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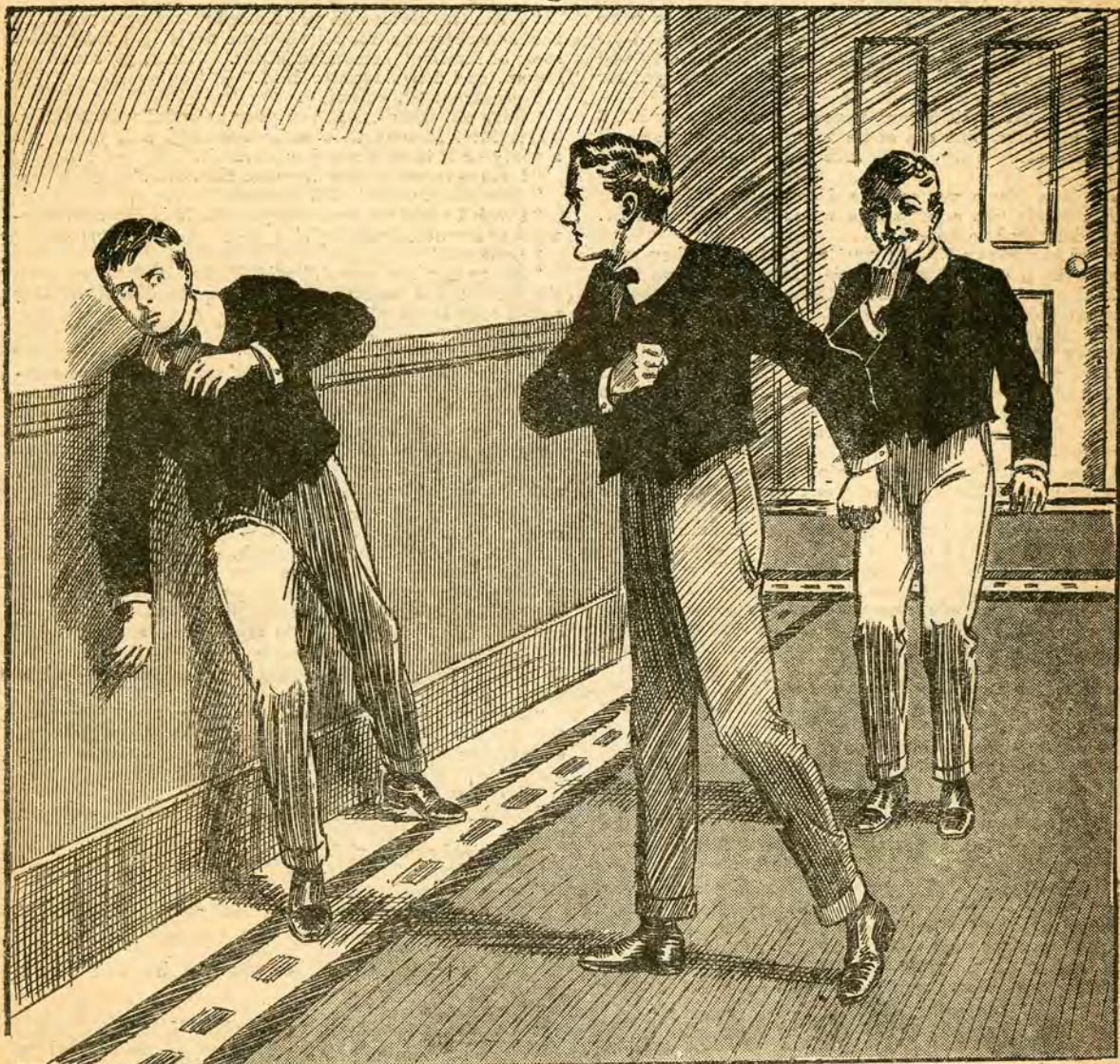


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IN THE KING'S KHAKI!

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

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Talbot spun Crooke along the passage with a single sweep of his powerful arm, and he reeled against the wall, and crashed to the floor. "Hip-pip!" yelled Wally D'Arcy, in great delight. (See Chapter 3.)

CHAPTER 1.

A Parcel for Gussy.

"**C**ORN in Egypt!" said Jack Blake, in tones of great satisfaction.

"What luck!" ejaculated Digby.

"Even Gussy comes in useful sometimes," remarked Herries.

"Weally, deah boys——" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Weally, you know——"

Those remarks had been called forth in Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, by the appearance of Toby, the page, in the study doorway, with a broad grin and a welcome announcement. The announcement was to the effect that a parcel had arrived by post for Master

Next Wednesday:

"TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE!" AND "THE FILM FAVOURITE!"

D'Arcy, and Study No. 6 almost hugged Toby on the spot. For it was, as Blake declared, like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years.

The occasion was important, as any observer might have deduced from the fact that the study was being put into a state of unwonted tidiness.

Blake was collecting up books and papers from the floor. Herries was struggling manfully with the accumulation of rubbish in the fender. Digby was dusting the study; at all events, he was brandishing an old cap and whacking the furniture with it, and he had informed his inquiring friends that he was dusting the study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was tastefully arranging the flowers in the jamtops on the mantelpiece.

The fact was that Miss Marie had consented to come to tea in Study No. 6. She was to arrive at tea-time under the escort of Talbot of the Shell. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell were also engaged for the little party.

So far as the Shell fellows were concerned, Study No. 6 would not have gone out of its way to make any special preparations. They could take things as they found them.

But Miss Marie was quite a different proposition.

Miss Marie was a personage whom the juniors of St. Jim's delighted to honour.

Never had Study No. 6 forgotten that when they were down with the "flu" Miss Marie had nursed them back to health, and had made even the school sanatorium a pleasant abiding-place.

Miss Marie was coming to tea, and hence the extraordinary preparations in Study No. 6.

There was only one cloud on the horizon, and that was that Study No. 6, at this critical epoch in its history, was somewhat short of funds.

Such things will happen. In fact, they happened not infrequently.

It was particularly unfortunate on this occasion, considering what a distinguished guest was expected in the study.

Under the circumstances, the feed should have been of the very best—a feed for the gods.

Blake & Co. had done all they could. The Terrible Three had come nobly to the rescue, lending all the cash they possessed at the moment—unfortunately a small amount. Talbot of the Shell had placed all his funds at the disposal of the study, but as his allowance had not arrived, those funds were limited.

It would be a case, as Blake had said, of "S.S.D."

Those mysterious initials stood for "Study Stands Down."

Good things would be pressed upon the guests, but the study itself was to be afflicted with want of appetite, and was to find its satisfaction in supplying generously the wants of the guests.

And then came Toby, the page, grinning, with the announcement that a parcel had arrived for the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Toby was not grinning at the parcel; he was grinning at the study. He seemed to find something rather amusing in the efforts of the chums to make that celebrated apartment presentable—especially in Dig's frantic endeavours with the duster. Dig was certainly filling the study with dust from floor to ceiling, from window to door.

No wonder the chums of the Fourth felt inclined to hug Toby for his welcome news. It was indeed "corn in Egypt."

"A parcel," said Blake thoughtfully. "Not a hamper, Toby?"

"No, Master Blake."

"Your people might have made it a hamper, Gussy!" said Herries, a little reproachfully.

"Yaas, wathah!" assented Arthur Augustus. "My patah might weally have made it a fivah. I sent him a telegwam explainin' that I was weally hard up this time, and he hasn't even answhaed it."

"Perhaps Lord Eastwood can't afford telegrams in wartime," grinned Blake. "I know you wasted ninepence."

"Weally, Blake, the ninepence would not have been wasted, if it had pwoduced a fivah. It was a spwat to catch a whale, you know."

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"But we've lost the sprat, and we haven't caught the whale," grunted Blake. "That ninepence would have got another pot of jam."

"Vewy likely there's jam in the parcel, deah boy!"

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder. Who's it from?"

"I weally do not know. You see, I have not been expectin' a parcel," said Arthur Augustus. "However, it's bound to be tuck. It will gwace the festive board wippingly."

"And there won't be any need for S.S.D.," remarked Herries, with considerable satisfaction. Herries had a healthy appetite.

"Where's the parcel, Toby?"

"In the 'ousekeeper's room, Master Blake."

"What the dickens do you mean by leaving a parcel in the housekeeper's room, when we're jolly nearly in a state of famine?" demanded Blake. "Here, give me that stump, and I'll slaughter him!"

Toby departed, grinning.

"Buzz off, Gussy, and get your parcel!" said Herries. "Tell Mrs. Mimms that we're starving, and we've got a party on if there's any jaw about it."

"I am awwangin' the flowahs, Hewwies."

"Blow the flowers! I'll do that."

"I feah I could not twust to your taste in the awwangement of flowahs, deah boy!"

"Fathead!"

"I'll go for the parcel," said Blake. "Buck up with the study; it's beginning to look quite decent—if Dig would only leave off dusting it."

"Look here——" began Dig warmly.

"Bow-wow!"

Jack Blake started off in great spirits for the house-dame's room. A certain amount of supervision was exercised over parcels and hampers of tuck sent to the juniors. But Blake had no doubt of being able to get that welcome consignment from the good-natured house-dame.

"Called for Gussy's parcel, please!" announced Blake, as he presented himself in the house-dame's room.

"There it is, Master Blake," said Mrs. Mimms, with a smile. "You may take it."

"Thank you! You're a duck, Mrs. Mimms!" said Blake. "My hat! Tain't a very big parcel—sewn up in canvas, too, as if it were going to the Front. Very careful johnnie who sent that parcel, I should say—careful that he didn't put too much in it, either."

Blake picked up the parcel and marched off with it. It was not large, and it was not heavy. But every little helps.

"There you are!" Blake slammed the parcel down on the study table. "When you find out whom this is from, Gussy, you can give the chap a hint to make it a bit bigger next time."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stared blankly at the canvas-wrapped parcel.

"What's the matter, fathead?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Open it, ass!"

"Bai Jove! I know who sent that parcel, deah boys!"

"Eh—who?"

"I did!"

"You did!" yelled Blake and Herries and Digby together.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You sent yourself a parcel?" shouted Blake.

"No; I sent it to Corporal Bwown, of the Loamshire Wegiment, in Flandahs. It's come back."

"Oh, great pip!" groaned Blake. "A parcel for the Front—returned! Never mind, we'll polish off this lot, and you can send Corporal Brown, whoever he is, another. There's grub in it, of course."

"I am afwaid not, deah boy!"

"My hat, what's in it, then?"

"Socks——"

"Socks!" howled Blake.

"Yaas, and cigahs——"

"Cigars! Oh, crumbs!"

"And tobacco—and shirts——"

"Tobacco—shirts! Great Christopher Columbus!"

Blake & Co. stared at the parcel, and at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with feelings too deep for words. They

had expected a welcome addition of tuck to the feed, and they were presented with socks, cigars, tobacco, and shirts! It was tragic!

CHAPTER 2. Marie's Father:

"BUMP him!" said Herries at last.
"Weally, Hewwies——"
"Bump the silly ass! Why couldn't he send tuck to his blessed corporal! Then the parcel would have come in useful when it came back."

"Of course it would, the duffer! What use are cigars and tobacco to us!" exclaimed Digby wrathfully. "They might come in for Levison, or Crooke of the Shell. They're no good in this study."

"Weally, deah boys——"
"Fathead!" said Blake and Herries and Digby together. They were exasperated.

"Pway be weasonable, deah boy. I did not expect the parcel to come back," said Arthur Augustus. "I feah that it means that somethin' has happened to poor old Corpowal Bwown."

"Oh!" said Blake.

"Who is Corporal Brown?" demanded Herries.

"I weally do not know, Hewwies."

"You don't know, and you've been sending him parcels!"

"Certainly, deah boy. It is not necessary to know a man to send him parcels, I suppose. I got his name fwom Wailton."

"Railton!"

"Yaas. You see, I send a parcel out ewevy week to the Fwent, and aftah Wailton came home fwom the wah, it occurred to me to ask him for the names of some of the men in his wegiment—the Loamshire Wiffes, you know. I thought it a jolly good ideah to back up old Wailton's wegiment, especially as he got winged by the beastly Huns, you know. He gave me the names of several

men who hadn't many welations in England, and this Corpowal Bwown was among them. He's a wathah wippin' soldier—he has the D.C.M.—the Distinguished Conduct Medal, deah boys. Wailton said this chap hadn't many welations—only one daughter—and so he was a good man to send parcels to. So I've sent them, you know. This is the first that's come back, so I feah somethin' has happened to the chap."

"How rotten!" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy examined the parcel.

The name and address—B.E.F.—of the corporal were written on the label, and there was a scrawl in pencil over it—a short but significant scrawl:

"HOSPITAL."

"PRESENT WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN."

The name and address of the sender being written outside, the parcel had been returned to D'Arcy unopened by the military post.

"Wounded or sick!" said Blake.

"Or—killed!" muttered Digby. "Poor chap!"

"Hospital" means that he's still alive, but in hospital," said Blake decidedly. "Blow the Huns, and hang the Kaiser!"

"Better shove it out of sight," said Dig. "It won't cheer up our guests to see it just now!"

"Hallo, here we are again!" said a cheery voice at the door.

The guests had arrived.

Miss Marie, bright and smiling, came in with Talbot of the Shell. Talbot, the "Toff" of other days, was looking very cheery. Behind them came Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther.

"Trot in," said Blake. "Awfully good of you to come, Miss Marie."

"Yaas, wathah! We are honahed, deah gal!"

"For goodness' sake put that duster away, Dig!"

"I haven't finished dusting!"

"Yes, you hav-. Chuck it!"

"Are we rather early?" asked Talbot, with a smile.

"Not a bit of it, but Gussy's just had a parcel back from the Front. Gussy will do these things, you know!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Here's your chair, Miss Marie!"

"Thank you," said Miss Marie sweetly, as she took the armchair. "I hope there is no bad news from your friend at the Front."

"Not exactly, Miss Mawie. I don't weally know the chap, you know; but, of course, he's a fwiend in a sense, as he's a soldiah. The parcel's come back because he's in hospital—sick or wounded, I don't know which—and they don't know where he is."

"Poor fellow!" said Marie softly.

"Yaas, it's wotten. It makes you think of what might happen to one's own welations out there—my bwothah, old Conway, f'winstance. But old Conway is still going stwong. And I twust your uncle is all wight, Talbot?"

Talbot nodded.

"I had a letter yesterday from Colonel Lyndon," he said. "He hasn't had a scratch so far."

"This chap is in his wegiment—old Wailton's wegiment, too, you know. He was a vevy decent chap, I believe."

"A man in the Loamshire Regiment!" exclaimed Talbot.

"Yaas, a corpowal!"

Miss Marie rose suddenly to her feet. The colour in her pretty cheeks had faded, and a pained, startled look was in her eyes.

"A corporal in the Loamshire Regiment!" she exclaimed, catching her breath.

"Yaas, Miss Mawie."

The Terrible Three and Talbot exchanged quick glances. Only they knew that the father of Miss Marie—the nurse, the Little Sister of the Poor—had enlisted in the Loamshire Regiment, and had become a corporal—once the fellow-soldier of Mr. Railton, the School House master, when he was at the Front.

"There are a good many corporals in the Loamshire Regiment," said Talbot hastily, as he noted the Fourth-Formers' glances turning curiously upon Miss Marie's startled face.

The girl was pale as death.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE!"



"What is his name?" she asked huskily. "Tell me his name, please."

"Brown."

* Miss Marie gave a cry.

"Corporal Brown, of the Loamshire Regiment!"

"Yaas, but——"

The girl sank back into the chair, her face blanched, her eyes filling. The chums of Study No. 6 stood astounded.

"What is the mattah, deah gal?"

"Miss Marie!"

"What——"

"Not killed?" exclaimed the girl. "Is he—is he killed? Oh, Heaven!"

"No, no. Wounded or sick," said Blake, in amazement at the girl's agitation. "Miss Marie, is it possible he is a relation of yours? We never knew."

"My father! Oh, my father!"

"Your father!"

"Bai Jove!"

"But—but——"

The girl was sobbing now. The juniors looked at one another helplessly. Corporal Brown, the soldier to whom Arthur Augustus had sent cigars, was the father of Miss Marie, the Little Sister of the Poor.

"But—but Miss Mawie's name isn't Brown!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in utter bewilderment.

Talbot set his lips.

"Miss Marie's father enlisted under another name," he said quietly. "He had his own reasons for doing that."

"Oh, deah!"

"My father!" moaned the girl. "It has come at last—what I have feared every day, dreamed of every night. Now I have lost him, my father!"

She rose to her feet, stretching out a hand blindly. Talbot caught it, and held it firmly.

"Come, my dear," he said, his voice soft and tender.

The girl made an effort to control her agitation.

"I—I am sorry!" she stammered. "I—I was startled; I had had no news. You will excuse me! I—I must go! Please excuse me. I—I do not feel very well now."

She left the study, leaning heavily on Talbot's strong arm.

A grim silence fell on Study No. 6.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy at last. "How uttally wotten! How beastly! I hadn't the faintest ideah——"

"It's extraordinary!" muttered Blake. "I—I didn't even know that Miss Marie had a father."

"It couldn't be helped," said Tom Merry. "You couldn't have guessed anything of the kind."

"Did you chaps know?" asked Blake, looking at the Terrible Three.

Tom Merry nodded.

"We knew that Miss Marie's father was in the Loamshire Regiment under the name of Brown—yes. Talbot knew too, and Railton. Nobody else, I think. And—and, of course, you fellows won't speak about it. It's Miss Marie's business!"

"Of course," said Blake. "But it's jolly queer. I don't see why he should enlist under an assumed name."

"He had a jolly good reason," said Manners.

"And you know that, too?"

"Yes; but it isn't our secret."

"You fellows seem to know a lot," said Digby.

"It was really through Talbot's being connected with Marie's father that we knew," said Tom, colouring a little. "But—but it's not a matter to be talked about. Miss Marie has given it away to you fellows, but——"

"Of course, we sha'n't say a word about it outside this study if Miss Marie doesn't want it known," said Blake.

"But it seems odd. I know I should be jolly proud of having a father fighting the Germans."

"So is Miss Marie, but she has reasons."

"Well, we're not going to talk about it," said Blake. "It isn't our business. I'm awfully sorry for Miss Marie. It must have been an awful shock to her just now. I—I say, if you fellows don't mind, our little party's off."

"Yaas; I feel wathah wotten myself."

The Terrible Three were feeling the same. The feed in Study No. 6 was decidedly "off." Tom Merry & Co. quitted the study with clouded faces. The blow that had

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fallen upon Miss Marie had struck them, too—for her sake.

And they knew more than Study No. 6 could know; they knew that Marie's father had once been John Rivers, the cracksman—that he had enlisted under another name to wipe out the disgrace of the past by fighting bravely for King and Country, and that by courage and conduct he had redeemed the evil of his earlier life. And now a German bullet had laid him low!

CHAPTER 3.

Cousins and Foes!

TALBOT came into Tom Merry's study about an hour later, with a clouded and moody brow.

The Terrible Three were not at work.

They looked inquiringly at the handsome Shell fellow as he came in.

"How is Miss Marie?" asked all three at once.

"She is calm now; but, of course, it's a fearful shock to her," said Talbot quietly. "It's rotten unlucky that she should have learned it so suddenly. I never knew that Gussy was sending things to a Corporal Brown in Railton's old regiment."

"Gussy does good by stealth," said Tom, with a faint smile. "He's got a long list of soldiers he sends things to. I didn't know that Corporal Brown was in the list. Of course, Gussy hadn't the faintest idea who he was."

"If there's talk about this——" said Talbot uneasily.

"There won't be. They won't chatter."

"They don't know the importance of it," said Talbot.

"I don't think you fellows quite know, either."

"How do you mean? We know that Corporal Brown was John Rivers."

"And that the police are still after him!" said Talbot bitterly.

Tom Merry shifted uneasily.

"I suppose so," he said. "He is still wanted for what he has done in the past; but nobody is likely to guess that Corporal Brown's right name is John Rivers."

"Crooke may."

"Crooke of the Shell?"

"Yes."

