and I'll give you the hiding of your rotten young life!" shouted Wally.

No one likes to have his ambitions laughed at, and Wally was as furious as Reggie now.

The rest had not joined in Reggie's ridicule. They did not see why the Third should not challenge either Shell or Fourth. The scheme blurted out by Wally had rather impressed them.

"Take that, young Frayne!" howled Reggie. And he struck at Joe's face with his open hand.

But the blow did not get home. Wally knocked up Reggie's arm, and in another moment Manners minor was pressed back over a desk, with Wally forcing him down, and glaring into his scarlet face with angry eyes.

CHAPTER 2.
The Tempter.

"LET the chap get up! That ain't fighting!" shouted Piggott.

"Yes, better let him get up, Wally," said Jameson. "He's a silly ass if he wants to fight you! We know you can lick him into a cocked hat. But he's got a right to if he chooses."

"I do choose!" panted Reggie, wriggling furiously. "He may be stronger than I am! Perhaps he can lick me, though I don't admit that. But it's a coward's trick to hold me down like this!"

"Let him get up, Wally!" pleaded Joe Frayne. "Bless you, I ain't afraid of him! Reggie's mostly talk! If he can lick me he's welcome to do it!"

"Better let him get up, D'Arcy minor!" said Hobbs, with some hostility in his tone.

Wally stood up, releasing Reggie.

"But Frayne's not going to fight you!" Wally said, breathing hard. "And I'm not, either! We've been chums, anyway, and however much you may deserve a licking I'm not keen on giving you one!"

"I don't see that it's for you to say whether I shall fight Frayne or not!" panted Reggie. "I don't want to particularly. I know I can lick him. You ain't the only one who bars winning on the cheap, D'Arcy minor!"

"Hear, hear!" came from Reggie's supporters.

Whatever virtues were wanting from the make-up of Manners minor, no one had ever had the right to accuse him of cowardice.

"I know that all serene!" said Wally. "But I know you're not up to my weight, so it's no good making out you are!"

"I can force you to fight me!"

"I don't see how!"

"Will you take the coward's blow?"

"S'pose you gave me it? Do you think anybody here would believe I was afraid of you? I don't see much sense in cowards' blows when there isn't any doubt."

Manners minor hesitated.

He was in a fury of rage; but he had not wholly lost his senses.

Wally had been a good chum. Wally might be a bit of an autocrat. Certainly he did want his own way a little too much, and he expected to have it, too. But one could depend on Wally. He might chuck over a fellow who was going the wrong road wilfully; but he would not desert a chum down on his luck.

"Better drop it, Reggie," said Frank Levison.

Manners minor turned on his heel.

"I'll fight anyone who says I'm afraid of D'Arcy minor," he said. "But if he won't fight me I can't make him. I don't care if he and young Levison never speak to me again—that's straight! And I think if the Form did its duty it would jolly well rag those two for sucking up to the Fourth and Shell!"

"I should like to see the Form try it!" snapped Wally.

Only one fellow followed Reggie out of the Form-room—Reuben Piggott.

Hobbs and Jameson and Gibson looked rather uncomfortable, and the faces of some of the others showed that they were not with Wally, though they might not be ready to declare themselves against him.

"You chaps got anything to say?" asked Wally.

"We don't want to row with you, Wally," replied Hobbs. "And we don't say young Manners is right about everything."

"But we think you two have cut the Form a bit lately, and hung on to the Shell and Fourth," added Gibson.

"I wouldn't say hang on," corrected Jameson. "But—— Oh, well, you know what we mean Wally!"

Just as Wally was about to give them an answer which would certainly have had no effect in the way of keeping up friendly relations, he felt Frank's arm on his sleeve.

"Well, you chaps are civil, anyway," he said, after a moment's pause. "Reggie's a sulky young bounder, and I don't care who tells him I say so! But you're all wrong—don't look at things in the right way at all. Haven't got brains enough, I s'pose!"

Another pressure warned him that Frank thought he had said quite enough. To judge from the faces of Hobbs, Jameson, and Curly Gibson, one might have thought he had said rather more than that.

He and Frank went off together.

"Silly young asses!" said Wally.

"I don't know that they're so far wrong, the way they look at it," replied Frank. "They think a heap of you, Wally!"

Grunt!

"And they don't like you cutting them so much over this competition umpiring, you know."

"Rats! What about you?"

"Oh, I don't count like you do!"

"You're too blessed modest, Franky! No one can say that about me, though I won't have chaps making out I'm swanky! But Reggie——"

"It isn't quite that way with Reggie. He's not a bad sort; but he's jealous and sulky. He'll come round, though, if you only give him time."

"Manners minor can have all the giddy time there is; but I don't care a scrap whether he comes round or not!" said Wally.

Meanwhile, Manners minor was not at all in a frame of mind which made it likely that he would come round very soon.

Piggott found him kicking stones in the road just outside the gates.

For some time past Reggie had avoided Piggott. Reggie's friendship with Racke had not worked out at all well for either of them. It had brought Racke hard up against Harry Manners, and Racke had not won the struggle which followed. And it had been made clear to Reggie's mind that Racke cared nothing about him for himself, but had only wanted to make use of him as a weapon against his brother. That hurt Reggie's vanity, naturally.

Piggott was associated in Reggie's mind with all that had happened then. Also, Piggott was barred by all the leading spirits of the Third.

But just now Reggie was in the mood to accept Piggott's overtures.

"You spoke up jolly well to that swanking young cad of a D'Arcy, old sport!" said Piggott admiringly.

Reggie only grunted. He could not really think Wally a cad. But he was not displeased to hear him called one.

"I believe you could lick him!"

Reggie grunted again. He knew that he could not lick Wally, and he knew that Piggott knew it. But he liked to hear that, all the same.

"If I were you, I'd have nothing more to do with him or with that little sneak Levison!"

"I don't mean to," said Reggie.

"Fact of the matter is, the Third wants a new skipper. I suppose if we've got a skipper, it's D'Arcy, as he's been elected skipper for both cricket and footer; but if another chap was made cricket skipper in his place, he couldn't go about making out that he's boss of the Form."

Again Reggie grunted. The vision of being cricket captain of the Third tickled his vanity. But a saving remnant of common-sense told him that there was a big gap between wanting the post and getting it.

"You're a jolly good cricketer," went on the tempter. "I won't say that you're better than young D'Arcy, for he's a rare good, all-round man for his age; everybody admits that. But if you bucked up you might be pretty nearly as good, and it don't follow that the best player must be skipper."

Piggott was wily. If he had said that Reggie was better than Wally he would have aroused suspicions in the mind of Reggie. But Manners minor really was a promising player. Cricket appealed to him rather more than footer; and, of course, it was true that the best player was not necessarily the best captain.

"Do you think the chaps would have me, Piggy?" he said.

"Sure of it, if you go the right way to work."

"H'm! I shouldn't mind having a flutter. It would show D'Arcy minor that he's not the only pebble on the beach, anyway."

"You could get three-quarters of the Form, if the election was to-day, I fancy," Piggott said.

"Well, it's not."

"Nunno! Still, you've got time to talk the chaps round; and if D'Arcy

goes on the way he's going, you can do it. I'll help. I hate those two!"

"So do I!" said Reggie.

It was not true, and when he came to think it over he would know that it was not. But at the moment he really felt that he hated Wally and Frank.

"I wonder that you don't do something to get even with them," Piggott said slyly.

"I would, if I could think of anything. But what is there to do?"

"I can tell you one thing, anyway. There's that book Levison minor keeps the records of the competition in. He's dotty on it! Get hold of the rotten thing and burn it!"

"Dunno about doing that. Wally wouldn't care much if I did."

"Not so much as Levison, perhaps. But he'd be just as mad. And the Shell and Fourth chaps—Tom Merry and Blake and the rest—would be no end down on them both for not taking proper care of it. Why, I don't believe they could tell what points each side had scored without that book!"

Piggott was wrong there. The book he spoke of was the very apple of Frank Levison's eye, but the Shell and Fourth could have done without its help. There were at least a dozen fellows in each Form who could have made from memory an accurate list of events and points scored in them.

But they liked little Frank Levison, and appreciated his keenness. That book of records was quite a model volume. It was ruled with mathematical accuracy, and every entry in it was made in Frank's best round hand. Black ink and red and green had been used, and not a single blot—black, red, or green—disfigured its pages. There was no alteration, either. Frank had made one once, in the very last line of the first page; but the look of it had worried him so much that he had copied the page all over again, and torn out the one with the mistake upon it.

The general opinion of the Third was that that book was a distinct credit to the Form, and that no one in the Shell or Fourth could have begun to do it so well.

"There's the list on the notice-board," objected Reggie.

"That's been torn down before now, and it can be torn down again. I should grin to see the Shell and Fourth bounders all muddled up about their points, and squabbling over them," replied Piggott.

"Racke tore it down," said Reggie. "He didn't get much change out of that, though. They made him write it out all over again, and then put up young Levison's list because they said Racke's wasn't neat enough. And I tell you straight, Piggy, I don't want to have anything more to do with Racke."

"Same here," answered Piggott readily. "I'm going in for steering clear of that gang."

"Their beastly food-hogging was the giddy limit!" said Reggie.

"Rather!" agreed Piggott.

But Reggie meant what he said, and Piggott did not. Piggot was feeling very sore with Racke, and ready to do him a nasty turn if he got a chance. But that was because he had been left out of the banquets under Pepper's barn—the banquets which had now come to an end with the discovery by the rival detectives of Shell and Fourth of the means by which the unlawful supplies of food had been obtained.

"Look here, Piggy, if you were still standing in with Racke and that lot, I shouldn't care to have much to do with you," said Reggie candidly. "But, as it is, I don't see why we shouldn't be chummy. We'd better not show it too much at first, because you know Hobbs and that lot bar you no end, and I want to keep in with them. But if we can work it so that I'm cricket skipper, I shall have a big pull, and we needn't mind them."

Piggott was not quite such a worm that he did not resent that speech. But he was worm enough to disguise his resentment. Of course, he had no real desire for the boon of Manners minor's friendship, great as that boon might seem to Reggie's vain mind. Piggott only wanted to use Reggie against Wally and Frank—and perhaps one other fellow. Piggott had a plan for making Racke sit up, and Reggie might be useful for that, too.

"Right-ho!" said the black sheep of the Third. "You turn that book bizney over in your mind, Reggie. It's worth doing."

CHAPTER 3.
Racke & Co. in Council.

"I'M not goin', dashed if I am!" said Racke.

"It's no good tryin' to get out of it," Crooke said sullenly. "Those bounders have got us in a cleft stick, you know. Best thing is to toe the line an' get it over."

"Yes, that's the best, Racke," said Clampe.

Six of the seven who had shared the food-hogging of Racke were present in No. 7 of the Shell studies. The absent member was Baggy Trimble. Baggy showed prudence in being absent, for although he had to stand his trial like the rest, there were special circumstances in his case which made it wise for him to give them a wide berth.

"What can they do if we all hold out?" sneered Racke. "Of course, if you fellows are goin' to cave in out of sheer funk an' leave me to stick it out by myself——"

"Rats! You don't suppose we expect to be let off because we cave in, as you call it, do you?" interrupted Crooke hotly. "They're going to make it jolly hot for us, anyway. But if we don't put in an appearance for their rotten trial, Merry an' Talbot will go to Railton. You know what that means—the sack for some of us an' a floggin' for the rest! It might be the sack all round—I'm not sure. Can't say I think much about that, for I know I sha'n't get off, bein' in the black books already. An' I know you won't—not that that matters to me!"

"They'll never dare to go to Railton," Racke said doubtfully.

"They would, though!" said Scrope, with conviction.

"An' the other fellows wouldn't call it sneakin', either," put in Chowle, blinking nervously. "Lots of chaps over in our House say that the Head ought to know about it, don't they, Clampe? That beast Wynn says he reckons we ought all to go to quod for it; that's because he can't bear the notion of others gettin' plenty of grub when he's goin' short, I suppose!"

"You'd think he might have some sympathy, but he hasn't, not a scrap!" said Clampe. "I shall be glad when this bizney is all over an' done with. It isn't exactly all violets to have everyone slingin' abuse at you day an' night."

"We might have to go to prison, too," whined Mellish. "You can't tell how the Head will take it. He can be jolly stern when he likes."

"An' he'll be mad about you bringin' that man of yours into it, Racke," said Clampe. "We never knew about that until afterwards. Not sure that I should have agreed, for one."

"You'd have agreed to anything to get a gorge on the cheap!" retorted Racke wrathfully. "An' how the merry dickens did you think I was to work it if I didn't do it through someone outside? Berrymore was best; I could trust the brute, an' he'll do anythin' in the world if he's paid enough."

"Well, I don't mind ownin' that I think it was a pretty crafty wheeze to get him settled down at Rylcombe as a scientific merchant livin' all alone," said Crooke. "But you weren't careful enough, Racke—you must have let it out somehow. Beats me that those bounders should have got on his track so quickly, though!"

"It was all through Trimble," said Racke viciously. "But I'll be even with the fat fraud sooner or later, you bet! If he hadn't gorged so, an' made himself disgustin'ly ill, I don't believe anyone would have suspected anythin' even yet."

"Well, he's goin' to tell all he knows now," said Scrope.

"What do you mean? Where is the rotter? Oh, hang it all, if we stick together an' deny everythin', they can't prove it against us even yet! But if that skunk——"

"Baggy's turned what they call King's evidence," said Mellish dismally. "He never said a word to me about what he meant to do. He just slunk off to Merry. It ain't a scrap of use tryin' to stick it out, Racke! He'll tell all he knows. Then there's what those bounders found out when they rushed your man on the moor. Lowther's got a yarn to tell, too; and Levison minor an' D'Arcy minor are to be called as witnesses, I hear."

Mellish usually heard a good deal, and there was no reason to doubt that he had been making diligent use of his customary methods of obtaining information.

"If we give in tamely to those rotters——" began Racke.

"They've got us, I tell you!" Crooke broke in. "Say we don't go now—well, then, it will be a dormitory trial; an' very likely Kildare or Railton or someone will come along, an' it will all leak out. They may pretend they want to spare us that; but it would suit their book very well to be forced to speak, you bet!"

