THE SHELL SCORES!

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

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CARDEW'S CATCH!

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

THE SHELL SCORES!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Two Thinking Hard.

"MONTY!"

It was Harry Manners, of the Shell, who spoke. The Terrible Three were together in their study, No. 10 on the Shell passage, and two of the three were apparently in deep thought.

Monty Lowther sat in the armchair, his legs thrust out, his hands in the pockets of his trousers, his brow wrinkled. Tom Merry sat at the table, a pen in his hand, a sheet of paper before him, his hair rumpled, and a line drawn right down the middle of his forehead.

Lowther took no notice at all of his chum's call. Tom looked up and frowned, as one who does not want to be disturbed.

Now, Manners was, as a rule, the most thoughtful of the trio. He certainly had no objection to thinking, but it seemed to him just then that his chums really were overdoing it.

"Monty!" he said again, with a note of impatience in his voice.

"Oh, don't bother!" snapped Lowther.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing's the matter," replied Lowther. "I'm thinking, that's all."

"Not half a bad thing to do," said Manners. "I wonder you haven't tried it before this."

"Brrrr!" growled the humorist of the Shell.

"Tommy!"

"Well?" snapped Tom Merry.

"Lowther's thinking!"

"I wish you would, instead of jabbering all the time!"

"What's the matter with you?" asked Manners.

It was not at all usual to catch Tom bad-tempered.

"Nothing's the matter. At least—oh, it's the cricket bizney! Easy enough to pick an eleven from both Forms, but it's another pair of boots picking two elevens from the Shell alone."

"I should say it simply can't be did," returned Manners.

"It's got to be done, idiot! After we have scored over the Fourth in the Second Eleven footer match we can't refuse to put a team into the field against their Second at cricket."

"Well, it's not much more than choosing your first team, and then scratching up eleven sitters to go and be slaughtered, is it?"

"P'r'aps not. But——"

"Who are your First Eleven?"

"I wish you fatheads would stop gassing!" said Lowther irritably.

"Go and think in the box-room!" suggested Manners.

"Very much the same as the footer team," said Tom. "We three, Talbot, Noble, Dane, and Glyn, Gunn and Wilkins, and the last two chosen from Gore, Frere, Thompson, French, and Jimson."

"H'm! The three who will have to stand down won't make much of a backbone for the Second, I can see. But it's no good worrying about the Second."

"No. What's worrying me most is about the last two for the First. Gore might make a few runs, but he's no bowler. Frere can bowl a bit, but he's a lump of lead in the field, and a stodgy bat without a single scoring stroke. Thompson and French are moderate all round—very moderate. Jimson is about the pick of the bunch, I think, but he drops catches."

"Who's going to captain the Second? it's not everyone's job when a licking's a dead cert."

"I know one chap who would," said Tom, grinning.

"Oh, Grundy! Well, why not let him? It will keep him from coming along and insisting on being played in the First."

"It would do that. But he won't be be played in the First if he insists from now to Doomsday. I thought of Gore."

"If the Fourth get first knock and run up a hundred or so without a wicket down, Gore's quite capable of turning the whole thing up and marching off the field."

"Oh, I don't think so—not now," said Tom. "Gore's a long-sight better chap than he used to be, and he's really keen on the competition."

"He's not exactly a Job, though. Now, old Grundy would go on to the bitter end, anyway."

"But to make Grundy captain is admitting the thing to be a farce."

"Well, what is it but a farce, Tommy?"

Tom knitted his brows more furiously than ever. The Shell Second Eleven at footer had looked a very cheap lot, but they had brought off an unexpected victory.

That had been little short of a miracle. It had been almost entirely brought about by Bernard Glyn, who had done wonders both as skipper and goalkeeper.

But it was too much to hope for another miracle, and Glyn confessed frankly that he was no good at licking a cricket eleven into shape. Moreover, it takes far longer to shape a decent cricketer out of unpromising materials than to do the same thing at footer; and, as Tom knew, the Fourth had several quite useful cricketers outside their best team. The Shell had scarcely one.

"We can't treat it as a farce, Manners. It isn't fair to the chaps who play, and it isn't quite fair to the Fourth."

"Are you chumps ever going to stop cricket jaw?" demanded Monty.

"Not till we've finished," replied Tom, with a touch of irritation.

"Go on, then, and I'll join in and do my bit," was the unexpected answer.

"Finished your thinking?" inquired Manners, with a grin.

"I have!" replied Lowther solemnly.

"What's the giddy result?"

"A tremendous score for the Shell—in the future."

"Very much in the future!" said Manners.

"Rats! I've thought out a stupendous wheeze."

"Don't!" implored Tom. "Take it out and bury it decently. We're far enough behind on points now, without any more of your stupendous wheezes, old scout!"

"Well, don't we want to catch up?"

"Yes, of course we do. But we never shall if——"

"I tell you this is simply——"

"So was the last. And look what it cost us!" said Manners.

"But this——"

"We don't want to hear it!"

"You're not going to, Tommy. For the present I mean to keep it an absolute secret. It was only you fellows who spoiled the other by wanting to know all about it in advance."

"Hanged if I don't like that!" said Tom. "You were bursting to tell us, you ass!"

"I didn't put Wynn where he could overhear it all, anyway."

"Well, did we?" demanded Manners.

"No. That is, you didn't exactly put him there; but if you were half as sharp as you think you are you would have suspected."

"Why didn't you suspect?" asked Tom.

"My dear, good ass, it's simply impossible for me to think of everything! I may have the best brains in the Shell——"

"My hat!" gasped Manners.

"No, Manners—no! That has never yet covered them, unless when I have borrowed it. Hallo, Kangy! I've got a new wheeze!"

Harry Noble, the Australian member of the Shell, had just stuck in his head.

"Oh!" he said blankly.

"What are you looking like that for, you boiled owl?" snapped Lowther.

Kangaroo turned to Tom Merry.

"Can't you stop him, Tommy?" he asked. "I haven't given up hope yet, badly as we're down on the latest count of the score; but if Lowther is going to ——"

"I'm going to put the score up, fathead!"

"So you said last time. But——"

"Is thy servant a goathcrd?" asked Lowther tragically.

"More of a goat, I should say!" replied Manners. "Why?"

"Because I seem to have tumbled into a dashed lot of butting!" snapped Lowther.

"Whereas you'd prefer butter," said Tom. "Well, you won't get it, Monty! We're fed-up with your rotten schemes!"

"That," said Lowther, taking the last word, as usual, before he went out, "is where they differ from butter, anyway, for you can't say you're fed-up with that!"

CHAPTER 2.
Being Friendly with Brooke.

"GOING home, Brooke?"

Thus Monty Lowther, after classes were over next day. He was standing at the gates when Dick Brooke, the day-boy, came up.

"That's where I usually make for about this time of day," replied Brooke, smiling.

"I'll walk part of the way with you if you like," volunteered Lowther.

"I'd be glad. I get tired of my own company sometimes, and it isn't often there's anyone going my way. But how is it you're not at cricket?"

Lowther showed a bandaged hand. He said nothing, because the injury to his hand, though there was an injury, was not really serious enough to have kept him from practice if he had not had other fish to fry.

Dick Brooke was not in the least suspicious. He was on good terms with everyone at St. Jim's, except the cads, and he and Lowther had a good deal in common. Both tried their hands at literary composition, and both had real talent in that direction.

Besides, there seemed no reason why he should be suspicious. He was keen enough on the competition between his Form and the Shell; but the fact that he was a day-boy kept him from being quite so actively concerned in it as he might otherwise have been.

"Why aren't you practising?" asked Lowther. "I hear that you are to play against us on Wednesday."

"Can't afford the time to-day," Brooke answered. "Wanted at home. Blake and Figgy have been no end decent about it. But it really is a fact that I can generally play just as well without much practice. It's being fit and having a good eye, I suppose. I never should be a first-rate cricketer, but I'm capable of doing what I can without a lot of work at the nets."

"I'm not," confessed Lowther frankly. "But then, I'm not a born cricketer, only a made—or, rather, a half-made—one. I suppose cricketers, like poets, are born, not made."

"All depends," said Brooke, getting on to a subject that interested him, and warming up to it. "Some are born to it—like old W. G. and Victor Trumper. I'm not sure about Ranji. He had to do all sorts of things before he was of much use against fast bowling. But there's Charles Fry for a case of the made cricketer. And look what a splendid bat he was!"

But it was not for cricket jaw Lowther was being friendly with Brooke, and he made haste to turn the subject in another direction.

"Can't be any doubt in the case of the poets," he said thoughtfully.

"I don't know. I'm hoping there is. Because, you see, I can't believe I'm a born poet, and yet I'm hoping to do something decent in that line one day."

"You've done something decent already, old chap," said Lowther. "I think that war-poem of yours in the 'Weekly' was no end good. Sort of gathering of the clans thing, you know. You remember it?"

Did Dick Brooke remember it? Well, rather! His shining eyes showed how much the praise meant to him. Lowther, for all his tendency to bad jokes, was a really well-read fellow, well up in the classics, and his word of commendation was worth much to Brooke.

"You really liked it?" said the day boy diffidently.

"Of course I did! So did other fellows. Kerr told me that he thought the Scottish verse was splendid. Let's see, how does it go?

"Where Ben Nevis towers snow-capped,
where Schiehallion lifts proud head,
Do ye hear the pibroch shrilling? Do
ye hear the clansmen's tread?
Islesman, Highlander, or Lowlander,
they're leal hearts are bred
In Auld Scotland!"

"Something like that, wasn't it?"

"Very like that," said Brooke, with glowing face. "Fancy your remembering it all this time! And Kerr, too! He never said he cared about it."

If Lowther had merely been pulling Dick Brooke's leg, he would have felt ashamed of himself just then. But he had liked those verses, and it had not been necessary for him to look them up in order to quote from them; and Kerr really had confessed that they had got him, though, in a general way, Kerr did not go in much for poetry.

"Chaps don't," remarked Lowther. "Tommy and Manners make out that they think everything I write is blessed rot. They don't think so really; but there's a delusion that writing johnnies are conceited."

"I don't know that it's altogether a delusion," said Brooke thoughtfully. "I shouldn't call it exactly conceit; but when a chap has thoughts all of his own that he doesn't share with anyone, and dreams dreams of being famous one day—well, he has a way with him that might seem to others a bit conceited, as if their games and so on didn't matter to him as they do to them, you know."

"Didn't know you were such a philosopher, Brooke."

"That isn't philosophy. It's only thinking things out a bit."

"Well, what's philosophy, if it isn't that?"

"Got me there! Yes, that's so. But I'd never thought of it."

"Ever try your hand at a long story?"

"Yes; but I've never finished one yet. They don't work out right."

"I'm doing one," said Lowther. "I don't know that it's much in your line—rather cheap stuff, you might call it. Shocker kind of thing. Two chaps hard up against a gang of German spies, and all that."

"Can't see that a yarn's any the worse for being exciting," Dick said. "I don't care for the stories where everything goes on inside people's heads. I like plenty of conversation, and a fair amount of seeing things done. Rough luck for you to have hurt your right hand just now. I suppose you can't write?"

"Not very easily."

"But Tom Merry or Manners would write it from your dictation if you asked them, I'm sure."

"Blessed if I am, then! Catch them at it! Besides, they can't spare the time from cricket."

"Look here, Lowther, I'd help you, if you'd let me!" Dick said eagerly.

Monty Lowther's heart smote him. He had prepared this trap; but now he saw his victim walking into it with his eyes open he did not feel quite comfortable about it. It seemed a trifle mean.

But, after all, his plot was not against Brooke, but against the Fourth generally. Brooke was only being used because he was the most suitable person to play a certain part in it—an unconscious part, of course.

There really was a story, and Lowther had good hopes of it—providing the supply of paper in the country did not run out completely before some confiding editor or publisher had offered him wealth untold for it.

In thinking over the development of his story the vague notion of the scheme he was now pursuing had occurred to Lowther. Quite a lot of hard thinking had been needed before he had seen his way. Even now some of the details of the scheme were rather shadowy. But his talk with Brooke had made them less so. He began to see his way clear, he thought.

"Can you spare the time?" he asked.

"Well, not just anywhen," answered Brooke, using a Sussex word rarely heard elsewhere, as he did now and then. "But there are times when I could manage it. To-morrow, after morning classes, for instance. It would be easy enough then."

"But the match is on Wednesday. You ought to be at practice."

"Yes; but I can get them to let me have first turn at batting, and then come away. My bowling—such as it is—won't be wanted in the match; and I can always field up to the mark, I think."

"Think the Fourth will win, Brooke?"

"I think we've a jolly good chance. You've the best batsmen; but, after all, Blake and Figgy and Kerr and Redfern aren't so very far behind Talbot and Tom Merry and Kangaroo. And we've others who may make runs. To my mind, both sides are a bit short of the sort of bowling that can get fellows out quickly, and there ought to be some pretty heavy scoring if this weather lasts. But I think Wynn is a bit better than any of your bowlers—even Talbot, though he's nailing good at his best."

"We must win," said Lowther. "It will never do for us to be beaten by you kids, and we look like being beaten if you annex the First Eleven cricket points as well as the footer."

"You've gone down rather on the japes," remarked Brooke, quite innocently. "My Form has rather a pull there, of course. More than half the day they're safe, because I'm away, and no score can count if the whole Form's not in it."

"Oh, when we do get started we'll have you in, my son!"

"You won't find it so easy, Lowther!"

"Is that a challenge, Richard?"

"If you like. There's no need of a challenge, though, as you are bound to be looking out against being had all the time—and the same with us."

"Quite true—spoken like an oracle! Well, I think I'll turn back now."

"Right-ho!" answered Brooke cheerfully. "Thanks for coming along—it's a treat to get a yarn with a fellow who is interested in the same things as oneself. I'll look you up to-morrow about writing some of that yarn of yours to dictation."

"Do," said Lowther. "I want to get on with it. And look out for yourself and that wheeze we're bound to bring off! I shouldn't be surprised if Tommy or Kangaroo has something up his sleeve, you know."

"Are they turning you down for good, then, after the bizney the other day?" rejoined Brooke, laughing. "You didn't score a big success there. But it was a ripping wheeze, all the same."

"Thanks, dear boy! Hope you'll say the same when you're taken in and done for!"

"Oh, I will, all serene—when! But you won't bring it off, I'll bet! Ta-ta!"

Dick Brooke walked briskly on. Monty Lowther stood for a few seconds gazing after him.

"Richard, my boy," he murmured, "you don't see it; but you're in the toils already!"

CHAPTER 3.
Dick Brooke, Absentee.

"WHERE'S that chap Brooke?" asked Jack Blake, with a touch of irritation.