"That rotten cad—— Excuse me, I know he's your cousin, Talbot; but——"

"You can't think of him much worse than I do," said Talbot, with a curling lip. "I think I ought to tell you. Crooke, like all the fellows, knows my history. He knows I was the Toff in John Rivers' gang in my early days—before I came here, and before Colonel Lyndon found I was his nephew. You know how Crooke feels about the colonel taking me up. I've tried to make friends with him, because he was my cousin, but——"

"But you couldn't," said Tom. "Of course you couldn't. No decent chap could be friends with Crooke."

Talbot nodded.

"When Corporal Brown was on leave he came here to see his daughter," he said. "I helped to meet them. Of course, it had to be secret. Crooke spied and listened, and knows that Miss Marie's father was Rivers, the cracksman, and that he's in the Army under an assumed name. That, I believe, is all he knows. But when the corporal was on leave Crooke set the police on his track, and they nearly had him. But they don't know his name or his regiment. He disappeared again, and went back to Flanders safe."

"Good luck!" said Monty Lowther.

"But, you see, now," went on Talbot, "if it comes out that Miss Marie's father is Corporal Brown, Crooke will know all he wants to know."

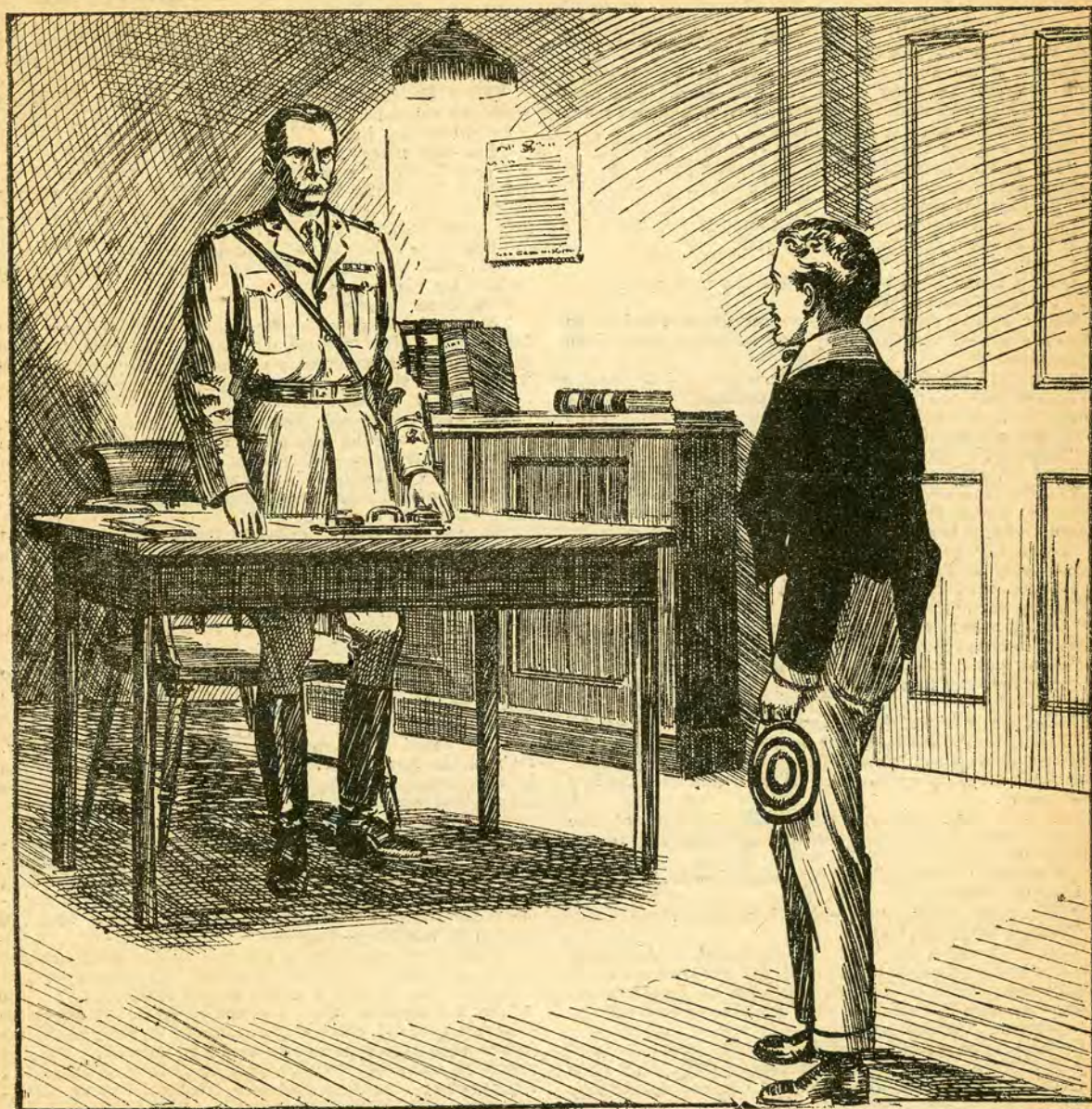
"Do you think he would give him away?"

"I know he would."

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"The cad! He knows that Rivers is honest now—that he has been facing death in the trenches. That wipes out everything."

"He knows that the old charges hang over his head, all the same, and that five years' penal servitude, at least, waits for him if he is caught. It's different with me; my past was the same, but I had the King's pardon. Rivers is defenceless; and now he's wounded or sick, and



"The hound!" Colonel Lyndon rose to his feet, his brow black as night. "He has had the audacity to put on the khaki—a cracksman, a thief, a scoundrel! By gad, he shall answer for his insolence. You say he is at the school?" "Yes, sir," faltered Talbot. (See Chapter 12.)

may be sent back to England. If Crooke knew the truth now, John Rivers would be seized in hospital."

Tom shivered.

"But he won't know, Talbot. Blake and the rest won't say a word. I've warned them."

"That's all right, then. I can't help fearing that it might get out."

"Does Marie think—"

Talbot smiled slightly.

"Marie isn't thinking of that now. She's only thinking of his danger. She pictures him shattered by a shell; she's only thinking of his life. I've been to Mr. Railton, and he's promised to make inquiries at once. There hasn't been any news of him in the official lists yet. It may not be very serious, after all. But—but he's in hospital, and you know what it might mean. I'm jolly glad now that I managed to help him to see Marie when he was on leave. I—I wanted to warn you chaps to be careful about Crooke; he would do his very worst if he could. But, of course, you'll be careful?"

"Rely on us," said Manners.

"We won't say a word, even among ourselves," said Tom Merry. "Crooke won't have any chance of spying on us."

Talbot nodded, and left the study. He had complete faith in his chums, yet he had an inward feeling of uneasiness.

John Rivers, fighting at the Front in the hosts of khaki-clad men, was safe from the danger of the past; but, stretched in a hospital bed in his native country, his danger was greater. In delirium he might babble out the past—his real name, only too well known, his one-time profession. And, even if that peril did not occur, there were others, especially from Gerald Crooke, if Crooke should ever know.

As Talbot strode moodily down the passage a sharp cry came to his ears, and he stopped.

"Leggo, you bullying beast!"

It was the voice of D'Arcy minor—Wally of the Third.

"You cheeky little hound!"

Talbot's brows darkened as he heard the bullying tones.

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of Crooke of the Shell. He hastened his steps, and turned the corner of the passage.

Crooke of the Shell was grasping the fag by the collar and bumping his head again the wall hard. The hero of the Third was resisting gamely, but he had not much chance against the big Shell fellow.

Talbot's eyes glittered with anger.

"Let him alone, you brute!" he rapped out.

Crooke turned towards him with a snarl.

"He's kicked my shins!"

"Serve you right for bullying him. If you don't let him go at once, Crooke, I'll make you!"

Thump!

D'Arcy minor's head went against the wall again.

"Yow-ow!" roared Wally.

Talbot sprang forward. His strong grasp was laid on Crooke's collar, and the bully was wrenched away from his victim.

"Let go!" shrieked Crooke furiously.

Talbot spun the bully along the passage with a single sweep of his powerful arm, and Crooke reeled against the wall and crashed to the floor.

"Hip-pip!" yelled Wally, in great delight.

"Cut off, young 'un!" said Talbot, with a smile.

The fag cut off, chuckling. Crooke's prompt punishment fully consoled him for the bumps of his hard head against the passage wall.

Crooke lay gasping on the floor, his eyes gleaming venomously at Talbot.

Talbot looked down at him, with a curling lip.

"Hang you!" muttered Crooke. "Hang you!"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Talbot contemptuously.

"Why can't you let the fags alone, you bully?"

"Hang you!" groaned Crooke, sitting up and rubbing his shoulder. "I'll make you sorry for this, you hound—you thief!"

Talbot's eyes blazed for a moment.

But he checked himself, and went quietly into his study and closed the door. Crooke dragged himself to his feet. He had been hurt by his fall. Talbot had not handled him gently.

"Hallo! Been scrapping?" asked Levison of the Fourth, coming along the passage, and stopping to eye Crooke curiously.

"Mind your own business!" growled Crooke.

Levison grinned.

"Your dear cousin again—what?" he asked.

Crooke gritted his teeth.

"I'll make him sorry for it!" he muttered. "My chance will come some time—I know that! I'll get that reformed cracksmen turned out of St. Jim's—if he is reformed! I know enough to ruin him, once my chance comes!"

"Gammon!" said Levison.

Crooke's eyes glinted savagely.

"You'll see whether it's gammon when the time comes!" He lowered his voice. "You could help me, Levison—a cunning rotter like you——"

"Thanks!"

"You're hard up?" said Crooke.

"Stony as the Sahara!" said Levison, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Are you going to offer to lend me money? You refused last time I asked you."

"I'd make it worth your while if you could help me. It's a question of finding something out——"

"About Talbot?"

"In a way—yes."

"Come into my study," said Levison, with a curious expression on his face.

And Gerald George Crooke, still groaning from his injuries, followed Levison of the Fourth into his study.

CHAPTER 4.

Levison's Answer!

"GO ahead!" said Levison tersely.

The study was empty, Lumley-Lumley and Mellish and Trimble being downstairs. Levison stood at the table, his hand resting upon it.

There was a peculiar expression in Levison's eyes, which Crooke did not observe.

"Now, how can I help you? And how much is it worth?" asked Levison.

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"I'll tell you how the matter stands. You know my uncle, Colonel Lyndon, found out that Talbot was his nephew——"

"All the school knows that. He gets an allowance from the colonel now," said Levison.

Crooke bit his lip.

"Yes—my money!"

"Your money?" repeated Levison.

"Yes; it's really mine. I was going to have all my uncle's money when he died; but that's all changed since he's found Talbot. Talbot's his favourite."

"Bad taste on his part?" grinned Levison.

"Oh, rats! That's how it stands. Talbot is sticking up to him for his money——"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Anyway, he's down in the colonel's will—I know that for a fact. He's cut me out there. He used to be a cracksmen—a member of a cracksmen gang—he was the 'Toff'—and that kind of fellow has cut me out——"

"That's all ancient history."

"It hasn't finished yet!" said Crooke venomously. "I'm going to make him sorry for it—and disgrace him with my uncle, too——"

"How the dickens——"

The cad of the Fourth eyed Crooke curiously. The Shell fellow went on eagerly:

"It can be done. Colonel Lyndon has swallowed Talbot's past whole—he had to, you see. But if he learned that Talbot was still on friendly terms with some of the old gang——"

"But he isn't."

"He is!"

"What rot!" said Levison incredulously.

"I know it for a fact. You remember John Rivers, who tried to rob the school once? He's the father of Miss Marie, the nurse in the sanatorium."

"Rats!"

"I've heard them speaking about him, and I know. He's in the Army now, under an assumed name. When he's on leave he comes to see Miss Marie, and Talbot manages it for them. I found it all out. Last time he came I nearly got him nabbed. That would have finished Talbot here—if it came out that he was helping a badly-wanted criminal to escape the police. You can be imprisoned for that, I believe. Anyway, it would finish him with my uncle. Only—only, you see, I can't say it out—the fellows are all fond of Miss Marie, and they wouldn't believe it, and they—they——"

"They'd cut you to pieces if you said a word against her or her father," grinned Levison. "I advise you not to, if you like to keep a whole skin, Crooke!"

"Oh, I know that, ass! I'm not going to say anything—I can't prove it. But if I could find out what name her father uses in the Army, he could be nabbed. Then it would all come out—without my appearing in it at all. That's what I want to find out—the man's name, rank, and regiment. Then Inspector Skeat will do the rest."

Levison looked hard at Crooke. Levison of the Fourth was generally supposed to be a "hard case," and to be about as little particular as a fellow possibly could be. But the malignancy in Crooke's face was a shock, even to Ernest Levison.

"But if the man's doing his duty in the Army, wouldn't it be only decent to let him alone?" he said.

"Oh, rats!"

"And what about Miss Marie—what would she feel like?"

"That's her business!"

"She's a ripping girl!" said Levison. "She nursed you well when you were down with the flu that time."

"She was paid, I suppose."

"Paid!" said Levison. "Yes, I suppose so. Of course, that's all there is to be considered in the matter?"

"I suppose so," assented Crooke, quite blind to the irony in Levison's remark. "I'm not troubling myself about her. It's Talbot I want to get at—and she and her father will have to chance it."

"Talbot!" repeated Levison. "Exactly. And you want me to help you—how?"

"You're a cunning beast," said Crooke—"you can find things out; I can't. Talbot is on his guard against me, too. He wouldn't suspect you; besides, you've been rather friendly with him."

"Being friendly with a chap gives you a good opportunity of playing him a dirty trick," said Levison thoughtfully. "Of course, you don't imagine for a moment that I should have any scruples about doing it."

Crooke laughed.

"Don't be funny, Levison! All the fellows know how scrupulous you are!"

"I suppose so. What next?"

"Find out the name Marie's father goes under—the rest will be as easy as rolling off a log," said Crooke. "If you could do that, I'd make it worth five pounds to you!"

"Five pounds is a lot of money—especially to a hard-up beggar like me," said Levison, laughing. "I could do it, I dare say; as you remarked, I'm a cunning beast, and Talbot has done me a lot of good turns, and doesn't suspect me. I dare say I could manage to spy it out."

"You'll do it!" exclaimed Crooke eagerly.

Levison laughed again.

"No, I won't do it! My dear man, I've been drawing you out. Do you know for what reason?"

Crooke scowled savagely.

"No. What do you mean?"

"To repeat to Talbot every word you've said to me," said Crooke cheerfully. "I may be as big a blackguard as you, Crooke—though I doubt it. But I'm not quite blackguard enough to turn on the only chap at St. Jim's who has ever treated me decently. I'm going to warn Talbot; and, first of all, I'm going to kick you out of my study."

"You rotten hound!" roared Crooke. "Hands off! Why, I— Oh! Oh!"

Crash!

Crooke spun back against the door as Levison's fist crashed full in his face. The Fourth-Former bent over the gasping junior, grasping him, tore the door open, and pitched him bodily into the passage.

Crooke, dazed and dizzy, lay gasping on the floor.

"Grooh!" he mumbled. "I'll smash you! I'll—"

"Come on, then!" said Levison coolly. "I can lick you, dear boy. You smoke too many cigarettes, old chap—you've got no wind! Come on!"

Crooke scrambled to his feet, and sprang at him like a tiger. Levison was by no means such a fighting-man as Talbot of the Shell, and Crooke was the bigger of the two. They closed, and fought furiously.

Fellows looked out of the studies all along the passage.

"Hallo! It's a fight."

"Levison and Cwooke, bai Jove!"

"Go it, ye cripples!"

Crash! Crash! Stamp! Tramp! Tramp!"

"Pile in!" roared Jack Blake. "Hurrah!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, as the Terrible Three arrived on the spot. "A battle of the funks—I've never seen such ferocious funks before!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crash! Crooke went to the floor, and he did not rise again. Levison dabbed his nose with his handkerchief, and blinked at the juniors.

"Any more, Crooke?" he gasped.

Groan from Gerald Crooke. He did not want any more. "The show's over," said Levison politely. "We're both dished—I've licked Crooke, and Crooke won't lend me any more money after this! Both down and out, you see!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! What a funnny ass you are, Levison! What was the wow about?"

"Better ask Crooke," drawled Levison.

He turned away, still dabbing his nose, and went to Talbot's study. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass inquiringly upon Gerald Crooke, who sat up panting.

"What on earth was the wow about, Cwooke?"

"Find out!" snarled Crooke.

"Weally, Cwooke, that is hardly a polite weply—"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Pway hold my jacket, Blake, while I give Cwooke a fearful thrashing for his wotten wudeness."

"Crooke doesn't want any more thrashing," grinned Blake. "As you are strong, be merciful, O great and sublime Gustavus!"

"Weally, you ass—"

Crooke rose, and went groaning to his study. He was feeling very sore, both in mind and body.

In his cunning scheming for the injury of Talbot, his

cousin and foe, Levison of the Fourth, might have been very useful to him. The most cunning and unscrupulous fellow in the School House might have succeeded where he, so far, had failed. But Levison had unexpectedly developed scruples.

What was the reason, Crooke asked himself savagely, that everybody, in the long run, came round to Talbot's side? Levison had been against him at first; had, indeed, been the first to discover the "Toff's" connection with the cracksman gang of which John Rivers was the most dangerous member. Yet Levison had been turned into a friend—how and why? What was that amazing gift of Talbot's that disarmed enmity, that changed hatred into friendship?

A kind, honest heart—a frank and generous nature—a generosity that would help foe as well as friend—that was the secret, if Crooke could have known it, or understood it if he had known.

In his study, he dabbed his nose and rubbed his eye. He stood against the Toff, and in all the school he stood alone. Even the cad of the Fourth had turned on him.

But the thought of it only made Crooke's savage determination more fixed and deadly.

Somehow or another—sooner or later—his hour would come, and he would hold his enemy in the hollow of his hand. And when that hour struck, there would be no mercy for the Toff.

CHAPTER 5.

Danger Ahead!

"COME in!" said Dr. Holmes.

A timid knock had sounded at the door of the Head's study.

The door opened, and the Head rose as Miss Marie entered.

The girl was pale, and her eyes showed signs of weeping, but she was quite calm now.

"Come in, my dear child," said the Head, as the Little Sister hesitated. "Take this chair."

The Little Sister sank into the chair.

"I will not waste your time, sir," she said. "I—I have a little favour to ask, if I may—"

"You may ask anything, Marie."

"You—you know my father is wounded, sir." The girl's face was flooded with colour. "You know what he was once; but—but he was my father, sir. And—and you know that since he joined the Army he has been stainless. Mr. Railton was in the same company, and he can tell you so."

"My dear child, you need not tell me—I know it," said the Head kindly. "Mr. Railton respects him now, whatever he may have been long ago, and I share his feeling."

"Thank you, sir! I learned it suddenly—that he was wounded—two days ago. But since then Mr. Railton has been inquiring, and now I know all. My father was wounded weeks ago." The tears welled into her eyes, though she strove to hold them back. "He was struck down in a charge that captured a German trench. He was sent to the base, and has now been removed to England. Mr. Railton has learned it from the War Office. Of course, I had no news, as it is not known that I am his daughter. You know he dare not bear his own name."

"I know, my poor child," said the Head, deeply moved. "You are anxious for his safety? But the secret is well kept; I do not think there is anything to fear."

Marie clasped her hands.

"I wish to go to him, sir."

"To go to him!"

"Yes, I am a good nurse. You have told me so. I used to nurse the poor in the poor districts in London, once. I could nurse him. He needs my care now. I might save him. He is badly hurt; I know it. My poor father!"

The Head was silent.

The girl's desire to go to her father was natural enough, but the kind old doctor saw many difficulties in the way.

"He is in hospital now?" he asked.

"Yes."

"But I fear that you are too young to be admitted to a hospital as a nurse, my child."

"I am a good nurse."

"Yes, yes; but—"

"I must go to him," said Marie. "That is what I came to ask. If I cannot go to nurse him, at least I must go to London, where I can stay near him, and see him as often as it is allowed."

"You wish to leave the school?"