"Whereas if we go along all together an' let them try us, we sha'n't be any worse off," added Clampe. "Whatever they make up their mind to do they can do—there's enough of them, goodness knows! An' if we're goin' to resist—but I can't see much use in thinkin' about that—we can put up a fight just as well at Pepper's barn as we can here—better, really, because there won't be any danger of what Crooke suggests. I'm for goin' an' gettin' it over."

"I suppose you mean to go, even if I don't?" Racke said.

"It would be better all round if you did go," answered Clampe, shirking the direct question.

"Yes, we do, then!" replied Crooke, with greater boldness. "An' it will be worse for you if you don't come, my boy! They'll fetch you!"

"I'd like to see them!" snarled Racke.

"Well, you will, if you don't go," snuffled Chowle.

"Better for all of us you should go, Racke, old man," pleaded Mellish. "They can clear the rotten bizney up then, and we sha'n't hear any more about it."

"An' what can they do, after all?" said Scrope. "Send us to Coventry? I don't know why we should care a fat lot about that."

"Oh, I'll come!" said Racke, with curling lip.

CHAPTER 4.
Racke & Co. Come to Trial.

"THEY won't come," said Monty Lowther. "Trifle too much of the 'Will-you-walk-into-my-parlour?' touch about it, you know."

"Oh, I think they'll come!" said Tom Merry.

"It will be the worse for them if they don't!" said Jack Blake grimly.

The Fourth and Shell had assembled at Pepper's barn—otherwise the St. Jim's House of Commons.

Dormitory trials were the usual thing in such cases as this; but the offenders belonged to four distinct and separate dormitories in two Houses, and there were difficulties in the way of getting them all together.

So they had been summoned to Pepper's barn, and the two Forms concerned had come along to meet them. Even Skimmy was there. Outside the Shell and Fourth only Wally D'Arcy and Frank Levison had been allowed admittance. They were witnesses.

Now the assembly waited for six of the seven criminals.

The seventh was already there. Baggy Trimble sat apart in a corner, podgy and pale and anxious. Baggy had anticipated leaping into instant popularity when he volunteered to turn "King's evidence." But the result of his offer had been quite otherwise. No one seemed to desire conversation with him.

St. Jim's did not exactly love informers.

"Who's going to prosecute?" asked Kangaroo.

"Oh, I'll do that," said Lowther at once.

"Won't do," said Figgins, shaking his head. "You talk too much."

"Why, you silly chump, it's eloquence that's wanted, isn't it?"

"Not your brand," said Kerr. "Besides, you're a witness."

"I'd forgotten that. It's a pity. The finest specimen of forensic eloquence——"

"We sha'n't miss it much if it was all in words like that," remarked Clive. "You can't expect fellows to cheer you for picking the long 'uns out of the dic, and slinging them about."

"Your ignorance, Clive——"

"Is colossal!" the South African junior finished for Lowther, grinning as he spoke. "I happen to know that one. Now, I vote old Cardew——"

"Worse than Lowther, if poss!" groaned Manners. "Takes longer, and uses just as many words that ignorant kids—like Clive and some more in the Fourth—can't understand!"

"An' I'm a witness, too," said Cardew.

"Levison, then," Clive said.

"Keep it in No. 9, Fourth passage, do, old son!" urged Clifton Dane.

"I'm not on," said Levison. "It had better be someone who hasn't been so hard up against Racke as I have. I don't know that I feel spiteful; but I can't pretend to be impartial."

"Talbot for judge, anyway," said Tom Merry. "He's the one man for the job."

"I'm not," Talbot put in quickly. "Levison's right. Judge and prosecuting counsel must be fellows who haven't been at odds with Racke and Crooke so often as he and I have. I propose Noble."

"Talbot, old son, when did you ever catch me being pro-Racke?" asked Kangaroo reproachfully.

"Never. But even they can't deny that they'll get fair play from you."

"Right-ho! But I'm like the good American early in the war who said he was absolutely neutral—he didn't mind who licked Germany!"

No one objected to Kangaroo as judge. At least, nobody present did. And it really would not make much difference to the accused who the judge was. They knew, and everyone knew, that they were bound to be declared guilty.

"Clive wouldn't be half a bad man for the prosecution," said Ernest Levison thoughtfully.

"Do keep it in No. 9!" Dane chortled.

"What's the matter with No. 9?" asked Clive.

"She's all right!" chanted Cardew. "I'll vote for Clive. We three don't get much chance of liftin' up our mellifluous voices in eloquence within these classic walls, do we?"

It so happened that all three of the fellows in Study No. 9 had failed to secure election to the St. Jim's House of Commons—whereof had come some disturbance. And more might come yet—though hardly till the sports series was over.

"There's nothing the matter with Clive," said Figgins. "I agree to Clive. Hands up for Clive!"

The South African was genuinely popular, and the show of hands was so good that there was no use in calling upon those who did not agree to put up theirs.

"Clive it is, then," said Tom Merry. "Now, who's going to defend the rotters?"

"Don't all speak at once," said Monty Lowther.

Nobody spoke at all.

"Figgy, will you?" asked Tom.

"No, I won't!" snapped George Figgins.

"Gore, are you on?"

"It all depends. May I say what I like about them, if I defend them?"

"Oh, in reason! You have to remember that you're supposed to say anything you can in their defence, you know."

"I'll do that, if I think of anything," replied Gore. "But I don't expect to think of anything, mind you!"

Baggy spoke up from his corner.

"I—I think I ought to have a separate what-do-you-call-it," he said nervously.

"Tarring and feathering?" suggested the humorous Lowther blandly.

"Nunno! Like Gore, you know."

"You mean you don't like Gore?" said Cardew, grinning.

"It's not so much that. But I don't think he's quite the chap to enter into my feelings, you know—to put it in the best way for me, an' all that. I shouldn't call Gore a very sympathetic chap, really."

"I should jolly well hope not," retorted George Gore. "When I catch myself sympathisin' with a bladder of lard, I'll get someone to lock me up!"

"Would you like Skimmy?" asked Talbot, winking at Tom.

"Oh, really, my dear Talbot, much as I should like to oblige you in any possible way, and great as is my desire that justice——"

"To be continued in our next," chipped in Lowther. "Here comes the merry criminals!"

"You're late," said Tom severely, as the six came in.

They were a hangdog crew. Racke was the only one among them who held his head up and looked defiant, and there was more brazenness than real boldness even about Racke.

"We couldn't help it," said Mellish meekly.

"I only came because these fellows begged me to," said Racke. "I'm not at your beck and call, let me tell you, Merry!"

"There's nothing personal about this affair, Racke," replied Tom. "You've come to answer grave charges before a duly constituted court of your peers, not in the reply to an invitation from me."

"And the less you say the better it will be for you!" snapped Figgy.

Racke looked round arrogantly.

"Where's the duly constituted court?" he demanded, with a sneer.

Not the way to win!
(See Chapter 9.)

"It's here," said Tom, quite seriously. "Long before any of us came to St. Jim's, the custom that a fellow who had offended against the honour of his Form could be tried and punished by the Form was known and acted upon. There are fellows here who have been so tried, and haven't questioned the right of the rest to try them."

"But who's to decide that a fellow has offended against what you call the honour of his Form?" demanded Racke.

"The Form does that, naturally."

"An' the Shell's decided that I've offended in that way?"

"Yes."

"Rather!"

"You know you have, you food-hog!"

"Yaas, wathah, Wacke! It becomes you bettah to——"

"An' the Shell an' Fourth have decided that these other fellows have also offended against the—er—honour of their Forms?"

"Shurrup, ass!" whispered Crooke.

Crooke saw that Racke was doing their joint cause no good. His tone in speaking of "the honour of the Form" was such as to suggest that he regarded any such sentiment as humbug. No doubt it seemed so to him. But it did not seem so to most of those present.

Racke paid no heed to the warning. His pallid, sneering face was an offence to almost all who saw as he awaited Tom's answer.

"That's so," said Tom curtly.

"Well, as you've decided that, why on earth don't you go on to punish us? Mind, I don't admit your right to punish. I don't admit that we've done anything that concerns any of you. But what's the use of this silly farce of a trial, anyway? You say we're guilty. Nothin' we say will make any difference."

"Not jolly well likely!" said Digby fervently.

"But you want to try us, all the same. For your amusement, I take it. But I don't care about providin' you with amusement. That's not what I came to St. Jim's for."

"What did you come for?" asked Grundy hotly. "That's what beats me. Nobody here wants you, you smoky blackguard, and——"

"It's not exactly for amusment, Racke," said Tom, still very quiet and determined. "I don't suppose I can make you understand; but there are a lot of us who feel very strongly about what you've been doing. If it was known outside it would let St. Jim's down horribly. We see, if you don't, that at a time like this people who are too old or too young to fight ought to help in any way they can. One way is to economise grub, and we are told that it's pretty nearly the most important way of all."

"We don't like food-hogs anywhere," added Blake, as Tom paused. "But we shouldn't butt in where it wasn't our bizney. This is. There isn't going to be any food-hogging at St. Jim's, if we can help it!"

"As for trying you, I don't know that there is much need for it, come to that," said George Figgins bluntly. "No room for doubt, anyway. But it's the St. Jim's way of doing things, and I'm dashed if we're going to upset it for a rotten outsider like you, Racke!"

"Oh, get on with your trial!" snarled Racke. "These weak-kneed wasters seem to think that they are going to get off easier for it, an' I'm hanged if I care! It may amuse me a little. St. Jim's, for all you may say about it, is a blessed dull hole, an' I wish myself out of it a score of times a day!"

CHAPTER 5.
Racke & Co. on Trial.

KANGAROO, as judge, took his place on the elevated seat occupied by Talbot as speaker when the St. Jim's Parliament was in session. Tom Merry, as clerk of the court, and Clive and Gore, as prosecuting and defending counsel, sat below him. Clive chose Levison as his junior; and Skimmy, after some slight argument, consented to join Gore, with special charge of the defence of Baggy Trimble.

Grundy had his desire to be in the front of things gratified by being appointed foreman of the jury, his colleagues being Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Digby, Herries, Dane, Glyn, Julian, Redfern, Gunn, Wilkins, Jimson, and Lumley-Lumley.

The accused were ranged up in a row where the commanding eye of the foreman of the jury could rake them fore and aft, so to speak. They did not appear to paying special attention to the said foreman; but that was not Grundy's fault. He frowned upon them with a magisterial air that would have done credit to Mr. Ratcliff at his sternest.

Baggy Trimble would have stood apart from the rest had he been allowed to do so. But it appeared that he was to be treated as a criminal still, although he had promised to tell all that he knew about his fellow-transgressors.

It seemed to Baggy grossly unfair. He had not been quite sure about receiving a reward, but he had at least counted on escaping punishment.

Percy Mellish felt in the lapel of his coat, but could not find what he wanted there. Baggy was between him and Chowle. The New House fellow, grinning spitefully, passed a pin behind Baggy's fat back to Mellish. Those two were more bitter against Baggy than against anyone else in the assembly.

"Prisoners at the bar," began Tom, "you are charged with food-hogging. That may not be the legal term, but everybody here understands it, which they might not do if it was put in law language. You are charged with having, on several occasions, within these premises, and possibly elsewhere, grossly exceeded the limitations as to food imposed by authority in the national interest. Do you plead 'Guilty' or 'Not guilty'?"

"Not guilty!" muttered three or four of the seven.

"But Racke kept a stubborn silence.

"We will accept the plea of 'Not guilty' as being offered by all the prisoners," said Kangaroo.

"There's one rotter who hasn't spoken," said Grundy. "That rotter ought to be made to speak!"

And he fixed upon Racke a look of terrible sternness.

"No need to force Racke to tell lies, Grundy," remarked Lowther. "It may be a sign of grace in him that he tacitly admits his guilt. First time I've ever known him to miss the chance of telling a whopper!"

"Silence in court!" rapped out Figgy, who was acting as usher.

"Yowwww! Yaroooooh!" roared Baggy.

"The pangs of conscience are beginning to work in one of the prisoners," said the irrepressible Lowther.

"You silly ass, Lowther!" burbled Baggy, in indignation at such a charge. "It wasn't conscience! I haven't—I mean I was stabbed!"

"Stabbed?" repeated Tom Merry wonderingly.

"Yes! Some beast stabbed me in the leg—at least, the knife went through my trousers! I can feel the blood running down!"

Baggy's tones were positively tragic. But no one else seemed to take the matter tragically. It was difficult to imagine anyone but a pork-butcher without a proper sense of duty to his customers wanting to assassinate Baggy, as Lowther pointed out to Manners.

"Turn round, you porpoise!" snapped Figgins.

Baggy turned promptly. He screwed his neck round at the same time, trying to see the damage. Mellish took advantage of the attention concentrated upon Baggy to show Chowle, inside a half-closed hand, a pin with a slightly reddened point.

Chowle grinned maliciously. The pin would have been redder if he had used it. But Mellish had no very strong strain of cruelty in him.

"There's no sign that you've been hurt," said Figgins severely. "It's my opinion that you were merely wasting the time of the court."

"I was stabbed, I tell you! I suppose I know, don't I? I'm not jolly well going to stand here to have beasts sticking knives into me from behind, so don't you think it!"

"What's that in your hand, Mellish?" asked Clifton Dane.

Mellish dropped the pin as if it had been red-hot, and held up both hands to show his perfect innocence.

"Nothing, Dane!" he said.

But the sharp eyes of Kerr spotted the pin.

"Here's the deadly weapon that stabbed Baggy!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But there's blood on it," said Owen. "Whoever jabbed that into Baggy must have jabbed it hard. It was you, Mellish, I'm sure."

"A pin isn't going to do Baggy any damage," Figgins said. "Don't be soft, Owen! But you'd better be careful, Mellish!"

"Interestin' scientific experiment, I call it!" drawled Cardew. "It proves that there really is human blood in Trimble—at least, I suppose it's human. I should never have thought a pin would reach to it, though. Is it a hatpin, Kerr?"

Baggy, much to his relief, was allowed to stand apart from the rest after that.