Wednesday afternoon had come, and with it the Shell v. Fourth First Eleven match. Blake had tossed with Figgins for the captaincy, and had won it. Then he had tossed with Tom Merry for the choice of innings, and had lost. The Shell would bat first, naturally. But the Fourth were not ready to take the field, being a man short.

two places in the Shell team, Gore having caught at the chance of captaining the Second Eleven. The Fourth side consisted of Blake, D'Arcy, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Redfern, Levison, Clive, Roylance, Koumi Rao, and Brooke. There were plenty of reserves, Digby, Herries, Cardew, Owen, Lawrence, Lumley-Lumley, Julian, and Reilly being all quite useful cricketers. But Figgy and Blake had agreed that Brooke, very sure and quick in the field, and a plucky if not very finished bat, was the best man for the eleventh place.

Now Brooke had failed to turn up, and it looked as though someone would have to be brought in to replace him.

"Have you seen anything of Brooke, Monty?" asked Tom, as Lowther came up. "To-day, I mean. I know you've been seeing a good deal of him the last day or two."

"Yes. Brooke and I are working in collaboration on the sensational novel of the year, not to say the century," answered Lowther blandly. "But, of course, he isn't here to-day."

"He wasn't in classes this morning," said Figgins. "But we counted on his turning up for the match this afternoon, of course. That's much more important than classes."

"Oh, hang it all, what a rotten memory I have!" said Lowther, with a grimace. "Didn't I tell you that he couldn't play?"

"You certainly didn't!" snapped Blake.

"It's a bit thick," said Figgy warmly. "A message like that ought to have been delivered, I think!"

"But it wasn't exactly a message," replied Lowther. "Brooke didn't actually ask me to tell you. I fancy he'd forgotten all about the match for the moment."

"You seem to be talking in riddles," Levison said.

"Not at all! If there's no hurry about the match——"

"But there is!" growled Blake.

"I will tell you the whole story. It has a touch of the mysterious about it."

"Oh, bless the story!" said George Figgins. "If it's certain that Brooke isn't coming, we must shove in someone else, that's all. Question is, who?"

"Owen—or Lawrence," said Dick Redfern at once.

"Cardew," suggested Levison.

"He's in jolly good form," added Clive.

"Don't leave No. 9 out in the cold, you fellows!" gibed Kangaroo.

"There's old Herries," said Blake.

"As no one mentions me, I'd like to put in a word for myself," spoke the voice of Dick Julian.

"I considah that it should most assuahedly be either Hewwies or Dig," said Arthur Augustus.

"You and I will have to settle it, Figgy," said Blake.

"How could I deliver that message—even if there had been an actual message, which there wasn't?" murmured Lowther. "To which of the two kings of Sparta should it have gone? Figgins was captain when we met them at footer; now Blake is, it seems."

Figgins and Blake had gone off together to settle the important point at issue without interference.

"Quite right, too," said Tom. "They're taking turns, and if you ask me, the way they've run this bizney together without a single House squabble coming into it is jolly creditable to them."

"In the Fourth, Thomas, we are not childish," said Kerr gravely.

Meanwhile, Blake and Figgins were settling things.

"Who's the best man to take, Figgy?" said Blake.

"I rather fancy Lawrence. To my mind, he's a bit ahead of either Herries or Dig."

"Well, so he is," Blake admitted. "And they won't mind, for they're counting on piling up no end of runs in the Second Eleven game. But there's a chap I'd prefer to Lawrence, and he isn't keen on playing for the second. I'm not dead sure he will play."

"You mean Cardew? But he's such a lazy beggar. And I don't see why a chap should be given a place in the First Eleven because he turns up his haughty nose at the Second."

"It isn't only that. We've got to make the best use of all the material we have, all the same; and Lawrence and Owen will be satisfied with the Second Eleven game, as well as Herries and Dig. Have you noticed Cardew's form lately?"

"He's got a pretty late cut, and he does get them round to leg in style," Figgy admitted. "And—when he chooses—he is about as smart a field in the slips as I know. But will he choose?"

"You bet! He's just aching to play, though he wouldn't admit it for a giddy pension. And it will buck up Levison and Clive no end."

"Let it be Cardew, then, old scout!" said Figgins amicably.

There was something like a murmur of surprise when Blake came back and said:

"Better go and get into flannels, Cardew. We want you."

"You don't mind waitin' a bit, I suppose?" returned Ralph Reckness Cardew. "I won't be more than half an hour or so. Or perhaps Merry will put us in first. That will make it all right, for my place is naturally No. 11, and you fellows ought to last long enough for me to get changed, by gad!"

"Merry's no such ass!" said Tom.

Clive took Cardew by the shoulders and gave him a push in the right direction.

"Hurry up!" he said. "I dare say we can have a substitute in the field for you till you're back, as it's Lowther's fault that we didn't know till the last minute that we were a man short."

"Dash it all, why should I hurry if a man is to field for me, dear boy?" asked Cardew. "Seems the best possible reason for takin' my time. If I have to field too long in this glarin' sun I can't possibly do myself justice as a batsman. I'm delicate, y'know, not a stalwart bounder like you or Levison."

Clive hustled him off.

"Tommy, I've been thinking," said Blake.

"Did it hurt much, old chap?" replied Tom sympathetically. "You can't very well go and lie down after it, but——"

"Ass! Can we finish this match to-day?"

"Not if we never start it," Tom said, grinning.

"That's not what I mean. We're not keen on deciding on the first innings."

"Nor we, if you come to that. Two innings each are much more satisfactory."

"Well, if we play on till seven, and can't finish then, do you agree to play it out another day? We could do it one evening, after classes, or on Saturday, if it looks like taking a whole afternoon."

"What do you fellows say?" asked Tom of his team.

They all agreed that it would be much more satisfactory to play out the game. The Fourth thought the same. They had talked it over beforehand.

Tom Merry and Lowther got on their pads, and the Fourth went out into the field, Owen, who was in flannels, taking the place of Cardew until the School House junior came back.

Two small figures, in white coats much too big for them, were already at the wickets. Wally D'Arcy and Frank Levison were to umpire. The school team had an away match on, and no one of the seniors left at home cared for the job; while the two fags at least knew the game well.

Wally and Frank, were talking together when Blake, Figgins, and the rest came along, throwing a new ball from hand to hand.

"Catch, kid!" yelled Clive, chucking it in Wally's direction.

Taken by surprise, Wally fumbled.

"Yah, butter-fingers!" came from outside the ropes.

Wally flushed angrily.

"That was that young beast Reggie!" he said to Frank. "As if I wasn't a better catch by a long sight than he ever was or ever will be! Better not make a mistake, Franky. They'll chortle no end if there's any argument over our decisions."

"No one's going to be allowed to argue about mine," replied Frank, with dignity. "What the umpire says goes, with decent chaps. Rats to Reggie and all the cads who back him up, Wally! Let's forget all about them."

From which it was evident that harmony in the Third had not yet been restored.

"Catch, Franky!" called Ernest Levison, throwing the ball high into the air. Frank caught it neatly as it dropped.

"Don't those Levisons swank?" sounded Reggie's high-pitched voice over the level sward.

"Catch, Wally!" cried Frank, taking no notice.

"He can't catch for nuts!" yelled Reggie.

But Wally took the ball neatly with one hand, and threw it hard to Koumi Rao. And now the Fourth got to their places, for Tom Merry and Lowther were emerging from the pavilion, ready for the fray.

CHAPTER 4.
An Awful Slump!

FATTY WYNN, stroking the ball as if he loved it, walked back from the wicket, and prepared to send down the first ball of the match to Lowther, who had taken guard with great care from Frank Levison.

Monty was not used to the honour of going in first. But neither Talbot nor Harry Noble cared for the place, and he had taken it readily enough.

He may have had visions of a century, but if he had any visions of that sort he was doomed to an early disappointment.

"Play!" cried Frank Levison.

Fatty came pounding up to the crease, and sent down a fast ball just outside the off-stump.

Lowther played forward, missed it completely, dragged his right foot over the crease in making his stroke, and whipped round to see his bails off, and Dick Roylance standing there with a grin on his face and the ball in his hand.

"Howzatt?" yelled half-a-dozen voices.

"Out!" said Wally.

"Strikes you as humorous, then, Roylance?" said Lowther.

"Well, it does a bit."

"You have a queer sense of humour, I must say!" snapped the funny man of the Shell as he walked away.

"Told you Roylance was the man for the stumping job," remarked Figgins to Kerr.

"That was smart enough for anything, anyway," replied the Scottish junior.

Kangaroo came in, took guard, and

marked the turf with a bail, after his usual custom—which no one thought swanky, because he always did—faced Fatty, and had his middle-stump bowled clean out of the ground by a ball that came in inches from the off and beat him completely.

The Cornstalk allowed no sign of the chagrin he felt to appear in his face. But he looked very thoughtful as he walked out.

Talbot was next. It was almost too much to look for the hat trick, but some of the Fourth yelled to Fatty to bring it off.

He did not. Talbot met the first ball confidently, and cut the second neatly for two. He scored a three off the last ball of the over, and faced Ernest Levison.

Levison had developed pace since the last season. He was now very near being that rara avis, a fast bowler of class, for he had lost none of his direction or pitch in increasing his pace.

He kept Talbot very much on the qui vive. But Talbot lived through the over, though he did not score a run.

Now Tom had his first ball to play. Fatty's bowling had no terrors for Tom Merry. It might dismiss him—any decent bowler may get out even the best batsman—but he did not fear it.

He got the first ball nicely round to leg for a couple, and made a spanking drive to the boundary off the fourth. Then he scored a brace and a single, and had to meet Levison.

"Tommy's all right," said Manners with a deep sigh of relief.

"Everything isn't lost as long as he and Talbot are there," agreed Glyn.

"Nothing's lost," growled Kangaroo. "We've made a bad start, that's all. It happens to every side now and again."

"Oh, yes, something's lost," said Lowther.

"What?"

"Your wicket, dear man!"

"Well, what about yours?"

"You did not play that ball in the right way, Noble," explained Grundy, flourishing a bat. "You——"

"I didn't play it at all. That's what was wrong."

"Then you ought to have done."

But Kangaroo walked away. He did not feel quite like having what he ought to have done explained to him by Grundy.

There was some applause when twenty appeared on the board. But runs were not coming fast, though both batsmen were in form. They found both Fatty and Levison very much on the spot, and the Fourth fielding was first-rate.

Cardew came lounging on to the field, and Owen went off. Cardew expressed himself as gratified that his place was short-slip.

"Means I don't have to do any runnin'—what?" he said.

"It means I'll scalp you, if there's a chance off my bowling, and you miss it!" returned Levison.

"I'm allowed to put 'em on the floor if they're off Wynn's, then?"

"You hadn't better!" growled Fatty.

Thirty went up after rather more than half an hour's play. Then Tom just touched a fast one from Levison, and next moment Cardew was seen to throw up the ball. It had come to him about knee-high, and at a great pace; but he had got his right hand to it, and it had stuck—he professed not to know how.

Three wickets down for 32 did not look too rosy. But Tom and Talbot had been playing a quiet, confident game that had encouraged those still to come; and no one expected the series of disasters that followed.

Jimson was next in. He was a batsman or he was nothing. On this particular day he seemed to be nothing. Off and middle stumps reeled as the result of Levison's first ball to him.

Wilkins followed, escorted out of the pavilion by Grundy, full of counsel. But Manners and Lowther seized the great George Alfred and held him back.

"Bad enough to have to go in at a time like this without being gassed by you, Grundy!" said Glyn, as the burly Shell fellow turned a red and angry face upon the grinning players sitting in a row awaiting their turns.

Wilkins raised false hopes by hitting Levison for 4 as a start.

"There you are!" said Grundy triumphantly. "You see what it means when a fellow has sense enough to take my tip!"

"We see!" groaned Lowther.

Grundy started in surprise. Wilkins was walking back to the pavilion.

"Wha-a-at's happened?" asked Grundy.

"Wilky's taken your advice, and he's coming back," replied the humorist of the Shell. "It was hardly fair to the Form to advise him to use his leg instead of his bat, though!"

"Oh, yes! It was out right enough!" admitted Wilkins honestly. "I didn't think the ball was straight, but it was; and young Levison hadn't any doubt about it."

"Catch him, with his brother bowling!" said Gibbons.

"Oh, you shut up! That kid's all right!" snapped Wilkins.

"You ought to be put in a museum, Wilky!" said Lowther.

"Why?"

"Cricket Section—Exhibit A 1—Batsman who admitted being out lbw, and did not consider the umpire a criminal of the deepest dye!" gibed Lowther.

"Oh, rats!" said George Wilkins.

Clifton Dane was the next man in. He did not know what nerves meant, and ought to have been just the right man for such a crisis as this.

Very Like Hindenburg!
(See Chapter 10.)

So he might have been had he only been able to stay. But a stolen run brought him Fatty Wynn's bowling to face. He slammed round hard at one off the leg-stump, and then, turning, groaned. For Cardew, taking short-leg to Fatty's bowling, and fielding daringly close in, was throwing up the ball.

"My hat!" gasped Dane. "It ought to have gone through you, you dangerous maniac! You'd no business fielding in a chap's pocket!"

"Had to stop it, by gad! You're right, Dane; it would have gone through me, so I put my hands in the way! Lucky it hasn't hurt them much—what?" drawled the dandy of the Fourth.

Six for 37, and Talbot inactive, getting no chance. This was awful!

Manners was next. Lowther opened his mouth to say something—funny or cheering. But Tom grabbed him by the arm and stopped him. Manners was not wanting anything—funny or cheering—said to him just then.

His face was set as he walked to the wickets. He was very keen to do something to-day.

He did, though it was nothing great. He started by letting Talbot have the bowling by running a risky one that most fellows would not have attempted at such a time. But it was good policy.

Talbot, also taking risks, hit a couple of 4's. Then Manners met six balls from Levison, and got his bat to each one of them, though all he scored was a brace for a lucky snick.

Again Talbot faced Fatty. He scored a single, and Manners, jumping out to a rather short one, sent it whizzing to boundary.

Fifty went up without a cheer—50 for six wickets on a perfect pitch was not matter for cheering.

Again Manners jumped out. Tom groaned.

"That does it!" he said.

The ball was in the air. Manners had

played the same stroke as to the last; but Fatty had not bowled quite the same ball. It was a couple of feet farther up, and the result was that, instead of the drive going all along the carpet, it was lofted.

George Figgins stood waiting for it; and Figgy rarely missed a catch. He did not miss this one.

Glyn came. But Glyn failed to stay. He scored a single off Fatty; but Levison's first ball sent his off-bail on a journey.

Gunn was next. For the last five minutes Gunn had been zealously dodging Grundy. Perhaps he felt that advice at that moment was really more than he could bear.

"Haven't you a word of encouragement for your faithful henchman, Grundy?" asked Lowther, as Gunn hurried out.

"I've nothing to say to anyone!" snorted Grundy. "This is only what might be expected when a captain deliberately leaves out the best man available!"