"I must."

Dr. Holmes was silent, frowning thoughtfully. St. Jim's had been a haven of refuge for the cracksmen's daughter. Between Miss Marie's life now and her old life there was a great gulf fixed. In the school hospital Marie had made herself very useful, and she was beloved by all. Even the somewhat sour Miss Pinch, the school nurse, treated her with kind affection. The thought of the young girl returning to the wilderness of London—perhaps to fall in with associates of the dark old days—was distasteful to the Head.

"I have told Mrs. Holmes," said Marie timidly. "She does not wish me to go, but she agrees that I should be with my father if possible."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"That is right, Marie—that is quite right. But—but"—he paused—"what is your father's present state, my child? Could he be moved?"

"I think he can be moved; but his state is still serious. But that is not possible, for I have no home; I have nowhere to take him."

The doctor smiled.

"What if he were brought here, Marie?"

"Here!" exclaimed the girl, with a start.

"I have thought several times," said the Head, "that the school sanatorium might be used, to relieve pressure on the hospitals—in the less serious cases. It is one's duty to do all one can. In this case, I can have no hesitation. If he were here, you and Miss Pinch between you could care for him."

"Oh, sir!"

"It depends on whether he can be moved. That the authorities would accede I have not the slightest doubt, upon my assurance that the patient would be well cared for. And I think I could answer for that," said the Head, with a smile.

"Dr. Holmes, if—if you would— But—but, no!" The girl's voice broke. "You know what my father was. You cannot have him here. I could not let you. Suppose—suppose there should be a discovery, the disgrace—"

"There would be less chance of a discovery here, Marie. To my mind, John Rivers has wiped out the past, and he stands stainless in my eyes. A man can do no more than offer his life for his country. The past is dead and done with. All that we need remember is that he is a soldier of the King; and, as such, on an equal footing with any man in the land."

The tears ran down Marie's cheeks.

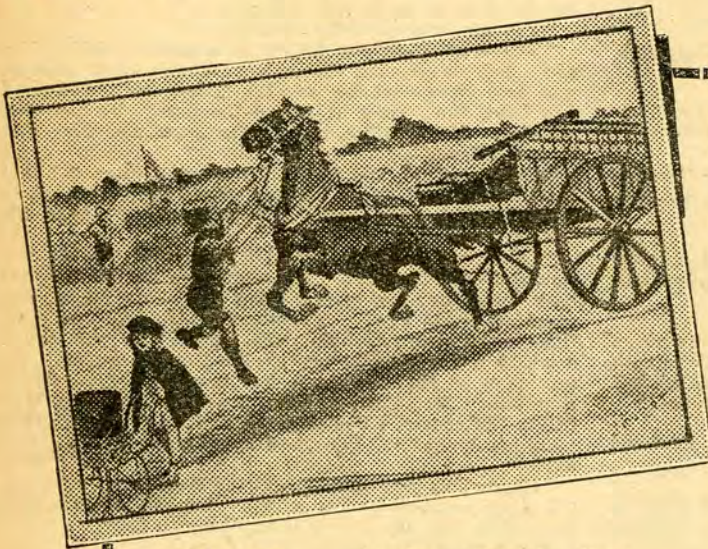
"I should be so happy!" she murmured. "I have feared—I have feared— You know that a patient is sometimes delirious—he might speak—they might discover! Then he would go from a sick bed to a prison! Oh, sir—"

"In our hands, there will be no danger of that, my child. I also have thought of that. Comfort yourself, my dear child, there shall be no danger. You shall make preparations for him. I will consult Mr. Railton at once and, as early as possible Corporal Brown shall be installed in the school hospital."

"Thank you, sir! I—I can't really thank you as I should like," faltered Marie.

"Don't trouble to do so. Dry your eyes. We will save your father, amongst us," said the Head, with a smile; "and when he recovers, if he cannot rejoin the Army, we shall see that he has an opportunity of following an honourable course in life."

"I wish I could show how grateful I am, sir," faltered the Little Sister. "Oh, it will be splendid to have him here, where I can care for him—my father!"



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The Little Sister quitted the study with a light step, though her eyes were red. Talbot of the Shell was waiting at the end of the passage.

He started a little at the sight of the girl's brightened face.

"He is coming here, Toff!" she whispered. From old habit, Marie always called her chum by the name of other days.

Talbot started violently.

"Your father—here!"

"Yes, Toff!" Marie touched his arm timidly. "You are glad?"

"Glad!" muttered Talbot.

His brow was black as night. It was with doubt and apprehension. But Marie's eyes dimmed as she looked at him.

"Toff"—her voice was pleading—"I shall be able to care for him here! It is splendid of Dr. Holmes—splendid! Isn't it, Toff?"

"He's a brick!" said Talbot heavily.

"But you are not glad?" said the girl reproachfully. "Toff, you surely do not remember now the troubles of long ago—that you were enemies. Surely——"

Talbot shook his head.

"We became friends when your father put on the King's khaki," he said. "We are friends now, dear. But—but I am glad he will be here in your care, Marie," he added quickly. "I am glad for his sake and yours."

"Do you think there is danger?" asked Marie quickly.

"Danger! After all, why should there be danger?" said Talbot reassuringly.

He might reassure Marie if he could not reassure himself. The thought of Crooke was in his mind—Crooke and his undying animosity.

"Yes, why?" said Marie. "Only you and your friends know his name, and the secret has been kept so far. They will not speak——"

"They will not speak," assented Talbot.

"And why should anyone suspect?" said Marie.

"Yes, why?" agreed Talbot.

He walked back to the school sanatorium with the Little Sister, and by an effort of will chased the clouds from his brow, and talked cheerily. Marie was full of delight. To have her father safe, where she could care for him, was all she asked of Fate. He would not dash her happiness by his own black doubts and fears. She was smiling when he left her—the bright smile that had not visited the sweet face since, two days before, she had first heard the news in Study No. 6.

But, as Talbot walked back across the quadrangle, his brow grew grim again.

John Rivers was to be installed in the school hospital. To all St. Jim's he would merely be Corporal Brown, of the Loamshires, a wounded soldier whom the Head had befriended. Crooke knew no more than the rest. After all, what could Crooke discover? Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther knew the secret, but their lips were sealed. The chums of Study No. 6 knew that "Corporal Brown" was Marie's father now, though they did not know his real name, but they also could be trusted not to reveal what they knew.

Surely all was safe?

True, in the dark old days John Rivers had been seen at St. Jim's, but life in the ranks had changed him. He would come back greatly altered—sunburnt, different in every way. Recognition was unlikely, and few of the fellows had had more than a glimpse of him, too, excepting when he had been in disguise, which did not matter.

Surely—surely there was no danger?

Less danger, in fact, than anywhere else; for, if delirium should come, and the unconscious tongue should speak, there would be only friendly ears to hear. That peril, at least, would be avoided, and it was a terrible one. The danger was greater than any John Rivers could find at St. Jim's.

Talbot felt that it was so, and his heart lightened. Taking everything into consideration, John Rivers was safer at the school than he would be anywhere else. And certainly Inspector Skeat, of Rylcombe, would never think of looking for his man—the cracksman who had attempted to rob the school—in a sick man in the school hospital. Talbot smiled at the thought.

His heart was lighter. The step that was being taken, greatly as it had startled him at first, was for the best.

But as he came into the School House he passed Crooke of the Shell. Crooke did not speak, but his eyes rested for a moment upon Talbot, and his glance sent a chill to the heart of the Toff. Talbot hurried on. Every other danger would be lessened by John Rivers coming to St. Jim's. But there was always Crooke and his undying enmity! What if Crooke should discover——

Talbot drove the black and troubling thought from his mind. How could Crooke discover? But, in spite of his efforts, that black thought would recur, and he could not banish it.

CHAPTER 6.

Crooke is Sorry He Spoke!

"WIPPIN'!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And D'Arcy's chums echoed:

"Ripping!"

It was two or three days after Miss Marie's visit to the Head's study, and some very interesting news had just leaked out. Owing to the pressure on the hospitals a good many convalescent soldiers were being taken into private homes for nursing, and one was coming to St. Jim's. His name was not yet known, but it was known that he had been in the regiment in which Mr. Railton had served, when the Housemaster had worn the King's khaki and had been "Sergeant Railton."

Like Mr. Railton, he had come home wounded; but, while "old Railton" was left with what the juniors alluded to as a "gammy arm," this poor fellow had been much more seriously hurt. A bed in the school hospital had been prepared for him, and Miss Pinch and the Little Sister were to take care of him.

"A pivate, I believe," said Arthur Augustus. "And I must remark that this is wippin' of the Head!"

"Topping!" said Monty Lowther.

"First chop!" said Blake. "My idea is that Gussy ought to go and tell the Head that he approves. The old boy would feel no end bucked."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Is it a chap with any relations here?" asked Figgins of the New House.

There was a sniff from Crooke of the Shell, who was standing by listening to the remarks of the juniors, with a sneer upon his face.

"How could he have any relations here?" he demanded.

"Well, couldn't he?" said Figgins, in surprise.

"He might, in the New House!" sneered Crooke. "He certainly hasn't any in the School House. We don't have relations serving in the ranks."

Figgy's eyes gleamed.

"If that chap who's been cut up fighting the Germans were a relation of any chap in the New House, our House would be proud of it," he said. "And if any snob in our House said a snobbish, caddish thing on the subject, I'd hammer him till he couldn't howl!"

"That's a tip!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Gentlemen, Figgins has kindly told us what he would do to Crooke if Crooke were a disgrace to his House instead of ours. I vote that we take Figgy's tip!"

"Hear, hear!"

Crooke backed away, in some alarm.

"Here, don't play the fool!" he growled.

"Pway leave him to me, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And he advanced towards Crooke. The cad of the Shell would have turned away, but the juniors had drawn round him in a circle, and there was no escape for him.

"Stand where you are, Crooke!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Let me pass, you rotter!"

"You're going to be talked to by Gussy!" said Monty Lowther, with a chuckle. "Gussy is coming down heavy. I can see it in his eyeglass."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My own opinion is that Crooke deserves something lingering, with boiling oil in it! But we'll let Gussy talk to him instead. Crooke will soon be wishing that he had boiling oil instead."

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass——"

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"Let me pass!" yelled Crooke.

"Not yet, me darling!" said Reilly of the Fourth, pushing him back. "Buck up, Gussy, if you're going to lick him! Sure, I can't keep my own hands off the spalpeen!"

"Cwooke——"

"Oh, shut up!"

"I wefuse to shut up, Cwooke! You have made a disrespectful wemark concernin' one of the chaps who have been keepin' the Germans fwom scwaggin' you!"

"Oh, rats!"

"If you had a wag of decency, Cwooke, you would be pwopahly grateful to the bwave fellahs who are keepin' the Germans out, especially considewin' the fact that they are doin' it for pwactically nothin'——"

"Hear, hear!"

"You have made a wemark dewogatory to the wanks of his Majesty's Army," continued Arthur Augustus, who was now very much on the high horse, and in deadly earnest. "You are awah, Cwooke, that our wespected Housemastah, Mr. Wailton, served in the wanks in Flandahs. Mr. Wailton appeahed to be quite satisfied with the wanks. Appawntly, howevah, you have some fault to find with the wanks. I wquest you to explain yourself, Cwooke!"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Crooke.

"I uttably decline to cheese it! As you have no explanation to offah, I can only conclude that your wemark was dictated by uttah snobbish caddishness and uttah ignowance of what you were talkin' about!"

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "Go it, Gussy! Listen to him, you chaps! This is how he will go it in the House of Lords some day!"

"Pway be sewious, Blake! Cwooke, the Head has decided to take in a wounded soldiah and have him looked aftah. Appawntly, you see some objection. I wquest you to state that objection, Cwooke."

"I suppose the school isn't to be turned into a home for incurables!" sneered Crooke.

"I think that ewevy gentleman pwesent will agwee with me that St. Jim's is honahed by the pwesence of a soldier of the King within its walls——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Cwooke is of a diffewent opinion. I feah that that only shows that Cwooke is a cwawlin' cad! Under the cires, I feel that I have no wesource but to thwash Cwooke! Put up your hands, you uttah blackguard!"

Crooke, alarmed at the storm he had raised, backed away. But Arthur Augustus was not to be denied. He pushed back his elegant cuffs, and rushed upon the cad of the Shell.

Crooke put up his hands then, but it was not much use. Biff! Biff! Bang!

With a roar of pain, Gerald Crooke went sprawling along the passage, just as Mr. Railton's door opened and the Housemaster came out.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Tom Merry. "Gussy's done it now!"

Gussy had!

The sprawling Crooke crashed into the Housemaster's legs, and Mr. Railton staggered back, catching at the wall.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Railton.

"Yaroooh!" roared Crooke.

The Housemaster's stern eyes turned upon the group of juniors, and there was a hush. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood firm as a rock, his eyeglass gleaming in his noble eye, and his eye gleaming fearlessly behind it.

CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus Knows What To Do!

CROOKE wriggled away from Mr. Railton, and sat up.

The Housemaster fixed his eyes upon the swell of the Fourth.

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir."

"What does this mean?"

"I have knocked Cwooke down, sir."

"I can see that, D'Arcy," said Mr. Railton, a little

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taken aback by that plain statement of fact. "You appear to have assaulted Crooke violently, almost outside my study door."

"Yaas, sir. Undah the cires, I had no wesource but to thwash Cwooke."

"Indeed!" said the astonished Housemaster.

"Yaas, indeed, sir. Don't twead on my foot, Blake. What are you tweadin' on my foot for, you duffah?"

Blake crimsoned as the Housemaster's eyes turned on him.

Crooke staggered to his feet, panting. It looked as if Arthur Augustus was booked for a very serious row, which was some consolation to Crooke. He rubbed his nose and his eye, and glared.

"If you are under the impression, D'Arcy, that you are allowed to fight in the passage outside your Housemaster's door, I shall endeavour to correct that impression," said Mr. Railton drily. "Follow me into my study."

"Certainly, sir."

"If you please, sir——" began Tom Merry.

"You see, sir——" Blake started at the same moment.

Mr. Railton did not seem to hear. He stepped back into the study, and Arthur Augustus, with his noble nose high in the air, followed him. Mr. Railton took up a cane from the table.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy."

"My hand, sir?"

Arthur Augustus looked as surprised as if Mr. Railton had asked for his foot.

"Yes, at once!"

"You are not goin' to cane me, sir?" ejaculated the swell of St. Jim's.

"I am going to cane you very severely, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove!"

"I am waiting, D'Arcy," said Mr. Railton, with very visible signs of impatience.

"Oh, vewy well, sir. I do not think I ought to be caned."

"Our opinions differ upon that point, D'Arcy."

Swish!

"Oh, deah!"

Swish!

"Gwooh!"

Mr. Railton laid down the cane.

"You may go, D'Arcy."

"Thank you, sir."

Arthur Augustus rubbed his hands, and made a wry face. Those two swishes had been severe, and they almost overcame that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"And if such a scene should occur again, D'Arcy, your punishment will be more severe."

"Weally, Mr. Wailton, I shall have to wisk that!"

"What!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"I should have to wisk it, sir," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "Even at the wisk of your displeasure, sir, I cannot allow anybody to speak diswrespectfully of his Majesty's Army in my heavin'."

Mr. Railton fixed a very curious look upon the junior.

"Stay a moment, D'Arcy. I do not quite understand you. Do you mean to say that that was the reason why you attacked Crooke?"

"Certainly, sir. I could not possibly allow a low boundah to speak in dewogatory terms of the chaps who are keepin' the Germans out."

"If Crooke did so, D'Arcy, he was deserving of punishment, though I cannot approve of your methods. Silent contempt would be more suitable. Anyone who is contemptible enough to speak diswrespectfully of our gallant soldiers is unworthy of notice."

"Yaas, that's quite wight, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I nevah thought of that."

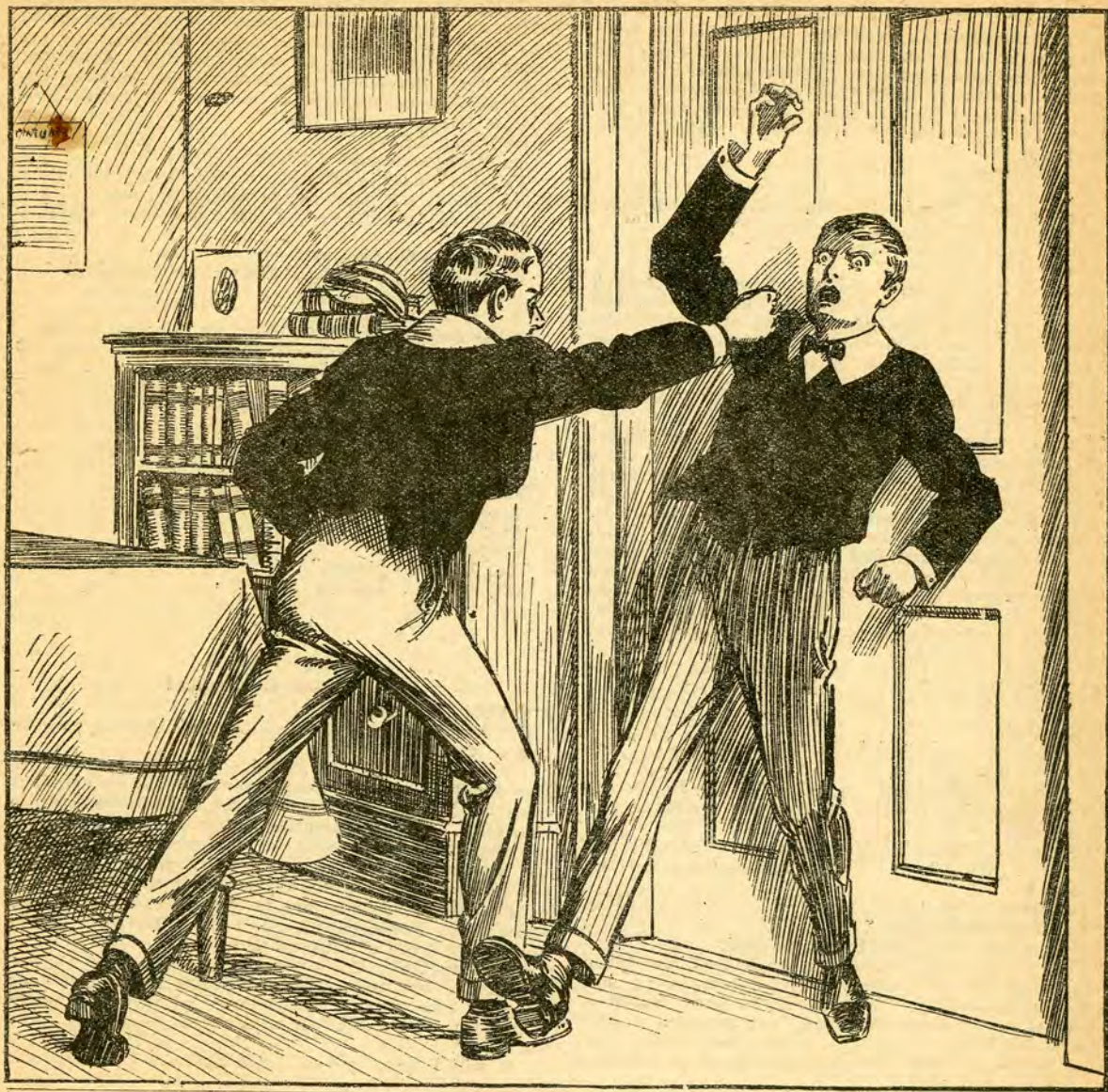
"Why did you not explain this to me before I caned you, D'Arcy?"

"I was goin' to, sir, but you were in such a huvwyy."

Mr. Railton smiled slightly.

"I think you had every opportunity to explain, D'Arcy. However, you must remember that fighting in the passages is not permitted, even in a good cause. I should not have caned you, however, if I had known your provocation. You may go."