Clive opened the case for the prosecution. His first witness was Lowther, who testified at length to having seen one of the food-hogging banquets through a knot-hole in one of the boards of the barn's floor. He wanted to point out the hole; but the learned judge decided that this was not necessary. So Lowther contented himself by indicating the eye with which he had seen it—the left.

"There is another witness whom I might call," said Clive. "He saw more than the very talkative gentleman who has just given us his evidence. But I do not propose to call him, for two reasons. One is that I understand he was put on oath not to divulge the secret, and though an oath forced from a chap when other chaps have got him down—seven of them to one—doesn't count for much, still—well, there you are, you know! The other reason is that if he is called to give evidence he would probably talk the hind-leg off every donkey in court, and as the Shell is very strongly represented here—well, nuff said!"

"Too much!" snapped the learned judge, while the Fourth cackled.

Clive then called Cardew, who deposed to what he and Levison had seen through the window of the room at the Hollies.

"This evidence—given in a terse and businesslike manner which does credit to the Form to which the witness belongs—

in strong contrast to the wordy and rambling depositions of the witness from the Shell——"

"That sort of thing doesn't go!" said the judge hotly.

"I should think not!" snapped Lowther.

"I thought a court of justice was a place where the truth was to be told," said Clive demurely.

"Then you are more innocent than you ought to be at your age!" replied Lowther. "The barristers on both sides do all they know how to show that there really isn't any difference worth mentioning between white and black; the witnesses——"

"That's enough, Lowther!" rapped out the learned judge. "Ours is a different sort of court from that; and if I catch any counsel trying to prove black white he'll hear from me in a manner he won't like!"

"I, my lud, shall certainly not attempt that process," replied Clive. "The absolute blackness——"

"Nigritude!" suggested Lowther.

"I'm talking the English language, my friend! The absolute blackness of the prisoners at the bar is a thing fully established in my mind, as, I trust, it will be in the minds of all before I have finished."

"It is already. No occasion for so much cackle, you know, Clive!" Grundy said reprovingly.

Cardew stood down, and the usher asked the Hon Walter Adolphus D'Arcy to take his stand in the witness-box.

"Not so much of your Adolphus, Figgy!" said Wally. "I don't like it!"

"Your name," said Clive, grinning, "is Walter Adolphus D'Arcy, known by courtesy as——"

"Be a jolly sight more like courtesy if you cut out the Honourable and the Adolphus, and got on with the washing!" snapped the Third Form leader.

A snigger heard at this moment seemed to Frank Levison very like Reggie Manners. It was not from inside the barn, though; Reggie was not there. The door was closed against intruders—especially the Third, who had manifested a strong desire to be present.

A few questions from Clive elicited from Wally all that needed telling about the visit to the Hollies which he and Frank had made. Then Manners was called to tell of his watching the place, of his seeing Racke come to it, of hearing him speak to the tenant, and of the examination of Mr. Berry's packages by the six juniors on his way home across Wayland Moor.

Racke's scowl grew blacker and blacker as the facts were brought out. He had not imagined that half as much as this was known. The case was complete enough for a real court of law, although some of the methods by which evidence had been obtained were highly illegal.

"Such is the evidence I propose to offer, my lud," said Clive, with a bow to the learned judge. "I think it is clear enough even for the extremely limited intelligence which is so well known to be a prominent characteristic of the Shell. I will go further—I will say that not only must it be conclusive to you—and that is saying much—but that I do honestly and sincerely believe that the dense brain of the foreman of the jury has grasped at least the main part of it. More than that——"

"You'd better not say!" snapped the judge.

"My hat I'll slay you for that, Clive!" gasped Grundy.

"He understands again! A miracle has happened! All right, old sport! I want another go at you, though I dare say you'll lick me again!"

"Counsel for the defence will now address the court!" said Judge Noble.

Gore rose.

"I'm supposed to be counsel for the defence," he said. "Well, all I've got to say is that I've nothing at all to say! There isn't anything to be said, that I can see. There they are—as measly a lot of rotten food-hoggers as you could find anywhere! Look at them! Think I'm going to waste my breath defending that gang? Not jolly well likely!"

"You cast your clients upon the mercy of the court, then?" asked Kangaroo, with a grin that did not look very judicial.

"If you like. But I hope the court won't have any mercy on them, and I don't see why it should!"

And George Gore sat down, amid howls of applause. His "defence" had undoubtedly hit the popular taste.

Skimpole arose.

"Got anything to say, Skimmy?" snapped the judge.

"An unpleasant duty has been thrust upon me, in no sense with my approval," began the philosopher of the Shell. "I have been deputed to conduct the defence of the accused Trimble, and——"

"Oh, that reminds me—I forgot to call Baggy!" said Clive.

"It is now too late to call any more witnesses for the prosecution," said the judge.

"Besides which, we don't want Baggy as a witness. He's told us all he knows," added the clerk of the court.

"But he would be much funnier than Skimmy," pleaded Lowther. "Let's have Baggy, and let Skimmy slide. A jellyfish in the witness-box——"

"There's no neccssity for Baggy's evidence," pronounced the judge. "It's justice we are after, not law, which isn't always the same thing—not by long odds. Skimmy must cut it short."

"He can't," said Kerr. "Who ever heard of old Skimmy's cutting it short?"

"Well, he must be heard," Kangaroo said. "Skimmy's a chap with original views. He may find something to be said for Trimble. I couldn't, I don't mind owning that. I never could see any redeeming quality in the podgy image. But perhaps Skimmy does."

Everyone looked at Baggy. He had shifted his place again, but no one noticed that he was now quite close to the door. The door was shut; but there was clearance enough to get it open by a sudden push, and Baggy, desperately meditating escape, had crept closer and closer to it.

He was relieved to hear that his evidence would not be wanted, but he did not at all like the learned judge's remarks. They struck him as personal.

"Oh, really, Noble——" he began.

"I shall have you before me for contempt of court after the present proceedings are at an end if you address me again with that gross familiarity, prisoner!" said the judge sharply. "Except to be heard in his own defence, an accused person must not lift up his voice in court; and anything which a judge chooses to say about such a person is correct—you can take that from me."

"In the times of the ancient Romans, from whom——"

So Skimmy began, but a chorus of groans interrupted the flow of his eloquence.

"Try lower down," suggested Kerr. "Anno Domini, anyway, not B.C.!"

"Start us with King John, Skimmy," said Cardew. "Merry old King John, an' Habeas Corpus, an' all that, y'know! Cæsar an' Cicero really are——"

"King John signed Magna Charta, not the Habeas Corpus Act, duffer!" chipped in Lawrence.

"Did he? But I dare say he'd have signed the other thing if they'd put it under his nose, dear boy. He was like that, you know—up to any low dodge."

"From whom we have derived much of our jurisprudence," went on Skimmy, as soon as he could make his voice heard again above the din.

"May I ask the permission of his lordship to have that last word spelt out to me?" broke in Cardew, looking puzzled. "I wish to look it up in the dictionary. Repairs to my sadly-neglected education appear eminently desirable. Your pardon, learned counsel! As you were saying, in the times of the ancient Hottentots——"

"Not at all! I——"

"Oh, make the silly ass shut up, Noble!" growled Grundy.

"Yes, make him dry up! We've had enough, Skimmy——"

"And a bit over!"

"Yaas, wathah! You are weally too dwy, deah boy, with your ancient Womans an'——"

But the rest of what Arthur Augustus had to say was lost in the howling of the crowd. Sad to relate, no one seemed to want to hear Skimmy.

He tried hard to make himself heard. He gesticulated in a manner that no one could understand. He seemed to be pointing to the door, though why he should point to the door was a mystery. The eyes of the rest were elsewhere, and they saw nothing suspicious.

"You'll have to sit down, Skimmy," said Talbot, touching him on the shoulder. "It's no go! They don't want to hear about the Romans. Can't see myself what Cæsar and the rest of them have to do with the case."

Talbot spoke right into Skimmy's ear, and Skimmy, in return, spoke right into Talbot's. What he said was more interesting than anything about the Roman system of law.

"Silence in court!" yelled Talbot at the top of his voice, and in the sudden hush that fell Skimmy got his chance to speak.

"I was merely about to draw your attention to the fact that the prisoner Trimble was attempting to escape," he said mildly.

CHAPTER 6.
Shut In.

"THE door's fastened! I—I mean, I—I never tried to get out! Skimmy's telling lies!" howled Baggy.

"Well, wasn't that what you wanted the chap who defended you to do?" asked Lowther blandly. "The truth wouldn't suit you, you know, Baggy."

But no one thought it the time for Lowther's humour.

Half a dozen fellows were pushing their hardest at the door. But it resisted all their efforts.

"The windows—quick!" shouted Tom.

But it was too late. The windows of Pepper's barn were not in the least like those of a house. There was no glass in them. They were simply apertures in the wooden uppor half of the building, with flaps to fit over them. Those flaps opened outwards, and were fastened inside with big wooden buttons.

Just as Tom spoke the flaps came down with a clatter. Next moment there was a scramble to get at them. Fellows got on the shoulders of others, and strove to push the heavy flaps back.

But it was too late!

Those outside had done their work thoroughly. No amount of pushing would stir the things.

The door was locked outside, and no one inside had a key. Exit by the store-

house underneath was impossible, for the door of that was locked on the outside.

The whole of two Forms, with two members of another Form, were prisoners, at the mercy of the enemy outside.

But who were the enemy?

"Grammar School bounders, I'll bet!" said Figgins.

"Sure to be," agreed Tom.

But Frank Levison did not think so.

He took Wally aside, out of hearing of the rest.

"It's Reggie and those kids, Wally," he said. "I heard Reggie's sniggering outside a few minutes ago."

"My hat! The young rotters will catch it hot for this!" answered Wally.

"Well, I don't see us telling the rest of these fellows," said Frank. "After all, it's a bit of a score for the Third, in a way. They didn't fancy being kept out, and they've done this to show the old fogies what they think about it."

"Shouldn't have thought there'd have been brains enough among them without us," Wally said.

"Well, it wasn't Reggie's whoeze, I'm jolly sure, though he'll make out it was."

"Whose, then?"

"Piggott's, I should say. He's a cunning beggar, and Reggie's been about with him this last day or two."

"Look at Tommy and the rest pushing at the giddy windows!" said Wally, not quite decided yet whether to applaud this as a score for the Form, or to be angry because he was numbered among the victims of the joke.

"I don't fancy they'll do anything that way," Frank replied. "I think I know how the flaps are fastened."

"How, then?"

"With some of those hop-poles from the next field. Stick one end well into the ground—it's soft after the rain we've had—and the other up against the flap. Then the more the chaps inside push, the firmer the thing gets wedged—unless it slips. And I don't think they'd slip."

"Crumbs, Franky, you aren't any duffer, I must say!"

"Did you ever think I was, Wally?"

"They'll have to let us out soon."

"Not so giddy sure of that! I fancy we shall miss dinner, anyway. And there'll be a row, you bet! Railton's away, and Linton's ill, and Lathom's got some special job on that takes up all his spare time. Do you see what that means? Old Selby's boss of the show in our House for the next few days."

"Jingo! There won't be half a row!"

Racke & Co. stood sullenly apart while the rest did all they knew—but they didn't know anything, unluckily, and all the guesses they made proved unavailing—to get out.

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"By Jove, we shall be late for dinner if we aren't out in about half a sec!" he said.

"We shall be late, anyway," said Blake. "What's worrying me is whether we sha'n't be so late that we shall miss it altogether."

"I shall insist upon having mine," Grundy said majestically. "I should like to see them take my dinner away from me!"

"That's queer, Grundy, for seeing them take mine away from me wouldn't please me a scrap!" grinned Kerr.

"Look here, if it's coming to that, let's make it pax with the bounders outside, whoever they are, and get out!" Fatty Wynn said anxiously.

"I'm hungry! I feel quite faint! I can't stand much more of this," burbled Baggy. "I say, Tom Merry, couldn't you or—or somebody get out through the roof or something? It's your fault we're here; and I don't see why we should go without our grub—such as it is, and precious little of it—because you chose to play at——"

"Boost Baggy up to the roof, and butt his head against it till it gives!" suggested Manners.

"Good wheeze! Come along, Baggy!" cried Redfern.

"We shall weally have to give in, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus pathetically. "I wegwet to say that, not feelin' vewy peckish at bwekkah I——"

"Gay!" shouted Tom, in desperation. "Gay, you bounder!"

No answer.

Frank and Wally grinned. They were pretty sure that the Grammarians had had no hand in this.

"Gay! Gordon Gay! Monkey!" yelled a score of voices.

Still no answer.

"They wouldn't be there," said Blake. "It's their dinner-time as well as ours, of course. They've shut us in and done a bunk!"

Faces grew long as it dawned upon the crowd that there was good reason to suppose this correct. It was not in the least likely that those who had played this trick intended to forgo their own dinners.

"Well, I mean to have my grub, whatever time I get in," said Grundy determinedly.

"You mean out, not in, don't you, old top?" inquired Cardew.

"I mean what I say—in—back to the school. So, as there's no question about that——"

"Grundy having settled it, and no one else's opinion mattering!" murmured Lowther.

"Let's get on with some of the sports events," Grundy finished.

"What can we do in this darkness?" asked Roylance.

"I was going to suggest that you worked off that bout of yours with Noble," replied Grundy. "But it is a bit dark in here, certainly. If we could only get one of the windows open——"

"We could get out!" snapped Manners.

"So we could, that's true enough," answered Grundy thoughtfully. "Needn't lose your temper about it, though, Manners. Keep calm, you know—nothing like keeping calm!"

"I believe there's some grub down below," said Baggy.

Fatty Wynn pricked up his ears.

"Do you mean some of Racke's food-hoard?" he asked. "I say, you chaps, in an ordinary way I shouldn't be on for necking any of that—you all know I shouldn't. But as it is——"

"As it is," said Tom, "St. Jim's is already at dinner, and goodness knows when we are going to get out of this! I'm not very keen on sharing a food-hoard; but I don't suppose anything there may be will make a gorge for our number. So——"

"If there's anythin' down there—I don't say there is, an' I don't say there's not—it's mine; an' I decline to allow anyone here as much as a mouthful!" snarled Racke.