"But your finger isn't fit yet; you can't hold a bat!" protested Wilkins.

"I could bat one-handed——"

"As well as with both," chipped in Lowther. "Quite right, Grundy! That's the beauty of your style of cricket. Even a bat is not a sine qua non. You could do exactly the same things with a shovel or a scythe!"

"I couldn't get out for less than a duck, or sooner than first ball, anyway!" retorted Grundy, breathing hard.

Gunn could not do more than those two things; but those two he did as completely as Lowther, and with about the same amount of satisfaction to himself.

And it was Roylance in his case, too—a really clever catch at the wicket, for which the New Zealand junior had to jump. He fell on his back, but he held the leather clear of the ground.

Frere whipped in. But Talbot had the bowling, and hit a 4 a 2, and a 3. The last stroke was worth 4; but Frere was always a bit slow. And Fatty was too much for him. His middle-stump pirouetted, and the Shell innings was all over for 63.

Talbot carried his bat for 30. Levison and Fatty Wynn had each taken five wickets, the School House fellow for rather fewer runs than the Falstaff of the New House.

CHAPTER 5.
Laying the Train.

"NOW, what's this yarn about Brooke, Lowther?" asked Figgins, buttonholing the humorist of the Shell as the Fourth team came off the field, looking very pleased with themselves, as they had every right to do.

"Yarn? There's no yarn that I know of," replied Lowther.

Figgins had asked exactly the question that Monty had wanted some Fourth Former to ask; and the astute Lowther also wished several of the Fourth to be within hearing when he told what he had to tell about Dick Brooke.

The story he was going to tell was quite true. The truth happened to fit in quite nicely with Lowther's plot. It helped that plot a good deal, though it was not absolutely necessary to it.

And, remembering how completely the Fourth leaders had taken him in over the Lathom spoof, debating with grave faces the propriety of risking twenty-five points on a chance that they knew was practically no chance, as far as they were concerned, but a dead certainty, Monty had no prickings of conscience about deceiving them by telling just as much of the truth as suited his purpose, though he felt a little bit uneasy as to taking in the frank and unsuspicious Brooke.

The Shell fellows were showing no interest in the Brooke question. They were debating the state of the pitch. Talbot said it was perfect, and Tom agreed with him. Kangaroo said he hadn't seen anything wrong with it, and Manners admitted that he couldn't tell by looking at a pitch, for his part, though he had seen crowds of people looking as wise as owls while inspecting the wicket on a big county ground. He didn't believe they could tell, either. But Dane and Glyn and Wilkins and Gunn were all of opinion that the turf could not be as true as it looked. It must have given the bowlers some help, they considered.

"When a pitch is hard," said Tom, "there are only two ways it can help the bowlers. One is by being uneven, and that certainly is not the case here. The other is by being fiery, in which case the ball gets up high, and leads to chances in the slips. Only Dane and I were caught in the slips, and neither of us off a rising ball.

"Let's go and have a look at it," suggested Clifton Dane.

"Not any for me, thanks!" replied Tom. "I rather fancy we are going to see enough of it during the next two or three hours. We sha'n't get those bounders out much under 200."

"But you said you knew he couldn't play to-day," persisted Figgy, in the other group. "I think you ought to have let us know. When a chap has a message——"

"Don't I tell you I had no message, dear boy? Brooke simply didn't say anything to me about missing the match."

"But you knew he wouldn't turn up, and you might have told us!" growled Blake.

"I didn't know that he might not send you a message. And, anyway, it's not my bizney to act as messenger for you kids!" answered Lowther, with deliberate and intentional flippancy.

"You burbling Shellfish!" snapped Figgy. "You ought——"

"I really can't allow myself to be instructed in my duty by a member of a Form junior to mine, Figgins," said Lowther blandly.

"Well, I'd like to know why Brooke was away, for one," remarked Levison. "It isn't often he misses classes, let alone the chance of a match."

"I can only tell you what I know," Lowther replied amiably. "I don't in the least mind doing that, although I deny that Figgy has a right to expect me to run after him—or after Blake—by the way, which is the pro tem. King of Sparta!"

"Oh, cut the cackle, and——"

"There is no cackling, Blake!"

"But there might vewy well be," said Gussy slyly.

"I don't quite follow you, D'Arcy."

"An' I hope I shall manage to wefwain fwom followin' you, Lowthah! You might cackle, you know, because you have pwoduced an egg! Ha, ha!"

"Did you think of that all by yourself, dear child?" inquired Lowther, patting the swell of the Fourth on his beautifully-brushed and carefully-parted hair. "Well, done! Well done, indeed! Send it to 'Chatterbox,' do!"

"Oh, shut up, Gustavus!" growled Blake. "We want to know about Brooke, and time's getting on."

"There is not much to tell," said Lowther. "Brooke and I were strolling along together within half a mile or so of his lowly, but eminently respectable cot. In the words of the great poet who—er—perpetrated 'Little Jim':

"'The cottage was a thatched one——'"

"Oh, hang it all, can't you get on?" hooted Figgy. "We all know Brooke's show. It's Brooke we want to be told about!"

"We were strolling along, I repeat, and——"

"You said that before," chipped in Clive.

"If I had not said it before, sweet youth, I could hardly have repeated it," said Lowther suavely. "Do, pray, give words their due weight!"

"Oh, get a move on!" snapped Blake.

"We were doing so. Not a rapid move. I repeat that we were strolling—a gait inconsistent, as no doubt my learned friend Skimpole, if present—— Is he present, by the way?"

"You'll get yourself bumped, Lowther!" said Ernest Levison ominously.

"Inconsistent with the idea of really rapid locomotion," went on Lowther, delighting in their impatience. "We were discussing a critical point in the story in which Brooke is kindly collaborating with me. The hero, whose name is Robert Brooke—I had fixed upon that name before Richard came into partnership, and we saw no reason why it should not——"

"Boil your piffling hero! We don't want to hear about him!" snorted Clive.

"It's Brooke we want——"

"Yes, Figgy, old top, but which Brooke?"

"The real Brooke, of course, chump! Who cares about your——"

"As a fellow artist in the realm of imaginative fiction, you should show more sympathy, Figgy—you really should!" said Lowther, with a sad shake of the head. "But let that pass! It is the fate of genius to be scorned by mere workaday talent. We were just——"

"If there's another word about Robert, look out for a bumping!" Levison warned him.

"When we were accosted—or, rather, Brooke was accosted—by a somewhat Hunnish-looking individual."

"Do you mean——"

"I mean just what I say, Herries! And I do not say that the man who accosted Brooke was a Hun—I merely say that he was Hunnish-looking. He spoke to Brooke of something which it appeared Brooke had undertaken to do for him, and which he desired to have performed to-day. Brooke seemed to think that any other day would be, on the whole, a better day; he seemed, indeed, a trifle dismayed, though I am not prepared to say upon what score."

"He tried to beg off, you mean?" said Kerr.

"You might put it that way, certainly."

"And the chap wouldn't have it?"

"The chap, as you infer, Roylance, wouldn't have it."

"And then Brooke told you——"

"What Brooke said was: 'Excuse me, Lowther, old chap; I've business with this gentleman. Afraid I shall have to be away to-morrow.'"

"Well, wasn't that a message for us?" demanded Figgins.

"Was it? I may be dense, Figgy, dear boy, but——"

"You are dense!" snapped Blake.

"It all sounds dweadfully mysterious," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Do you think the individual weally was a Hun, Lowthah?"

Lowther did not give a direct answer to that question. It would not have suited him to do so, for the man who had stopped Brooke was a Wayland tradesman, whom at least half the fellows there knew by sight.

Mr. Wagstaff certainly had a Hunnish

appearance, and was often taken for a German by strangers to the town. But there was nothing Hunnish about him except his looks and a certain arbitrariness of manner.

"I can only say, Gustavus, that he might have been Hindenburg's twin brother."

Here again Lowther took a risk, for Mr. Wagstaff was notoriously like the Prussian generalissimo. But no one thought of Mr. Wagstaff.

"I do hope and twust Bwooke is not gettin' mixed up with——"

"Rats, Gussy! Is it likely?" said Dig.

"Are you fellows thinking of batting this afternoon?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes; you'd better hurry up. You're taking more time between innings than you're entitled to," said Wally of the Third.

Blake and Kerr hurried into the pavilion to get their pads and gloves on.

CHAPTER 6.
The Fourth Ahead.

KERR was a very steady bat. He could hit when he chose; but his chief value to his side consisted in his ability to wear down the bowling.

Blake, a far more dashing bat, was less reliable. But he was in fine form that day, getting the full face of the bat to everything, and seeming to find everything easy.

The Fourth roared their applause as the score leaped up to twenty in exactly eight minutes.

Thirty up in five minutes more. Then there was an appeal for stumping against Blake. But Glyn, who was keeping wicket, was not quick enough by a shade, and Blake's foot was back again just in time.

Forty! Kerr had now made 8, including one capital 4 off a loose ball from Tom. But neither Tom nor Talbot had sent down many loose ones.

Tom went off, and gave Frere a trial at his end. Frere bowled simple-looking slows, which were possibly not so simple as they looked. Kerr seemed to smell a rat, and played an over of them with great care.

But Blake, when he got opposite Frere, dashed at the slows. He got fairly hold of the first he received, and sent it clean over the pavilion for six. The next travelled along the turf to boundary—four. A burst of cheering greeted the fact that the Fourth had reached their rivals' score without the loss of a wicket.

Then there was another shout. Blake had slammed hard again, and the ball looked like travelling well over the ropes. But the cheering died away as it was seen to be falling within them, and Tom Merry, running like a greyhound in the long field, made for the catch.

He got to it only just in time, and how he held it he hardly knew. But he did hold it. And now it was the Shell that cheered.

Blake had played a really brilliant innings of 45.

Figgy joined Kerr, and the two, who understood each other to a nicety, rather bustled the field by sneaking runs. They did it once too often, though, for with 55 added, of which number his own score was 25, the New House chieftain was cleverly thrown out by Kangaroo, fielding at cover.

Koumi Rao joined the steady Kerr, scored two fours by leg glances quite in the old Ranji style, and then was clean bowled by Talbot.

The score had now passed the hundred, and with Cardew and Kerr in partnership another 50 were added. Cardew's form was a revelation to almost all who saw. They had not realised that here was a fellow who could do as well as the best at most things—if he only cared to try!

It was Kerr who left next, out to a good catch with one hand by Lowther at point. In two hours Kerr had made only a couple of dozen runs, but he had deserved well of his side. He had taken much of the sting out of the bowling by his dour defence.

Everybody did something.

Cardew proved top scorer, with 50. Levison, hitting out like a horse kicking, scored 24 by means of six strokes to the boundary in two overs from Frere and Manners. Clive got 20 in capital style, and carried his bat; and altogether Study No. 9 had thus done better than well. Manners, put on to bowl in sheer desperation, had the satisfaction of getting a wicket—that of Arthur Augustus, who was lowest scorer with five. Gussy explained that it was the sheer badness of the ball that caused him to get out; but no one believes that, least of all Manners. And, in point of fact, it was quite a good ball, though not equal to many of Talbot's which had been played and sometimes scored from.

Talbot bore the brunt of the bowling all through the innings, keeping an end going for all but three overs. He came out with an analysis of four for 72, which was not so bad in an innings of 246. Tom Merry and Frere had a couple of wickets each.

The Fourth were jubilant. A lead of 183 meant a tremendous handicap for the Shell to face in their second innings; and they would have to do something really sensational to have even an off chance of victory.

"If all your best bats make centuries, and old Talbot does the hat-trick two or three times in our second innings, we may lose—not unless, I fancy," said Blake.

"Well, such things have happened," replied Tom Merry.

"Not at St. Jim's!" said Kerr.

"What's the odds? If they could happen anywhere else they could happen here, I suppose? Three centuries in an innings have been made lots of times—by schoolboys, too. If there are three men on a side capable of making centuries it isn't such desperately long odds against their all doing it in the same innings. As for all the hat-tricks—well, if we can only make enough runs they won't be necessary, you know."

"How many runs do you think would be enough, Tommy?" asked Figgins, winking at Blake.

"Oh, about five hundred, to be safe," Tom replied coolly.

"And you think you're going to make all that lot?" gasped Clive.

"I wouldn't go so far as that. But I know we're going to try. The pitch is good enough for anything, and it's only a question of not making mistakes for a chap to stick there as long as he cares to."

"If the bowlers will let him!" grinned Levison.

"That's included in the not making mistakes," Tom answered.

"Well, you're a good old 'Never-say-die,' Thomas," remarked Kerr, with some admiration. "But I can't see the Shell making five hundred myself."

"Do you think we've a dog's chance, really, Tommy?" asked Lowther, taking Tom aside.

"Not sure. Yes, I think we may have. I don't see why we shouldn't make as many runs the second time as they did the first, and then it's only a matter of getting them out for less than they did us at our first try."

"Only!" said Lowther.

"Well, it might be done. Anyway, I'm not throwing up the sponge, not with a long afternoon's cricket on Saturday to come—for that's what it will mean if we stick there for the rest of the afternoon."

"You want to make a really good start—that's the great thing," Lowther said thoughtfully.

"That's so."

"Well, get Kangaroo or Talbot to go in first with you. I know they don't care for the place; but there's a ten times better chance with one of them there than with me."

Tom eyed him narrowly.

"Monty, you've something up your sleeve!" he said.

"Spoken like an oracle, Thomas! I have. But don't you worry about that. Just take Kangy in with you, and stick there all the rest of the afternoon, the two of you!"

"Is it a spoof?"

"Something in that way, Thomas, But don't ask for details."

"Well, all I hope is that you won't make a giddy mess——"

"Did you ever know me to do such a thing, old scout?" asked Monty Lowther reproachfully.

"I did. The Lathom——"

"Consign that to the limbo of things forgotten! This will wipe out that—and more!"

"You're sure the Fourth don't know——"

"My dear man, I haven't told a living soul! No taking chances this time. But here's a paper in an envelope. If the Fourth start on a wild-goose chase when game's over for the day, get a dozen or so of the Shell together, and make them sign the declaration inside, that's all."

Tom stared at him as he took the sealed envelope.

"A wild-goose chase?" he said. "You're talking in riddles, Monty! Why should——"

"If they go off it will be on a wild-goose chase," broke in Lowther. "'Shush now! We are observed! Ask no more. But if they go, as many of the Shell as want to go may go with them; but at least a dozen must have signed that paper before they start—see?"

"Hanged if I do! And why can't you get them to sign it yourself?"

"I may be elsewhere."

"It's too blessed dark for my fancy," said Tom doubtfully.

"Trust your Uncle Montague, Thomas!" replied Lowther solemnly.

"I suppose I shall have to; but I don't half like it."

"Is he not trusting you to make a century?"

"He may be, old fellow, though it's a very off chance. I hope your wheeze is more of a cert than that!"