"Thank you, sir. I was suah you would take a wight



"You rotten hound!" roared Crooke. "Hands off—why, I—oh!—oh!" Crash! Crooke spun back against the door as Levison's fist crashed full into his face. (See Chapter 4.)

view of the mattah," said Arthur Augustus benevolently. "As for the canin', I don't mind. That was merely a misapprehension. Ow-wow!"

Arthur Augustus departed, rubbing his hands, leaving the Housemaster smiling.

"Licked?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! Wow! But it's all wight—Wailton is a bwick. Wow-wow!"

"Well, I'm glad you're pleased."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am not exactly pleased, deah boy. This pain in my beastly hands is wathah seveah. But Wailton took a wight view of the mattah, and that is the important point. Where's that wottah, Cwooke? I had not weally finished thwashin' him."

"Crooke's satisfied!" grinned Tom Merry. "I think he's gone to bathe his eye. I know it needed it."

"Wow-wow!"

"Hallo, what's the matter now?"

"Nothin', deah boy—only a twiffin' pain. Wailton is a good sort, but I must say he is wathah hasty—wow! I was goin' to make a suggestion about that soldier chap, when that wascal Cwooke wedged in. It appeahs, deah

boys, that the chap is bein' bwrought down in a motor-ambulance this aftahnoon."

"So I've heard," assented Tom Merry.

"What about meetin' the ambulance on the woad and givin' him an escort to St. Jim's? Wow-wow!"

"Not a bad idea," said Figgins. "The St. Jim's Boy Scouts could turn out in force, and give him a guard of honour. That would show him that he's jolly welcome here."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry heartily. "We can leave the footer over till later. It's a ripping idea. How on earth did you come to think of it, Gussy?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We'll find out just when the ambulance is coming, and meet it about a mile from the school," said Figgins. "I'll have all the New House scouts out ready, you bet. It looks like rain, but that won't hurt us."

"Wathah not. Pway leave the awrangements in my hands, deah boys, and I will undahtake to have ewewythin' on a satisfactowy footin'."

A suggestion to which the dear boys responded unanimously:

"Bow-wow!"

But it was evidently a good idea, all the more so as it would effectually crush and silence Crooke and any other "rotters" who agreed with him. The chums of St. Jim's preceded at once to make their arrangements. Tom Merry looked in at Talbot's study, where he found the Toff with his brows wrinkled over a letter. Talbot looked up with a smile.

"Interrupting you?" asked Tom.

"No; I've finished this. A letter from my uncle," Talbot explained. "Colonel Lyndon, you remember him? He was in that last attack, and—and—"

Talbot's voice faltered a little.

"Not hurt?" asked Tom.

"No, luckily; but he would have been killed, only a brave fellow chipped in time. He had been knocked over, and the Huns were going to bayonet him on the ground, when a man in his company rushed between and defended him, and got the bayonet in his own body. Wasn't it ripping of him?"

"A splendid chap," said Tom Merry. "And the man?"

"Severely wounded," said Talbot. "But the Colonel would have been killed if he hadn't saved him. I—I can't help thinking of that." He coloured a little. "My uncle has been awfully good to me since—since we made friends. I've come to know him better now, you know. His hardness is only on the outside. I can't help thinking of the danger to him, and I'm glad he's coming home for a bit. He's going to take over the command of the recruiting camp at Abbotsford, so I suppose we shall see him at St. Jim's soon. I shall be glad to see him again. I—I wish I could have got on better with Crooke. That would have pleased him."

"Not much good thinking of that, old chap. It takes two to make a quarrel; but it takes two to make friends, as well."

Talbot nodded.

"Yes, it can't be helped." He rose to his feet. "You came in for me. What's on?"

"We've got a scheme on," said Tom. "The Boy Scouts are turning out in force this afternoon—a special march. You'll come?"

"Of course!" Then Talbot hesitated. "I—well, yes, I can come. What is it? A scout run, to learn to stand the rain?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"No; a grand reception."

"A reception?" repeated Talbot, puzzled.

"Yes; it was Gussy's idea, but the fellows have taken it up in great style. Gussy wants a brass band, but we have squelched him. We're going to form a guard of honour of every scout the school can muster. Lucky it's a half-holiday. Figgins is turning out all the New House Scouts, and I'm responsible for the School House. So I can't let you off."

"Right-ho! But what's it all about?"

"You've heard of a wounded soldier coming here—a chap the Head is taking into the school hospital—helping to relieve pressure on the regular hospitals, I understand?"

"Yes, I—I've heard."

"I don't know who the chap is, but he's a man in

Railton's old regiment—your uncle's regiment, you know. He's going to be put in the school hospital, and the school nurses are going to mend him. It's a ripping idea. Well, the school scouts are going to meet the motor ambulance on the road, and escort it to St. Jim's in state. Good wheeze—what?"

"Oh!" said Talbot.

Tom Merry's face fell a little.

"You don't seem to think it's a good idea, Talbot. We thought Gussy was right on the wicket, for once."

"So he was," said Talbot. "It's a good idea; but—but—"

"But what—the dickens?"

"It will draw a lot of attention to him," said Talbot.

"To Gussy?"

"No; to the wounded man."

"What does that matter? We want the chap to understand that he's right welcome, and that St. Jim's doesn't make any distinction between a private and a field-marshal."

"He isn't a private," said Talbot.

"I understood that he wasn't an officer. I'm sure Kildare said so."

"He is a corporal," said Talbot.

Tom Merry started.

"A corporal? Not——"

"Yes."

"Corporal Brown?"

"Yes, Corporal Brown."

"Oh, my hat! Marie's father!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Guard of Honour!

TOM MERRY whistled.

There was a troubled look on Talbot's handsome face.

The idea of a guard of honour, composed of Boy Scouts, for the wounded warrior was an excellent one. But, under the circumstances, Talbot was sorry to hear of it. The less attention Corporal Brown attracted, the better. Talbot would have been better pleased if the corporal could have been taken quietly into the sanatorium, without a single eye resting upon him.

"I'm afraid it's too late to stop it now," said Tom awkwardly. "Of course we didn't know. The other fellows have never heard of Corporal Brown, and it would cause a lot of curiosity if we chucked the idea. In fact, it couldn't be chucked. The New House scouts would go anyway, and most of the fellows on this side would join them. We can't tell anybody the—the facts, you know."

"It will have to go on," said Talbot. "Will Crooke be there?"

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"Crooke? Not likely! The miserable cad was making rotten remarks about it! He doesn't think the school ought to take in anybody under a general, I suppose! That rotter will keep clear of it! Besides, he isn't a scout; he's a slacker!"

"That's all to the good," said Talbot, in relief. "I shouldn't like the cad to see him. It's not likely the corporal will be recognised by anybody—he's changed enormously since he entered the Army. He looked ten years younger when I saw him in khaki, and more set up, you know, and as brown as a berry. But—but I'm afraid of Crooke, if he saw him."

"He won't see him," said Tom. "And after he's in the sanatorium he's less likely than ever to see him. Lots of the fellows will want to visit him there, but not Crooke. Crooke wouldn't want to."

Talbot smiled.

"No, that's so! Even Crooke's caddishness comes in useful, you see! Well, I'll come along with the scouts, of course. The corporal is on his way now, and the ambulance is expected here about four. It will come through Rylcombe, from Wayland."

"Then the scouts will meet it at Rylcombe," said Tom.

"Right-ho!"

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At three o'clock a light rain was falling in the quadrangle, and drenching the old elms. In the drizzle the scout scouts paraded. A little rain did not hurt them; in fact, their turning out in the rain would make the great reception more impressive. It would show the disabled warrior what St. Jim's thought of the men in the King's khaki.

Every squad in the school turned up, Tom Merry taking chief command, politely declining Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's offer to relieve him of that responsibility.

Nearly a hundred and fifty scouts joined in the parade. School House and New House had turned out in strong force.

Even Levison of the Fourth had turned up, looking a little sheepish in his scout costume. Scouting was not much in Levison's line, but even Levison had his good points sometimes.

Crooke of the Shell lounged on the School House steps, watching the parade with a sneer upon his face, but without venturing to utter the remarks that rose to his lips. Even Mellish of the Fourth did not seem to share Crooke's peculiar views; Percy Mellish had turned out with the scouts. He was late, having stayed to finish a cigarette in his study, one of Mellish's pleasant little customs. But he came out in full costume, staff in hand, hurrying, and passed Crooke on the steps. Crooke stared at him.

"You in it, too?" he ejaculated.

Mellish paused, and flushed.

"Why not?" he said.

"You?" sneered Crooke.

"Well, the chap's been wounded out there," said Mellish. "I don't see why we shouldn't make rather a fuss of him."

Crooke sneered.

"I suppose he was paid for what he's done!" he said.

"Paid?" said Mellish. "Well, you are a rotten cad, Crooke! Dash it all, draw a line somewhere! You make me feel sick!"

Crooke stared at him. Mellish was generally considered the meanest fellow in his Form—the cad complete, as Blake had remarked. And Crooke made him feel sick!

"As for being paid," went on Mellish, "as a matter of fact, he hasn't been paid. What they give the soldiers can't be called being paid. And if it were ten pounds a day, instead of a miserable bob, it wouldn't pay a man for getting German bayonets through his body! They don't do it for the bob, Crooke, and you know it, as well as I do! What do you want to say such caddish things for? Get into your scout clobber, and come along with the rest!"

"Thanks! I'm not keen for a walk in the rain, to curry favour with Tom Merry!" sneered Crooke.

"That's not what I'm doing it for!" said Mellish, flushing again. "I hadn't thought of anything of the kind! But—"

"Are you coming, Mellish?" called out Tom Merry.

"Take your place in the ranks! You're late, you slacker!"

"I'm coming!"

Mellish ran down the steps, without wasting further time on Crooke. The cad of the Shell looked after him with a bitter expression. If there was any fellow in the School House whom he thought he could have depended upon to back him up in anything "rotten," Mellish was the fellow, and even Mellish turned his back on him!

Gerald Crooke was left alone in his glory, as the scouts marched off through the dropping rain.

There was mud in Rylcombe Lane—heaps of it. But the scouts did not mind. They marched cheerily through mud and rain.

In the old High Street of Rylcombe they halted.

There they were to wait for the ambulance to pass through.

They were in good time—too good time, some of the scouts thought, as they waited in the rain.

But the hoot of the motor was heard at last, the ambulance, marked with the Red Cross, came in sight, proceeding at a slow pace. The ambulance was closed, and not a glimpse was to be had of the wounded man within. Talbot felt glad of the rain as he noted it.

A chauffeur in khaki was driving. The ambulance-car came at a crawling pace through the bumpy village street.

The driver in khaki blinked at the long array of scouts. Tom Merry stepped towards the car, easily keeping pace with it.

"You're the car for St. Jim's?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Corporal Brown inside?"

"That's so, and a nurse."

Tom Merry could guess whom the nurse was. Miss Marie had gone away by an early train that morning.

"I suppose he's awake. Can he be spoken to? There's an old friend of his here?"

"Better ask the nurse; but I can't stop."

"That's all right."

Tom signed to Talbot, who approached the car. Miss Marie let down the window from within. She gave the Toff a bright smile.

Within, a man was stretched on the pallet, warmly covered. The brown face was pale and thin, the eyes had dark circles round them. Corporal Brown of the Loamshire Regiment had been very near to death.

His eyes lighted up as they fell upon Talbot at the window. The Shell fellow had mounted on the step.

"The Toff!" he murmured.

He stretched out a feeble hand, and Talbot grasped it. Time had been when those two had been bitter foes—when the "Professor" had striven to drag the Toff back into the abyss of crime from which he had escaped. But that black time was blotted out now. John Rivers, the cracksmen, had paid for the past.

The last time Talbot had seen him he had been in khaki—strong, erect, healthy; life in the Army had made a man of the slim, stealthy Professor. Now he was stretched upon the sick bed, weak as a child. Talbot felt a pang in his heart as he saw him. Was the danger over—or was the man who had already expiated his crimes to pay more dearly still for past wrongdoing?

"I'm mending, Toff," said the corporal, reading Talbot's thought in his face. "If anybody can mend me, it is Marie." His glance dwelt affectionately upon his daughter. "This is a stroke of luck for me, Toff. St. Jim's again—under rather different circumstances—what!"

"Very different," said Talbot.

"But, by gad, what would the people there say if they knew?" smiled the corporal.

"They know that Corporal Brown is coming," said Talbot. "The fellows have turned out to give you a welcome—a hundred and fifty of them, in the rain."

"By gad!"

"They're afraid to cheer, in case it should disturb you, otherwise you'd have heard them," said Talbot, with a smile. "It's a guard of honour—the Boy Scouts of the school, you know."

"It's good of them, Toff. If they knew—"

"There are three of them who know, and they are here, too," said Talbot. "Tom Merry is in command. All he remembers now is that you have worn the khaki and done it credit."

"I've done that, Toff. Since I put it on, I haven't disgraced it," said John Rivers earnestly.

"I know, I know. And you'll soon pull round at St. Jim's, with Marie to take care of you."

"Oh, I shall pull round—but not soon, I'm afraid. Three German bayonets have been in me together, Toff. I should have been finished if the chaps hadn't come up in time. I don't know how I got over it alive, but the Professor was always tough," added Rivers, with a smile.

"Do you think you could stand a cheer?"

The Professor laughed softly.

"Any number of them," he said. "I'm glad to think that I'm welcome there—especially to those who know who I am, and what I've been."

Talbot dropped off the step, and Marie, with a smile, closed the window.

"All serene, Tom," said Talbot. "The fellows can let themselves go."

"Good egg!"

The scouts were waiting for the signal. At a sign from Tom Merry they did let themselves go.

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

"Thwee cheeahs, deah boys!" chirruped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Loud and clear they rang out through the rain—three thunderous cheers that woke every echo in the old village street. The villagers in the shops and cottages joined heartily in the cheering. John Rivers, once the cracksmen of Angel Alley, corporal in Kitchener's Army now, smiled as he listened.

Then the ambulance rolled on, escorted in great style by the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's, to the gates of the old school.

CHAPTER 9.

The Shadow of Peril.

CORPORAL BROWN had been installed in the school hospital. Many were the fellows who inquired daily for news of him; and the news, upon the whole, was satisfactory.

The corporal had been severely wounded—indeed, but for a splendid constitution, and an iron will, he would hardly have lived. But he had lived, and he was on the mend—slowly, but, as all hoped, surely. Unless there was a relapse, he would proceed by slow degrees to recovery—perhaps complete recovery. His illness was likely to be long and painful—but all that kindness and affectionate care could do for him would be gladly done.

Fellows who had looked forward to visiting the bedside of the wounded warrior, and hearing tales of wild charges and stricken fields, were disappointed. The corporal's condition did not allow him to receive visitors.

There was another reason, too—known only to Talbot and the Terrible Three. The danger of recognition was slight, but it always existed.

Greatly as the Professor had changed since the old days, sharp eyes might have detected him, and that would have meant trouble.

That anxiety was always in Talbot's mind.

For all that Corporal Brown had done in the stricken fields of Flanders counted for nothing in the eyes of the law. To the law and its officers he was still John Rivers

the cracksmen, with a long record of crime unexpiated. If Inspector Skeat, of Rylcombe, who he had escaped, had learned the true identity of the wounded man at St. Jim's, the inspector would have had only one course to take—and he would assuredly have taken it.

The corporal would have been removed from the school hospital to the prison infirmary, there to await till his restored health allowed him to stand his trial on many an old charge.

His crimes had been expiated—but not in the eye of the law. In health and strength he would never have been captured—but in fighting for the old flag, he had placed himself at the mercy of those who would otherwise have tracked him in vain. But it would all have counted for nothing—except, perhaps, in mitigation of his sentence.

But as day followed day Talbot's mind was relieved.

Discovery seemed less and less probable.

The wounded man's identity was known to the Head and the Housemaster, to the Toff, and to Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther. Their lips were sealed. Blake & Co. only knew that he was Marie's father; they did not know that he was John Rivers. But the secret was safe with them.

To the rest of the school he was a wounded soldier, who had been taken in for nursing in the school hospital—that, and nothing more.

Talbot paid a visit or two to the wounded man, but he gave that up very soon; he knew that it would not do. Crooke suspected nothing so far, but any connection between the Toff and the corporal might have put him on the track. The ead of the Shell needed only the smallest clue.

Indeed, Talbot wondered uneasily sometimes if Crooke suspected nothing, after all.

More than once he found Crooke's eyes turned upon him with a searching look—more than once he heard that Crooke had been making inquiries concerning the invalid.

Those inquiries were not dictated by concern for the wounded man; Talbot knew that.

Did Crooke suspect?

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John Rivers' eyes lighted up as they fell upon Talbot at the window. The Shell fellow had mounted on the step of the car. "The Toff!" murmured the soldier. (See Chapter 8.)

So far as Crooke knew, the man had been taken in by order of the Head, to help to relieve pressure on the hospitals. The man was simply an ordinary patient—nothing more to Miss Marie than to Miss Pinch.

But Talbot remembered that once Crooke had purloined a letter from John Rivers when he was home on leave, and on that letter the name "John Brown" had been signed.

Brown was not an uncommon name, certainly; in Kitchener's Army there must be a whole army of Browns. There was nothing to connect Corporal Brown with the "John Brown" who had signed that letter. Crooke did not know the man's number, or regiment, or company, or whether he was a private or a non-com or an officer. He knew only that Marie's father was in the New Army, and that he had once, at least, used the name of Brown.

It could hardly be called a clue; and Crooke, malevolent and obstinate as he was, was not gifted with a very keen brain. But if Talbot had paid assiduous visits to the wounded man, his eyes would have been opened—and also if he could have seen the tender care Marie lavished on the invalid. But of that Crooke knew nothing. A week after the corporal had been installed at St. Jim's, Colonel Lyndon returned from the Front. He was too busy to come to the school, however; he was in command of the new troops camped at Abbotsford, and every moment of his time was taken up. Talbot would have been glad to see him again, but he was relieved that the colonel did not come. Corporal Brown had been in his regiment, and probably the colonel had seen him a dozen times, little dreaming who he was, or what had been his old connections with Talbot.

If a hint of the truth should reach the colonel's ears, Talbot realised, with a shiver, what it would mean.

To the colonel, John Rivers would simply be a criminal who had donned the King's khaki to escape the law. Colonel Lyndon would only think of the disgrace such recruit brought upon his regiment, and he would be implacable.

To Talbot, the colonel had shown a softer side of his nature; and the Toff knew that he was not wholly the grim and severe martinet he appeared to others.

But on that point he would be hard as iron, Talbot knew. His deepest anger would be roused by the mere thought of a crackman, hunted by the police, dishonouring the khaki. Without a moment's hesitation he would hand the man over to the law to be dealt with.

Whatever happened, the colonel must never know.

Of what would happen to himself, if the colonel knew, Talbot did not think. He cared nothing for Crooke's scheme of disgracing him with his uncle. Levison had told him of it, word for word, and Talbot had merely shrugged his shoulders. Risk for himself never troubled the Toff.

Colonel Lyndon had written Talbot a short note, telling him that he was at Abbotsford. He had not written to Crooke. But a few days later Crooke stopped Talbot in the Form-room passage to speak to him.

"I've had a letter from home," he said.

"Yes?"

"My uncle is at Abbotsford now."

Talbot nodded.

"You knew?" asked Crooke, with a sneer.

"Yes, I knew."

"He wrote to you, of course," said Crooke. "You're the favourite nephew now. You've played your cards well, Toff."

Talbot winced at the name.

"I haven't played my cards at all, Crooke," he said quietly. "And if your uncle does not think much of you, it's your own fault. I suppose it's because he caught you acting the blackguard when he was here."

"It's because you've cut me out with him," said Crooke, between his teeth. "But that's a game two can play at. Look out!"

Talbot gave a shrug.

"My time's coming," said Crooke, watching his face intently. "I think it's pretty near now. Wait till I can tell old Lyndon that you are still chummy with the crackmen gang—and prove it."

"You cannot prove what is not true," said Talbot coldly.

"Do you deny that you saved John Rivers from the police, when he came here on leave from the Army?"

"I deny nothing to you, Crooke. I'd rather you didn't speak to me."