Grundy put a big fist within the fraction of an inch of Racke's nose.

"See that?" he growled. "You shut up, or you'll feel it!"

"Take it away!" said Racke nastily. "I don't like the smell of it."

"Wha-a-at?"

The outraged dignity of the great George Alfred was immense.

"Grundy's fist can't be very dirty," remarked Monty Lowther. "I saw him washing his hands only the day before yesterday—or it may have been the day before that."

Grundy whipped round, to glare at Lowther.

"You saw me—what?" he yelled.

"Pardon! I thought I saw you, that was all. I may have been mistaken. If you want to assure me that you never do wash them, I am quite prepared to believe it. But it's a dirty habit to get into, old man, and no credit to the Shell!"

"You—you——"

"Come and give us a hand with this board, Grundy!" called Wilkins. "You and Noble are the strongest chaps here, and he can't do it."

"I decline to allow anything down there to be touched!" Racke snarled.

"A little more gratitude would not be out of place, Racke," said Cardew sadly. "Seein' that this conversazione was more for your benefit than——"

"Oh, you go to Bath, you sneerin' puppy!"

"I must admit that I should be glad to go anywhere out of here. But the polished charms of your conversation do at least tend to mitigate the boredom, Racke."

The board was wrenched up, and Ernest Levison and Wilkins dropped into the storehouse below.

"Hurray! Two tins of biscuits!" called Levison.

"And three of tongue!" added Wilkins gleefully.

"There's a whole ham! My hat, didn't those sweeps go it!"

Racke gritted his teeth. He was surprised to hear that there was so much stuff there. But he remembered that his henchman, Berrymore, had expressed fears as to keeping it at the Hollies after the discoveries made by the rival detectives. Doubtless he had removed it hither in order to be safer.

"Tins of lobster! More biscuits—plain ones, so they'll go all right with the meat," announced Levison.

"Caviare—who wants that stuff?" added Wilkins. "Sardines—that's better, though it licks me that Racke & Co. wanted anything so common as sardines. That's about all, I think."

The stuff was passed up, and pocket-knives got to work upon it. Among so many, it was not at all likely to provide rations in excess of those allowed. But a ham and three tins of tongue can be cut up so as to provide a fair scrap each for a good many, and the carvers did their best to be fair.

"Do the rotters get any?" asked Herries.

"They do not!" answered Tom grimly.

"Oh, let 'em have the caviare!" said Lowther.

Gunn offered the tin containing the sturgeon roe to Racke. Racke took it, and returned it at once—into Gunn's face.

"My hat! Put your fists up, you cad!" howled Gunn.

"Go it, Gunny! Give him beans!" roared Grundy.

"Open this door at once!" sounded the harsh voice of Mr. Ratcliff from outside.

"Yes; open it at once—do you hear?" thundered Mr. Selby.

"Bai Jove——"

"My only sainted aunt, this looks healthy!" groaned Tom.

CHAPTER 7.
Released and Gated.

"WILL—you—open—this—door?" howled the New House master.

"We can't, sir!" answered Tom Merry. "We're locked in!"

"Absurd! Nonsense!" snorted Mr. Selby.

"Are you there, Figgins?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir."

"Then why did you not answer me?"

"My hat! What is the matter with the silly old idiot?" groaned Figgy to those near him.

Aloud he said meekly:

"Merry answered you, sir. It would have been rude for me to shout him down."

At that Mr. Ratcliff only grunted. Possibly he was aware that Figgy had not always any great objection to trying to shout Tom Merry down.

"Where is the key of this door?" snapped Mr. Selby. "You say that you have been locked in. From that I deduce that you have no key inside."

"Some deducer, too!" murmured Cardew. "Who'd have thought it of him?"

"I do not believe a word of their story, Mr. Selby!" said the New House master acidly.

"It's true, sir!" shouted Figgins. "'Tisn't likely we should lock ourselves in and miss dinner!"

"For once I am in agreement with you, Mr. Ratcliff," said the master of the Third.

Messrs Ratcliff and Selby had been for some time past on the worst possible terms. They could not meet without glaring at one another, and on the way to the barn they had not spoken half a dozen words. But they were ready to join forces against the common enemy—boy!

"I think if you could look and see what's keeping us from opening the windows we might be able to get out!" called Talbot through the door.

"Use the key that I am sure you have!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"We have no key, sir," Talbot replied.

"Ugh!" grunted Mr. Selby disbelievingly.

But a minute or so later he called to them to try the window nearest the door. Frank Levison had guessed aright. It had been quite easy for Mr. Selby to remove the obstructing pole by pushing it to one side; but all the pushing straight against it had only wedged it the more tightly.

"No, you will not come out of the window!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I insist upon having the door opened!"

"Really, Ratcliff——"

"My conviction remains unshaken, Mr. Selby!"

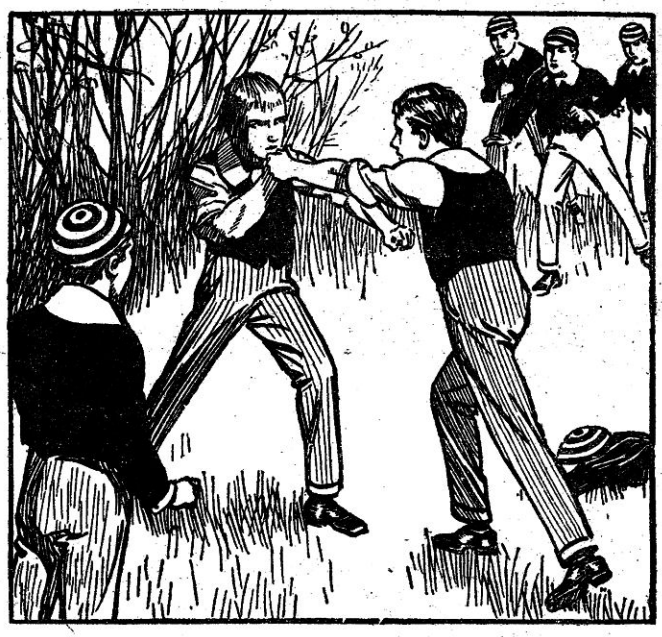
The master of the Third stooped to pick up something. Tom and Figgy and Blake, all at the window, saw that it was a key. It had lain on a ledge of brickwork near the bottom of the door.

"I have little doubt that they have a key, but here is one. Let me see if it fits, will you, Mr. Ratcliff?"

The New House master ungraciously moved aside. The key fitted.

The prisoners would have flocked out, but the two masters barred their way, and almost as with one voice commanded them to stay were they were.

"Which is the most like a vulture?" whispered Cardew to Clive.



In dead earnest!
(See Chapter 10.)

"Both of them!" growled the South African junior.

"What have you been eating?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff, perceiving crumbs among the dust.

"Ah! This explains it!" rumbled Mr. Selby. "A disgraceful food orgy! No wonder they did not want their dinners!"

"Excuse me, sir, but that's a mistake," Tom said. "We do want our dinners."

"You are not in the very least likely to have that want gratified, after the evidence we have seen of your activities here!" snorted Mr. Selby. "No one present will dine to-day in the House of which I am in charge!"

"Nor in my House!" sniffed Mr. Ratcliff. "Do you see that hambone, Mr. Selby?"

"I assure you, sir, we have not been eating that!" put in Lowther, with false meekness.

"I see it, Mr. Ratcliff! I also see several tins which have presumably held meat."

"Another deduction!" muttered Cardew. "Sharp of him to twig that it wasn't dubbin or soft soap—eh, Clive?"

"Where was this food procured?" asked Mr. Ratcliff sternly.

The juniors looked at one another. This was decidedly awkward.

They could not explain without bringing Racko & Co. into it, and no one there had any mind to do that. It was all very well to threaten the food-hogs with the Head or Mr. Railton, but it was quite another matter to give them away to these two tyrants.

Moreover, it would not in the least help to clear the rest. It was unlikely that Messrs. Ratcliff and Selby would distinguish between the guilt of a few fellows who hid themselves away to gorge forbidden quantities of food and the action of many in dividing what they had found to provide a few mouthfuls for each in the absence of dinner.

"Do you hear me, Merry?" demanded the New House master.

"I can't explain, sir," replied Tom.

"Figgins!"

"I've nothing to say, sir."

"Kerr!"

"Same here, sir."

"Talbot!"

"I might point out, if you will allow me, sir, that a ham, a few tins of tongue, biscuits, and the other things we have had don't go far among the number of fellows there are here," said Talbot quietly. "The accusation of a disgraceful food orgy is certainly not justified."

"I used no such words, though I do not say that they are not a correct statement of the case."

"I took that to be your meaning, sir," Talbot said. "The words were Mr. Selby's. I think I may say for the rest that we all resent them!"

"Perhaps you would like me to apologise?" sneered the Third Form master.

"I do not think that it would be out of place, sir," was Talbot's urbane reply.

Talbot made an excellent spokesman at such a time as this. He spoke much as one man might speak to another. But Arthur Augustus evidently thought that his methods could be improved upon.

"I considah, Mr. Selby, that if you are a gentleman——"

"What!" roared the furious master.

"Pardon me. I should have worded it diffewently. As you are a gentleman——"

"Silence!"

"Second thoughts are not best there, D'Arcy," spoke Cardew in the ear of the swell of St. Jim's. "Surely you haven't any doubt that Selby is not, never was, an' never will be a gentleman?"

"Yaas; but——"

"Ah, I perceive two of my flock here!" said Mr. Selby, rubbing his hands together. "Come forward! This is an addition to the offence of which you older boys have been guilty. Not content with your own evil-doing, you must

needs draw into it mere children like Levison minor and D'Arcy minor! Are not their brothers ashamed of this?"

"I'm not!" said Ernest Levison uncompromisingly.

"If you will only heah weason, Mr. Selbay——"

"I wish to hear nothing from you, D'Arcy major!"

Mr. Selby had grabbed Frank and Wally by their collars. He seemed to meditate knocking their heads together. But the eyes of threescore juniors were upon him, and it may be that their steady stare put a stopper on his kindly intentions.

"Will you allow me to get a word in, Mr. Selby?" asked Mr. Ratcliff in his most acid tones.

"Oh, certainly! Most certainly! I was not aware——"

"Racke, can you explain this?" inquired the New House master, turning his back rudely on his colleague.

"I have only to say, sir, that I have had no food whatever here," replied Racke sullenly.

"Is that true?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff, wheeling round on the rest.

"Racke had none of this," replied Tom Merry. "And neither had Clampe, Scrope, Crooke, Chowle, and Mollish."

"And me! Don't forget me, Tom Merry!" whined Baggy.

"I'm not forgetting you, but I'm telling the truth," answered Tom.

Baggy groaned. He had managed to snatch a chunk of ham and a few biscuits, the merest snack, hardly a mouthful to him. And for that he was to be classed among the goats instead of among the sheep!

For it was evident that Mr. Ratcliff, at least, was inclined to treat the accused more leniently than the judge, the counsel, the jury, or the audience. Of course he knew nothing about the trial, and it was not likely that he would hear anything.

"Explain this, Merry!"

"Sorry, sir, but I'm afraid I can't."

"Were the boys you mention here against their wills?"

That was rather a nasty poser, but Tom dealt with it as frankly as he could.

"In a sense, yes, sir. They did not want to be here, that is."

"Racke, Crooke, Clampe, be good enough to explain this, one of you."

But none of the three answered. They had no more desire to explain than Tom had.

"Mr. Selby, do you agree with me that the six boys whom Merry has mentioned may be left out of any punishment which we decide to inflict upon the rest?" asked Mr. Ratcliff.

Neither of the masters liked Racke & Co. But then they liked no boy. They had no more objection to the black sheep than to the rest, perhaps less than they had to some of the others. And both saw that, whatever the matter afoot in the barn might have been, there had been two opposing parties in it, and that it would not please the bigger party to see the smaller one exempted.

"On the whole, yes, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Third Form-master.

He spoke as though agreeing with Mr. Ratcliff hurt him. But he agreed, nevertheless.

"Very well! You six may go. If there is any dinner left, you may share in it. Trimble, do I understand that you claim to be a victim of tyranny also?"

Racke & Co. waited to hear what Baggy would say. He was quite capable of telling things that would blow them sky-high, so to speak.

Baggy was trembling with eagerness and greed. He felt an awful emptiness within, and would have stopped at little to gratify his cravings.

But as he opened his mouth to speak, a strong hand pressed the back of his neck. Kangaroo was just behind him, and Kangaroo had no mind to let Baggy give away what others had chosen to conceal at their own cost.

"Yow!" howled Baggy. The hand dropped. If the hint was not enough, Harry Noble would attend to Baggy later.

"What is the matter? Did anyone——"

"It was a pain, sir; a—a sudden pain! I had one a little while ago. I—I think it's through being half starved, sir!"

"That is not to the point. You certainly have no appearance of being half starved! Do you complain?"

"Nunno, sir! Not of any of the fellows, sir! Only of the grub—I mean the food, sir! It's bad enough, any way; but it's worse when a chap doesn't get any!"

Mr. Ratcliff snorted, and Mr. Selby did likewise, apparently to show that he could snort as loudly as his colleague. Both had finished with Baggy Trimble, it seemed.

"The boys in my House concerned in this disgraceful business will be gated for a week, and will each write two hundred lines of Homer, with all the accents!" grated Mr. Ratcliff.

"Those in my House—that is to say, in the School House—will also be gated for a week, and will write five hundred lines of Virgil each!" thundered Mr. Selby. "All but the two in my Form, that is. I shall deal specially with them later."

Then the two masters stalked off. They did not walk together. Mr. Ratcliff went first, and Mr. Selby followed, with Wally and Frank, to whom he had rapped out a sour command, at his heels.

"Those two are the giddy outside edge!" said Jack Blake.

And all agreed.

CHAPTER 8.

In the Third Form Room.

"I DON'T think much of a caning instead of a dinner," said Wally.

Frank shrugged his shoulders, which were smarting, for Mr. Selby had not confined himself to strokes across the hands of the two young criminals. Their refusal to say anything that would serve to explain the barn mystery had infuriated him, and he had laid on unmercifully.