"I regard them both as dead certainties," replied the humorist of the Shell, apparently in earnest for once. "Tommy, my bright and beautiful youth, the Fourth must not triumph—they simply must not! Anything but that!"

"I'll go and ask Kangy," said Tom. "Talbot ought to have a rest after all the bowling he's done."

"Right-ho!" said Lowther. "I think myself Noble's the man. Good luck, my son!"

When Tom looked round again Monty had mizzled.

CHAPTER 7.
Startling News.

"OH, I'm on, right enough, Tom, if you think it's for the best!" said Harry Noble at once. "It's really only a fancy of mine, not liking to go in first. I suppose we play for keeps?"

"Play for——"

"Keep our wickets up without taking a ha'porth of risk—Kerr's game, you know," chipped in Kangaroo, seeing that his skipper was frankly puzzled. "That's what we call it in Australia. And you just ought to see Frank Laver and big man Armstrong doing it, as I've seen 'em, when I was a kid, on the Melbourne ground! Thirteen feet and thirty stone, or thereabouts, of man scoring about twenty-five runs an hour. My word, delirious wasn't the word for it!"

"I shouldn't think it was," said Tom, grinning.

"Old son," said Kangaroo gravely, "an hour of that sort of thing might save us yet. We've a good bit over an hour to go, and if we can tame Fatty and Levison we can thump the rest, I reckon. Let's try it, anyway."

"Right-ho!" answered Tom. "It's not my game, and it's not yours; but we haven't a Kerr on the side, so it's up to us."

When the two came out together for the desperate uphill game they had to play, the Fourth fully anticipated trouble from them both.

But they did not begin to anticipate the trouble they were to have.

A really good batsman who has patience, and is at concert pitch, has always a chance of wearing out any bowler, bar bad luck. To play very steadily is to cut out more than half the chances of the game. And that was what Tom and Kangaroo set themselves to do.

It was very dull to watch, but what did that matter?

Grundy grumbled. Grundy's notion was that the best way to meet the situation was to take the bowlers by the scruffs of their necks, and thump centuries out of them in rather less than no time, so to speak. And had it only been possible it would have been quite a good way.

But Fatty Wynn and Ernest Levison were not exactly that kind of bowler. And as the two batsmen had not to listen to Grundy's criticism it did not worry them, though it nearly sent Manners crazy, and caused Wilkins and Gunn to say insubordinate things to their chief.

The players understood, at least. Not only the Shell players, but, after a bit, the Fourth. There was Saturday to come, and the changes that the great game is full of; and, meanwhile, the Shell were not losing any wickets, if they were not scoring many runs.

Slow—terribly slow! Not a run off the first three overs. Off the first ball of the fourth Tom scored a four. Then he seemed to go to sleep again.

No, not quite that. There was no napping about Tom. Levison found a bat that seemed as wide as a barndoor meeting every ball on the wicket; and every ball off it was left alone. None of them was loose enough yet to be hit with absolute safety, and the two were putting safety about everything.

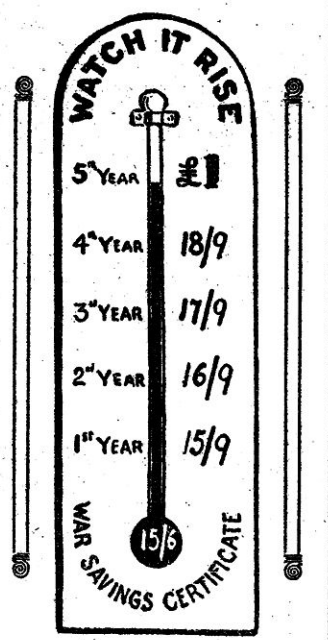
Kangaroo was as careful with Fatty's bowling as Tom with Levison's. Eight overs were bowled for 12 runs—Tom's 4 and four hits for 2 each—before the batsmen changed ends. And when they did it was a case of Kangaroo going carefully now with Levison, and Tom with Fatty—that was all the difference.

Blake tried a change, going on himself at Levison's end, and putting on Redfern at Fatty's. Two overs from each resulted in an additions of 16 to the score; but that was not because the batsmen risked anything, it was because Blake and Redfern sent down some rather short stuff, which they could hit quite safely.

Fatty and Levison resumed. But Fatty was getting cross, and Levison was losing some of his pace. Now the runs came faster. But still Tom and Kangaroo took no risk. Not a single ball was put up, and not a single unsafe stroke was made.

And now the two were thoroughly set. The ball looked bigger. Their keen eyes could see every stitch in the seam as it came towards them, and they glided into a faster rate of scoring. At the end of an hour they had made only 33. Five minutes later 50 went up. Twenty minutes after that sent up 100.

But it was not by wild hitting. They had tamed Fatty and Levison, as Kangaroo had hoped they might, and none of the others, though some of them were very fair bowlers, had any terrors for them. Blake and Figgy, Kerr and



Redfern, Gussy and Clive, all had a shot, and the only question was off which runs came the fastest. Cardew bowled one over, and seventeen came off it. Roylance took off his pads and wicket-keeping gloves, and tried his hand in the very last over of the day. He bowled a maiden—the first since fifty had gone up. Tom and Kangaroo were taking no chances in that last over.

At seven o'clock stumps were drawn, with the score 137 for no wicket. Tom had made 73, Noble 60. Kangaroo accused Tom, as they walked back to the pavilion amid frantic cheering, with having played recklessly.

"That's how you got ahead of me," he said. "We mustn't do it when we make a fresh start, old son. This has to be done all over again on Saturday, you know."

"If they'll let us," replied Tom.

"Well, they didn't want to let us today. Never saw old Fatty get so annoyed. And I don't mind admitting it must have been a bit hard to—— Hallo! What's the row?"

"Somebody with a letter for Blake!" sang out Kerruish of the Fourth.

Blake hurried forward. The messenger came to meet him. He was dressed shabbily, and his face was dirty. His cap was pulled well down over his eyes, and he had a curious downward droop of the head, which served to hide his features. It was rather as if he were trying to get the end of his nose into his collar, except for the minor detail that he wore no collar.

He really did not look at all like Monty Lowther. But he was Monty Lowther, for all that.

It was not suspicion that caused Blake to look sharply at him. It was only that Blake was not used to having notes brought to him by such queer customers as this, and he wondered what it meant.

"Who sent you with this?" he asked.

"Carn' say," growled the messenger.

"Do you mean you don't know?"

"Well, I might be knowin' of the young bloke, an' then, agin, I mightn't. Read it, an' per'aps you'll see as 'ow openin' my mouth too wide mightn't be the game as 'ud pay the likes of me best."

Blake tore the note open.

"My hat!" he gasped as he read it.

"What's the row, old scout?" asked Tom.

Everybody else was looking at Blake; but Kangaroo happened to catch the left eye of the mesenger as he lifted his head for a second, and that left eye gave the Australian junior a wink. Enlightenment dawned upon Kangaroo. He at least knew from the first that that was a spoof.

"Look at this!" said Blake dramatically.

Everybody crowded round to look. Grundy hurt his broken finger, now healing, by collaring Gunn's ear with his left hand to get Gunn out of the way. Figgy looked over one shoulder; but it was Clive, looking over the other, who read out the two or three lines the note held.

"Rescue! I am in the hands of the Huns. Unless you bring help within twelve hours there is grave peril for me.—R. BROOKE."

"Dick Brooke! In the hands of the Huns!" gasped Julian.

"It can't be true," Kerr said. "It's some jape."

"But Brooke isn't the sort of fellow to play a jape like this," said Redfern.

"That's a dead cert," Lawrence chimed in.

"I don't think he is myself," said Blake. "It sounds too jolly wild to be true, though."

"It's Brooke's writing, anyway," remarked Figgy.

"Tommy, are you in this?" asked Kerr, with a quick glance at Tom.

"Never heard of or saw it before," replied Tom, quite truly. "How should I?"

"Well, it might be a Form jape," said Kerr.

"Don't see it," Clive said. "Brooke wouldn't play against his own side. If he wrote this—and I'm jolly certain he did—I don't see how it can possibly be a do."

"Let's have a look at it," said Ernest Levison.

Blake put it into his hand. He examined it very closely.

"It's Brooke's writing all serene," he said. "I could have written it like this, with a bit of practice, but there isn't a duffer in the Shell who could have done it in a hundred years!"

"Well, forgery isn't exactly the sort of thing we go in for in the Shell!" sneered Clampe, who had lounged up to the group around Blake a few minutes earlier.

"I'll attend to you later on!" snapped

Levison. "Blake, I really think there must be something serious in this."

"We don't want to be taken in and done for by that Shell crowd!" grumbled Pratt.

"No chance of that. Here it is in Brooke's own fist——"

"If it is Brooke's own fist!" put in Owen.

"I can swear to that," said Levison. "I've studied this sort of thing. It's Brooke's fist, as sure as I stand here!"

"What was that yarn Lowther was telling about some Hun meeting Brooke?" asked Tompkins. "That's at the bottom of it, I'll bet!"

Clarence York Tompkins was not usually looked upon as an oracle, but his present suggestion found favour with the majority.

"It seems such rot!" objected Kerr. "What Huns are there round here?"

"Scores, for all we know!" replied Figgins.

"Hundweds, vewy likely!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "I considah——"

"Thousands!" said Dig. "Anyway, there's old Schneider. Do you think he's got Brooke?"

"But why should any Huns want Brooke?" asked Clifton Dane.

"Give it up," replied Kangaroo. "Queer taste, I must say, for anyone to be so keen on a chap in the Fourth. But I never did pretend to understand Huns."

"Where is that ass Lowther?" demanded Figgy. "He might let some light in on this."

"He might—if he liked!" whispered Kangaroo in the ear of Tom Merry.

"I don't think he's here," Tom replied.

"I know he is!" said Harry Noble.

CHAPTER 8.
The Mystery of Dick Brooke.

"'ERE, I say, there's a rare lot of lip a-goin' on, but I don't 'ear nothink about me gettin' anythink for the job I bin an' done!" spoke the dirty messenger.

They had almost forgotten him, and certainly he had not courted observation until that moment. Now he came forward, with the peak of his cap and his nose well down.

"Where did you get this?" asked Blake sharply.

"I dunno as that's a safe thing to tell!" snuffled the dirty-faced one.

"Oh, rats! I suppose nothing can happen to you if you tell us whether Brooke himself gave you this?"

"It don't 'elp me none for you to s'pose this or to s'pose that. There ain't any sense in openin' mouths too wide in times like those 'ere. It's dangerous, that's wot it is, young feller-me-lad!"

Faces were getting angry. By this time the great majority of those present believed that, however strange it might seem, Dick Brooke must be in some real peril.

After all, stranger things than that had happened. Queer things had chanced even at St. Jim's and in the neighbourhood. Everybody knew that German spies had been spread all over the country before the war, and few believed that all of them had been rounded up and put behind barbed wire or under lock and key.

Brooke might have fallen foul of a gang of these scoundrels. The messenger seemed to know more than he was inclined to tell about it. But he was not to be allowed to go without saying more than he had yet said.

"Did Brooke give it to you?" snapped Blake.

Dick Brooke Appears!
(See Chapter 9.)

"Yaas, wathah! That is the question, my good man. Did Bwooke——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" growled Herries.

"Well, then, 'e did not," said the good man, making the admission as if he felt it as big a wrench as having a tooth drawn.

"Here you are! That's what you want to loosen your tongue, I suppose!" Blake said, taking half-a-crown from his pocket and tossing it to the fellow.

The dirty-faced one looked at it as if doubtful whether Blake might not have made it himself. He tested it with his teeth. It appeared to satisfy him after that. They rather expected him to spit upon it for luck, but he put it in his pocket without going through that ceremony.

"Can't you speak?" demanded Figgy impatiently.

"Speak? In course I can speak! Ain't you heard me speak? 'Oo're you gettin' at, Longshanks?" returned the stranger huskily.

"Well, what about Brooke?" asked Roylance.

"I shouldn't think as 'ow you'd be fur wrong if you 'unted the moor for 'im," was the reply.

"But that's where he lives," said Digby, puzzled.

"'E don't live all over it, do 'e? Mind, I ain't sayin' as you will find 'im there, but I reckon it's the likeliest place."

"He didn't give you this himself?" said Tom Merry.

"Ain't I said so? It come into my 'ands, that's all I'm a-goin' to tell about it."

"It looks rather as if it had done that," remarked Cardew, who was now handling the note. "Faugh!"

The envelope was not conspicuously clean, but no reasonable person could have expected anything which had been handled by the fellow before them to be very clean.

"Somebody might have bribed him," said Kerr.

"Yes, some Shell bounder!" snapped Herries.

"But nobody could have bribed Brooke," said Levison. "That's Brooke's fist; and unless you disbelieving chaps can explain how he could be got to write it if it wasn't true, I don't see that we can very well help believing what he says."

Kangaroo's elbow nudged Tom Merry's ribs. When the astute Levison had been taken in they were well on the way to triumph, surely!

Tom understood now. He knew that the shabby stranger, who talked in the rough, coarse voice, and seemed such a queer mixture of stupidity and cunning, was his chum, and naturally he knew that Dick Brooke was in no danger, but naturally he was not going to say so.

The disguised Lowther turned, and began to shamble away.

"Here, I say," cried Julian, "we haven't done with you yet!"

"Is there any more chink 'angin' to it?" demanded the messenger, facing round again.

"Depends upon what more you can tell us," said Kerruish diplomatically.

"I'll think about that arter I've 'andled the brass," answered the messenger hoarsely; and he leered unpleasantly at them.

"I fancy he's told us all he knows," said Figgy to Blake.

"If he tells us any more it will probably be lies," Blake replied.

"Even if what he's told us already isn't," put in Kerr.

"You can go!" said Levison curtly.

Lowther shambled off. Levison turned to the rest.

"There's only one thing to do that I can see," he said. "We're bound to go and look for old Brooke."

"What! Without tea?" said Fatty Wynn plaintively.

"And what about call-over?" asked Hammond.

"Oh, hang tea!" snapped Figgins.

"And bless call-over!" said Roylance. "If we're all away we can't be dropped on to very heavily; and if we find old Brooke——"

"We've got to find him!" said Clive determinedly.

"Yaas, wathah! You had bettah let me take the lead, deah boys. This is the kind of job where bwains count."

"Hadn't you better nobly offer to stay at home, Gustavus?" inquired Dig.

"You fags aren't up to a bizney of this kind!" growled Grundy. "I'm the man to lead you!"

"You?" snorted Figgins. "My only sainted aunt! That thing wants to lead us, Blake—us!"

"It would," said Blake, "but it can't help it, poor thing! I didn't know that this affair was anything to do with the Shellfish. Brooke sent the message to me, and, of course, it was the Fourth he expected to go to his rescue."

"Yaas, wathah! Heah, heah, Blake! Still, if the Shell like to take a part in the enterpwise——"

"Are you coming along, Tommy?" Blake asked.