"Wait till I find John Rivers!" said Crooke, with a smile. "When that time comes, I shall hold you in the hollow of my hand. And I think I'm going to find him."

Talbot turned his back on the cad of the Shell, and joined Tom Merry & Co. But there was a chill in his heart, though his face was smiling.

CHAPTER 10, Tricked!

"HALLO! That's a letter for you, Talbot," said Gore.

Gore and Talbot had come into the study together, after footer practice. Skimpole, their study-mate, was sunk deep in the armchair, with one of his favourite, ponderous volumes on his knees, blinking over it.

A sealed envelope lay on the table. Talbot's name was written on the outside. There was no stamp or postmark on the letter.

Talbot picked it up, puzzled.

"A note from somebody," he said. "Hallo, Skimmy! Who left this here?"

Skimpole blinked up through his big glasses.

"What is it, my dear Talbot?"

"This letter, fathead!"

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"Oh, Toby brought it in!" said Skimpole. "I think it is for you, Talbot. I should have brought it to you, but I was very busy with this volume. Would you like me to read you this entrancing chapter on the subject of entomology?"

"Begin, and I'll brain you!" said Gore.

"My dear Gore!"

"Cheese it, and help get tea," said Gore. "I'm hungry!"

Talbot slit the envelope, puzzled to guess who might have chosen that peculiar method of communicating with him.

He started violently as he read the note. The colour faded from his handsome face, leaving him as pale as death. For the note ran, in a crabbed writing which Talbot did not know:

"Dear Master Talbot,—Something very serious has happened. Our patient has been delirious, and in his delirium he has confessed that he is John Rivers, the burglar who tried to rob the school some time ago. Marie has asked me to see you before I acquaint the Head with the matter. Will you come quickly?"

"ELIZABETH PINCH."

Talbot suppressed a groan.

It was all out now, then.

The head nurse knew!

She spoke of acquainting the Head; the Head already knew more than she could tell him. But could the Head ask the stiff, prim Miss Pinch to keep such a secret? Would she keep it, if he asked her? Talbot felt his brain in a whirl. Had the blow, long feared, fallen at last?

"Hallo! What the dickens is the matter with you, Talbot?" exclaimed Gore, in astonishment. "Bad news?" Talbot did not reply.

He hurried from the study, the letter crushed in his hand.

Somehow, anyhow, he must persuade Miss Pinch to keep her knowledge to herself. He would urge that a nurse has no right to betray secrets learned from a delirious patient—even dark and guilty secrets. He would plead with her—beg her, for Marie's sake, to be silent. Somehow—somehow, she must be silenced. He ran, rather than walked, down the passage, and almost ran into Crooke at the corner.

He avoided him, and ran on.

Crooke chuckled softly.

He had noted the pale face, the startled eyes, the letter crushed in the convulsive fingers. And he chuckled, and sauntered after Talbot. It did not occur to the agitated junior that Crooke had been waiting in the passage for him—that the cad of the Shell was on the watch.

He hurried out of the School House, and across the Head's garden to the school hospital. The maid who opened the door to him looked in surprise at his white and startled face.

"Is Miss Pinch here?" exclaimed Talbot.

"She is in the ward, sir."

"Tell her I wish to speak to her, in answer to her note."

"Yes."

The maid hurried away. Talbot stood waiting, striving to suppress his agitation. There was a step behind him, and he turned. Crooke of the Shell was lounging there, with a smile on his lips.

Talbot averted his glance; he did not want to speak to Crooke then. The cad of the Shell came in. Apparently he had business in the sanatorium as well as Talbot.

A few minutes later Miss Pinch came rustling down, her severe face more severe than usual.

"What is this, Master Talbot?" she exclaimed. "I am busy. What do you want?"

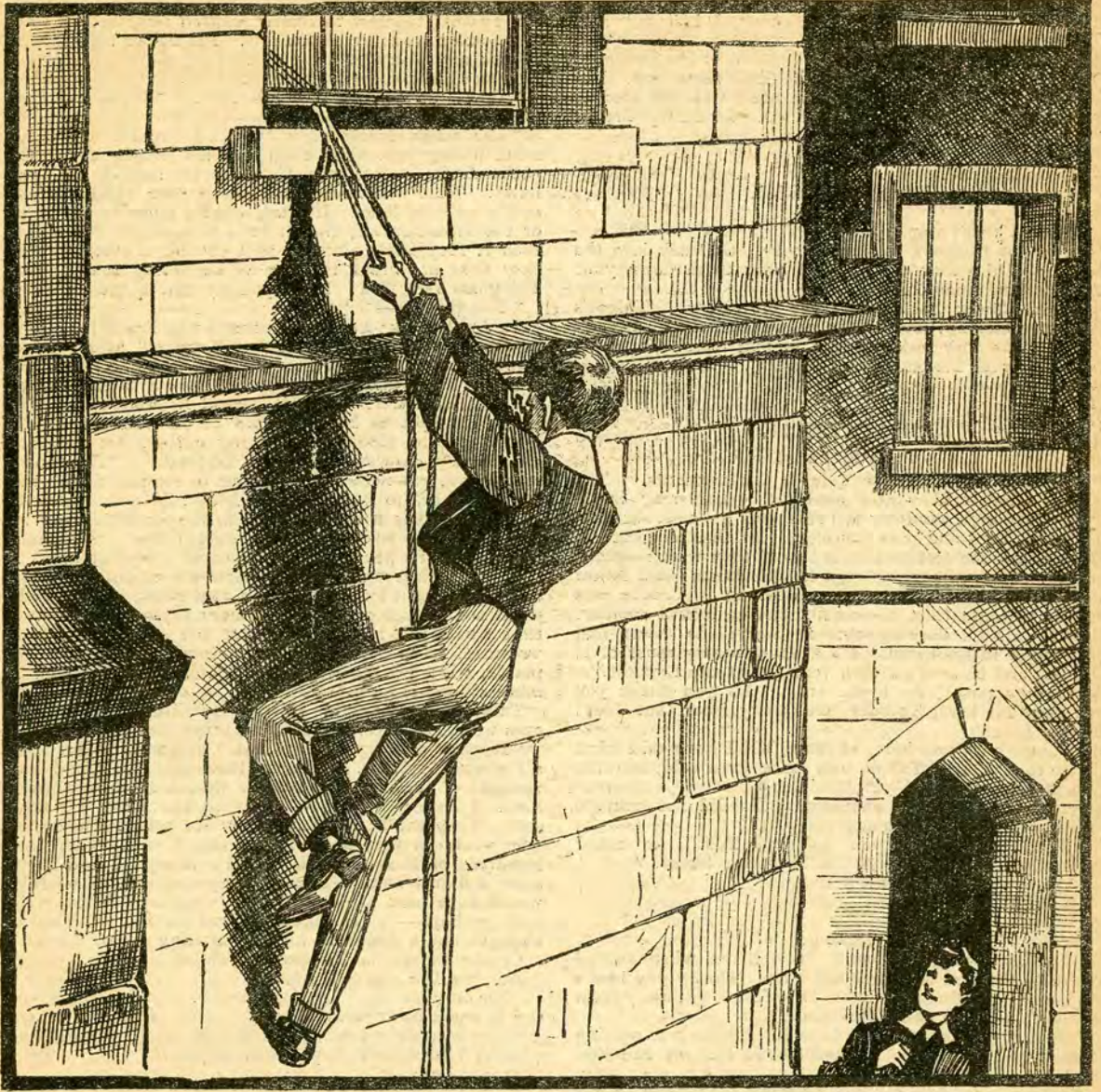
"Your letter—"

"What letter?"

"The letter you sent me—"

"If this is a joke, Master Talbot, I can only say that I shall report the matter to your Housemaster!" said Miss Pinch severely.

Talbot staggered.



THE JUNIOR'S EXCITING ESCAPE!

A Thrilling Incident in "Fought for and Won!" A Great, Complete School Story of Harry Wharton & Co., at Greyfriars; in this week's issue of the "Magnet" Library. Now on Sale, Price 1d.

Crooke, with a grin, went down the steps. He was satisfied. With a very merry expression on his face, he sauntered back to the School House.

The agitation in Talbot's face struck the head nurse, and her expression softened.

"Why should you suppose I sent you a letter?" she asked.

"Did you not?" stammered Talbot.

"Certainly I did not."

"I—I found a letter in my study—a letter with your name signed," Talbot stammered. "It—it said——" He broke off. The letter had evidently been a deception, and there was no need to tell Miss Pinch what was in it. She did not know, and she need not know. "Is the patient delirious, Miss Pinch?"

"No; he is sleeping peacefully."

"Oh, good! I—I suppose it was a rotten joke on me," said Talbot. "I'm sorry I've troubled you, Miss Pinch."

"If anyone has used my name in a joke of that description, I shall certainly complain to the Head," said Miss Pinch sharply. "You need not be alarmed

about our patient, Master Talbot; he is still very weak, but is progressing quite as favourably as can be expected."

"Thank you!" stammered Talbot. "I—I'm sorry I troubled you. Please excuse me; I—I was deceived."

He hurried away, anxious to get the letter away before Miss Pinch could ask to see it. He ran back to the School House.

He did not need to ask who had written that letter.

Crooke of the Shell!

Tom Merry was in the hall, and Talbot caught him quickly by the arm.

"Have you seen Crooke?" he panted.

"Yes; he just came in. What's the matter?"

"Where is he now?"

"He went upstairs."

Talbot ran up the big staircase, leaving the captain of the Shell staring after him in astonishment. He looked into Crooke's study. It was empty. Grundy of the Shell came out of his room, and Talbot called to him.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE!"

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

"Have you seen Crooke, Grundy?"

"Gone up to the dorm for his mac, I believe," said Grundy.

"Thanks!"

Talbot mounted the stairs to the Shell dormitory. The door was open, and Crooke of the Shell was just coming out, with his cap and macintosh on. Evidently Crooke was going out—where, the Toff could guess.

"Stop a minute!" said Talbot.

Crooke laughed.

"I'm in rather a hurry," he drawled.

"Stop!"

"Well, I won't stop! Get out of the way!"

"I've got to speak to you, Crooke. Go back into the dorm, or I'll knock you in, and your teeth down your throat at the same time!"

Gerald Crooke backed into the dormitory. Talbot's eyes were blazing, and his fist was clenched and already raised. The Toff followed him in and closed the door, and stood with his back to it, panting.

CHAPTER 11.

Face to Face!

TALBOT did not speak for a few moments. The clear, cold winter sunlight, glimmering in at the high windows, fell full upon his face, showing it hard and pale and clear. At that moment the Toff's handsome features looked as if they were moulded in iron. The contrast between the handsome Shell fellow and the cad of the Form was striking. Crooke was burlier in build than his cousin, but he looked smaller. Before Talbot's flashing eyes he seemed to cower and grow more insignificant. He had an uneasy sense of it himself, and he scowled with vexation at the thought.

"Let me pass!" he broke out. "Do you think you can keep me here, Talbot? Get away from that door! Do you hear?"

"I shall keep you here, at least, till I have said what I have to say," said Talbot, and there was a cold, metallic ring in his voice.

Crooke shrugged his shoulders. He did not venture to attempt to force a passage.

"Well, what have you to say, Toff?" he asked insolently. "Any message for Inspector Skeat?"

"You are going to him?"

"Naturally."

"Why?"

Crooke's look became gloating.

"You know why, my friend. To tell him where to find his bird—the bird that flew last time. That giddy bird's wings are clipped now—what? He will not get away from old Skeat quite so easily this time!"

Talbot drew a deep, deep breath. Crooke was willing to show his hand now. He considered that he had won the game. He knew all.

His glance was sinister and mocking as it dwelt on the Toff's handsome face. All the cards were in his hand, so to speak; he had only to lay them on the table. It was a moment of supreme enjoyment to Crooke. He was glad, after all, that Talbot had intercepted him. It gave him the fullness of his triumph to enjoy before he struck the final blow—the blow that was to deliver a wounded soldier within prison gates, to break the heart of a suffering girl, and to ruin for ever the enemy he hated.

Talbot's hands had unclenched and dropped to his sides. Crooke noted it, and smiled. Violence would not serve now. A blow was easy to give, but it would only make the cad of the Shell more implacable.

Crooke's sense of elation showed in his face. He ceased to cringe, and unconsciously his head rose more erect, and his eyes gleamed.

"Quite an interesting story for old Skeat," he went on. "Did you know how furious he was at the Professor getting away from him before? Twice, you know. Twice he was beaten by that scoundrel, and now he is biding his time. One word to Skeat—only one word, my dear boy! Your precious cracksman friend will sleep to-night in gaol!"

"Crooke"—Talbot's tone was very quiet—"I suppose it's no use making any appeal to you?"

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"None at all," said Crooke, with a laugh. "I believe it's against the law to shelter hunted malefactors. Are you asking me to break the law? I'm not so used to that as you are, Toff!"

Talbot did not heed the taunt.

"What do you know?" he said. "What can you know?"

"The whole lovely story!" smiled Crooke. "I don't mind telling you. You can't stop me from going to the police-station. Are you thinking of licking me, you bully? That won't stop me. Keep your hands off me, or I'll yell for help! If I tell what I know to the Head or the Housemaster, they'll have to send for the police, even if they know already, as I shouldn't wonder. But they dare not break the law by sheltering that villain. The game's up, Toff! I told you my time would come!"

"You think—"

"I don't think; I know. The man who lies in the school hospital is John Rivers, the cracksman," said Crooke coolly. "I was a fool not to guess it before. I knew the man went under the name of Brown in the Army; I'd seen his letter. And a Corporal Brown was brought here. I ought to have guessed at once, but I didn't. But I've been thinking—thinking quite a lot for your benefit, my dear chap!" He laughed. "The man's recovering, yet nobody's admitted to see him; that was rather queer, to begin with. Miss Marie was sent to London to come down with him in the ambulance—a lot of attention to pay to a soldier nobody knew. Of course she went; he's her father. I thought it out at last. A few days before we heard the man was coming here she was going about looking as white as a ghost, and anybody could see by her eyes she had been crying. Of course, that was when she learned that her father had been wounded. You see, it all fitted together like a giddy puzzle, when I'd thoroughly thought it out and called to mind all the circumstances."

Talbot did not speak. He was breathing hard, and his eyes were fixed upon Crooke's gloating face.

"It came into my head at last!" grinned Crooke. "It all pieced together. I knew then why the Head had thought of the idea of having a wounded soldier nursed here. I dare say Miss Marie asked him. But I wasn't sure. Corporal Brown mightn't have been John Brown who wrote to you, and whose letter I saw. There are hundreds of Browns in Kitchener's Army. I had to be sure; I didn't want to come a cropper myself. A mistake would have been a bit too serious—perhaps the sack for me; perhaps—I couldn't afford to risk it. But I thought out a dodge at last for making sure."

Crooke paused, as if expecting Talbot to reply.

But the Toff was still silent.

"Nothing to say?" smiled Crooke. "Why don't you say it was a dirty trick?"

"It was a dirty trick," said Talbot quietly—"the kind of trick I might have expected from you!"

Crooke laughed.

"I had to be sure, and a chap needn't be too particular in dealing with the criminal classes," he said. "I wrote that letter, and gave it to Toby to put on your study table."

"I knew it must have come from you—afterwards."

"But not in time?" grinned Crooke. "It was a good dodge—what? I waited in the passage to watch for you. If Corporal Brown in the hospital was really John Rivers, I knew that letter would bring you out at top speed, to rush to the sanatorium to see Miss Pinch." He chuckled. "And it did. You fell into the trap like a rabbit. Where were your wits, Toff—the wits you used to use against the police when you were the prince of cracksmen? You must be losing them. You wouldn't have been caught like that in the days when you were the pal of Hookey Walker and the Professor—what?"

"I did not suspect treachery," said Talbot.

"I was the spider and you were the fly," said Crooke, with great satisfaction. "You've given me the proof I needed. If the wounded man wasn't your old friend, the Professor, you'd have laughed at the letter. You didn't look like laughing when you rushed off to the sanatorium, Ha, ha! The laugh is for me this time, dear boy!"

And Crooke laughed heartily.

"And now—" said Talbot.

"Now I'm going to do my duty!"

"Your duty?"

"Isn't it the duty of an honest and law-abiding citizen to help the police in catching criminals?" grinned Crooke.

"Isn't your precious friend a criminal?"

"That is not why you are doing it."

"Well, to be quite candid, no. I should do it, anyway. But you know why I'm doing it—specially for you. When John Rivers is arrested, Colonel Lyndon will have all the proof he can need that you are still on with the old gang—to the extent of sheltering a hunted crackman within the school walls. I fancy that will finish you with my dear uncle—what?"

"Very likely!"

"Oh, it's not very likely—it's a dead certainty! I know old Lyndon. Once let him know that you've deceived him, and he will never forgive you. He's been rusty enough with me, because he found me smoking soon after giving me a lecture on the subject. But let him know you've deceived him—kept on palting with criminals after all your promises of reform—you won't be troubled with any more avuncular tenderness from the colonel, I fancy."

"I have not deceived him, Crooke." Talbot was strangely calm. "Whatever John Rivers has been, he became an honest and honourable man when he put on the King's khaki. Since then he has fought for England—and almost lost his life. It is very doubtful whether he will ever really recover his strength. Crooke, that man has faced the Germans, he's had their bayonets in his body, he's on a sick bed now. You won't hurt him?"

"Won't I?" grinned Crooke. "Inspector Skeat will come back with me from Rylcombe. John Rivers will leave St. Jim's in the prison-van!"

"Remember," said Talbot, and his voice trembled—"remember, he's a soldier now, Crooke! Remember what the soldiers are doing for us!"

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"And his daughter," said Talbot. "You know it will break her heart, Crooke. What has she done to you?"

"Nothing."

"Then why—"

Crooke yawned.

"I'm afraid I haven't much time to waste over a crackman's daughter," he said. "What do other crackmen's daughters do when their fathers are nabbed? Let her do the same!"

Talbot's hands clenched convulsively.

"Crooke, I am trying to be patient—to make an appeal to your better nature. You can't be all bad—"

"Thanks!"

"Will you keep that secret, Crooke? You can ask me anything you like in return—anything I can do."

"Let you off, when I've got you under my thumb!" smiled Crooke. "Likely, isn't it? My uncle is going to know you exactly as you are. I've got an old score against you, Talbot; and I tell you plainly that, apart from ruining you with my uncle, I wouldn't let you off—I'd make you suffer for all you've done!"

Talbot's lips closed hard. He had known that an appeal would be useless; yet he had made it. It had failed, as he knew it must fail. Words could not move to pity the mocking blackguard before him.

"And now we've had this pleasant little talk, dear boy, get away from that door," said Crooke, smiling; "I'm in rather a hurry."

Talbot did not move.

"You are going to betray John Rivers?"

"Not at all! I'm going to give him up to justice!"

"Take care, Crooke! The Head knows who he is, and has sheltered him here. Mr. Railton knows, and has befriended him—he fought by Railton's side in Flanders, before our Housemaster was wounded. What do you think they will say, if you do this?"

"They can say what they like. I know they won't dare to admit in public that they knew they were harbouring a criminal."

"Then you are determined?"

"Quite!"

"Nothing I can say will move you?"

"Nothing," said Crooke. "Come, I'm tired of this! Let me pass!"

"I shall not let you pass!" said Talbot, in low, distinct tones. "What to do, I don't know at present—unless

Heaven helps me to defeat your villainy. But you shall not pass—you shall not go to Inspector Skeat."

Crooke stared at him.

"Do you think you can keep me here?" he demanded.

"I shall keep you here!"

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Crooke, in anger and amazement. "Keep me here, by gad! Let me pass, you fool!"

"Stand where you are!"

"You fool, I'm going!"

Crooke made a rush at the door, seeking to shove Talbot aside. Talbot did not hesitate. His right fist shot out straight from the shoulder, and the cad of the Shell rolled heels over head along the floor of the dormitory. The yell he gave as he went down could have been heard at the end of the passage outside. And as he lay gasping on the floor, the Toff stood over him, a deadly blaze in his eyes.

"Keep where you are, Crooke! If you get up, I shall knock you down again!"