"He didn't fetch a howl out of us, anyway, the old beast!" said Frank. "You looked as if you wouldn't let out a yell if he killed you, Wally!"

"So did you, Franky! And we weren't going to, either—not if we could keep them in, anyway."

"He nearly fetched me with that last one. I felt as if the cane was red-hot."

"Poor old kid! You never showed it, anyway. What a rotten sneak old Selby must have been when he was a boy!"

"Reggie landed us in a nice mess there," said Frank.

But he did not speak bitterly.

"Yes, the young cad!" growled Wally. "I'll get even with him!"

"I think we ought to do that some way. But, of course, it wasn't Reggie alone—shouldn't wonder if a good many of them were in it. And we can't possibly tell the other chaps who did it. Wonder whether they'll ever find out?"

"They'll not hear it from me," Wally answered. "After all, a chap's Form is a chap's Form, however big a set of rotters they may be. But I don't say I sha'n't let Master Reggie think that I'm going to tell."

"I wouldn't, Wally! You tried a game something like that once before, and it didn't pay a little bit."

"This is different," replied Wally obstinately.

At this moment the fellows began to troop out from the dining-hall.

Reggie Manners grinned as he saw the two. It was not entirely a friendly grin, but it was not entirely hostile, either.

To pose as leader of the Third had suited Reggie, and he felt much bucked at the success of his scheme—which was really the scheme of Reuben Piggott, as Frank had guessed. Manners minor was not much in the way of looking at things from the point of view of the other fellow, and he did not yet know that Wally and Frank had had a severe caning as well as not having dinner.

"Hallo, kids!" he said cheerily. "Who scored this time?"

"Just you come somewhere quiet with me, and I'll show you!" said Wally hotly.

"Thought you weren't willing to fight me?"

"Fight you be blessed! I mean to give you a thundering good hiding! I don't fight worms like you!"

Reggie flushed, and his hands clenched.

"A worm, am I?" he retorted. "Then there's a lot more worms about—that's all! Pretty near everyone in the Third was in it!"

"Were you, Hobbs?" snapped Wally.

"Yes; I was, then! And Curly and Jimmy, too. I think Frayne was about the only chap who wouldn't lend a hand. We locked him up to make him safe."

"You rotters!"

"It's all very well, Wally; but we're fed up with you and your pals in the Fourth and Shell! We wouldn't have minded if they'd let us in to hear the trial, but——"

"They didn't want a lot of snivelling kids!" snapped Wally.

"Well, they had you and Levison," answered Hobbs.

"Do you mean that we are snivelling kids?"

"As much as we are, young D'Arcy!"

"Hear, hear, Hobby!"

"That's the way to talk to him!" said Reggie. "But you've said enough, Hobbs. I'll do the rest of the talking."

"I think I'd better do a little," said Wally, slowly and with emphasis. "Tom Merry and the rest thought it was the Grammar School bounders who locked them in. They'd be interested to know who it really was!"

"Are you going to sneak? Is that what you mean?" yelled Reggie.

"If you're going to shout like that there won't be much need. But should you call it sneaking?"

"Well, I shouldn't—not exactly," replied Hobbs honestly. "You see, young Manners, they were in it with the rest; and if they've found out who did the trick there ain't much reason why they shouldn't tell the rest, not that I can see. That is, if they feel like it. And I don't suppose they care much about the Third now that they've been taken up by those chaps!"

"I haven't made up my mind yet," said Wally, not quite truthfully. "Of course, I shouldn't like to get that kid Manners into a row with his brother, after all Manners major has done for him."

Reggie's look, at that taunt, was vicious enough for Racke. All that was worst in him was uppermost. Now and again there did come into his mind the glimmering of a notion that he was not as grateful to his brother Harry as he ought to be. But it was never much more than a glimmer; and that anyone else should suggest such a thing seemed to Reggie the very height of offensiveness.

"Cave! Here's Selby!" hissed Butt.

Mr. Selby favoured the two whom he had so lately caned with a very black look as he passed them.

He turned when he had got a few yards away.

"The Third will assemble for classes at once!" he snapped. Then he stalked on to the Form-room.

"Crumbs! That's pretty thick!" said Willersby.

"He cu-cu-can't mum-mum-make us!" stammered Leggett.

"I'm not going to risk finding out whether he can, for one," answered Wally. "Had enough of the old Hun for one day. And, as Franky and I haven't had more than a scrap for dinner, we may just as well be in classes as running about and getting more peckish, I reckon."

And Wally and Frank led the way to the Form-room, followed by all the rest. There was much muttering and screwing up of faces; but it was of no use to rebel. Mr. Selby had the whip-hand.

He set them a subject for essay writing, and told them that he should expect at least three hundred words from each, as the hours for the afternoon were longer, and they would have thirty minutes more than usual for their "auctorial efforts."

Then he settled himself down for a comfortable hour's reading at his desk.

To most of the Third the task of writing three hundred words about anything whatever, let alone "The daily life of the Romans in the time of Julius Cæsar," was an appalling one. But Frank Levison took rather more interest in the ancient Romans than most of the Form, and he found it easy enough. It was not likely that he would get any credit for it. Mr. Selby had a way of discounting the merit of any work done by members of his Form upon whom he was specially down. But Frank did not want praise from the tyrant. What he wanted was a chance to take out his cherished book of records in the Shell v. Fourth competition, and gloat over it.

While Wally on one side of him, and Reggie Manners on the other, were still scratching away, presenting a picture in words of the ancient Romans which might have made Caius Julius Cæsar smile if he could have read it, but which was even better calculated to make Henry Selby, Esq., M.A., scowl, Frank got out the book, spread it open on the desk before him, and read everything in it over again with the utmost enjoyment.

It was quite a harmless amusement for the time he had to spare after doing rather more than the task set him. There was really no very good reason why Mr. Selby should object to it, though Frank had no doubt that he would object, if he happened to see. And there was certainly no good reason why Manners minor, looking up from his scrawled essay, should give vent to a very disdainful sniff.

Wally looked up at the sound of that sniff, and glared at Reggie.

"Rot!" said Reggie in a whisper.

And he pointed to the book with the end of his pen.

Frank flushed hotly.

"Don't be a cad, young Manners!" hissed Wally.

"Cad yourself!" retorted Reggie. "Yah, who sucks up to the old fogies? You've called them that often enough, but now——"

"Don't talk to the silly ass, Wally!" said Frank, putting his arm in such a position that it blocked Reggie's view of the open book.

"I don't want to talk to the kid, anyway," replied Wally.

"Done your tripe?" whispered Frank.

Reggie had turned away.

"Yes. It is tripe, too—not half! Never mind that, though. Let's have a look at the giddy book. My word, it's a credit to you, Franky!"

Their heads were bent together over the book of records when the harsh voice of Mr. Selby sounded.

"D'Arcy minor and Levison minor, come here at once, and bring with you whatever it is that you are so absorbed in. I am persuaded that it is nothing in any way connected with your work."

"Shove this at him!" whispered Wally.

It was a Roman history that he tried to thrust into Frank's hand. But Levison minor shook his head. He might not have minded the deceit, perhaps; but he knew that the pretence was too thin.

They marched up together. Some of the Third grinned. Wally's bluff had affected his usual popularity, and nearly all but Joe Frayne had some sympathy with the attitude taken up by Reggie Manners, with Piggot pulling the strings in the background.

Reggie himself grinned broadly. Piggott put his head down on the desk and sniggered into his sleeves.

Mr. Selby took the book. He was in one of his worst tempers, and his best tempers were really nothing to brag about. The bearing of the two displeased him. It was not more than an

hour ago since he had dealt with them most severely; yet they held their heads up, and were apparently not at all frightened.

"What is this rubbish?" snapped the master, after one scornful glance at Frank's beautifully ruled and neatly written entries.

"It isn't rubbish, sir!" protested Frank, stirred to wrath.

"It's the record of the Form sports, sir," Wally explained.

"I know of no Form sports which have received official authority," replied Mr. Selby. "Moreover, this—er—concoction professes to be an account of doings in which the Shell and Fourth are concerned. You two belong to neither of these Forms."

"We're on the committee for the sports, and Levison is secretary for them," explained Wally boldly.

Somebody giggled. Others grinned in derision. Mr. Selby snorted.

"Absurd! Preposterous!" he said. "I really do not know what this school is coming to! In any case, I apprehend that you will see the relevancy of the question as to what you were doing with this thing in the Form-room—eh?"

"We'd finished our essays, sir," replied Frank, "and we didn't think there was any harm in looking at it, as long as we kept quiet."

"Stuff and nonsense! Any excuse for wasting time. Hold out your hands, both of you!"

There were weals across the hands held out, and the cane stung horribly when it came down across them. But it was only one on each hand, which was less than they had expected, and they bore it unflinchingly.

"Go to your seats!" rapped out the master.

But they lingered. Wally had turned, but when he saw that Frank was not by his side he faced round again.

"What are you waiting for?" snapped Mr. Selby.

"The book, if you please, sir," answered Frank.

"You will certainly not have it! Such a request is sheer impudence! The book is confiscated. I shall probably burn it. I will not have time in classes wasted on such absurd trifles!"

"But you can't burn it, sir," said Frank, deadly pale, and speaking in low, tense tones.

"It isn't ours, you see, sir," Wally backed him up loyally.

"That is a matter of no importance in my eyes. Go to your seats!"

"It really belongs to Tom Merry and Blake and the rest of them, sir," pleaded Frank. "If you burn it there may be no end of trouble. The whole competition may be messed up, very likely!"

"The messing up—as you so graphically phrase it—of the whole competition would not strike me as in any sense a catastrophe, Levison," sneered the master. "I consider that far too much time and energy are expended here on futile games. Go!"

"But, sir, you can't—you wouldn't ——"

Frank's evident distress stirred Reggie to another giggle. But not everyone felt as Reggie did. Jameson, sitting next him, gave him a kick on the calf to express the fact that he differed.

"Go!"

"Will you cane us instead, sir?" asked Wally desperately.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy minor!"

Two stinging strokes fell across the smarting palm.

"Now yours, Levison!"

Frank looked quite relieved. He fancied Wally's alternative had been accepted. He took his two strokes almost with pleasure, so glad was he.

"Now, go!" thundered the angry master.

"But the book, sir?" asked Frank, with wide-open eyes.

Mr. Selby laughed harshly.

"I caned you again for your gross impertinence—your almost incredible insistence. You will not have the book back!"

Frank and Wally were boiling with indignation as they went back to their desks.

"Rough luck, old son!" murmured Jameson sympathetically.

But Reggie Manners grinned derisively in Frank's face.

CHAPTER 9.

The Three-Legged Race.

"I SAY, Wally, where's my young brother?" asked Ernest Levison, meeting D'Arcy minor and Joe Frayne on the playing-fields an hour or so after classes.

There was a sports events for that afternoon. It was not one of the highest importance, only the three-legged race, which had not been included in the programme without a good deal of argument. Some of the leading spirits thought the event too farcical. But many of the lesser lights favoured it, having no dignity to maintain; and, once it had been agreed upon, the entries simply poured in. After all, there were points to be picked up, and it was not worth while to let them be annexed by mere sitters belonging to the opposition; and, of course, the leaders of neither Form could count for certain upon sitters of their own romping in first.

So, if athletic prowess counted for any-

thing at all, the race was not likely to be won by a pair of nonentities, though many such pairs were entered for it. It was an open question, however, whether an athlete has a better chance than another fellow in a three-legged race.

"In sanny," said Wally gloomily.

"What! He was all right this mornmg. What on earth can be the matter with him?"

"Came over giddy and queer just before the end of classes," Wally answered. "He'll be all right tomorrow, I'm pretty sure, Levison. Don't you worry!"

"But there must have been some reason. You don't look too merry and bright yourself, kid. What's wrong?"

The kindness of Ernest Levison's tone brought a lump into Wally's throat. Wally was smarting under the bitterest sense of injustice, and Frank's collapse —due party to distress of mind, partly to the punishment he had received, and perhaps most of all to missing his dinner —had upset him.

"It's old Selby," said Joe Frayne. "If ever there was an old 'Un, Levison——"

Levison clenched his hands, and his eyes gleamed.

"Why can't he leave the kid alone," he said angrily. "Franky's not an angel; but there isn't a better kid anywhere, and he don't behave badly, on the whole."

"Selby's always down on him an' Wally!" said Joe.

"So he is on you, Joe!" growled Wally.

"A bit. But that's no odds."

"Are you coming, Levison?" yelled Clive.

Cardew had refused to take part in the three-legged race; but Clive and Levison were partners in it, and Levison had to hurry off now. His heart was not in the race, though. He was thinking of Frank.

Grundy was also an absentee from the race. His broken finger was pretty painful. A few others were standing down, including all the Conchies; but the entry was a big one.

"Grundy, old top," remarked Cardew, "you an' I ought to see some fun here, I fancy! The course is wide; but I'm not sure that it's wide enough for all that crowd. They'll be tumbling over each other quite prettily."

"You're a slacker, Cardew!" growled Grundy.

"Eh? I don't quite see it, dear boy."

"If you were in my Form——"

"But I wouldn't be seen dead in the same Form as you, Grundy!" broke in Cardew. And he walked away chuckling.

Grundy went off to tell Gunn and Wilkins exactly what they must do to win the race.

Tom Merry and Talbot, Manners and Lowther, Noble and Dane, Lucas and Walkley, Gibbons and Boulton, Glyn and Frere, Thompson and Jimson, were among the Shell pairs. Blake and Herries were being fastened together. D'Arcy and Digby were another couple. Figgy had paired off with Redfern; he was too tall to have a chance with Kerr. Kerr had insisted upon having Fatty as a partner. Someone had suggested Fatty and Baggy Trimble, and after that Fatty, who had not intended to show up at all, had regarded it as a small sacrifice to run with his chum. The idea of entering with Baggy had horrified him. But it was not likely that Fatty and Kerr would win.

Roylance and Smith minor, Owen and Lawrence, Mulvaney minor and Tompkins, were among the other Fourth Form pairs.