"Oh, we'll come, eh, Kangy?" said Tom.

"We'll come right enough!" replied Harry Noble. "Better muster the whole available force of the two Forms, I should say."

"You think there's something in it, then?" said Kerr.

"I think there's a good deal in it," Tom answered, with unmoved face.

"There must be," said Kangaroo gravely.

"There you are!" said Levison.

"I give in," said Kerr. "I couldn't help suspecting a low Shell dodge in this. But I can't see how it could have been worked; and it's out of the question not to respond to old Brooke's appeal if there's a dog's chance that it's genuine."

"Let's go and change, and start straight away!" said Figgins.

"Need we change?" asked Blake.

"We can't go tramping along the roads in spiked boots," answered Redfern. "And as we've got to change those, it won't take much longer to get our flannels off. You may not mind laundry bills, Blake, old scout; but I have to be careful, I can tell you. Flannels are for cricket, not for Hun-hunting!"

"And the chaps who haven't any changing to do can be rounding up the rest," suggested Levison.

"Good notion!" said Tom heartily.

He rounded up the rest—or some of them—in the Shell dormitory, and got their signatures to the paper Lowther had left in his hands. Everyone who signed it grinned. No one refused to accompany the search party; but after signing that paper they went with lighter hearts than the Fourth did.

Not that Blake, Figgins & Co. were disposed to take the affair tragically. They did not really fear for Brooke's life. The worst at all likely to happen was that he should receive rough treatment at the hands of some Hun spies upon whose secrets he had accidentally stumbled—that was the general theory. They all rather anticipated finding him a prisoner somewhere, perhaps tied up,

while the Huns put a good distance between themselves and the neighbourhood.

But as there might still be a Hun or two lurking around, some of the more ardent armed themselves with cricket-stumps; and Grundy—until he had seen that paper—was keen on borrowing Mr. Railton's revolver. It was pointed out to him that Mr. Railton was not on the premises; but—as Grundy justly remarked—that made the chance of borrowing it a much better one.

"I shall take Towser," said Herries.

"What for?" sniffed Blake.

"To track Brooke down, of course. I've got a book of his here for the old chap to sniff at."

"Towser ain't a bloodhound," said Dig.

"Who ever said he was, ass! He's as good, though!"

"I shouldn't think Brooke's books can niff so——"

"This is for a dog to smell, not a donkey, Clive!" rapped out Herries. "Wally, you might go and fetch old Towser."

"Yes; and I'll get Pongo, too," replied Wally eagerly.

"What good would he be? Besides, you're not in this!"

"As much good as that thick-headed old Towser! And we jolly well are in this; so don't you make any mistake about it! We're going along, aren't we, Franky?"

"Ra-ther!" answered Levison minor, as his chum darted off.

"We can't have all the fags——"

"It ain't all the fags, Tom Merry," said Frank pleadingly. "It's only Wally and me. We—we ain't very chummy with the rest of them just now."

"There's me," said Joe Frayne behind him.

"Oh, well, you can go, of course, Joe. These fellows won't mind that."

And the three fags went with the search party, though the efforts made by Reggie Manners and a dozen or so more to assert their right to be of it were successfully resisted. The appearance of Mr. Selby just as Reggie was leading his band out of gates had something to do with that.

Wally and Frank and Joe had got away with the Fourth and Shell. They would have to settle with their tyrant later, as they well knew; but they were not inclined to let that worry them.

Towser and Pongo were also of the party. Racke, Crooke, & Co. were not. As Lowther might have said, had he been there, the dogs went, but not the gay dogs. This, however, did not apply to the gay dogs of the Fourth. Mellish and Trimble were too curious to stay behind; and Chowle was brought along by Dick Clarke, who said he wasn't going to let the rotter slack about while others were working.

Thus the whole Fourth was there—all save Brooke. And, as it was evident that Lowther must in some way have taken in Brooke as well as the rest, there seemed a good chance of bringing off a really big scoop and annexing much needed points for the Shell.

"I say, you fellows, don't go so fast!" begged Baggy Trimble. "I can't keep up with you."

"Well, don't!" retorted Blake. "Nobody wants you to!"

"Towser can't keep up, either," said Herries. "I'll leave him behind to take care of you, if you like, Baggy, in case some of the Huns spring on you unawares," you know!"

"I—I say, though, you don't think—— Here, I won't be left with Towser. The beast ain't safe! Hold on! I'm coming!" wailed Baggy.

"He's safe enough!" yelled back Herries. "He only likes good pork—sound, wholesome stuff. He wouldn't taste you if you asked him to!"

But Baggy broke into a shambling run, Towser trotted alongside; and whether Baggy was most afraid of his protector or of the Huns who might attack him if he got too far behind was quite an open question.

Wayland Moor was wide; but they wasted no time on the nearer part of it. They spread over the more remote regions searching. It naturally did not occur to anyone to start the search at the cottage where Dick Brooke lived. The Huns would not have imprisoned him there, and the searchers did not want to alarm Brooke's people.

Houses were few and far between on the moor, and none of the few seemed at all likely places. But, of course, Brooke might not be in a house at all. He might be lying, bound and gagged, in some hollow of the moor. Anything was possible in that way.

The Shell members of the party drew together after a bit. Theirs was, of course, the merest pretence of searching. They chuckled as they saw the Fourth-Formers industriously beating gorse-bushes, peering into low-lying places now beginning to grow gloomy as the sunset faded in the western sky, searching for Brooke, who was quite safe all the time!

"This is every bit as good as the Lathom spoof that Kerr worked," said Glyn cheerfully.

"Better, if anything," said Tom. "Monty's done 'em down completely. He's hotter stuff than I ever thought. We tried to choke him off—afraid he'd come a mucker again—but it was no go. And he took no risks this time. He wouldn't tell even us what it was he meant to do."

"Wonder where he is?" said Manners.

CHAPTER 9.
Brooke Turns Up.

"HERE I am!" spoke the voice of Monty Lowther. And the dirty-faced messenger arose from behind a clump of furze.

"What? You?" gasped Manners.

"You don't mean to say——"

"My hat, you've fairly done them this time, Lowther!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kerr was the only chap who——"

"And even he gave in—the evidence was too strong! Ha, ha!"

"Do you mean to say that you chaps didn't tumble?" inquired Monty, beaming.

"Not one of us!" replied Manners.

"Yes, there was one—Kangaroo did."

"But I shouldn't have done if you hadn't looked up and winked at me, old scout!" confessed Noble.

"And I could hardly believe it, even after Kangy had put me up to it," said Tom.

"Then I may take it that my impersonation was a real first-rate success?" said Lowther.

"Oh, rather!"

"Then don't any of you ever tell me again that I can't do it! Do you think our dear young friends in the Fourth have had nearly enough hunting now?"

"Seems likely," said Kangaroo drily. "On the whole, I fancy we'd better draw stumps, anyway. It's going to be dark before we get back; and, in the circs, we can't hope to get off the trouble about being absent from call-over by explaining that we were hunting for Brooke."

"I don't know. We could produce Brooke if necessary, I suppose," said Jimson.

"That's hardly enough. It would go a jolly long way to prove that he was found, but no distance at all to prove that he was ever lost," Manners remarked.

"He couldn't be found if he wasn't lost," said that master of logic, the great George Alfred Grundy ponderously.

"Think not, Grundy? Well, he isn't lost now; but I think we can find him," answered Lowther. "You fellows creep up within a little distance of the cottage, and start yelling his name. He'll soon show up."

"Is he there?" inquired Gunn.

"Yes. It was a jolly close shave! Your crowd was in sight when I saw him go in. Another five seconds, and some of those chaps might have caught a glimpse of him, and then there would have been no end of argument as to whether we had scored or not."

"Well, they can't argue about it now," said Dane, grinning.

"How did you manage the letter spoof, Lowther?" asked Boulton.

"You'll hear all about it presently. Cut off and fetch Brooke out now!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Never mind that, Thomas. Trust your uncle to be on the spot when needed!"

The Shell fellows moved off, scattering a bit, towards the Brookes' cottage. Lowther, taking cover when necessary, made his way over the moor towards the searching Fourth-Formers. None of them had smelt a rat yet. They were all still busy; but some of them were getting a bit tired of the search.

Baggy was one of these, naturally. Lowther, passing behind a big clump of gorse, heard a groan from the other side, and recognised the kind of sound that Baggy was wont to make when feeling badly fed up.

"Ach! Ve haf him, Hans!" he exclaimed, in guttural tones.

Baggy jumped to his feet as if something had bitten him.

"Ow! Yow! Yoooop!" he roared. "The Huns are here! Oh, save me! Help! Fire! Murder! Thieves! The Huns!"

Lowther went on his way. He saw Baggy running towards the nearest searchers, howling at the top of his voice, and Towser running to meet him as if interested. Towser had refused to take any interest at all in the book Herries had carted along as scent; but he seemed to consider the howling Baggy better worth his attention.

Now Lowther, crouching behind cover, let the Fourth-Formers draw together around Baggy, who had begun to tell his tale of dread.

"Two great Huns!" he panted. "Enormous fellows! One is named Hans. I don't know the other's name!"

"Rats!" snapped Blake. "You snoozed off and dreamed it!"

"I didn't, I tell you! I heard them as plainly as I hear you, though I couldn't see them!"

"You didn't see them?" asked Kerr.

"No. They were behind——"

"Then how do you know how big they were?"

"I—I—— Oh, I guessed! It's easy enough to tell by a voice, ain't it? I—— Oh, what are we going to do? Don't run, you chaps! I can't keep up—I can't, really!"

"Run?" snorted Figgins. "Think we're going to run from a couple of Huns?"

"Especially imaginary ones," drawled Cardew. "I'd tackle Baggy's Huns single-handed. I know the kind of Huns they are!"

"Hallo! Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Blake. "There's——"

"Brooke! The lost is found!" finished Kerr, with rather a wry grin. Alone among the Fourth, Kerr felt certain from the moment of Dick Brooke's appearance, that the Shell had scored. He had suspected a spoof from the first, and he was certain of it now, although, even yet, he could not see how it had been worked.

Brooke did not look in the least like a fellow who had been captured by Huns. But he looked very much surprised.

"What on earth are all you chaps after?" he asked.

"Well, I'm hanged——"

"That's a good one!"

"My hat!"

"Looking for you, of course, chump!" said Figgins crossly.

"For me? But why? And why didn't you come to my house if you——"

"It wasn't likely that the Huns——"

"Huns? What Huns?" There aren't any——"

"There are, then!" burbled Baggy. "That's all you know, Brooke! I saw them—that is, I heard them! Two enormous fellows——"

"They were so enormous that Baggy could tell by the sound of one's voice how big they were," put in Kerr.

CHAPTER 10.
Explaining the Mystery.

"BUT you say you were looking for me," said Brooke, evidently puzzled. "What have I got to do with any Huns? I don't believe Baggy heard or saw any. But, even if he did——"

"Ach! Ve haf them, Hans!" sounded a guttural voice from somewhere close by.

"Yaroooop!" howled Baggy, getting behind Herries. "There they are! Keep them off! Oh, I say! Mercy, mercy!"

Everybody was staring at the spot from which the voice seemed to have come. Certainly there was not cover there for two enormous Huns. But they had heard the voice.

And suddenly they found the dirty-faced messenger in their midst. Lowther had stolen round while they had all been staring.

"Why, here's the rotter who—— Oh, collar him, someone!" roared Blake.

And, not being one of those people who call upon others to do what they shirk doing themselves, Jack Blake grabbed the messenger by the neck. Figgy caught him round the middle. Dig seized him by the legs. He went down without a struggle, and Dig and Herries and Reilly promptly sat upon him.

"That's the chap who brought me your letter, Brooke!" yelled Blake.

"What letter?" asked Dick Brooke, with wide-open eyes. "I never wrote you any letter! And I never saw this fellow before in my life!"

"Ho, yuss, you did, then—'underds of times!" came a husky voice from beneath Herries and Dig and Reilly.

"Here it is!" snapped Blake. "Perhaps you'll deny your own fist?"

He was not the only one who was feeling angry with Dick Brooke. It really began to look as though the day-boy must have been a party to the spoof. If he proved to be, it would be a very long time before the Fourth would forgive him.

But Brooke was absolutely innocent. He took the letter from Blake's hand, his face the very picture of bewilderment.

"I never wrote this!" he said. "Then: "Yes, by Jove, I did, though! My hat! Haven't I been had! Oh, the bounder!"

"What are you burbling about? You did, and you didn't, and you've been had? What about us?" roared Figgy.

"We've all been had," Brooke replied quietly. "Lowther's played us up nicely. Me worst of all, I suppose. That thing isn't a real letter!"

"Don't talk rot!" snapped Levison. "It's a letter, and it's in——"

"Oh, I wrote it right enough! It's part of the story Lowther and I were doing together. I offered to write to his dictation when his hand was bad, and he suggested we should collaborate. I never thought he was spoofing!"

Kerr groaned. He saw it all now. But how could anyone have guessed it?

"Blake," said a bland voice from beneath Herries and Dig and Reilly, "I owe you half-a-crown. If these gentlemen will allow me to get up, I will at once hand it to you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" sounded a merry chorus, and through the gathering gloom the Shell fellows appeared, grinning with the utmost cheeriness.

"Lowther!" gasped Blake.

"I myself," said Monty. "Kerr, old scout, can I act?"

"You can!" was Kerr's terse reply.

"Scrag him!" yelled Dig. "The bounder! The deep beast!"

"Bump him!" shouted Clive.

"No, you don't!" said Tom Merry sharply. "We're here to see to that, my pippins! Just own up you've been fairly taken in and done for, and then make tracks for home quick, sharp, for there's going to be a row over this!"

"Lowther scores all along the line, and the Lathom wheeze points are wiped off!" said Talbot.

"Looks like it," admitted Blake ruefully. "But how on earth did you work it, Lowther, you bounder? Never mind about being late, Tommy—ten minutes more will make no odds, and I want to get to the rights of this before I stir!"

Lowther was suffered to get up. He pulled off the shabby cap he had worn, and flung it away. He wiped some of the dirt from his face.

"'Ere's your 'arf-dollar, young gent," he said, in the husky voice of the messenger. "Considerin' of all the circs, I don't feel as 'ow I can keep it."

"Hang it on your watchchain," replied Blake. "You've spoofed us—you! I didn't think you'd got it in you!"

"I don't half believe it now," said Redfern.

"I'm jolly peckish!" remarked Fatty Wynn. "Hurry up, Lowther!"

"Is there any story left to tell?" asked Lowther blandly. "I really don't see what needs to be added. You have heard from Brooke the dodge by which I got the letter. You know that I played the messenger. Voila!"

"You told us a giddy pack of lies about Brooke meeting a Hun," growled Herries.