Crooke glared up at him with a look of hate. But he did not rise.

CHAPTER 12.

Held by the Enemy!

"HALLO!"

Tom Merry opened the door of the Shell dormitory, and looked in.

"You here, Talbot?"

"Yes. Close the door, Tom!"

"What—what the merry thunder—"

The captain of the Shell stared in amazement at the sprawling Crooke.

"Close the door!"

Tom shut the door, in wonder. Then he came towards the two.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Will you help me?" panted Crooke. "That criminal is keeping me here—to keep another criminal from being handed over to the police."

Tom Merry started. His eyes hurriedly sought Talbot's face.

Talbot nodded.

"It's true, Tom. Crooke's found out!"

"Found out?" echoed Tom Merry, in utter dismay.

"Yes, by spying and treachery."

"Oh, the cad—the rotter!"

"So you're in it, too!" said Crooke venomously. "You, too, Tom Merry—you help your precious pal to shelter crackmen—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Tom fiercely.

"Oh, I'll hold my tongue!" sneered Crooke. "I'll hold it so long as I'm kept here by force. How long do you think you can keep me here, you fool? Any of the fellows may come in any minute."

"I—I came up for you, Talbot," said Tom. "Tea's ready. Grundy said you'd come up here to speak to Crooke, so I came. I—I say, this is an awful fix! That dirty scoundrel can't be made to hold his tongue, old chap."

Talbot pressed his hand to his throbbing brow.

What could be done?

John Rivers' secret was out of his keeping now. Crooke knew, and how long could Crooke be kept from imparting his knowledge to the police? Talbot was trying to gain time while he thought the situation out—he could not keep Crooke a prisoner in the dormitory for long. He must think out a plan—but what plan? For the first time in his chequered life, the Toff felt himself beaten—at the end of his tether.

In the old days, dangers and difficulties had been his daily lot, and he had never been found wanting. Always his cool, clear brain, his courageous heart, had saved him. For the first time, he was utterly at a loss. For it was not his own danger; it was danger to another—to a helpless man, stretched upon a sick bed by wounds received in battle—a man who could not stir a hand to save himself. It was danger to Marie—danger of black shame and disgrace—and of losing her father, when he needed all her care. At St. Jim's, in his daughter's tender care, John Rivers would recover. Would he recover in the grim surroundings of a prison? His very

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life, perhaps, as well as his liberty, was at stake! The life the German bayonets had spared was to be lost, to gratify the mean hatred of an unscrupulous blackguard.

The misery of the Toff's pale face brought a lump to Tom Merry's throat. It brought a mocking smile to the face of the fellow sprawling on the floor. Crooke was content to wait. Talbot was only prolonging the anguish. Crooke could not be kept there for ever, and as soon as he was free he would strike his blow.

"Talbot, old fellow—"

The Toff turned an almost wild look upon his chum.

"Tom, what can I do? He must be saved! Tom, you know he's made up for all he did in the past—you know it will break Marie's heart if he is taken! Tom, how can I save him?"

The captain of the Shell was silent. What could he say? What advice could he give? The Toff paced to and fro, his brows knitted, his hands clenched. Crooke regarded him with a gloating grin. His hatred was being fed fat in those moments.

"The—the Head!" muttered Tom, at last.

Talbot made a despairing gesture.

"What can the Head do? He cannot deny that the man is John Rivers, if Inspector Skeat comes for him."

"After what he's done, Talbot—"

"After what he's done, he will be dragged away to prison like a felon," said Talbot bitterly. "It may lighten his sentence, perhaps—if he lives to hear his sentence! But it will kill him, Tom!"

"How long is this going on," said Crooke.

"Hold your tongue!" said Tom, so savagely that Crooke shrunk away, and was silent. But his eyes glittered like a snake's. His time was coming!

A sudden flash came into Tom Merry's eyes.

"Talbot, your uncle!"

Talbot stopped in his hurried pacing.

"My uncle, Tom? What about my uncle?"

"Colonel Lyndon," exclaimed Tom excitedly; "he is the commanding officer of the regiment! He's at Abbotsford now, training the Sixth Battalion. Talbot, he could save Marie's father if he would! They would listen to him. Talbot, he could speak for the corporal, and save him, if he chose!"

Talbot groaned.

"You don't know my uncle," he said. "He would only think of the disgrace to the regiment; he would be as hard as iron. He would only be sorry that he could not have the man shot for degrading the colours of the Loamshires, as he would regard it."

Tom's face fell.

"Go to the colonel!" grinned Crooke. "Go and tell him you want to save one of your old criminal pals—oh, do! It will save me the trouble of telling him the story. Go and play my game for me. Ha, ha, ha!" Crooke chuckled gleefully. "Go to him, by all means; it will save me the trouble of proving the story, if you confess it with your own mouth. Do go!"

Talbot threw himself upon the nearest bed. He leaned his chin in his hand. His brow knitted, trying to think it out. Go to the colonel; tell him all. That was Crooke's game—to tell the colonel all! He would be playing Crooke's hand for him! But was there a chance?

Would the colonel believe in the reform of John Rivers? Would he not rather believe that Talbot was on the old footing with the cracksmen? That was what Crooke was certain of, and Crooke knew his uncle well.

But was there a chance—a slim, faint chance? If he ruined himself, it did not matter, so long as he saved Marie's father. Let the colonel cast him off—come what would, if he could only save the sick soldier who lay helpless at the mercy of the enemies his earlier errors had made for him.

Crooke watched him, grinning. He asked nothing better than that Talbot should go to the colonel with the story. From Crooke the colonel would demand rigid proofs, and Crooke, judging Talbot by himself, fully

expected that he would lie and shuffle, to keep his chance of the colonel's inheritance. The cunning hound, as Crooke said to himself, might possibly wriggle out of the net after all. But if, in this hour of excitement and anxiety, he made that false step, nothing could save him after that!

Talbot rose to his feet at last.

"Tom, I'll try it. The colonel could save John Rivers, if he would, and he alone could save him. He must know that the corporal was a good soldier while he was in the regiment. There's a bare chance. I'll try it."

"And if it fails?"

"Then Crooke will have the satisfaction of having ruined me with my uncle," said Talbot quietly. "That matters nothing. It's the only chance of saving John Rivers. I'm going to the camp, Tom. Will you—"

He paused.

"Anything!"

"Keep that hound from betraying the corporal while I am gone."

"Rely on me," said Tom Merry grimly. "Crooke, you're coming to my study with me. You're going to stay there till Talbot comes back."

"I'm not! I—"

"Make any objection—say a word to any of the fellows—and I'll smash you!" said Tom, between his teeth. "If necessary, we'll gag you and tie you to the study table, and keep the door locked. Don't trifle with us, Crooke; we're not in a humour for it, you know. Talbot, ask Lowther and Manners to come here when you go down."

"Right!"

Talbot left the dormitory. Crooke rose sullenly to his feet. Tom Merry watched him, his hands clenched. He was, as he had said, in no mood to be trifled with. He was ready to knock the cad of the Shell spinning at a word. Crooke knew it, and he did not make a movement towards the door. Five minutes later, Lowther and Manners entered the dormitory. Their faces were grim.

"Talbot's told us," said Lowther quietly. "We're going to look after Crooke. Take his other arm, Tom."

Crooke ground his teeth as Tom Merry took one of his arms, and Lowther the other. He was marched out of the dormitory, and Manners followed. The four Shell fellows went down, and stopped at Tom Merry's study. Crooke looked wildly along the passage.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was there, chatting with Blake at the corner. Crooke gave a sudden shout:

"Help me, you fellows—oh!"

Crash! Crooke went headlong into the study. He crashed on the table, and rolled to the floor. The Terrible Three followed him in. Arthur Augustus's eyeglass gleamed in at the doorway.

"Bai Jove, that's a wathah cwiuous way of bwingin' a fwied to tea!" he remarked.

"Help me!" panted Crooke. "They're keeping me here so that—Grooogh!"

Gerald Crooke's remarks came to a sudden termination, as Monty Lowther jammed a cushion over his mouth.

"I wefuse to help you, Cwooke. I decline to help a wotthah who had uttached dewogatory wemarks concernin' his Majesty's Army."

"Gerrrooogh!"

"Crooke's planning to play a dirty trick, and we're stopping him," Tom Merry explained. "He's going to be our guest for a bit, that's all!"

"I should wegard his pwesence as wathah contaminatin' to a wespectable studay, deah boy. I wecommand you to have the place disinfected when you kick him out."

And Arthur Augustus sauntered gracefully away, leaving the hapless Crooke in the hands of the Philistines. Tom Merry locked the door.

CHAPTER 13.

The Last Chance!

TALBOT was already outside the school walls.

The winter dusk was closing in as the Shell fellow wheeled his bicycle out of the gates. He mounted in the muddy road, and started. It was a long and hard ride to Abbotsford Camp, and he could

ANSWERS

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not be back for calling-over. But calling-over was a slight matter to him now.

He rode hard through the thickening dusk.

Only one halt he made, to light his lamps as the darkness closed in. By deep muddy lanes, by slushy road, by steep acclivities and headlong slopes, the cyclist pedalled on, the pedals flying round under the powerful drives of his feet. He was unconscious of fatigue.

He was riding to save a soldier of the King—riding for the bare, last chance of saving him—a chance so slight that he sickened as he thought how slight it was. In the building that had disappeared behind him, Marie was watching by her father's sick-bed, never doubting. He had never told Marie his fears and doubts—it was useless to trouble her with them. Until the blow fell, she would know nothing; it was more merciful.

But, unless he could avert it, the blow could not much longer be delayed. Crooke was silent for the time; on the morrow, at the latest, he would speak. But this grim winter night Talbot would know his fate.

Harder and harder he rode, through splashing mud—through the rain that was lightly falling. He was wet. The rain ran from him, but he did not notice it. The wind was wild—it cut him like a bitter lash—but he did not heed it. Harder and harder, till the town of Abbotsford rose in the distance, a few faint glimmers of light indicating where it lay. Then at last Talbot slackened down.

The khaki camp lay on the heath outside the town. Talbot knew the way well; he had visited the place more than once to see the matches between the soldier teams and local clubs. His bicycle bumped heavily over the rutty road, thick with mud. A sudden shout rang from the darkness:

"Halt!"

The junior jumped off his machine. There was a glimmer of khaki, the glimmer of a rifle, in the winter night. Had he not stopped, a bullet would have sung by him.

"Who goes there?"

"I am Colonel Lyndon's nephew, and I am going to the camp," said Talbot.

The sentry advanced, and peered at him in the gloom. It was easy to see that Talbot was a schoolboy, and his frank, handsome face was reassuring.

"Nobody's allowed in after dark without a pass, sir."

Talbot panted.

"I must see my uncle. A man's life depends on it—the life of a wounded soldier. Pass me in!"

"I can't leave this 'ere spot," said the man in khaki. "But wait a tick."

He called out into the darkness. There was a tramp of feet, and a couple of men appeared from the night. They blinked curiously at Talbot in the light of the sentry's lantern.

"This young gentleman says he is the colonel's nephew, and it's a matter of life or death," Talbot heard the sentry mutter. "Take him in, Bill."

"This way, sir!" said Bill.

Talbot followed the soldier, wheeling his machine.

In a few minutes they reached the gate of the camp, where another sentry challenged, but "Bill" passed Talbot in. The junior left his bicycle there, and followed his guide through the maze of winter huts. He was taken to the officers' quarters, where Bill handed him over to a stout sergeant-major.

"The colonel's busy now, sir," he said, respectfully enough, "but if you like to wait here, I'll take your name in to him."

"Thank you. My name is Talbot. I am Colonel Lyndon's nephew."

"Wait, then."

Several officers came out of the colonel's quarters, and passed the junior, as he stood in the rainy night, breathing deep after his hard ride. He was not sorry for a chance to pull himself together before he faced the colonel. The closer the interview came, the more terrible it seemed to him. Now that he was there, he realised more clearly than ever that he had come upon a wild-goose chase—that the appeal he had come to make would fall upon deaf ears.

But it was too late to turn back; neither would he

have done so with a single chance untried. A wounded soldier's life and liberty, and his girl chum's happiness, depended upon his success.

The sergeant-major eyed him curiously while he waited. At last he went in, and Talbot heard a voice:

"Show him in, sergeant-major!"

It was his uncle's voice.

The sergeant-major reappeared, and made Talbot a sign. The boy followed him in. Colonel Lyndon was alone in the gaunt, plainly-furnished room, seated at a deal desk. The sergeant-major retired. Talbot of the Shell was alone with his uncle. Harder, grimmer, colder, the colonel's face looked; the hard campaign in Flanders had told upon him; his moustache seemed greyer, the hair looked thinner upon his temples. That he had a deep affection for his nephew Talbot knew; but his bronze face expressed only surprise at the sight of him. With the grim old martinet military duty came first and foremost. It was no place for a schoolboy, and the colonel's expression was a silent rebuke.

"What does this mean, Talbot? 'Why are you here?'"

"Uncle, there's a soldier in your regiment lying ill at the school——"

"At the school?" The colonel raised his eyebrows.

"He was taken in by the Head, to be nursed well——"

"That was kind of Dr. Holmes. But why——"

"I must tell you about it, uncle. He was wounded, badly, in the fighting over there; he will recover, but now he cannot move. I must tell you who he is. It—it is a man I knew when—when——" Talbot's voice faltered—"when I was called the Toff—when I was what he was."

"You know that I do not like to hear you speak of that time, boy!"

"I know it; but I must! This man—his name is John Rivers——"

The colonel started.

"John Rivers?" he repeated. "You need tell me no more! I know the name—I have heard it from Dr. Holmes. John Rivers is the man who was the moving spirit in the rascally gang who once held you in their clutches!"

"Yes. But——"

"After you had thrown it up, he sought by every means to draw you back into crime, even to the extent of kidnapping you——"

"Yes. But I——"

"And you tell me that this man, this scoundrel, has joined my regiment!" the colonel exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, and has served in Flanders——"

"The bound!" Colonel Lyndon rose to his feet, his brow as black as night. "He has had the audacity to put on the khaki—a cracksmen, a thief, a scoundrel! By gad, he shall answer for his insolence! You say he is at the school?"

"Yes," faltered Talbot.

"He will not remain there long!" said the colonel grimly. "A corporal's squad will relieve St. Jim's of him before two hours have passed!"

"Uncle!"

"You have not come to me to speak in his favour? That is impossible!"

"He reformed when he enlisted——"

"Tush, tush!"

"He has been a good soldier——"

"You cannot have seen him while he was a soldier! Not another word!" thundered the colonel. "Take care, my boy! You are asking mercy for this scoundrel, who has been your evil genius! Take care what you make me suspect!"

Talbot smiled bitterly.

"I am risking that!" he said. "I knew that! But if you cannot trust me, uncle, you need never look upon me again. But—but you can save that wretched man! You can save his daughter from a broken heart——"

"Tush, tush!" The colonel gnawed his grey moustache.

"A thief who has skulked into khaki to escape the police! Reformed—pah! Talbot, I do indeed trust you, and I will believe that you believe him; but I am not likely to be influenced by a foolish schoolboy's nonsense! This man has put on the uniform of the Loamshire Regiment—my regiment—John Rivers, the cracksmen!"

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By gad, he shall pay for his insolence! He shall pay for it dearly! Not a word! I shall send a squad to the school to seize him, and hand him over to the police!"

"Uncle—"

"And if you speak another word for him, begad, I shall think you are hand-in-glove with the scoundrel!" thundered the colonel.

Talbot's eyes flashed.

"Think what you like, Colonel Lyndon!" he said. "What he was, I was, and I will stand by him!"

"Silence!" fumed the colonel. "That is enough! What name did this scoundrel go by in my regiment? He did not go by his own, I know that!"

"Corporal Brown," said Talbot dully. "Uncle, he must have been a good soldier, they gave him the D.C.M.!"

"Corporal Brown?"

"Yes."

"Good gad!"

Talbot gazed in astonishment at the colonel's grim face. The grimness was gone now. There was wonder and amazement in it.

"You—~~you~~ had noticed him, then, uncle?" Talbot asked, his heart beating wildly. Was there a chance?

"Corporal ~~Brown~~ Brown?"

"Yes."

"Good gad! Talbot, I wrote you a letter from Flanders. I told you how the German bayonets were at my breast as I lay in the mire, and a man in my regiment sprang between, and received the bayonets that were meant for me! Talbot, that man has been recommended for the Victoria Cross, and that man was Corporal Brown!"

"Oh!" gasped Talbot, almost reeling with the flood of relief. "Oh, uncle, it was John Rivers who saved your life—"

"John Rivers, by gad! That man! But he was the best soldier in my regiment—the best non-com—and I have recommended him for a commission if he recovers!" the colonel exclaimed. "Talbot, you are dreaming; it is not the same man."

"It is the same man, uncle."

The colonel tugged at his grey moustache.

"I must see him, Talbot. I must see with my own eyes. But if that man is Corporal Brown, he has earned his pardon, whatever he has done—and his pardon he shall have, by gad. They will listen to me—you can depend on that." The colonel's eyes twinkled. "Inspector Skeat cannot be allowed to take away the first V.C. the Loamshire Regiment has earned in the war. But—but—is this known to anyone but yourself, Talbot?"

"Croke knows, and he is going to the police—" faltered Talbot. "My friends are—are keeping him in their study now—"

"By gad!"

"But he will speak. Uncle, if you can save him—if you will save him—"

"I can save him, and I will save him," said Colonel Lyndon. "I owe him that, I think. I shall return to the school with you—and we shall see whether my other nephew will let his tongue wag when I command him to keep it still."

Talbot could not speak; his heart was too full. It was sunlight after shadow—light at last, and his heart was too full for words.

CHAPTER 14. After Darkness, Light.

KNOCK!

"Clear off!" called out Tom Merry. "We're busy!"

"Let me in, Tom!"

"Talbot, by Jove!"

Tom Merry sprang up and opened the door. A tall figure in khaki stood in the passage with Talbot of the Shell.

"Colonel Lyndon!" exclaimed Tom, in astonishment.

"My nephew is here, I understand," said the colonel.

"Ahem—yes!"

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The colonel strode in. Tom Merry looked at Talbot; the brightness in his face reassured the captain of the Shell. Talbot pressed his hand.

"It's all right," he whispered. "Right as rain!"

"Good egg!"

Croke rose as he saw his uncle. For hours he had sat in the study armchair waiting. It was nearly bed-time now. But his long imprisonment in the study was to be paid for now—or so he thought.

"Uncle! Has Talbot told you—"

"Talbot has told me everything, Gerald. It appears that you have discovered that Corporal Brown, who lies sick here, was once called John Rivers, the cracksman?"

"Yes, uncle." Croke's eyes glittered. "I should have already denounced him to the police, but Talbot made these rotters keep me here—"

"When I tell you, Gerald, that Corporal Brown saved my life, and nearly lost his own in doing so, and that he is lying wounded and helpless in my place, you will doubtless understand the propriety of keeping your discovery to yourself," said the colonel grimly.

Croke staggered.

Monty Lowther gave a little chirrup of glee, and then coloured as he caught the colonel's steely eye.

"Ahem!" he murmured.

"Uncle," almost shouted Croke, "it—you must be mistaken. That man—"

"That man saved my life, Gerald, and that man is my friend," said Colonel Lyndon. "That man will be given a free pardon for all his offences, as soon as I can get the case stated in the proper quarter. That man will be a lieutenant, and will wear the Victoria Cross. You will hold your tongue, Gerald, until your speaking can do him no harm—or you will answer for it to me."

Colonel Lyndon strode from the study. Croke stood dumb. His house of cards had tumbled down about his ears with a vengeance. He gave Talbot one look of deadly bitterness and slunk from the study.

Ten minutes later the colonel stood by the bedside of Corporal Brown—Miss Marie looking on with startled eyes. The wounded man raised his hand to the salute. But the colonel grasped the thin, worn hand.

"I have come to see you, corporal," he said. "I have good news for you. Your real name and history have become known to me—"

Marie gave a cry.