Mulvaney and Tompkins had been practising diligently, and were rumoured to show very good form.

In all at least twenty-five pairs lined up.

A three-legged race is not by any means an invariable event in school sports. When it does come off it is looked upon as a joke rather than an athletic contest. But this was something more than a mere joke. Shell and Fourth were even on points, and this event would give one side a lead for the time being. Hence everyone was keen; and only the fags of the Third and Second, and the few seniors who had come to look on, could regard the affair in the usual comic light.

Mulvaney and Tompkins got away at the start in a highly promising fashion. At fifty yards they were well ahead of the field.

Tom and Talbot had collided with Gussy and Digby, and all four had sprawled. Gunn and Wilkins had either neglected Grundy's instructions or had attended to them—anyway, they were among the ruck.

Kerr found Fatty an awful drag. Figgy and Reddy were not going too well. The nearest to the leading couple when about half-way were Roylance and Smith and Frere and Glyn.

"Go it, Tompkins, ye duffer!" panted Mulvaney. "Get a move on ye, do now! 'Tisn't half fast enough we're after travellin'!"

"Go it, you cripples!" howled Cardew.

"I can't go any faster!" puffed Clarence York. "You ain't keeping step, you wild—— Yoop!"

They were down! It was inevitable, when one wanted to quicken pace and the other to slow down, and both were as obstinate as people are made.

"Och, ye silly spalpeen—ye omadhaun!" howled Mulvaney.

"Why, you ass, it was your silly fault! Yow! Stoppit, will you?" yelled Tompkins.

"Take that, an' that, an' that!" panted the Irish junior, beating his partner about the cranium in his rage.

Past them went Roylance and Smith, Frere and Glyn, Kerruish and Reilly, Owen and Lawrence, Manners and Lowther. They continued to fight—or Mulveney went on punching and Tompkins trying to defend himself and yelling for aid.

And past them went Noble and Dane, Blake and Herries, and even Gunn and Wilkins—perhaps forgetting Grundy's instructions, and finding their feet through doing so.

That was all. The rest were down—Kerr reclining on the top of Fatty, Julian locked in the arms of Lumley-Lumley, Macdonald and Lorne arguing as to which had tripped up the other, Tom and Talbot laughing, Gore and Lucas scowling at one another; but only Mulvaney and Tompkins fighting.

Now in front more tumbles were taking place. Kerruish and Smith, quite by accident, barged into one another, and they and their partners went down—four of the Fourth out of the hunt at one blow!

Owen and Lawrence were leading now, with Manners and Lowther close up, and Glyn and Frere rather tailing off. And, to everyone's surprise, Gunn and Wilkins, who had looked hopelessly out of it, but had kept pegging along, were not far behind the Shell pair. The rest were out of it, bar more accidents.

But more accidents were to happen. Within ten yards of the tape Manners and Lowther got level with Owen and Lawrence, and at the same moment Glyn and Frere went down.

"Buck up, Monty!" cried Manners. And he bucked up even as he shouted.

Next moment they sprawled together.

"Look at 'em!" roared Owen. And Lawrence turned his head to look; and over went Owen and Lawrence.

"Come on, Wilky!" yelled Gunn. And Wilkins quickened up suddenly; and over went Wilkins and Gunn.

Lowther and Manners, Owen and Lawrence, scrambled to their feet, while Wilkins and Gunn still floundered helplessly. But at the first step the two Shell fellows went wrong, and sprawled again, and the Fourth-Formers stumbled over them.

"Our chance, Gunny!" howled Wilkins. And they staggered to their feet.

But even as they did so Glyn and Frere went past them, and stumbled on to the tape, and won!

It did not matter much to Manners and Lowther or to Gunn and Wilkins. There was no great honour and glory in a three-legged victory, and the Shell took the points. But Owen and Lawrence were greatly disappointed.

Nothing fell to second or third couple. The three points won by Glyn and Frere thus put the Shell ahead for the first time since the competition had started.

CHAPTER 10.
Footer and a Fight.

THE postponed boxing bout between Harry Noble and Dick Roylance put the Shell another seven points ahead. It was a fine tussle, though it had no definite finish, for Kangaroo did not succeed in knocking the other Colonial junior out. But the Australian always seemed to have a little in hand against his slightly less powerful opponent; and no one felt inclined to cavil at the referee's decision.

There were some who thought that in a longer contest the New Zealander's endurance would have pulled him through; but they were forgetting that Kangaroo was as tough and wiry as he was strong, and that he did not know what funk meant.

Roylance was satisfied, anyway. He came out of the bout with credit. His selection as one of the three Fourth-Formers to meet the champions of the Shell had been thoroughly justified, and henceforth he had a claim to rank among the six or seven best fighting-men of the St. Jim's juniors.

And the Fourth had got all they could well have hoped for out of the three boxing-bouts. It would not have been surprising had the Shell trio proven victorious in each case, for there had been an element of luck in Figgy's win over Talbot, and neither Blake nor Roylance would have felt sure of repeating it had the chance been offered them to try.

Racke & Co., pronounced guilty by the jury at a brief sitting in the junior Common-room, had been sentenced to a fortnight in Coventry. They did not seem to mind greatly. No doubt they thought they had got off easily; but they had only escaped without a ragging because it was plain that Mr. Selby and Mr. Ratcliff were both yearning for an excuse to stop the sports, and in Mr. Railton's continued absence the Third Form-master had more authority than usual. It was not worth while giving the two tyrants an opening, and an attempted ragging might have done that.

Racke had been told plainly that the continued presence of his myrmidon, Mr. Berrymore, in the neighbourhood of the school did not suit the views of the Shell and Fourth.

Racke had scowled when the message was delivered to him, but had said nothing. As yet he had done nothing, either. The "eminent scientist" was still at the Hollies, and Racke was free

to visit him, while the opposition were all gated.

But there was no evidence of any further food-hogging.

For several days Frank Levison had to stay in sanny. He was feverish and weak, yet seemed to have no definite illness. It was not Mr. Selby's cruelty that had knocked him over; he had borne as much of that before without any ill-effects.

The doctor was puzzled. But Marie Rivers found out.

It was the loss of the record-book that was preying upon Frank's mind. He had been told to take great care of it; and now, as far as he knew, it had been destroyed—through his fault. It did not seem to Frank that the competition could possibly go on properly without it. He felt as if he had failed in a high trust.

Perhaps it was silly; but when Marie Rivers told Ernest Levison, and he told Tom Merry and Talbot, neither the girl nor any of the three juniors felt in the least disposed to laugh at it.

"He's a sensitive little chap, you know, Levison," Miss Marie said to the elder brother.

"I know," answered Levison major briefly. Somehow the sight of Miss Marie sitting by Frank's bed had touched the heart of Ernest Levison—a heart not as soft or as easily touched as some fellows', even in these better days.

"We must do something to make him feel that it's all right," Miss Marie said. "But he won't feel like that if you tell him it doesn't matter if the book is burned. That would be a real shock to him. He thinks the book matters ever so much. I suppose it doesn't?"

"Well, not really, Miss Marie. You see, we know all that's in it. But Frank really had done it well. Tell you what I'll do—I'll talk to Tom Merry and Talbot about it."

"Yes, do! They may be able to think of some way to ease his mind."

"You—you like Frank, Miss Marie?" asked Levison, with unusual hesitation.

"No, I don't like him—I just love him! He's the dearest little chap, even with this cloud hanging over him."

Next day quite a deputation waited upon Frank in sanny. Wally was of the party, by right of chumship. Ernest Levison went, of course. Tom Merry and Talbot represented the Shell, Jack Blake and Figgins the Fourth, and Arthur Augustus, who had insisted upon coming, himself.

And Talbot brought the book with him! He had done what he hated to get it. He had asked a favour of Mr. Selby. It had been granted without courtesy or kindness; but at least it had been granted.

Frank's eyes shone with joy when the treasure was put into his hands; and he wanted to post up the results of the three-legged race and the Noble-Roylance contest at once. But Miss Marie had only black ink, so that duty had to be deferred, green and red being necessary for its performance in due order.

Then Tom Merry nudged Figgins. George Figgins was the fellow among the deputation whom Frank knew least, and so the most fitting person to speak to him officially, it had been decided.

The presence of Miss Marie rather checked the flow of Figgy's eloquence. He found himself getting red and confused. But he said the right thing, if he did not say it in an oratorical manner.

"We represent the Sports Committee, you know," he began. "Lefevre has been asking after you—says the committee's in no end of a hole without its secretary. And the replayed match is to-morrow, and—oh, you know, Franky, old son, we can't get along without you for linesman!"

"I'll be there," said Frank. "I'll get up now!"

"You will not!" said Miss Marie firmly.

"To-morrow morning, then?"

The girl nodded.

"That's all right, then. I say, it was jolly good of you fellows to come and see me, and—and say that, you know. And I'll take ever such care of the book after this, you may be sure. Wally can bring me the coloured inks, can't he, Miss Marie?"

"Buck up, Fwanky, an' you shall see us win to-mowwow!" said Arthur Augustus encouragingly, as the deputation left.

Was that to be a vain boast? Frank was there in his place, with the linesman's flag, when the match began, looking as fit as ever. But would he see the Fourth win?

The Fourth would be badly down if they failed to pull off the game. But the Shell, having got on top, naturally meant to keep there if possible, and a stern struggle was certain.

Except that Digby took the place of Dick Brooke in the Fourth Form eleven, the teams were as in the earlier match. Lawrence was the reserve for the half-back line; but he was off colour, and gave up his place to Dig. Grundy's finger was so painful that he did not even demand to play.

The Shell forwards went off with a rush. Manners and Gunn, on the left wing, put in some very neat work, and the goal which Talbot scored within ten minutes of the start owed something to their efforts. Fatty had no chance at all with the shot; but during the next half-hour his defence was quite the feature of the game. It was noticed that Bernard Glyn kept close to the Fourth goal. Someone inquired why, and Glyn replied that he was trying to learn how—an answer which wreathed the plump face of David Llewellyn in smiles.

But Gore did well at the other end, and again Noble and Dane were in great form. There was nothing the matter with the Fourth forwards; but at half-time they had not once got through.

Just after the restart Ernest Levison scored with a beauty, and Frank waved his flag in an ecstasy of delight.

"Linesmen ain't supposed to do that," said a voice behind him; and he turned, to see Reggie Manners, with Piggott, Kent, Watson, Harvey, and half a dozen more of the Third.

"I don't want to talk to you, Manners minor!" said Frank. "You're a young cad!"

"I dare say it's safe enough to say that while you're on the line, with all your protectors in the field!" jeered Reggie, who had not by any means improved during a close association of several days with Reuben Piggott.

"If you'll meet me down in the corner near our pitch after the game's over, I'll say it again," replied Frank. And he turned back to the play.

The Shell were pressing; but they could not score again. The Fourth battle-van surged down the field; but Noble and Dane and Gore repulsed the hot attack, and Lowther cleared to the right wing. Fatty was given more work. Gore was tested again. Still the goal on which everything might depend did not come.

And it did not come until so late in the game that everything did depend on it, for the goal that puts a side ahead in the last half-minute cannot be retrieved.

Study No. 6 had the honour of that goal. Herries could only watch; but it was Dig who gave Gussy the pass that enabled him to get clear away down the wing, and it was Blake who received the ball in front of goal, dodged between Kangaroo and the lithe Canadian with it at his toes, and sent in one that gave Gore no chance.

No one roared more loudly than Herries. If there was nothing else he could do, he could at least do that.

So the Fourth went to the front again, with a lead of ten points. But there was no faint-heartedness in the Shell. They had gained a lead after a stern case; and if they had lost it again—why, they must get it back!

None of the players noticed that their two linesmen made off to the Third pitch directly the game was over. It only needed a word or two to make Wally understand; but it needed more than a word or two to make him willing to let Frank fight.

"The young cad!" he said. "He thinks he can lick you anyway, and he wants to make sure of it by taking you on when you're ill!"

"I'm not ill, ass! I'm as well as ever I was in my life!"

"Well, I'm going to see to Reggie, so don't you make any mistake!"

"You're not!"

They found Reggie alone at the rendezvous. Piggott & Co. had been rounded up by order of Mr. Selby. They had all somehow forgotten that they were due for detention from half-past three to tea-time—an agreeable little dodge of their beloved master's for completely spoiling a half-holiday.

Reggie had somehow escaped the fate, and was ready, looking very wrathful.

"Now call me a cad again, young Levison!" he snarled.

"You are a cad!" said Frank stoutly. "We used to be chums anyway; and only a cad would have grinned at an old chum after Selby had walked into him as he did into me!"

"I was grinning at all that fuss about a potty book," sneered Reggie.

"Oh, put up your fists!" flashed Frank, in hot ire.

They had just started when Manners, changing in the Shell dormitory, chanced to look out of the window as he fastened his braces, and saw.

"Lend me those glasses of yours, Kangy!" he said sharply.

Harry Noble's field-glasses were passed over. Manners took a quick look, and then passed the glasses to Tom.

"Down there, in the corner by the kids' pitch!" he said.

"Got to be stopped!" said Tom, the moment he saw. "Young Levison can't be fit for a scrap to-day. Come on, Monty!"

"What's the row?" asked Lowther. But he pulled on his jacket as he spoke, and they buttoned their waistcoats as they ran.

They stopped it. Frank and Reggie were fighting hard, without advantage to either as yet. Frank was furious at being stopped, and Reggie threatened to kick his brother's shins.

But perhaps it would have been better to let them fight it out. For Reggie positively refused to shake hands, and Frank said he didn't care about it, and Wally said several scathing things; and the unfinished fight left bad blood among the Three Minors.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?" by Martin Clifford.)

THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA.

FOR NEW READERS.

The twins are Philip Derwent, of Highcliffe, and his sister Philippa, of Cliff House. They have a cockatoo, named Cocky, which has been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Gadsby, who is plotting against him with Vavasour. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a serious accident to one of Merton's eyes in a fight with Ponsonby. In their absence Flip gets too friendly with Pon and the rest of the nuts, and, without any real taste for it at the outset, takes to gambling. He 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. He goes to Highcliffe in the night, and sees the Caterpillar.