"I never said Brooke met a Hun. I said a Hunnish-looking person. Is that right or is it not, Brooke? When I came this way with you yesterday, did you not meet a Hunnish-looking person?"

"Not that I remember," said Brooke, puzzled. "Oh, yes, I did—old Wagstaff, of course! He wanted me to go over and do his books to-day—that's why I missed classes and the match. But you know Wagstaff all serene, Lowther! He's not a Hun."

"I know him, certainly," answered Lowther. "I never said I didn't. I said it was a Hunnish-looking person who stopped you, and Wagstaff is so like the dearly-beloved Hindenburg that he might be his twin brother. It wasn't my fault if these kids misunderstood me."

"Misunderstood? Oh, my aunt!" groaned Figgins.

"I played the game. Circumstances had worked out so nicely for me that I took a risk I shouldn't otherwise have done, so as to even things up. Didn't I tell you that the hero of our story was named 'Robert Brooke'? And wasn't the letter—supposed letter—signed 'R. Brooke'? Oh, Kerr, Kerr! How have the mighty fallen!"

Lowther shook his head, and Kerr grimaced.

"I ought to have twigged," he said. "You gave me an opening. But we weren't thinking about your rotten story. It was about Brooke missing the match we were thinking."

"You ought to have sent me word you couldn't turn up, Brooke," said Jack Blake reproachfully.

"I didn't think of it till after Lowther had gone, and then I fett sure he'd tell you. Sorry, Blake! I had promised old Wagstaff that I'd go over and do those books when he liked, and in a case like that Mr. Lathom excuses me—he knows the cash I get makes a bit of difference, you see. I tried to put Waggy off; but he wouldn't have it at any price. Hope you didn't miss me!"

"Cardew played in your place, and made top score and two catches—real, nailing, good catches!"

"I'm glad!" replied Brooke, quite sincerely. "Congrats, Cardew! We won, of course?"

"We haven't yet, but wo're going to on Saturday," Figgy answered. "And you must help the Second to rub it in then."

"Wait till Saturday before you crow, Figgy!" said Kangaroo.

"Oh, you're where the cow's tail was—all behind!" Owen said. "You can't get on top now."

"Wait and see!" said Talbot.

"I'll be glad to play for the Second," Brooke said. "I say, though, Lowther, you did waste an awful lot of butter on me!"

Monty Lowther caught him by the arm. He had expected that reproach.

"Brooke, old son," he said, "I didn't say a word to you about your use as an aide that I didn't mean. If you chuck our yarn, I shall chuck it—that's flat! I don't care to go on with it without you."

"Everybody knows Brooke's way ahead of old Lowther at that sort of thing," said Dig. "Brooke's Fourth—stands to reason he would be!"

"But Lowther's first, if I'm fourth," answered Brooke. "If you mean that, Lowther, I'll go on. I'm not a sulky beggar. And it was a fair spoof, and I was spoofed worst of all!"

"Wait a moment," said Figgins. "If the Fourth were spoofed, so were the Shell. I don't see that——"

"Produce the document, Tommy," said Lowther.

And Tom brought out the signed paper, and Figgy had to admit that the Shell were not fellow-victims of the spoof.

"Kim on!" said Blake. "Time to shift!"

And through the dusk the crowd made their way back to St. Jim's, debating the details of Lowther's great spoof. No one denied that it was "a fair do"; and D'Arcy minor and Levison minor agreed with the rest. As fags they had no voice in the matter; but as umpires of the contest their agreement possessed some weight.

Baggy limped wearily after the crowd. Towser, whose feet were sore, limped with him, not at all to Baggy's comfort—till he remembered the Hunnish voice, and thought what a fine protector Towser would be against a Hun!

But Hans & Co. did not appear.

Taggles growled when he had to open the gates; and Mr. Railton handed out a caning to each of the defaulters, as they had no explanation which seemed at all satisfactory as to their absence from call-over.

But it was only a couple of strokes each, and most of them minded little. Even the Fourth, who might have been expected to be crestfallen, were quite cheerful about it. As for Lowther, he felt that at last real greatness was his.

CHAPTER 11.
A Great Struggle.

EVEN with twenty-five points allowed for the Brooke spoof, the Shell still found themselves behind the Fourth, the respective totals being 160 and 169 to date.

The day after the search on Wayland Moor some more events were worked off; and the result was that the Fourth went farther ahead.

Figgy won the quarter-mile after a hot tussle with Tom Merry, whom he beat by less than a yard. Redfern came third, a couple of yards behind Tom, and only a few inches ahead of Talbot. Nine points for the Fourth, four only for the Shell.

That was an "A" contest, of course, with the best men competing. The hundred yards' race directly after it was a "C" affair, and the class of the competitors may be guessed from the fact that Fatty Wynn, induced by Figgins and Kerr to compete, much against his own wish, actually came in second, while Diggs, whom no one had ever heard of as a sprinter, took third place. But Harry Hammond, who came in first, ran right away not only from those two, but from all the rest, Shell as well as Fourth, showing a very decent turn of speed. The Fourth took all the points—seven—for this event.

Then there was the tug-of-war; and here again the Fourth scored. It was a desperate struggle, and Tom Merry, Kangaroo, Talbot, and Grundy came near to winning it for the Shell; but Fatty's weight and Fatty's tenacity turned the scale at the finish, and his side took five points.

Fatty was quite the hero of the day. But he resolutely refused to consider himself as a sprinter.

"I was second to Hammond, I know," he said. "But I was yards and yards behind him. Young Hammond can run. Who was there behind me? I don't believe Diggs was the best of them, though he did somehow get third; but if he was, I should say a one-legged soldier might have a chance against the rest. Diggs and Tompkins—poof! I'm not going to put on any side because I beat Diggs and Tompkins, so don't you think it! And don't fancy you're going to shove me in for the quarter, Class C. I can't run a quarter of a mile, and I'm jolly well not going to try! I say, isn't it time for a bit of supper?"

"Can't we be getting on with some of the events?" said Figgins to Tom Merry after morning classes next day. "It seems a pity to waste such weather as this."

"Anything you like, Figgy," answered Tom. "I dare say there are some 'B' and 'C' class events that could be worked off."

"Oh, bless them!" Figgins said. "It's something I am in myself that I want."

"Would Latin verse do?" inquired Tom, with a twinkle in his eyes. "I suppose you're not exactly Class A in——"

"Oh, don't be funny, Tommy! Leave that to Lowther—he's funny enough for three. Look here, what I really want is to get on with that cricket match after classes to-day. We might get you chaps out before we have to draw stumps. We can squeeze in a couple of hours' cricket."

"I don't mind," said Tom. "But have you thought that if you do get us out to-night it will make a very short afternoon's cricket for to-morrow?"

"That's no odds. We can walk along and see the Second teams perform. It ought to be funny!"

"Blake agrees, I take it?"

"You can take it so."

"Right-ho! Our lot won't object, I'm sure."

So before five o'clock that evening Shell and Fourth were hard at it again on Little Side. Tom and Kangaroo resumed their innings, and Fatty Wynn and Levison went on to bowl with new ardour and new hope.

The score was 137 for no wicket when they started, which meant that the Shell had 46 to get before they could begin to pile up runs on account of the second innings. And the Fourth had visions of seeing several wickets lowered before those 46 runs were obtained.

Alas for Fatty! Alas for Levison! Alas for the visions of the Fourth!

There was nothing wrong with the bowling. Levison was even faster than on Wednesday, and every bit as accurate. Fatty got on break, in spite of the true pitch, and was in capital form. Blake and Figgins and Redfern all bowled well.

But Tom and the Australian junior refused to be tempted—refused to make a mistake. They took over an hour to wipe off the 46; but by the time they had done that they were well set again, and runs came at a great pace. All the bowling seemed alike to them; it did not matter a bit how the changes were rung upon it.

"Last over!" said Frank Levison, looking at his watch.

Blake threw an almost despairing look at the telegraph-board. The score had crawled up to 200, but it had been galloping since. Both batsmen had long since passed into three figures. Such scoring had been known in schoolboy cricket before—even among juniors—but it had never been known at St. Jim's.

"I'll have another shot, Figgy, I think!" said Blake.

"Right-ho, old scout! Never say die!"

Kangaroo cut Blake's first ball for 4, and carted the second round to leg for another 4. The third and fourth were too good to be hit. The fifth was driven to the boundary. The last ball of the day had come, and still no wicket had fallen.

That ball was a little bit short, and Harry Noble drove it straight back with tremendous force. It fairly hummed in the air as it neared Blake, coming straight for him with almost powder enough behind it to go through him.

It was an awkward height, too. Not many bowlers would have tried for it. Prudence suggested ducking or dodging.

Blake paid no heed to the voice of prudence. He got his hands to the ball somehow. It broke through them, and everyone near heard the thud as it smote his chest. But his ready hands were there to grip it again, and he threw it up with a yell of "Howzatt?"

"Out!" said Levison minor. "Over!"

And he lifted the bails.

"My hat, Blake, that was some catch!" said Kangaroo warmly.

Blake grinned.

"I shall have a bruise to show for it," he said. "But that's better than a hole right through me. And we've got rid of one of you bounders, anyway!"

The Shell fellows swarmed on to the ground. They seized Tom and Kangaroo, and carried them shoulder-high to the pavilion. They shouted and roared and danced with delight. The total was 301 for one wicket. Kangaroo's score was 131; Tom, who had always kept a little ahead of his partner, was 159 not out; and there had been 11 extras; including the very widest wide Fatty Wynn had ever bowled in his career.

That two hours' spell of cricket had

put a different aspect on the game. The first-innings' slump of the Shell had been nobly atoned for; and if the Fourth won now they would only win after a hard struggle.

When Saturday afternoon came the second elevens absolutely refused to start on their game. They were not going to miss seeing the match that was making records for St. Jim's wholesale, they said.

There was quite a crowd around Little Side when Talbot went in with Tom to carry on the big innings.

"Bound to be dull for the first hour or so," said Lowther. "Tommy's got his 200 to think about; and I suppose Talbot will play the same game as Kangaroo, and get well set before he starts hitting."

"I doubt it!" replied the Cornstalk. "Things to-day aren't quite as they were yesterday. Levison's fagged out. Fatty's right forefinger is blistered. The other bowlers won't worry those two. So get ready for the fireworks!"

Kangaroo was right. It was made evident that the crack bowlers of the Fourth were feeling the strain when Blake, after a word or two with Figgins, started the bowling himself, with Redfern taking the next over.

Reginald Talbot, fresh from a turn at the nets, which had got his eye in, faced Blake smiling. He slammed the first ball for 4, cut the second for 2, and patted the third down the pitch, with the result that a dashing stolen run brought Tom Merry opposite the Fourth skipper.

Tom was not worrying about his 200. He and Talbot had agreed that the game now was to score as fast as possible.

"Hurrah!" roared Manners, as a mighty swipe sent the leather soaring over the pavilion.

It came back, and the next two balls added 7 to Tom's score, and brought him face to face with Reddy.

Twenty runs had come from Blake's over. Dick Redfern fared little better. He was hit for 18—four 4's and two singles—equally shared by the two batsmen.

Tom was now 181, and in two overs Talbot had scored 16.

Fatty Wynn and Levison went on. Neither might be at the top of his form; but it was hoped that they would at least fare better than the change bowlers.

It was but little better they fared. The next two overs produced 23 runs. Tom's score was now 196, Talbot's 24.

"Better try again, Fatty!" said Blake.

"Oh, I'll try! But it's no good—not a bit!" replied Fatty.

Tom jumped right out of the crease, hit with all his might, and sent a very bad ball far over the ropes, one of the biggest hits ever made on the ground It carried his score to 202, 6 being counted for it.

"My hat! I'll have my revenge for that!" muttered Fatty Wynn.

His next came in from the off, nipping sharply, and beat Tom all ends up. His middle-stump flew, and Fatty stood ruefully contemplating a broken blood-blister on his forefinger.

CHAPTER 12.

A Fine Finish.

AMIDST a tempest of applause Tom ran to the pavilion. Three or four fellows sat padded and gloved ready, for no batting-list had been made out.

"Going to declare, Tommy?" asked Kangaroo.

"Not just yet," said Tom. "You go in, Dane, and hit for all you're worth! Never mind about getting out; that's no odds! Hit, hit, and hit again!"

SCORE OF THE GREAT MATCH.

Shell v. Fourth.

SHELL.

First Inning.		Second Innings.	
M. Lowther, st Roylance, b Wynn	0		
T. Merry, c Cardew, b Levison	19	—b Wynn	202
H. Noble, b Wynn	0	—c & b Blake	131
R. Talbot, not out	30	—not out	102
F. Jimson, b Levison	0		
G. Wilkins, lbw, b Levison	4		
C. Dane, c Cardew, by Wynn	1	—c Figgins, b Clive	32
H. Manners, c Figgins, b Wynn	7	—not out	15
B. Glyn, b Levison	1		
W. C. Gunn, c Roylance, b Levison	0		
H. Frere, b Wynn	0		
Extra	1	Extras	18
	Total 63		Total (for 3 w. dec.) 500

FOURTH.

First Innings.		Second Innings.	
J. Blake, c Merry, b Frere	45	—b Noble	20
G. F. Kerr, c Lowther, b Merry	24	—c Glyn, b Merry	35
G. Figgins, run out	25	—b Talbot	52
Koumi Rao, b Talbot	8	—c Lowther, b Merry	38
R. R. Cardew, c Glyn, b Talbot	50	—b Talbot	29
R. Roylance, st Glyn, b Frere	15	—c Manners, b Frere	33
R. H. Redfern, c Noble, by Talbot	12	—c Merry b Wilkins	28
Hon. A. A. D'Arcy, b Manners	5	—c & b Talbot	20
S. Clive, not out	20	—not out	22
E. Levison, b Talbot	24	—st Glyn; b Talbot	0
D. L. Wynn, b Merry	8	—b Talbot	0
Extras	10	Extras	16
	Total 246		Total 293

Nothing could have suited Clifton Dane better. He could never have played the waiting game that Tom and Kangaroo had played; but this he could do.

The Fourth had the time of their lives during the next twenty minutes. Fieldsmen panted and puffed; bowlers were helpless. Dane slogged at everything; and at the other end was Talbot, finding everything easy, and scoring as fast as his partner without half the effort.

In those twenty minutes 65 runs were added to the score; and then Dane, who had been twice missed in the deep, was out to a fine catch there by Figgins. It had not been Figgy who had missed him.

"Might declare now," said Grundy.

"You go in, Manners, and let them have it!" Tom said.

And Manners went in, and, as far as in him lay, he let them have it. But he did all he could to give Talbot the bowling. He could guess that Tom wanted Talbot's century to be on the book before he declared.

The stroke that gave Talbot his three figures brought the total to exactly 500. Next moment Tom ran out of the pavilion and signalled to Blake.