"And I am going to work for your pardon, and I answer for it that it will be granted. You have been recommended for a commission and a V.C., and you will get both. Hurry up and get well, my man, we want you back in the Loamshires."

"Heaven bless you, sir!" faltered John Rivers.

And Marie, her eyes full of tears, took the colonel's rough brown hand and pressed it to her lips.

"He is my father!" she said. "Heaven bless you for this!"

And when the colonel was gone, Marie sank by the bedside, and breathed a deep prayer of thankfulness to the Giver of all good. John Rivers looked at his daughter with shining eyes.

"I shall get well now, my girl," he whispered. "I shall get well—after this—and fight the Germans again, please Heaven!"

And John Rivers did get well, though he got well as Lieutenant Brown—the old name with the past was dead. And before he was well his pardon had been granted—a pardon he had well earned. The shadow of the past had lifted from his life, as it had lifted from Talbot's, and he could look any man in the face without fear. And before he left St. Jim's to return to Kitchener's Army there was a tremendous celebration in Tom Merry's study, to which came Marie and her father, and Study No. 6, and Talbot of the Shell; and the guest of honour was the man who had once been known as the Professor, and who had won pardon and honour, facing his country's foes in the King's Khaki.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday's grand, long complete story of the Chums of St. Jim's is entitled "TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE!" by Martin Clifford.)

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COUSIN ETHEL'S SCHOOLDAYS

A Magnificent Serial Story dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's and their Girl Chum. Specially published at the earnest request of readers of the "Gem" Library.

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The Previous Instalments told how—

ETHEL CLEVELAND, a pretty English girl, and cousin to ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, the swell of St. Jim's, goes to St. Freda's to continue her education.

On the first day of her arrival at the school, she is attracted by the personality of DOLORES PELHAM, a high-spirited girl of Spanish descent. Subsequently, Ethel saves Dolores from disgrace, and the two girls become firm friends.

D'Arcy goes to St. Freda's, and throws a note over the school wall for his cousin. This is picked up by Enid Craven, a sneak, who shows it to one of the teachers, Miss Tyrrell.

Miss Tyrrell and Enid then go to the school gate in search of D'Arcy.

(Now read on.)

Seeing D'Arcy Off.

Miss Tyrrell looked hard at Enid.

"It is certainly very wrong and very bold to act in such a way," she said. "I hope none of the girls at St. Freda's do so. It is almost impossible for me to believe that Ethel Cleveland would be guilty of such an act. But I shall certainly question her."

"Pway excuse me, Miss Tywwell!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had suddenly stepped into view from behind the laurel-bush, silk topper in hand, with his very best bow.

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Tyrrell.

"Pway excuse me! I am sowwy if I startled you!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in his politest tones. "You see, deah madam, that I felt bound to speak, aftah what you just said."

"What are you doing here?" exclaimed Miss Tyrrell.

"I came to see my cousin."

"Oh, you are Ethel's cousin?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You did not mention that, Enid!"

"I—I forgot."

"Very well. But you must know, Master D'Arcy, that girls here are not allowed to receive visits from their boy cousins without the special permission of the headmistress!" exclaimed Miss Tyrrell severely.

"I am extremely sowwy—"

"Have you met Ethel?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I am afraid you have made it necessary to punish her."

D'Arcy looked dismayed.

"Bai Jove! But I am speakin' up now so that you will know that Ethel was not to blame in the mattah, you see."

Miss Tyrrell suppressed a smile.

"Please come with me to Miss Penfold!" she exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah! With pleasuah!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked with Miss Tyrrell up the garden path, and then towards the house. Miss Tyrrell proceeded directly to Miss Penfold's study, and she found both Ethel and Dolores with the Head.

After Enid's tale-bearing, Ethel had felt that there was but one thing to be done—to explain the whole matter to the Head.

That she had immediately proceeded to do, and Miss Penfold listened to the story with considerable amusement.

The absurd devices of Arthur Augustus for the purpose of providing the girls of St. Freda's with a dormitory feed made the Head laugh in spite of herself. She knew part of the story already, and the rest of it did not make her angry. She could not help laughing. She could see, of course, that every word Ethel told her was the exact truth—in fact, it never occurred to Ethel at all that her word might be doubted; and it seldom does occur to anyone who always tells the truth. It is that unconscious expectation of being believed natural to truthful people which gives the ring of truth to their statements.

Ethel had just finished her explanation when Miss Tyrrell came in with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's bowed gracefully to Miss Penfold over his silk hat.

"Good-aftahnoon, madam!" he said. "I twust I see you vewy well?"

The Head of St. Freda's smiled.

"You have been acting in a very foolish way, Master D'Arcy!" she said.

"Oh, madam!"

"You have been holding clandestine communication with a girl of my school—"

D'Arcy started.

"Oh, bai Jove, madam! What a howwid word!" he exclaimed.

"That is the correct word!" said Miss Penfold severely.

"Bai Jove!"

"Of course, you did not intend anything of the sort—"

"Bai Jove, no!"

"But that is what it amounts to. You were also encouraging Ethel to disregard and disobey the rules of the college."

"Bai Jove!"

"Now, I don't know what may be your ways of amusing yourself at St. Jim's," said Miss Penfold, "but I object very strongly to your transferring the scene of your activities to St. Freda's!"

Arthur Augustus was silent.

He felt that he had put his foot into it, and his only anxiety was that Ethel should not get into trouble over the matter.

"I twust you won't come down heavy on Ethel, Miss Penfold," he said at last. "It was all my doin', you know, fwom first to last. Ethel told me I was a silly ass to start with—or words to that effect!"

"Yes, I am sure it was all your fault," said Miss Penfold. "Now, the absurd things you have sent here will all be handed to the carrier, to be delivered to you at your school."

"Oh!"

"And if you ever—ever make such an attempt again to introduce St. Jim's customs into St. Freda's, I shall be very angry!"

"Ya-a-a-as!"

"And, that matter being settled—"

"You are not goin' to lick Ethel, then, Miss Penfold?"

The Head laughed.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE!"

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

"Ethel will not be punished at all. I am sure that the whole matter has been worry enough to her already." "Bai Jove!"

"That being settled," said Miss Penfold, "you will kindly take your departure, and never enter St. Freda's in a surreptitious manner again! If you want to see your cousin on a half-holiday, you may come and ask permission in a frank and open way. I do not like secrecy in young people."

"I-I vewy much disappwove of seeewy myself, Miss Penfold. It was all owin' to the vewy peculiah circes of the case—"

"Exactly. But no more of it, please. Miss Tyrrell, will you kindly assemble the girls to see Master D'Arcy off?"

Miss Tyrrell looked surprised for a moment, and then her eyes twinkled. She understood what the Head meant.

"Certainly!" she said, and she quitted the room.

"Bai Jove, that is very kind and attentive of you, Miss Penfold!"

"Good-bye!" said Miss Penfold.

"Good-bye, madam!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook hands with Ethel and Dolores.

"Good bye, deah gals!" he murmured. "I'm awf'ly sowwy about that feed! But we'll stand you a wippin' one when you come to St. Jim's again, so it will be all wight!"

"Good-bye, Arthur!"

The swell of St. Jim's quitted the study. He went down to the school-house door, and found that Miss Tyrrell had carried out instructions.

A double row of smiling girls waited for Arthur Augustus to pass along to the gates. And their smiles grew broader as the swell of St. Jim's appeared.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He turned pink as he descended the steps.

Wide smiles and soft laughter greeted him as he marched along between the double row of girls.

His face was crimson by the time he reached the end.

Corporal Brick let him out at the gates, grinning broadly.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, pushing back his hat and mopping the perspiration from his brow as he stood in the road. "Bai Jove, I wondah if that was a little joke of Miss Penfold's? It made a fellow feel an awful ass!"

He glanced back over the wall.

He could see the crowd of girls still, and he could see that they were all laughing now. His crimson complexion grew more crimson.

"Bai Jove, it's simply wotten!" he muttered.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped out in the direction of St. Jim's. He had seen Cousin Ethel and Dolores among the girls, and Dolores was laughing. Ethel had tried to keep a grave face.

"So there won't be any dorm feed after all, Ethel!" said Dolores, taking Ethel's arm, and walking down the garden with her.

Then Ethel laughed.

"No; we shall lose that great treat," she replied. "All the things will be taken, excepting those Milly Pratt has already eaten." She stopped at the seat where Milly sat; she had not moved for the past hour. "How do you feel now, Milly?"

Milly smiled a sickly smile.

"I feel a little—a little strange," she murmured. "Of course, it wasn't the tarts."

"Of course not!" said Ethel, laughing.

And she went on, leaving Milly Pratt to her meditations.

The Fateful Letter.

"There's a letter for you, Ethel," Dolly Carew remarked, one morning, a week or two after the visit of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to St. Freda's.

"Thank you, Dolly!"

Cousin Ethel took the letter.

A good many of the St. Freda's girls looked interestedly on while she opened it. The girls took a great interest in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as a matter of course, and they were curious to know if the letter was from St. Jim's.

Ethel started as she saw the writing.

"It is from my mother!" she exclaimed.

"Oh!" said Dolly.

Ethel did not note the comical disappointment in Dolly's tone. She carried the letter away to a quiet corner with trembling hand. She wanted to be alone to read it. Her heart was beating painfully.

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Her mother was in bad health, abroad. That was why Ethel had come to St. Freda's. Mrs. Cleveland had not written letters herself for a long time. A letter in her mother's hand was a surprise to Ethel. Did it mean that Mrs. Cleveland was much better, or—

She opened the letter quickly.

Then her eyes danced as she read it.

It was a brief letter, but full of happy news to Ethel.

"My dearest Ethel,—You will be glad to know how much better I am, and that I am home again. I want my own dear girl to come to me now. I have written to Miss Penfold, and arrangements will be made for you to return home at once. Whether you go back to St. Freda's will depend upon the state of my health, but I shall keep you with me if I can."

Ethel's eyes danced and shone.

She kissed the letter, and then ran off to find Dolores. Dolores was in the garden, and her dusky face lightened up at Ethel's approach.

Ethel caught sight of the letter in the girl's hand.

"Good news?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed. My mother is well again—and home."

"I am so glad!" said Dolores.

"And I am going home to her!" cried Ethel gaily.

Then she paused suddenly, struck by the expression upon the face of the Spanish girl.

She was glad to go home, to be with her mother again—to take up her old life as she had left it. But she had grown fond of St. Freda's, too; she had grown to love the place, and the girls there, especially Dolores.

It would not be all pleasure to leave, after all.

"So you are glad to go, Ethel?" said Dolores, in a low voice.

"I am glad to go to my mother again," said Ethel slowly.

"And not sorry to leave us?"

"Of course I am sorry."

Dolores smiled ironically.

"You do not look very sorry," she said.

Ethel's face became very grave.

"I had not thought for a moment about what I should be leaving," she said quietly. "I was so pleased with the news about my mother. But I am very, very sorry to be leaving you, Dolores! And—and you must come and stay with me the first holiday."

Dolores' face softened.

"You are right, Ethel!" she exclaimed. "And I am selfish and bitter. But—but I shall miss you so much!"

Miss Penfold sent for Ethel to come into her study, and greeted her very affectionately.

She had a letter on her desk, and Ethel knew why she was sent for.

"You are leaving St. Freda's," said Miss Penfold. "I am very sorry, Ethel. We shall all miss you. If you return to us we shall all be glad; in any case, we shall always remember you with affection. And you will have the knowledge, Ethel, that during your stay here you have done good to at least one person."

"It is very kind of you to say so," murmured Ethel.

"Not at all! Dolores will ever be indebted to you for having brought about a complete reformation in her character. And— Wait a moment, Ethel! I have given my permission for a party of St. Jim's boys, including your cousin, to come over here this evening for the farewell entertainment which will be held in your honour."

Ethel's eyes sparkled.

"Thank you so much, Miss Penfold!" she said brightly; and then the girl sped away to inform Dolores of the glad news.

Au Revoir.

"Ethel, deah gal!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy greeted his fair cousin effusively in the old gateway of St. Freda's. Behind him came the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were also among the arrivals.

"I am so pleased to see you all!" said Ethel. "It was very jolly of Miss Penfold to give you permission to come over."

"I believe we should have taken French leave if she hadn't," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Anyway, we shouldn't have let you go without saying good-bye."

"Wathah not!"

"Come along!" came the brisk voice of Dolores. "Everything's ready!"

And a movement was made to the class-room. All the girls were present without exception, and Miss Penfold herself had a seat in the front row.

At the end of the room platforms had been erected, and Miss Tyrrell presided at the piano. Everything seemed to make for an enjoyable evening.

"It'll go off swimmingly," murmured Monty Lowther, "so long as Gussy doesn't give a tenor solo."

"Weally, Lowthab, you ass, I wegard that statement as widdie!"

"Shurrup!" whispered Tom Merry.

The St. Jim's juniors were given a row of seats to themselves, and Miss Penfold, her staid, strict manner entirely absent, approached them with a smile.

"You will each give a turn?" she inquired.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Tom Merry. "I can't sing at the best of times, let alone before a crowd of—ahem—young ladies!"

"Never mind. You shall recite, then," said Miss Penfold. "Surely you can do that, if it's only 'Mary Had a Little Lamb'?"

"All right," said Tom. "I'll try and struggle through with something."

"And I shall be vewy pleased to entahtain the audience with a wollickin' soldiah's song," said Arthur Augustus.

"Hurrah!" chortled Monty Lowther. "That let's me off doing my bit."

"Why?" demanded D'Arcy.

"Because nobody'll survive your song!" explained Lowther, with a grin.

"You uttah wottah!"

"Peace, my infants!" said Tom Merry. "The show's starting."

Miss Tyrrell set the ball rolling with a few lively selections on the piano. Then, amid a burst of clapping, Dolores Pelham stepped up to give the first song.

Dolores had a splendid voice, full of rare beauty. She rendered a song of sunny Spain, and was loudly encored.

Then Kerr, the Scots junior, sent the audience into roars with his wonderful impersonations. He mimicked Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House at St. Jim's, in such a lifelike manner that the girls insisted upon his doing it all over again, and even Miss Penfold could scarcely repress her smiles.

Then Kerr imitated Taggles, the crusty old porter, and Corporal Brick of St. Freda's. To wind up his performance, he rendered "The Bluebells of Scotland."

"It's all right for that bounder!" growled Figgins when the storm of cheering had subsided. "He could face the crowned heads of Europe without turning a hair. I'm blessed if I could!"

"Where's Fatty?" asked Manners suddenly. "We'll get him to give us 'The Men of Harlech.' He's got the best voice of any of us."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "Wynn, old man—Why, my hat, he's vanished!"

The Falstaff of St. Jim's had discreetly made himself scarce. In the adjoining class-room a magnificent spread had been prepared, and Fatty Wynn was not proof against such tempting viands. Lured on by Milly Pratt, who had once more recovered her gigantic appetite, the fat junior had seized an opportune moment, and slipped away from his chums unobserved.

"Where the thunder is he?" asked Figgins. Then the light of understanding came into his eyes. "He's after the grub, I'll wager!" he said.

"Milly Pratt is absent also," said Cousin Ethel. "Let's come and rout them out."

They found the feasters going strong. Fatty Wynn had discovered a kindred spirit in Milly Pratt. Both were able to go great guns in the gorging line, and it was a moot point which could outdo the other.

Fatty Wynn was bolting a huge rabbit-pie by instalments. He looked up in alarm at the sudden invasion.

"Fatty, you old porpoise," said Figgins, "we want you to give us 'The Men of Harlech.'"

"I—I couldn't in my present famished state, Figgy, old man."

"Rats! You've stowed away sufficient for a fully-fledged cormorant already. Chuck it, and come along!"

"You, too, Milly," said Ethel. "You'll make yourself positively ill, over-eating like this!"

Fatty Wynn and Milly Pratt exchanged mutual glances of commiseration, and went back to the concert.

Whether Fatty was famished or not, his voice did not suffer. He rendered his song in rousing style, and was cheered to the echo.

Thenceforward the performance went without a hitch. Gussy gave "The British Grenadiers," and Monty Lowther's humorous recitation literally brought the house down.

Manners, whose brain had been busy for the past half-hour, vastly astonished his hearers by giving them an original song which centred round the great Gustavus. The first verse ran as follows:

"He's always dressed in Sunday best,

Complete with shining topper;

A modest cap, this lofty chap,

Regards as most improper!

His waistcoat, too, is pink and blue,

For spats he's fairly fussy.

He is the nuttiest of the nuts,

Our own immortal Gussy!"

"Weally, Mannahs!" protested the swell of St. Jim's, in shrill tones.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's juniors roared with merriment, and a ripple of laughter uprose from the girls. Manners didn't have much of a voice, but the novelty of his song amply atoned for this deficiency.

The Shell fellow was loudly applauded; and then the rest of the juniors, whether willing or not, were compelled to give a turn. Figgy's love-ditty—the only one of the evening—seemed to be intended solely for the ears of Cousin Ethel, and that young lady coloured perceptibly as the leader of the New House fixed his eyes directly upon her during the song.

Finally, Tom Merry and Cousin Ethel contributed a duet—the finest item on a fine programme. Tom's voice blended well with Ethel Cleveland's, and the audience fairly rose to them.

Then Miss Tyrrell struck up "For Auld Lang Syne," and the happy throng adjourned to the supper-room, where Fatty Wynn and his girl rival again got busy.

The entertainment had been a roaring success. There could be no question about that. Cousin Ethel might possibly have felt just a little miserable but for the musical evening, which banished all gloomy thoughts from her young mind.

Even the boundless appetite of Fatty Wynn was satisfied at last, and then the St. Jim's juniors bade their girl chums good-night. It was arranged that D'Arcy and Figgins should obtain the permission of Dr. Holmes to see Cousin Ethel to the railway-station on the morrow.

Next morning, at the appointed time, a smart turn-out drove into the gateway of St. Freda's, and whisked up the drive and stopped before the School House door.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Figgins descended, hat in hand, to greet Cousin Ethel.

Dolores stood on the step watching them. The Spanish girl's heart seemed to be in her eyes. In spite of all the efforts of her pride, two big tears wetted her black eyelashes.

"Adios, Ethel mia!"

"Good-bye, Dolores—dear Dolores!"

"Bai Jove! Say au vevoir, but not good-bye, you know!" said Arthur Augustus.

And the sweet voice floated back to the hearing of Dolores, standing on the school steps:

"Au revoir!"

THE END.



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

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

HARDLY INFALLIBLE.

"Arithmetic is the science of truth," said the professor earnestly. "Figures can't lie. For instance, if one man can build a house in twelve days, twelve men can build it in one."

"Yes," interrupted a quick-brained student. "Then 288 men will build it in an hour, 17,280 in one minute, and 1,036,800 in one second. And I don't believe they could lay one brick in the time!"

While the professor was still gasping, the smart ready-reckoner went on:

"Again, if one ship can cross the Atlantic in six days, six ships can cross it in one day. I don't believe that, either. So where's the truth in arithmetic?"—Sent in by H. Pursglove, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Notts.

THE "SILENCERS."

They gave him a whistle and drum.
Two big tin tops that buzz and hum,
A ninopin set, some squeaking toys;
Then said, "Now, Tom, don't make a noise!"

—Sent in by Sidney Robins, Birmingham.

THE "COAT" AND THE MAN.

They had just wished their last guest "Good-night!" at the door, and had returned to the drawing-room to talk over the success of the evening, and to consider whether their new-formed friends of rank and wealth had been duly impressed.

Mrs. Gotrichquick: "Don't you think, 'Enery, that now we are in the 'smart set' we should have a coat-of-arms? Lady Moneybags has, you know."

Mr. G.: "Yes, my dear. I'll see my tailor about it to-morrow."—Sent in by W. L. Goode, Desborough.

EASILY EXPLAINED.

It was the day for kit inspection in a certain infantry company.

"Attention!" came the command of Sergeant Bluff; and the fiery Lieutenant Blobbs, whom everybody dreaded, began the examination. He had an unhappy knack of bringing to light any article that the owner particularly wished to conceal.