Mr. Mobbs and the Caterpillar.

TWO of the group in the road had remained standing.

"You are not joinin' the hunt, sir?" said the Caterpillar urbanely.

"De Courcy, you have been guilty of studied insolence towards me to-night!" rapped out the master.

"I assure you—no, sir. It was certainly not studied. Quite impromptu, on the contrary."

"You will be sorry for this!"

"I don't think so, really, sir. You mean, I take it, that you will do all you know how to make me suffer for it. Well, as there's no one else here to be influenced by my insubordinate language, I'm going to talk to you straight, Mr. Mobbs! I haven't any use for you, an' I never had, an' you know it. You're playin' a game of your own just now, an' it's not at all likely to be a clean game, as it's yours."

"Boy! How dare you?" gasped Mr. Mobbs.

"That's merely silly. You threaten me. That's silly, too. If you had the authority you ought to have you could punish me. You can't do that, and you know it!"

"I can take you before the Head!"

"Well, do it, an' be dashed to you! But don't give me any more of your threats, you miserable worm in the semblance of a man!"

The Caterpillar had lost his coolness for once. He hardly knew why he was so angry; but he felt furious.

"You will return with me to the school now, De Courcy; and I will consider in the morning what I will do!"

"I shall do nothin' of the sort! I'm interested in what's goin' on down the road, an' I propose to take a stroll in that direction. If you really think Derwent is there, you ought to be interested, too; but I won't ask you to come with me, because I really can't stand your company. You know best why you've waited all this time before allowing any search to be made for Derwent, an' no doubt you'd a reason for mentionin' him now."

"It is for Doctor Voysey——"

"But I chance to know that the Head left it to you. Well, I'm off!"

And the Caterpillar walked away down the road.

Already the sound of the pursuit had died away in the distance.

Mr. Mobbs stood irresolute for a minute or two. All his snobbish regard for the Caterpillar as "an extremely highly connected youth" was not enough to prevent his resenting acutely the language which had been addressed to him. But he dared not move against De Courcy. He was afraid that the Caterpillar knew too much.

He made up his mind at length, walked to the gates, and let himself in. De Courcy, halting not fifty yards away, heard the click of the small gate as it closed behind him.

The Caterpillar walked back. It would be rather a score for him if he could catch Mr. Mobbs out in a pretence at going in.

But it was not a pretence. Mr. Mobbs had gone.

De Courcy turned again, and walked a couple of hundred yards along the road.

The Greyfriars fellows had disappeared into the night. It was hardly likely they would return.

And it was not at all likely that they would catch their quarry, the Caterpillar thought.

If he had been in Flip's place he would have bolted as Flip had done, and would then have dodged aside—as he believed Flip had done.

The pursuers would be making noise enough to render it difficult to detect such a ruse until it was too late.

He remembered the gap in the hedge, and the cover beyond which a small spinney afforded; and, like Flip, he found the gap in the darkness easily enough.

Standing by it, he spoke softly.

"Anyone there?"

"Don't answer him!" whispered Hazel.

"Yes; we are," said Flip. "Is the coast clear?"

"As far as I can tell. The dear Mobby has gone in. But he couldn't capture you, anyway; you wouldn't have any difficulty in frightenin' Mobby. As for the Greyfriars police gang, they ought to be a mile or so away by this time."

The two came out, Hazel rather unwillingly.

"I should recommend a mile or two in the opposite direction, an' then a discreet selection of some by-road," the Caterpillar said. "By the way, Derwent, I forgot to ask you before, but are you short of cash?"

"No. Got quite enough to be going on with, thanks all the same, old chap. Won't Mobby make things hot for you?"

"I think not. My impression is that I shall hear no more about it. I may be wrong, of course. But it's no odds either way. Better clear, hadn't you?"

Johnny Gogge Drops In.

"FLAP, you knew!"

It was Marjorie Hazeldene who spoke. She had just received from Mr. Quelch a very sympathetic and kindly note, telling her that her brother was missing. The Remove-master told her not to be unduly alarmed. He felt sure that Hazeldene would soon be brought back, and he hoped that the punishment which must be given him for his flight would stop short of expulsion—which he would not have mentioned but that he knew the possibility would be certain to occur to Marjorie.

Mr. Quelch had a warm admiration for gentle Marjorie Hazeldene. He knew the very real courage that lay underneath her gentleness.

But that courage seemed to fail her now. She had dreaded this so long.

Flap's face when Mr. Quelch's note was shown to her gave her away completely.

But she had not meant to deceive Marjorie. It was only that she could not bear to tell the bad news.

"Yes, I did, Marjorie," she admitted. "That's why I've been keeping away from you all the morning. I've never tried dodging you before, and I don't like it a bit. But I couldn't tell you."

"I think you ought to have told me, Flap. How long have you known?"

"Only since last night. Don't be angry with me, dear; there were things that made it very difficult for me to tell it."

"I'm not angry. I shouldn't be, anyway. I know—I know you would do as you thought right, Flap. But——"

"Flip gave me a message for you. He said you were not to worry; he had not forgotten his promise."

"Flip? But how could he——"

"He's run away, too, Marjorie!"

"Oh!"

The news thus given fairly staggered Marjorie.

That Hazel should bolt was not altogether surprising. He was the sort of fellow who might be expected to do that when trouble grew into a bigger load than he knew how to bear.

But Flip! It was difficult to imagine Flip in such trouble as would force him to run away. Marjorie would have expected him to stay and face the music, however heavy the trouble might be.

"I'll tell you all about it. I've been wanting ever so badly to tell you. It was pretty hard to bear alone. And, of course, Phyllis and Clara can't possibly feel quite as we do about it," Flap said.

"Wait a moment, Flap! Are those two together?"

"Yes. And you may count on Flip's sticking to Hazel, too!"

Marjorie breathed a sigh of heartfelt relief, and her face cleared wonderfully.

"It's not half so bad now I know that," she said. "I've ever so much faith in Flip. And I think he could do more to influence Hazel than Harry Wharton could even. I don't know anyone better than Harry—not even your brother or Bob Cherry, Flap! But Hazel is queer about him. Sometimes it's as if he likes him and hates him at the same time. That sounds awfully muddled, but——"

"I think I understand," Flap said. "I believe it's because he feels that Wharton is so far above him. Oh, I oughtn't to have said that; but I do blurt out what comes into my head."

"It's true," said Marjorie, in a low, troubled voice. "I'm not blind to Hazel's faults. I don't mean that Harry's perfect. But Hazel has to look up to him, and he doesn't like that. He ought to look up to Flip, too, for that matter; but not quite in the same way."

"Flip would hate it if he did," returned Flap.

"I'm not sure that Harry doesn't. He would not want anyone doing that. What he has wanted all along is to see Hazel going straight, as he goes—playing the game, you know. And sometimes Hazel does—for quite a long time, too; but somehow it never lasts."

"Marjorie, let's get out somewhere, so that we can talk without being interrupted. There are things we want to say that even Phyllis and Clara mustn't hear yet."

They went to put on their hats and coats, and got outside without being intercepted by either of their chums.

The Cliff House girls who had been the scapegoats of the hockey scandal—as the elder girls called it among themselves—were no longer gated.

Flap told Marjorie of what had happened the night before, and Marjorie listened without a word of reproach for the omission to wake her. She might feel that she would rather have been waked, but she knew that it was for her sake Flap had let her go on sleeping. And, of course, when Flap went down she had known nothing of Hazel's bolt.

"What will they do?" she asked forlornly.

"Oh, I'm not worrying so much about that. Flip isn't the sort to give in, or to let Hazel down. He seemed quite hopeful of finding something."

"But they'll never be able to come back here—that's the worst. No, it's not really the worst, either. The worst is my dreadful fear of what Hazel may have done. He wouldn't mean to be dishonest, but—but——"

Marjorie's lips quivered, and she almost broke down.

"I don't believe it's anything at all like that," said Flap stoutly.

But even she did not feel too sure. In an ordinary way it would have been impossible for her to imagine Flip throwing in his fortunes with those of a thief. But if the thief was Marjorie's brother! That, and her own brother's promise to Marjorie, would make all the difference.

"There's somebody coming along the road—a boy," said Marjorie. "Let's turn back, Flap. I don't want anyone to see my face, and I couldn't bear to talk to anyone but you just now."

They turned at once. Flap had noticed nothing about the boy except that he wore

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big glasses that looked somehow familiar. She concluded that it must be Billy Bunter's glasses she was thinking about.

But this was certainly not Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove would have been puffing and blowing like a grampus if he had travelled half as fast to overhaul them as this fellow did.

"Excuse me," said a very polite voice at Flap's side, "but I do not think I can be mistaken. You are surely Miss Derwent?"

"And you are Goggs!" cried Flap. "Oh, I remember, of course!"

She held out her hand frankly, and Johnny Goggs, of Franklingham, grasped it warmly. He seemed very pleased to meet her again; and, in spite of her trouble, Flap could not help feeling pleased to see him.

"This is my friend, Miss Hazeldene," she said; and somehow Marjorie, who had dreaded even being seen by anyone, did not feel that she minded this boy. There was something about Johnny Goggs that made many people trust and like him at once.

"You know, Marjorie—I told you about Gadsby and his meddling with Cocky at Victoria Station, and how Goggs stopped him?" Flap said.

"I remember quite well," Marjorie answered.

"And how are your brother and the wonderful bird?" inquired Johnny Goggs. "I will not ask after Gadsby. I must confess that my interest in that youth is not sufficient to justify an inquiry."

"Cocky's all right," replied Flap. "But Flip——"

She paused.

"I trust that nothing has happened to your brother?" said Goggs. "He seemed to me a very nice fellow indeed, though perhaps with hardly as much respect as he should have for the feminine understanding. I remember that he considered you incapable of getting your ticket."

Flap smiled. Then her face took on a resolute look.

"I'm going to tell him all about Flip," she said to Marjorie. "It's queer I should want to, because I don't really know very much about him. But I feel as if I knew him ever so well, and I am sure he can be trusted."

She spoke in a low tone, and Goggs looked the other way while she was speaking. But he must have heard, and Flap did not mind his hearing. She was sure he would understand.

"Tell him about Hazel, too," Marjorie said at once. "I should like him to know. And it's only half the story without that, for it doesn't do justice to dear old Flip. I believe that it was Hazel more than anything else that kept him from going back to Highcliffe."

Flap squeezed her arm. She was glad Marjorie had guessed that.

"Have you time to listen to rather a long story?" she asked Goggs.

"I am entirely at your command," he said, in his precise, grown-up way. "If I must admit the truth, I came this way with some vague hope that I might see you."

"That was very nice of you," Flap replied. "And I'm ever so glad to see you again. But what are you doing here? Franklingham is ever so far away, isn't it?"

"There has been an epidemic of measles there, and the school has been closed temporarily in consequence," Goggs explained. "Do not be alarmed; I have been in quarantine, and am now certified to be free from danger. I am staying at Courtfield for a few days with my grandmother—that is to say, my uncle. I should rather say that my uncle and I are both staying at the house of——"

"Your grandmother, I suppose?"

"Not at all. In point of fact, I have no grandmother. It is with friends that my uncle and I are staying."

"But you spoke of your grandmother," said Marjorie, looking puzzled.

"I apologise, Miss Hazeldene! It was foolish of me. At Franklingham I usually speak of my uncle as my grandmother."

"Is he that sort of man?" asked Flap.

"Not in the least! He is quite the manliest man I know, and the most able. It was merely a joke among us—a silly joke. My mistake to mention him in that way. I'm always making them."

"I shouldn't think you make very many bad ones," said Marjorie.

Johnny Goggs bowed.

"I am extremely obliged to you for your good opinion," he said.

He was quite the queerest boy Marjorie had ever met; but she felt sure his queerness was all on the surface. Underneath, she guessed, were strong, common-sense and unusual brain-power for a boy of fifteen.

Flap began to tell her story. They turned away from Cliff House again. There were not many people along the road at any time, and no one passed them except little Molly Gray with two other youngsters. One of the three giggled when she saw Goggs, but Molly told her at once that she ought to know better.

"I like hith fathe," she said. "It'th only hith spectacleth that maketh him look such a boiled owl!"

Goggs certainly ought to have been satisfied with that compliment if he had heard it. But, of course, he did not.

He listened attentively to Flap's tale, and asked some shrewd questions.

"I do not think your brother has had fair play," he said. "He has been foolish, no doubt; but he was certainly no worse than the other three, even apart from their desertion. At Franklingham we should think it shameful to desert a comrade in trouble. But I am not surprised that Gadsby should have done so. Gadsby did not strike me at all favourably.

"Perhaps he didn't quite like the way you struck him," said Flap, with the wan ghost of a smile.

Gadsby's very name was as hateful to her as Pon's now. She felt that those two had woven a net around her brother—a net of treachery—had tried to drag him down to their level. In the eyes of others they might seem to have succeeded; but Flap knew better. The boy who was standing by Hazeldene for Marjorie's sake was not such as Cecil Ponsonby and Reginald Gadsby, and could never be like them.

"The Greyfriars boys wouldn't have done it, either," Marjorie said. "But these Highcliffe boys aren't like boys at all to me. They seem like wicked men!"

"You mentioned two friends of your brother who are now away, and there appeared to be some story in connection with them, Miss Derwent," said Goggs. "Pray do not fancy me actuated by sheer idle curiosity, but I should very much like to hear that story also."

"Oh, I'll tell you!" answered Flap. "It all connects up, really."

And she told the story of the quarrel between Merton and Ponsonby—of the fight, of how Tunstall had stood loyally by his chum, and how Flip had been swayed this way and that by a divided allegiance.

"He was wrong, of course," Flap said. "We all thought so, and we were all horrid to him about it—all but Marjorie, who is never horrid to anyone."

"I am not convinced that he was wrong," Goggs said thoughtfully. "It is the point of view that makes all the difference. He regarded this person Ponsonby—who appears to be plausible, though a most unpleasant person—as a chum also. No, he was not wholly wrong. But I can understand others thinking him so. Are there any decent fellows at this place—Highcliffe—at all, now that your brother and Merton and Tunstall are away for a time?"