Then the Fourth came trooping in, perspiring, panting, tired, some of them feeling none too amiable, but none of them willing to admit defeat as yet.

"We've got 318 to get to win," said Figgins. "It's a big job—a dashed big job! But they made 500 for only three wickets; and you needn't tell me that what the Shell can do the Fourth can't! The pitch is all right still, and their bowling don't amount to much."

It was very much what Tom had expected when Kerr and Roylance came out first from the pavilion. He was not a bit disheartened when, at the end of an hour, they were still together. He kept changing his bowling, which served the double purpose of not wearying those on whom he chiefly depended—Talbot, himself, and Frere—and preventing the batsmen from getting set. They never did score fast; but when Roylance left for 33 the board showed 58.

Blake came in, and scoring quickened. In a quarter of an hour the total leaped to 85. Then Kangaroo got a good one into Blake's timber-yard, and the Fourth-Form leader retired for 20 of the best.

Ten runs later Kerr had to go. Glyn took a nice catch at the wicket, and the Shell felt that, with the stonewaller dismissed, half their troubles were over.

But they seemed only beginning. Figgins and Koumi Rao got nicely set and scored fast. Talbot had to be brought on, and it was he who at last got Figgy in two minds about a well-pitched one, and bowled him for a dashing 52.

The fourth wicket had added 79, and the total was now 174. Victory for the Shell was no certainty at this rate.

The next wicket fell almost at once, the Indian prince following his partner into retirement. But then Redfern and Cardew stuck, and made runs, and the score had reached 230 before Cardew left, having hit six 4's in his 29.

Redfern, who had played a more cautious game, went 25 runs later; and, with seven down for 255, the Fourth looked to have little chance.

But Clive and D'Arcy played as well as anyone who had gone before them. Again and again the cheers rang out as they pushed the score along.

At seven o'clock only 25 were needed for victory, and the pair were still together. The light was good enough for anything, the pitch was still true, and most of the Shell bowlers were tired out, while some of the fieldsmen found a lot of comfort in the fact that the next day was Sunday.

No better match had ever taken place on Little Side; and if the Shell had played an uphill game with the rarest pluck and determination, the Fourth had done likewise. Not a man yet had failed.

But now came the most dramatic happening of the match.

Tom tossed the ball to Talbot for the fifth time. Talbot was by long odds the Shell's best bowler, but so far he had

secured only two wickets—those of Figgy and Cardew.

Arthur Augustus faced him. The ball was a good one, but Gussy played it, sending it hard back about a foot from the ground. Talbot's right hand shot down and gripped it, while Gussy was yet yelling to Clive to run, fancying that the leather had gone past.

So Gussy left, and Levison came limping in. Ernest Levison was tough and fit enough; but he had been bowled to a standstill, and every muscle in his body was aching.

What happened to him might have happened to anyone. He played forward, slipped, and turned to see his bails off and Glyn smiling at him.

"It all depends on you, Fatty!" said Figgins, clapping his chum on the back.

"Then it's all jolly well up!" answered Fatty. "Oh, I ain't funky, and I ain't nervous. But I'm fagged out; and at my best I never could play Talbot, not worth talking about. He'll have me first ball. No; I'm not going to hurry, not for you or anyone, Grundy! There's plenty of time for my little innings before dark."

And there was. For Talbot did bowl Fatty first ball with a ball that might have bowled anyone.

"We win! Hurrah!" howled Lowther.

And the Shell cheered like madmen. It had been a great game, and they had won it by 24 runs, thanks to the three champions. Tom Merry's 200, Kangaroo's century and wise counsel, which had had so much to do with the result; and, perhaps most of all, Talbot's dashing, brilliant innings and his hat-trick at the critical moment, had pulled the Shell through!

But the Fourth took their licking like sportsmen.

"Are we downhearted?" asked Blake.

"Not likely!" roared the rest.

And, indeed, there was no reason why they should be downhearted, for, though the Shell had scored heavily during that week, the Fourth still led on points.

THE END.

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

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday

"RACKE'S MAN!"

Clifford

Next week's story continues the sports series, but it deals chiefly with an issue which is, in a sense, outside the competition, though the keen opponents of the Shell and Fourth contrive to bring it into the field of action.

That issue is—what is to be done about Racke's man? The gorging under Pepper's barn has been stopped. But Racke, in spite of the warnings given him, does not send away Mr. Berrymore. The Fourth and the Shell are determined that the fellow shall go. His continued presence at Rylcombe is an affront to them.

But how to make him go? That is the question.

One Form tries to solve it, and fails. The other tries, and succeeds. But which Form failed and which succeeded you will not know until next week.

CAN YOU HELP HERE?

A chance offers itself of which some of you may be able to avail yourselves—a chance to help in work of real national importance.

This year's flax harvest matters no end to Great Britain. Flax fibre is largely used in aeroplane manufacture, and much greater quantities of it have been grown this year for that purpose.

Between May 20th and August 31st volunteers are wanted—10,000 youths under military age—to help in getting in the flax harvest. This does not mean that anyone is expected to put in all that time. The scheme is one for fortnightly relays of workers. From May 20th to June 17th the number required each fortnight will be 750. In July there will be less doing; but the camps will be maintained at skeleton strength, and available labour may be utilised elsewhere. On July 29th each camp—there will be eight, in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire—will be brought up to its full complement of 500, making 2,500 wanted on that date for work up to August 12th.

The pay is from eight to ten shillings a week, with board, lodging, and railway fares to and from camp found. Employers are being asked to help by giving volunteers for the work an opportunity to take their holidays at a time that will fit. Enrolment cards can be obtained from the Ministry of National Service between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., or from Captain Elgee, N.S.R., Salters' Hall, St. Swithin's Lane, E.C.

I don't think I need say much to recommend the scheme to you fellows. It means working during your holiday. But who wants to loaf in these strenuous days? You will be in the open air, and you can arrange to go with your own chums. That is what makes a holiday; not the absence of work so much as change and fresh air and cheery companionship. And, by far the biggest thing of all, you will helping your country in the time of her need.

Your Editor.

CADET NOTES.

CADETS all over the country will be gratified to learn that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has been appointed Cadet-Colonel-in-Chief of the Cadet Corps in the United Kingdom. This places the Cadet Corps at once on a level with the other voluntary military movements, such as the Volunteer Regiments, whose colonel-in-chief is the Duke of Connaught. The Prince of Wales has always taken a great deal of interest in the Cadet Movement, and no doubt will be even more actively associated with it in future now that he is its chief officer.

* * * * * *

Major-General Lord Scarbrough, the Director-General of the Territorial and Volunteer Forces, accompanied by General Sir H. Sclater, G.O.C. Southern Command, and many other distinguished officers, etc., visited Southampton recently, and reviewed the local Cadets. The force on parade consisted of companies from several of the schools, and one or two local units also, and numbered about 250 lads. After the march-past, which was carried out very successfully, and a general salute had been given, Lord Scarbrough briefly addressed the Cadets, and urged on them the need for attending strictly to the duties of the corps, and hoped that their numbers would be increased. The affair was certainly a most successful one, but the small number of lads on parade scarcely reflects creditably upon so large a city and neighbourhood as Southampton.

* * * * * *

Active steps are being taken to secure the assistance and support of officers retired from the Army, after being wounded or suffering from ill-health in the war, in the Cadet Movement. No doubt such officers, of whom there are now large numbers in the country, would be a most valuable addition to the personnel of the Cadet Corps. In this connection it is worth noting that the South-West London Cadet Battalion, which is affiliated to the 23rd London Regiment, has recently secured for the post of adjutant to the battalion Captain J. Leach, V.C., of Streatham, late of the 2nd Manchester Regiment. Captain Leach won his Victoria Cross on the Western battle-front in October, 1914. His appointment will doubtless be very popular, and ought to do much to strengthen and increase the number of members in the battalion.

* * * * * *

The 1st Battalion Middlesex Cadet Brigade gave a cinematograph film exhibition of the work of the Cadets recently at the Wood Green Empire. Speeches were delivered by Colonel Simpson, commandant of the brigade, Colonel Scott-Miller, and others. There was a packed house, and the battalion was present in force, of course. The film exhibited proved to be extremely interesting, showing the camp-life of the boys, bayonet drill, machine-gun drill, and signalling work. The entertainment was most successful, and will undoubtedly result in considerable addition to the strength of the brigade.

Bradford's recent campaign for forming a Cadet Corps in connection with the Volunteer Regiment has had a most satisfactory conclusion. At the end of the recruiting period it is satisfactory to be able to say that the full complement of 1,000 lads was reached in a grand rally held at the Technical College on the Saturday afternoon. This is a remarkable achievement to have carried through, and ought to inspire other large cities where there are no Cadet Corps, or where those existing are very small at present, to similar activity.

* * * * * *

The very successful Cadet Corps at Hampstead, the 1st Cadet Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, had a special church parade of its members on a recent Sunday on the occasion of the anniversary of the consecration of the permanent war-shrine erected at the battalion's church, St. Silas, Canning Town, in memory of the ex-officers and Cadets who have fallen in the war. The body of the church was reserved for and entirely occupied by the battalion, the Colour party occupying seats near the front. The corps is one of the most successful in the London area, and provides for its members many useful and interesting attractions at its headquarters.

* * * * * *

The 1st Bristol Cadet Battalion of the Church Lads' Brigade celebrated its twenty-first birthday on a recent Saturday afternoon, and the celebration took shape in the formal opening of its new headquarters. Commodious premises have been secured, and successfully adapted to the work of the corps, at considerable cost, in order to increase its efficiency. The Lord Mayor of Bristol kindly performed the ceremony, the proceedings being directed by the Lord Bishop of Bristol, who is the regimental chaplain. The battalion is affiliated with the King's Royal Rifle Corps, and in spite of the large number of its members who have joined the Colours, it still contains more than 600 members.

* * * * * *

A meeting was recently held in the Drill Hall, Northallerton, with a view to increasing the local interest in the Cadet Platoon which has recently been formed in the town and attached to the 2nd Battalion of the North Riding of Yorkshire Volunteer Regiment. There was a good attendance, and much interest was displayed in an exhibition of dissembling and reassembling a machine-gun blindfolded which was given by a member of the Machine-gun Section of the Volunteer Corps. At the conclusion of the proceedings a number of Cadets were enrolled, and it is hoped that before long a strong platoon will be formed.

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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. He and Hazel sleep under a haystack, and, after buying caps—the school caps being unsafe—get breakfast at an eating-house. Goggs, of Franklingham, comes to Highcliffe.

JUST as they were rounding the corner Flip halted suddenly, and gripped Hazel's arm, pulling him up.

"What's——"

Hazel broke off. A heavy footstep sounded on the pavement, and a large policeman passed within a couple of yards of them.

He went on without seeing them. But if they had turned the corner at that moment they would have walked fairly into his arms.

"And he might have smelt a large rat," said Flip. "Unless he was a very wooden-headed bobby, he must have done. Never mind! A miss is as good as a mile!"

In five minutes they came to the outskirts of the town. Ten minutes later they were trudging, still in the dark, along a country road, where leafless trees loomed up dim and shapeless through the gloom, and the wind began to blow coldly about their ears.

"Running away from school," said Peter Hazeldene morosely, "ain't all it's cracked up to be, by long odds! It's the people who won't mind their own business who spoil it for a chap."

In Study No. 6.

"THANK you, sir," said Johnny Goggs demurely. "I understand, then, that I am to occupy Study No. 6 alone until the return of Tunstall, who is expected in a few days."

"That is what I told you," Mr. Mobbs said acidly. "What you understand I cannot say. You do not appear to be of acute understanding, even apart from your physical disability, which will, I fear, be a considerable trouble to me in class."

"Eh? I fear that I do not quite catch your meaning, sir," said Goggs politely.

"It is of no consequence!" bawled Mr. Mobbs. "That is all! Do you hear that? You may go!"

"Thank you, sir!" replied Goggs.

It was not difficult for him to perceive that Mr. Mobbs had taken a dislike to him on sight. But it was not difficult for him to bear that dislike with equanimity, either. Mr. Mobbs really did not matter much to Goggs; and if there was trouble between them it was very unlikely that the snobbish little Highcliffe master would get the best of the exchanges.

So Tunstall was coming back!

That was news. Flip Derwent, so Goggs fancied, would regard it as great news.

He went to his study, directed hither by Wilson of the Third, who irreverently addressed him as "Old Giglamps."

Just as he was turning the handle of the door a good-looking fellow, with fair hair carefully parted in the middle, lounged up.

"A new fellow, I presume?" drawled the Caterpillar.

"Eh?" said Johnny Goggs, with hand to ear.

"Oh, by gad, it's deaf!"

"Only intermittently," said Goggs, shaking his head. "By the way, is it quite polite to speak of a person as 'it'? I do not raise serious objections. So much depends upon the tone. But, speaking generally, I should say that most persons would prefer another method of mention."

Smithson popped his head out of No. 7.

"Ah, Nebuchadnezzar!" said Goggs, in the most friendly tone.

Smithson frowned. De Courcy looked puzzled.

"Why do you call him Nebuchadnezzar?" he asked. "Wasn't the Biblical gentleman of that name the merchant who gave a feast?

"'The king was on his throne,
The satraps thronged the hall;
A thousand bright lamps shone
O'er that high festival!'

Moore, I think, or Byron, or one of those back numbers—it's no odds. I don't know how I come to remember it, an' I'm dashed if I know what satraps were."

"Eh?" said Goggs patiently.

"Oh, by gad!" said the Caterpillar. "I can't go over all that again, y'know. Besides, it's not of the very least importance."

"The Caterpillar likes talking out of the back of his neck," said Smithson, grinning.

"Eh? The feat seems to me anatomically impossible," replied Goggs. "And the Caterpillar—what an extremely curious name! Almost as queer as yours, Nebuchadnezzar! But not quite—yes, I think, on the whole, it is; even more so, indeed. But, pardon me, Caterpillar, the feast to which you refer was not given by Nebuchadnezzar, but by Belshazzar. It was then that——"

"I thought you didn't hear!"

"Eh?" said Goggs. "Oh, yes! Sometimes I only think that I do not hear, and then find that I have heard. It may be due to the extreme density of this." He tapped his head, with a very plaintive look on his face. "I am not quite sure that what is wrong with me is not sheer stupidity, rather than actual deafness."

"I am, though, by gad!" murmured Rupert de Courcy, looking keenly at him.

"Satraps," went on Goggs, "were— "

"Oh, give them a miss! They're good an' dead by this time, I suppose, like all the other merry old Romans."

"But satrap was not a Roman title, my dear Caterpillar; it was Persian."

"Well, that's no odds. Pretty much the same thing, wasn't it? And it don't explain why you call Smi—er—this chap Nebuchadnezzar."

"Because I understand that that is his baptismal appellation. Surely that is sufficient reason?"

"Right-ho! You'll have to cling to the name now, Smithson. But it's too long for me. I shall call you Nebby, for short."

"Oh, don't rot, Caterpillar!" said Smithson uneasily.

If the Caterpillar took to using the name that had only been adopted for the mystification of Goggs, it was likely to have a wider currency than Smithson desired for it. He had no wish to become "Nebuchadnezzar" to all Highcliffe.

"It's all serene, Nebby. By gad, I've been guilty of a gross breach of etiquette! I've been talkin' to this chap without an introduction. Do the needful, Nebby, I beg!"

"Hanged if I will, if you call me that!" growled Smithson.

Chuckles sounded behind him. Yates and Benson were listening. They did not show their faces, because they had no desire to be labelled to the Caterpillar as Benjamin Boanerges and Johnny Walker.

"Then I must do it myself," said the Caterpillar urbanely. "My name is De Courcy."

"Eh?" said Goggs.

"De Courcy," repeated the Caterpillar. "Shall I spell it out for you?"

"Oh, no, not at all. I think I have it now. Not Caterpillar, then?"

"Oh, yes—that, too."

"Caterpillar de Courcy? Dear me, how extremely queer!"

"No, Rupert de Courcy, called the Caterpillar, because—oh, I'm dashed if I know why! Do you know why, Nebby?"

"I know jolly well I'm not going to be called Nebby!" howled Smithson.

"Do you? Then you know more than I do, Nebby," replied De Courcy blandly.

"Eh?" said Goggs. "I am trying to follow you, but I must confess that I find it difficult. Please be patient with me!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Smithson. "I've had enough of this! Chap's name is Goggs, De Courcy; and he's either a born fool—which I rather doubt—or he's jolly deep. Being jolly deep yourself—and jolly wide, too—I think you can tackle him better than I can. It may interest you to hear that he knows Derwent—and seems to like him. He also knows Gaddy, and don't like him the least little bit."

Smithson disappeared.

"Farewell, Nebby!" called the Caterpillar.

"Rats!" shouted Smithson.

Goggs shook his head sadly.

"I fear that I do not understand," he said.

"Now, I rather fancy you do," said the Caterpillar, loking at him hard. "Seen Mobby?"

"Mr. Mobbs? Oh, yes."

"Like him?"

"I cannot say as yet. I fear that my feeling for him may be influenced by the fact that he obviously does not like me," answered Goggs solemnly. "It is wrong, doubtless——"

"But dashed natural!" broke in De Courcy. "Don't try to like Mobby, even as a conscientious duty. It can't be done, my son! Mobby's a worm. Has he shoved you into this study?"

"You have deduced correctly, Cater—er—De Courcy."

"Oh, I never mind the Caterpillar, Goggs. Used to it, you see. Haven't you ever been called by a name that wasn't given to you by your godfathers an' godmothers at your baptism?"

"I have been called many things, most of them extremely uncomplimentary," replied Goggs patiently. "Some of them may have been justified—not all, I think. Sometimes I suspect that people regard my personal appearance as peculiar, though my dear grandmother, I believe, considers me attractive, if homely. Should you think that my personal appearance does strike others as strange, Cat—er—De Courcy?"

"Couldn't be off it," the Caterpillar said lightly.

"Eh? I fear that I do not quite understand."

"Never mind that. Of course, you know that you will have this study to yourself?"

"So I have inferred—at least, until the return of Tunstall."

"What? I say, you don't mean that Tunstall is coming back?"

"Very soon, I believe. Mr. Mobbs seemed to signify as much. Is he a very particular friend of yours?"

The languid Caterpillar, who seldom looked excited, was plainly pleased by the news.

"No; I could hardly say that," he answered. "But he's not a bad sort. Hear anything about Merton? I'd a notion that Tun wouldn't come back without him."

"Nothing about Merton. But I should imagine that his eye is distinctly better, and that there can be no doubt now that his sight will not be impaired."

They had passed inside No. 6 now, and the Caterpillar had shut the door. He could not have explained a moment earlier why he had done so. Perhaps he did not know now; but he was glad that he had shut it.

"How do you come to know anything about Merton an' Tunstall, Goggs?" he asked. And now all the levity had gone out of his voice and manner. It was not often Rupert de Courcy seemed wholly serious, but he seemed so then.

"I thought I heard Nebuchadnezzar mention that I know Derwent," said Goggs. "I also know his sister."

"She's a daisy!" murmured De Courcy.

"Eh? Oh, I think I gather your meaning. You also admire Miss Derwent—is not that it?"

"I certainly do, my pippin! And you?"

"I consider her quite the nicest girl in every way whom I ever met," answered Goggs simply. "There is nothing I would not do for her."

The Caterpillar did not even smile.

"You seem to be hearin' better just now," he remarked.

"Possibly the acoustics of this room——"

"Acoustics of the room be dashed! Look here, Goggs, are you deaf at all?"

An Alliance.

JOHNNY GOGGS stared at the Caterpillar.

"My dear De Courcy," he said, "what should lead you to suppose——"

"Oh, cut all that out, old fellow! You think no end of Miss Derwent. Well, so do I. You're Flip Derwent's friend, I gather; I may say that I also have that honour. You don't like Gadsby; my sentiments towards the merry an' festive Gaddy are not precisely affectionate."

"We appear to think alike in several respects," said Goggs demurely.

"There's another, if it can be called thinking. We both know dashed well that you're not really deaf!"

"I fear that no argument——"

"Certainly not! What's the game, Goggs?"

"I should prefer that you make yourself somewhat clearer to my doubtless all too limited intelligence before I even so much as admit that there is—er—any game whatever, De Courcy."

"I'll do it, then, by gad! An', first of all, I may say that I'm trying to the best of my poor ability to get to the bottom of a mystery that seems to surround the reasons of our friend Derwent's doin' a bunk. Got that?"

Goggs nodded.

"It seems to me an unnecessary bunk. Flip came a cropper, but he wasn't in it alone, an' I can't help thinkin' a trap was set for him. Twiggez-vous?"

Again Goggs nodded solemnly.

"If a trap was set, I know who set it—at least, I know within so little as hardly matters. It was one of two fellows, or it was both of them. If Derwent was expelled, those fellows, an' possibly one or two more, would have to go. See?"

"Your perspicacity leaves nothing to be desired, my dear De Courcy."

"I saw Flip Derwent later than anyone else did here, an' I promised him that I'd do all I could to clear things up. He was decent about it, but I can't really say that he appeared to hope great things from my efforts."

"That, I think, was an error of judgment on his part, if you read his meaning rightly, De Courcy. But Derwent, though a most likeable fellow, does not strike me as an eminently judicious one."

"Judicious—well, no, p'r'aps not. But young Flip has his head screwed on the right way about most things. Everythin' that went wrong with him here went wrong because he happened to make friends with Ponsonby. He got into the wrong set. There was no need for it. We should have been glad to have him among us, and though I say it that shouldn't, we are virtuous youths."

"I am sure of that, De Courcy!"

The Caterpillar grinned.

"Don't give me any credit for it, Goggs!" he said lightly. "I am as nought: a mere brand plucked from the burnin'. When you know my chum Franky Courtenay, that is—you'll understand."

"I shall be most happy to make his acquaintance, De Courcy, more especially if he resembles you!"

"Don't you believe it! Franky's way ahead of me, my son. Well, I've been nosin' into things a bit, but I can't say I've found out a lot more yet. What struck me was that if Flip Derwent knew that you were comin', to have a shot at settin' things straight, it was natural enough that he should despise my amateurish efforts at detective work."

Goggs shook his head.

"He could not have known. And, as for that, I'm sure that you are my superior in——"

"Then, by gad, you're sure of somethin' that's not so, Goggs! Will you tell me now whether you really have come here on Derwent's behalf?"

"That is the case."

"An' why?"

"The mystery appeals to me. Also I like Derwent, and, as I have already said, I have the very highest regard for his sister."

The Caterpillar held out a delicate, white hand.

"Put it there, Goggs!" he said.

The hand that met his was a brown, thin paw, with a very manlike grip.

"We work together?" said De Courcy.

"If you wish it, yes. The advantage is mine. You know so much that I cannot possibly know."

"I should like to hear how far your knowledge goes. I take it you had the story from Miss Derwent?"

"Yes."

"Well, there would be lots of things she couldn't know; lots an' lots! I don't know whether there's another person livin' who has an accurate idea of Pon's villainy besides myself. Franky won't believe it all, not even now. There's nothin' in the way of rascality Pon isn't capable of, Goggs; simply nothin'!"

"It was rather towards Gadsby that my suspicions turned."

"An' quite right, too! Gaddy may be the head villain of this plot. Pon rather liked the engagin' Flip than otherwise, showin' good taste for once. Pon admired the fair sister. Not that I'd compare Pon's admiration to your knightly devotion, old top, or even to my distant worship."

The Caterpillar spoke lightly, as was his wont. But Goggs knew that he meant what he said. And there was no jealousy in Johnny Goggs. He realised that the Caterpillar was a fellow whom any girl would be likely to prefer to himself; but that made no difference.

"Shall I tell you the story as Miss Derwent told it to me?" he asked.

"Yaas, do! I know it pretty well already, but somehow it doesn't bore me a bit. Most things do bore me frightfully, y'know, Goggs. Sad, isn't it?"

"If correct, certainly sad."

"But Pon never bores me," went on Rupert de Courcy brightly. "Next to Franky, Pon's quite the most interestin' person I know. More interestin' even than Franky, in some respects, bein' so much more various. I could stand Gadsby's bein' sacked; but if Pon can be spared, Goggs, do agree with me to wangle it in advance so that Pon does not get the order of the boot! Life at Highcliffe would be so doocid dull without Pon to enliven it. Let the festive Gaddy be the scapegoat. No one would ever really miss Gaddy—not a soul!"

Goggs did not answer that. Already he seemed to have a very accurate notion as to when the Caterpillar was talking out of the back of his neck, though he had pretended not to comprehend the phrase.

He told the story as Flap had told it to him.

"Yaas, that's the outside point of view, so to speak," said De Courcy, when he had finished. "It's not Miss Derwent's fault that she can't see it from inside. Flip himself couldn't. We can't yet; but we're goin' to. Tunstall may be able to help, or he may not. Anyway, I shall be glad to see him back. But there are others who can tell us more than he can, that's a dead cert."

"There are, of course, Gadsby and Vavasour," Goggs said. "But they are not likely to furnish us with any information they can withhold."

"I should say not. But do you use a notebook, Goggs?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Take it out. Open it. Set down at the head of a page the illustrious names of Cecil Ponsonby, Reginald Havers Gadsby, an' Adolphus Theodore Vavasour. Oh, and Monson's! I'm not so sure that Mon can tell anythin', an' he won't if he can help it, though he's not pronouncedly anti-Flip. But he may know somethin'. Drury? No; I think not. Got those four down?"

"Yes," said Goggs.

"Add a burly brute named Chiker, munitioneer at Courtfield, footballer, an' all-round rascal. I'm dashed sure he was in it! Also a fair post-girl, name—— Oh, dash it, I've forgotten her name! But there's only one of her, so there can't be any mistake. Note against her name, which you haven't got, by the way."

"It is possible to do without it?" said Goggs, smiling.

"Note that it might be useful to find out whether it really was Gaddy who told her his name was Smithson, an' kidded her with lies about Flip. That it might also be useful to find out her exact relationship to the aforesaid Chiker, an' how far she looks upon him as a desirable relation. I fancy there's a brother, too; but I don't know whether he comes into this case. Make a note of Greyfriars. There may be wheels within wheels in this affair of Hazeldene's doin' a bunk at the same time as Flip. An' put down Mobby; not that I believe Mobby helped, but on general principles."

"I fail to see how general principles apply."

"Not? Think it out, old top! Mobby's a worm, anyway; an' he hated Derwent. May as well have him down with the rest of the worms."

"I will put him down, De Courcy, if you wish it."

"I do. An' now, don't let's talk any more about it for the present. Come along with me an' let's see Franky. By the way, do you mind takin' those glasses off in the security of our apartment?"

"You think that I might look less of an—er—in short, an ass without them, De Courcy?" said Goggs mildly.

"I think you'd look a dashed sight more like yourself than you do with them! But go on lookin' as much of an ass as poss. to the general public, dear boy. It will pay. An', above all things, don't let Pon & Co. suspect that you are as wide as they are made!"

"I do not think there is any fear of that. It is possible that Gadsby may not believe in my entire harmlessness, however," replied Goggs, smiling.

Flip and Hazel.

"TIRED, Hazel?" asked Flip.

"Tired isn't any word for it!" replied Hazel. "I ache all over! And this wretched ankle of mine——"

"Awfully sorry, old chap! I forgot all about your ankle."

"You needn't apologise for that. It means that you forgot about saving my life last night, which isn't a thing most fellows would forget easily."

"Well, there's been quite a lot happening since," answered Flip, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "But I ought not to have forgotten that your ankle was hurt. New boots, too! They aren't very comfortable for walking in, I know. We seem to be getting near a town. That means grub, and a bit of rest. I want the grub, anyway. Brekker seems no end of a time ago."

They had been tramping for at least six hours, though they had not covered a great distance, for Hazel's pace was slow. Breakfast had been got at a cottage by the roadside, and had consisted chiefly of fresh milk and stale bread.

"If it hadn't been for you I shouldn't have had any boots to wear!" Hazel said.

"If it hadn't been for me your old ones would have been all right."

"What do you mean? You aren't blaming yourself for pulling my foot out from between the rails, surely?"

"Not exactly. But it wouldn't have needed doing if——"

"If Quelchy and Wingate had caught me!" said Hazel bitterly. "That's your notion, I suppose? You still think I could go back to Greyfriars and——"

"Well, you could, old chap. And it might be the best in the long run."

"What hinders your going back to Highcliffe, then?"

"Oh, I don't know! For the matter of that, I'm still willing to go back if you are."

Hazel stared at him.

"You mean that?" he said incredulously.

"Of course I mean it! It wouldn't make much odds to me. I should only be kicked out again. But they hadn't better let Mobby do the kicking. He might get hurt!"

"And I should be kicked out, too!"

"Are you certain? I'm not."

Hazel reflected. Dr. Locke was a long-suffering and merciful man. More than one fellow had been allowed to stay on at Greyfriars under promise of amendment, when he would have had very short shrift at most schools.

If Hazel returned now he would have a flogging to face, and he would have to take up the burden of his money troubles again, perhaps lightened by the help Flip was willing to give him.

It was a temptation. Already Hazel had had more than enough of the hardships of the road, which seemed to have so little effect upon his tougher and pluckier comrade.

But pride stood in the way. He thought of the sly gibes of Skinner and Stott and Snoop, the cackling of Bunter, the sarcasms of the Bounder, the contempt—veiled, maybe, but still there—of the Famous Five and their chums.

No, he could not stand it all! Better anything than that!

(To be continued. Look out for the great new serial in the "Magnet" next week!)