"Oh, lots!" replied Flap. "There are Courtenay and the Cater—I mean, De Courcey. They're quite all right in every way, though the Cat—though De Courcy has some funny ways."

"I scent a mystery in all this," said Goggs shrewdly. "Nothing appeals to me more than a mystery. I should feel that you were doing me a favour if you commissioned me to make an attempt to solve this one, Miss Derwent."

"Oh, but could you?" asked Flap.

"I could try," said Goggs modestly.

"I'm sorry. That was rude of me. And, indeed, truly, I have lots of belief in you. You're so—so reasonable, and you seem to understand things."

"I believe in you, too," said Marjorie, flushing. "But I don't see how you could find out anything outside."

"I should not try," replied Goggs quietly. "I was to have had a holiday for the rest of this term—at least, a partial holiday—for I am doing some study. But my uncle would not refuse to send me to Highcliffe if there is a vacancy there, as would appear. It would not be wise to tell the authorities that I shall be going back to Franklingham next term, perhaps; but the deceit is not a very black one."

"You would give up your holiday?"

"I hardly look at it in that light, Miss Derwent. To help a friend and to attempt the solution of a mystery would suit me better than a holiday."

"But would your uncle like——"

"My uncle is himself a detective. Some day I may work with him. Once or twice already he has allowed me to do so. In a few days he will be leaving me, and my holiday would be a very doubtful benefit to me then."

"Don't make up your mind all at once," said Flap. "It's such a lot to ask of you. Think it over, and see what your uncle says about it. And if you could meet us here to-morrow——"

"I will call at Cliff House if you wish," said Goggs, smiling.

"You're not afra—I mean, you don't mind meeting Miss Primrose?"

"I shall be charmed to meet a lady who, I feel sure, is to be most highly esteemed!" answered this amazing boy.

"Well, you shall certainly know her one day!" said Flap. "She would simply love you! But, if you don't mind, to-morrow——"

"I comprehend. Your wishes are as commands to me, Miss Derwent," said Goggs.

"I never saw anybody a bit like him before," said Marjorie, as they watched his slight figure recede in the distance; "but I do believe in him!"

"So do I—rather!" said Flap. "I say, Marjorie, what fun it will be to hear him talking to Clara!"

From which it was evident that Johnny Goggs had made Miss Philippa Derwent feel much happier than she had been before she met him.

The Wanderers.

FLIP and Hazel cleared, as the Caterpillar had suggested, they had better do. Flip was quite chippy, in spite of his fatigue; but Hazel was in a horribly morose temper. The Caterpillar's speeches had stung him.

"I can't stand that fellow De Courcy!" he said some twenty minutes later, when they had turned into a narrow by-road, and felt safe from pursuit.

"I like him!" answered Flip.

"He sneers at me. What is he better, with his drawl and his pretence of being too slack for anything, while all the time he is as crafty as they make them?"

"Well, being slack—or pretending to be—ain't exactly a crime. And certainly drawling isn't; only a silly habit. As for craftiness, it all depends on how it's used. I wish sometimes that I was craftier. Seems to me I've been going about fairly asking people to do me down!"

"I don't want you altered, Derwent," said Hazel quickly and in a much softer tone.

"Thanks, old chap, though I don't think you're right! And you won't get the Caterpillar altered. Courtney did, from what I can make out; but the repairs seem to be complete now."

"You know that he was hand-in-glove with the nuts not so very long ago, then?"

"Yes, of course I do! You might say the same thing about me—and about yourself, come to that!"

"I won't say another word about De Courcy if you don't like it!"

"Well, then, don't! You're feeling bitter just now. I know you can't help it. But, anyway, it's no fault of the Caterpillar's that we've both got into a mess; and he'd give you a hand out if he could, for all he may say!"

Hazel grunted. He did not believe that. But Flip may have been right.

"Look here, are you game to sleep in a shed or under a haystack?" asked Flip, after a pause. "We can't go anywhere for a bed while you have that Greyfriars cap on. You'd be spotted at once! Might be the best thing for you. But you're counting on me not to let you down, so I had to warn you."

"But you—— Oh, I remember now! You often went about without a cap, and I suppose you're not wearing one. I don't care where I sleep. I don't believe I shall be able to sleep a wink anywhere!"

But he was asleep before Flip was. They found a snug place on a haystack, with the wall of a barn to keep off the wind; and the hay made a soft and almost luxurious bed.

Flip lay awake, staring up at the stars in the narrow strip of sky visible, and thinking hard.

Things were not as bad as they might have been. He had little hope that the Caterpillar would be able to clear his name at Highcliffe. There did not seem much chance that Hazeldene would be allowed to return to Greyfriars. But perhaps it might be for the best that he should try to make a clean start elsewhere. Flip was no prophet, and he could not foresee the manner in which events were to shape themselves so that, mainly through his loyalty, the wayward

Hazel would be given yet another chance among the fellows who, after all, were his friends, if he would only let them be, and had far more sympathy with him than strangers would be ever likely to have.

It was Flip who woke first in the grey of a raw and shivery dawn. He shook Hazel by the shoulder.

"Grrr! 'Tain't rising-bell yet!" mumbled Hazel sleepily.

"It's time to be getting a move on us, though," said Flip. "We are a bit too near home still for my liking."

"Oooooh!" groaned Hazel. "Isn't this particularly beastly? I'm as empty as a drum!"

"If you were as empty as I am," replied Flip, grinning, "you wouldn't lie there in the hay grumbling. You'd get on your hind-legs and make tracks for brekker."

"Where are we going to get it, I'd like to know?"

"Well, the shops won't come to us, so perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to go to the shops," replied Flip.

"Can't make out how you can be so cheerful, Derwent!" said Hazel, half resentfully.

"I never was a very dismal Jimmy," Flip said.

They started. Very soon the by-road they were in brought them into a highway that Hazel said he knew.

"There's a sort of a kind of a town a mile or two further on, if I remember right," he said.

"Hope you do!" Flip replied fervently. "I'm not grumbling, but I do want some grub!"

"So do I!" said Hazel. "I suppose I'd better chuck this cap away. I shall catch cold without it, but——"

"But you'll probably be caught, cold or warm, with it!"

"I sha'n't be caught warm, anyway," replied Hazel, with a feeble attempt at a joke. His spirits were rising. Flip's cheeriness was the kind of thing a fellow could not resist long; and Peter Hazeldene, in his better moods, was not a dismal person.

He threw his cap into the hedge. He did not half like doing that, though. It seemed like breaking the last tie that bound him to Greyfriars. And, though he told himself that he was glad to get away, that mattered.

The sun rose, and drove away the cold mists. But it had little warmth in it at best. Sharp walking warmed the two, however, and by the time they reached what Hazel had described as "a sort of a kind of a town" they felt better—and also even hungrier.

The town still seemed asleep. Very few people were stirring. It was not at all a suitable place for the two fugitives to buy anything, if the police had been warned by their school authorities to look out for them. But they must at least have breakfast. And caps were needed. In cloth caps they would look less like runaways than they did bare-headed.

The caps were got first. The man who sold them seemed to Flip to look at him and Hazel in rather a suspicious way; but he said nothing.

Then they went to an eating-house in a by-street, and had a good meal. It seemed good, anyway, though the bacon was salt and the coffee had little virtue beyond being wet and hot.

Just as they had finished, and were about to call for their bill, the man who had served them with the caps came in. He did not order breakfast, but passed through the shop, with a glance at them as they sat there.

"That chap smells a rat," whispered Flip. "He's followed us here, I'm pretty sure."

Hazel turned pale under the grime which had begun to collect upon his face already. They had been too famished to think of their unwashed condition, and it might have given rise to awkward surmises if they had asked for a wash before breakfasting.

"What shall we do?" whispered Hazel.

"Leave it to me. Get out, if you like, and wait for me round the corner. I must pay before I go; and if we slipped off and left the money, they'd be sure to think we were—well, what we are!"

But Hazel would not go.

A girl with her hair in curl-papers made a mathematical proposition of evident difficulty of the addition of their bill, and finally informed Flip, rather doubtfully, that it came to two shillings and three-halfpence.

"I dare say you're right," said Flip coolly. "Anyway, if you guess again you may be farther out. Here you are. You can keep the change."

And he handed her half-a-crown.

She regarded it in a doubtful manner.

"Oh, it's good!" said Flip lightly.

(To be continued.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's story is not one of the sports series, though we have not finished with them. It tells of the campaign for a captain for the Fourth Form. Readers often ask who is the captain of the Fourth, and point out that at Greyfriars each Form has its skipper—why should not the same system prevail at St. Jim's? The same idea occurs to the great mind of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the consequences are very interesting. Of course, Gussy thinks he would make an ideal skipper—Gussy would be sure to think so! Blake obviously has strong claims, and so has Figgins. In fact, the claims of Blake and Figgins are so strong that one is inclined to fancy one or other of them must be elected. But the Fourth don't quite see it that way. They hold that there are other pebbles on the beach, and the upshot is that——

(See next week!)

CONTINUATION OF THE TOM MERRY STORY LIST:

After 48 numbers at a halfpenny, the GEM began a new series at a penny, and the No. 1 in the list below means No. 1 of this new series—it was really No. 49 of the GEM, which is just under a year older than its companion paper, the "Magnet."

1.—"The Gathering of the Clans."
2.—"Miss Priscilla's Mission."
3.—"King of the Castle."
4.—"St. Jim's to the Rescue!"
5.—"D'Arcy the Dude."
6.—"The Invaders."
7.—"Skimpole, Detective."
8.—"The Tell-tale."
9.—"The Bogus Detective."
10.—"Tom Merry's Bazaar."
11.—"Tom Merry's Struggle."
12.—"The St. Jim's Legends."
13.—"Skimpole's New Idea."
14.—"The Parliamentary Candidate."
15.—"Told on the Telephone."
16.—"The Detective's Pupils."
17.—"D'Arcy's Misadventure."
18.—"Skimpole's Crusade."
19.—"The Mysterious Hamper."
20.—"Blake & Co.'s Triumph.
21.—"Skimpole's Fancies."
22.—"Tom Merry at the Franco-British."
23.—"Tom's Terrible Time."
24.—"Tom Merry in Camp."
25.—"The Rival Camps."
26.—"Skimpole's Airship."

(To be continued in our next.)

Your Editor.

CADET NOTES.

THE work of the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments in promoting the increase and strengthening of the Cadet Movement has recently been officially recognised by the War Office. A few weeks ago the Army Council issued an instruction which says that "all concerned with the raising and administration of Cadet Units in the British Isles should note that the services of the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments have been placed at the disposal of the War Office in the matter of propaganda work and provision of speakers in connection with the rai-ing and recruiting of Cadet Units." This official recognition of the work should assist in making it more effective. Our readers everywhere should note this, and those who are not already members of Cadet Corps should apply for information to the Headquarters of the Association at Judges' Quadrangle, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C. 2.

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Units of the Church Lads' Brigade all over the country should note that if they desire to apply for recognition as Cadet Corps a special privilege has recently been conferred upon them by the express permission of his Majesty the King. This privilege is that all units, battalions, or companies of the Church Lads' Brigade then recognised, or to be recognised in the future, may be affiliated to the King's Royal Rifle Corps (60th Rifles). The privilege is one of considerable interest and some importance, and units of the C.L.B. not already recognised should avail themselves of the invitation thus given to them to affiliate with this historical regiment.

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Members of Cadet Corps and those who are thinking of joining such bodies will be interested to hear that the French authorities are making a presentation of some very handsome medals and diplomas to representatives of the Cadet Movement in this country. The gifts are intended to promote closer relations between the movement here and the similar organisations in France, and at the same time to cement the present alliance and good feeling between the two countries. It is hoped that these gifts will be placed on show somewhere centrally where Cadets and their friends may see them.

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As a large number of those of our readers who have written making inquiries about the Cadet Movement in response to these notes have asked for particulars about joining the Royal Flying Corps, it is desirable to state that we understand recruiting of boys for this corps has been suspended for the present. In these circumstances it is useless for further applications for this particular corps to be sent in; but our readers in London who would like to make a start in the Air Service may be glad to know that one of the London Cadet Corps has formed special training platoons for this Service, and would welcome more recruits. Information and headquarters, etc., will be sent on application as usual.

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The City of London Royal Engineers Cadet Training Corps (T.F.) held their first annual concert at the Cannon Street Hotel on Saturday, March 2nd, 1918. The programme was an excellent one, for which all credit is due to the Misses Esme and Vera Beringer. There was an audience of about a thousand people, mostly relatives and friends of members of the corps, and the following artistes very kindly gave their services: Miss Edith Gazzard, Miss Edith Abraham, Miss Olive Fox, Miss Mabel Manson; Miss Drusilla Wills, Miss Dorothy Ripley, Miss Audrey Hylton, Mr. Joseph Cheetham, Mr. George Baker, Mr. Walter Montagu, and Mr. A. E. Nickolds. There was not much time for speeches, but Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Harry North, on behalf of the commanding-officer, drew attention to the fact that it was the duty of all young men to join a Cadet Corps, and pointed out that this is a senior Cadet Corps, and was founded by Major C. A. Assiter expressly for the purpose of giving the best training to those who were fitted to become officers in the Senior Forces, and of late many members have joined the O.T.C., and some have received their commissions. This speaks very well for the training given, as the corps was only last year recognised by the War Office. And, apart from the ordinary infantry training, the Cadets are given a course of lectures on military engineering and topography at the Birkbeck College. These lectures are made as interesting as possible, and the practical work is taken up during the week-ends.

Educated young men under 18 years desirous of joining the corps should make application or call and see the commanding-officer at the Guildhall, King Street, Cheapside, E.C., any Tuesday or Thursday evening at 8 p.m.

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Readers in Hampstead ought to note that the 1st Cadet Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, which has its headquarters in that district, offers very great advantages to those who join it. Every member is provided with a khaki Service dress, and, beside this, the corps maintains football, cricket, and sports clubs, and offers billiards, gymnasium, and shooting facilities, and competitions at its headquarters. These advantages ought to be appreciated, and the way to appreciate them is to join and support the corps.