The first three kits were passed as being satisfactory; but the fourth belonged to Private Micky Dooley, and the Irishman shuddered as the lieutenant commenced to unroll a shirt he had been careful to place at the bottom of his kit.

When the shirt was open the lieutenant found a hole about four inches long in the front of it. Turning to Mike, he said angrily:

"How dare you destroy your shirt in this manner?"

"Please, sir," stammered the Irishman, "lately the woman who does my washing for me has forgotten to replace any buttons that have happened to pull off, so I thought I would remind her of her duty by stitching a blacking-tin on the place where a button was needed. And, please, sir, instead of stitching a button on, she made a hole to fit the blacking-tin."—Sent in by Stanley Orford, Waterloo, Liverpool.

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A CANNY STORY.

At some sports recently held in a Scottish village an open hundred yards handicap was one of the principal items on the programme, and the prize which was to be awarded to the winner was much coveted by the competitors.

Some "crack" runners from Edinburgh entered the event, and duly put in their appearance for the race.

Whilst dressing for the sprint a local competitor, who looked rather green, vouchsafed the information that the starter invariably fired the pistol the moment he asked the question, "Are you ready?" And the cracks determined to make use of this information.

After the competitors had lined up for the start, the starter put the question, "Are you ready?" And off went all the runners, except the informative local man, who stood his ground.

"Come back!" shouted the starter. "I ain't fired the pistol yet; and all of you who have stepped off the mark too soon will have to forfeit a yard!"

Again the question was put, "Are you ready?" And again the Edinburgh "cracks" tried to anticipate the pistol; but they were detected, and made to suffer another yard penalty.

"You can let her bang this time, father!" whispered the local man to the starter. "I guess I can win that clock now!"

And he did!—Sent in by John Hall, Dunsmore Lodge, Corstophine.

A TIMELY WARNING.

Agent: "I see you are busy, sir; but I will not take up much of your time. I want to talk to you a little on the subject of life insurance."

Victim: "Do you want to insure a man who may be hanged in a few months?"

Agent: "Good heavens! Are you a murderer?"

Victim: "Not yet. But I very soon will be if you confounded agents keep bothering me when I am trying to work!"—Sent in by John Ferth, Sheffield.

ADDING INSULT TO INJURY.

It was a railway refreshment-room. The traveller was hungry and in a hurry.

"Please pass me the potatoes, mister," he said, addressing an elegant gentleman who sat next to him.

The person addressed slowly focussed his gold-rimmed eyeglasses on the speaker, and then asked in icy tones:

"Do you take me for one of the waiters?"

The other diners held their knives and forks suspended in the air, expecting the traveller to shrivel up; but no such phenomenon took place. He just turned and beckoned to the nearest waiter.

"Hi! Come here, please!" he bawled.

"What is it, sir?" asked the waiter, as he hurried forward.

"I wanted to apologise to you, that is all. You see, I took this party for you; but I hope you won't be offended at my mistake. Now, pass me the potatoes, please."—Sent in by J. W. Richardson, Gillingham, Kent.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

THE BOYS' FRIEND, 1d.,

Published every Monday,

in order to give more of our readers a chance of winning one of our useful Money Prizes.

If you know a really funny joke, or a short, interesting paragraph, send it along (on a post-card) before you forget it, and address it to: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND and GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, E.C.
Look out for YOUR Prize Storyette in next week's GEM or BOYS' FRIEND.

GREAT POPULAR TRIUMPH OF "HAIR-DRILL."

BEAUTIFUL MISS ELLALINE TERRISS'S STRIKING ENDORSEMENT.

Says she owes her lovely tresses to this delightful toilet practice, and advises all who wish to keep young to follow her example.

1,000,000 SPLENDID "FOUR-FOLD" HAIR BEAUTY GIFTS NOW READY TO BE SENT GRATIS TO ALL READERS.

MILLIONS of British men and women at home and abroad have a soft corner in their heart for Miss Ellaline Terriss, and her gift of perpetual youth is one that many have longed to learn. Certainly Miss Terriss owes much of her charming appearance to her masses of abundant hair, always so tastefully and beautifully dressed, and it is gratifying to find this daintiest of actresses paying tribute to the value of "Harlene Hair-Drill."

A REMARKABLE HAIR BEAUTY OFFER.

So that readers of this paper may at once commence to test for themselves the wonderful improvement "Harlene Hair-Drill" makes in the hair, Mr. Edwards has decided to give everyone an opportunity of following Miss Terriss's example by sending 1,000,000 of his Four-Fold "Harlene Hair-Drill" Outfits absolutely Gratis.

We give Miss Ellaline Terriss's letter, knowing it will be read with the greatest interest by those who desire to cultivate a beautiful appearance.

Coliseum, London, W.C.,
October 27, 1915.

To Messrs. Edwards' Harlene Co.,
Lamb's Conduit Street, W.C.

Dear Sirs,—Thank you very much for sending the "Harlene" so promptly. As you know, I always like to keep a good supply with me.

I always apply "Harlene" night and morning. It is a delightful exercise I am careful not to forget, and on my dressing-table at the theatre, as at home, "Harlene" is a constant companion. I always tell my friends of "Harlene," and I think I have made many converts to this natural method of growing hair and keeping the hair healthy. I feel inclined to add that every Britisher should use "Harlene," for we all want to keep young nowadays, both men and women.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) ELLALINE TERRISS.



Millions of people have taken delight in the charm of Miss Ellaline Terriss and her fascinating art. To-day this world-famous actress gives advice which will enable everyone to double their attractiveness and charm. The secret is "Harlene Hair-Drill," in connection with which a Four-fold Gift awaits your acceptance. Fill in and post form given here.

THIS IS YOUR FOUR-FOLD GIFT.

Prove for yourself by accepting one of these 1,000,000 "Harlene Hair-Drill" Outfits exactly how quickly you can regain hair beauty. Send your name and address on this form and you will receive:—

1. A bottle of "Harlene," a true liquid food for the hair, which stimulates it to new growth, building up the very substance of the hair itself. It is tonic, food, and dressing in one.
2. A packet of the marvellous hair and scalp cleansing "Cremex" Shampoo, which prepares the head for "Hair-Drill."
3. A bottle of Uzon Brilliantine which gives a final touch of beauty to the hair, and is especially beneficial to those whose scalp is inclined to be "dry" or where powdery scurf exists.
4. The secret "Hair-Drill" Manual, giving complete instructions for carrying out this two-minute-a-day scientific hair-growing exercise.

You can always obtain further supplies of "Harlene" from your Chemist at 1s., 2s. 6d., or 4s. 6d. per bottle; "Uzon" Brilliantine—1s., 2s. 6d.; "Cremex" at 1s. per box of seven shampoos (single packets 2d. each).

If ordered direct from Edwards' Harlene Co., any article will be sent post free on remittance. Carriage extra on foreign orders.

SPECIAL NOTICE.—An innovation that will be much appreciated by travellers, and incidentally soldiers and sailors at home and abroad, is announced by Mr. Edwards' introduction of "Solidified Harlene." For a long time, in response to many requests, Mr. Edwards has been experimenting in this direction, and has at last produced Edwards' "Harlene" in solid form, so that it can more conveniently be carried in one's portmanteau or equipment than when in liquid form in a bottle.

In addition to the popular Liquid "Edwards' Harlene," Solidified "Harlene" is now on sale at all chemists in tins at 2s. 9d., or supplies may be obtained post free on remittance direct from Edwards' Harlene Co., 20-26, Lamb's Conduit St., London, W.C.

*** "HARLENE" HAIR-DRILL GIFT COUPON ***

* Fill in and post to
* EDWARDS' HARLENE CO.,
* 20-26, LAMB'S CONDUIT ST., LONDON, W.C. *

* Dear Sirs,—Please send me your free "Harlene"
* Fourfold Hair-Growing Outfit. I enclose 4d. stamps
* for postage to any part of the world. (Foreign stamps
* accepted.) *

* Name

* Address

GEM, JANUARY 29th, 1916.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 416.

WHAT DO YOU ANSWER TO THESE QUESTIONS?

If you answer "Yes" to any of these questions, the "Harlene" Gift is for you.

1. Do you notice any powdery dust when brushing?
2. Do you notice any split or broken hairs in the comb?
3. Is your hair difficult to dress?
4. Does your hair seem dull, lank, and lifeless?
5. Is your hair too dry or too greasy?
6. Do you notice an irritation of the scalp?
7. Is your hair gradually becoming thinner?

"Harlene Hair-Drill" very quickly remedies such conditions. As every little drop of "Harlene" penetrates to the hair cells, so all the waste clogging matter is cleared away and the hair, so to speak, is able to breathe again.



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — — — —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON ST. LONDON. E.C.
 OUR · · THREE · · COMPANION · · PAPERS!
 "THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES.
 — LIBRARY — : — POPULAR — : — 1/2° —
 EVERY MONDAY : EVERY FRIDAY : EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday:

"TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE!"

By Martin Clifford.

The title of next week's magnificent, long, complete school story is sufficient indication that "Baggy" Trimble once more finds himself "up against it." A series of thefts are perpetrated at St. Jim's, and black suspicion falls upon no less honourable a person than Tom Merry. In course of time, however, just as the skipper of the Shell is practically expelled, events take a new and startling turn, and serious

"TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE"

results. Next Wednesday's story is so intensely absorbing that no Gemite can afford to give it a miss.

A MARRIED READER'S TRIBUTE.

"Only Missed Once!"

My postbag this week has been of a particularly bright and cheering order, and not the least important letter hails from a married reader living at Montreal. I append his epistle in full:

"232, St. Antoine Street,
 "Montreal, Canada.

"Dear Editor,—You must excuse the liberty I am taking in writing to you, but I feel I must let you know how highly the companion papers are esteemed out here. We have to pay a good deal more for the books than our English chums, but I believe they are enjoyed more, on account of the fact that the mail brings them in a bunch, and if you have not ordered your special batch at five cents, a time, you get left, as Fishy says. The 'Gem,' the 'Magnet,' the 'Boys' Friend,' and that penny wonder the 'Pop,' we have to buy at one fell swoop, or else wait another eight or ten days for the next lot. Sometimes two mails come together, and then bang goes half-a-dollar! But still, the enjoyment is worth a guinea a box, a la Bob Cherry!

"I can think of nothing better, after a heavy day's work, than to sit and spend a pleasant hour with our genial chums of St. Jim's and Greyfriars; and I honestly believe that Mr. Martin Clifford and Mr. Frank Richards beat Charlie Chaplin at his own game, for I have repeatedly been sent into roars over the antics of Grundy and Gussy.

"My wife is also a great enthusiast for the companion papers, and sometimes, if supper is not ready for me, I know the mail is in and my wife has been busy with the 'Gem,' which is her favourite. All the stories you publish bear the same trade mark—manliness. I wish you good luck, sir, and when my son is old enough, he shall read them, too. I have a grandfather, seventy-three years of age, who reads your papers. He lives in Clerkenwell, London.

"Wishing you the best of luck, and Malpas & Co. the worst, I am, sincerely yours,
 E. J. DORAN.

"P.S.—I have only missed reading your papers once since their publication. That was when the mail was lost on one of our liners a few weeks ago. Not a bad record—what?"

I thank Mr. Doran most cordially for his eulogistic letter. The staunch support of such loyal readers as himself has worked wonders for the success of this journal, and my very best wishes go out to my Montreal friend and his wife and boy.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

L. H.—Not at all a shameful confession to make! If you have done your best to get new readers, you have done all that anyone can do. As for the photograph suggestion—wait and see!

"Bow."—Any number of the "Greyfriars Herald" will tell you who are the editorial staff. The Terrible Three are the chief members of the staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly."

M. C. (Bow).—Mr. Clifford has never bound himself down to make Tom Merry & Co. the central figures of every story, as you appear to imagine. The Talbot stories are very popular with a large number of our readers.

"Marion."—Thanks for your letter. We don't worry about the backbiters, but they must be put in their places now and then. The character you name has left St. Jim's.

J. B. W. (Dewsbury).—A bit late certainly, but very welcome all the same.

A. D. (Durban).—I can assure you that the companion papers have thousands of keen readers in the Army, and there is no doubt any numbers you send will be appreciated. Thanks for your fine work in getting new readers. I agree with you that our artist's illustrations are top-hole. Will consider competition suggestion.

J. S. (Portman Square).—The difficulty about the introduction of fresh characters is that the stage is already pretty well filled.

L. S. (Claremont, Cape Town).—You will have had the Christmas Double Number long before you read this. General Botha is admired as fully in this country as in South Africa, I am sure. We all think him a great and loyal man—an honest enemy once, a true friend now.

S. W. D. (Tooting Bee).—Cannot possibly answer "next week," because next week's number has already been printed some time. Many thanks for your help in getting new readers.

W. G. (Lincoln).—Quite right; very pleased to hear about what you are doing. A disappointment taken in a sporting spirit does one good, certainly. Try again with something shorter, as you suggest.

"Gemite."—St. Jim's v. Rylcombe G.S. is sure to come off again, in some form or other, before long.

"A Loyal Gloucester Reader."—Oughtn't you to have said, "A moderately loyal Gloucester reader"? To threaten a discontinuance of the "P. P.," if the suggested Tom Merry and Harry Wharton stories appear, does not seem too loyal. Your notion of stories alternating—St. Jim's one week, Greyfriars the next—is not at all a bad one, however.

"Billy."—I have borne your letter without grinning. Rylcombe is in Sussex, near St. Jim's. Most of the boys in the Fourth and Shell are about fifteen. Now and then a clever boy may reach the Fourth before that age, and now and then a stupid one may stay in one Form or the other beyond it, of course. Sorry you don't like Sexton Blake. But most of the "Penny Pop," readers seem very well satisfied.

L. M. (Hunslett Carr).—For something in the way of instructions as to making a cheap dynamo, you might try Hobbies, Ltd., Aldersgate Street, London, E.C.

"Two Regular Readers" (Glasgow).—Sorry you don't altogether like the "Penny Pop," as at present made up; but most readers do. Suggestions for improvement are always welcome, and we never mind candid criticism; but a certain gentleman, who shall remain nameless, might have a fit if we passed on your letter to him.

(Continued on page 111 of cover.)

REPLIES IN BRIEF—continued.

F. M. (Newton Heath).—You are certainly doing your bit. We might give the cads more notice, but they don't deserve anything but a dusting-down once in a way.

"Irish Doreen."—Not the same—merely a coincidence of name.

C. R. (Wembley).—You say I let my critics off much too lightly. Perhaps! But, you see, I make all the allowances I can for their youth and ignorance, and trust they will learn better some day.

H. L. R. (Plaistow).—Sorry I cannot use your story. If you had got into print with your first attempt, you would have done rather a remarkable thing. The story is not bad, but you might have done better with a subject you knew more about. Never write on both sides of the paper when submitting contributions.

H. L.—I do not take your letter as an insult, for I feel sure you mean well. On the other hand, having fully explained my position, I do not propose to argue the matter further; and I certainly do think that a private and confidential explanation is too much for any of my readers to expect.

C. K. D. (Maidstone).—I am much too busy to undertake the distribution of back numbers to men in the Army. But the Post Office does this free of charge; or you could find in these replies names and addresses of men who want them.

"A Faithful Reader" (Stirling).—"Under the new drink Act, how do the blades of St. Jim's manage to get drunk at Wayland?" you ask. The answer is, that they don't.

"Jay-Dee."—Portraits may appear in either the "Gem" or "Magnet." If you get "School and Sport," in the "Boys' Friend" Threepenny Library, you will find the names of the St. Jim's and Greyfriars footer teams.

C. B. (South Tottenham).—Your verses are very fair for a boy of eleven, but they are not good enough to be printed.

F. N. P. (Walsall).—I know the school you are going to, and it is a capital one. Here is one little bit of advice, since you ask for it—if you find yourself in a difficulty, think what Tom Merry or Talbot would do in your place, and do that. You will never go far wrong then. Congratulations on your swimming prizes.

P. G. (Forest Hill).—Thanks ever so much. But I am not Mr. Clifford, you know, and I don't write the stories. We do not acknowledge Storyettes. They come in by hundreds. Those which get a prize are printed; the rest go into the w.p.b. It is the only way to deal with a competition like this. Gore has always had a kind of fondness for Talbot, but Gore's reformation is not likely to be lasting.

"A Loyal Reader" (Wrexham).—Quite a good idea. A better one would be for each boy to buy his own copy, though, don't you think? Perhaps your friend at Huddersfield, whom you met at Rhyl, will see this, and note that you have lost his address, but would like to hear from him. As a clue to your identity, I give your initials—"W. F." No charge!

M. E. (Glasgow).—I should suggest that you put the poem by, and have another look at it in a year or so. Probably you will see its weak points then. I won't be so rude as Bob Cherry, who would probably say, "Take it out and bury it!"

W. C. (Ferryhill).—Your letter has gone a long time unanswered, and meanwhile the "Greyfriars Herald" has appeared. "Tom Merry's Weekly" will soon be out, I hope. You will have seen, too, that Mr. Railton has been discharged from the Army.

E. M. A. (Portsmouth).—Yes, we shall have another portrait gallery some day.

H. Y. (Bolton).—Glad to hear from you, and to know that your mother approves of my papers.

H. H. (Easton, Bristol).—Thanks for card. The suggestion is still being considered.

M. N. (New Cross).—Sorry to hear of your illness. Hope you are all right now.

Coalier.—You are a trifle below the average height, but don't worry. Gymnastic exercises might help. Specialists—well, I think not. After all, though, everybody cannot be six foot odd. I have spoken to Mr. Storm about leaving off his serial instalments at exciting points, and he actually had the hardihood to tell me that he does it on purpose! What do you think of that?

"A Jarrovian."—Talbot is certainly one of the best junior footballers at St. Jim's. Tom Merry's visit to the slums don't happen very often, you know; and they all make part of the stories.

E. W. (Newport, Mon.).—Perhaps we shall be able to give you another scout yarn before long.

E. H. (South Kensington).—Very pleased to hear from so loyal a supporter. Your mother is quite right. All boys who eat a lot are not fat; but you must not argue from that that fat boys don't eat a lot. Ask Wynn or Bunter!

F. P. (Fenton).—Thanks! The suggestion has not been shelved, but the alteration cannot be made just yet.

J. P. J. (Thornton Heath).—Thanks for suggestions, though it has taken me a long time to acknowledge them. Can't be helped!

"A Tom Merryite."—You want just the opposite of what F. P. wants. The difficulty is to please you both, together with the many who think like F. P., and the many who think as you do.

"Invalid."—Another of you! Your notion is the same as "A Tom Merryite's"—leave the "Penny Pop," as it is. It would save quite a lot of trouble if you would all vote the same way! Hope you are getting better now.

"Tipperary Schoolgirl."—Bunter is at Greyfriars, not St. Jim's. I don't quite understand your other query—"Is Tom Merry still in St. Jim's?" Perhaps you mean "Tom Merry's Weekly"?

C. V. R. (Sheffield).—Badges simply cannot be had during the war, and it would not be quite the thing even to try hard to get them. You will have seen more about Mr. Carrington since you wrote. The "Dreadnought" has ceased publication. I don't know anything about Arthur Paling, but if he sees this he will probably remember your initials and drop you a line.

Private James Small, No. 10098, 1st Cheshire Regiment, B.E.F., France, would welcome either letters or back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet." Will readers please note?

C. R. (Montreal, Canada).—The Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is Gussy's full name. He is often called others, however. You need not fear Tom Merry's disappearance from St. Jim's. There are enough national calamities happening without that. Tom Merry is Talbot's best chum. About two hundred boys in the School House, half as many in the New House.

"A Loyal Gemite Heart and Soul."—Answers cannot appear in the "Gem" at once, because it is printed some weeks in advance. Moreover, if we were to answer every letter in the paper, there would be room for nothing else, and very soon there would be no paper! You make the mistake of supposing that everybody else is answered and you are left out; but if you saw the stacks of letters we have to deal with you would know better. Please accept my word that I do not doubt your loyalty, and that I am sorry you should have had to wait so long for a reply.

C. A. (Ilford).—I cannot reply to letters at once, for the reason stated above. The place you name is quite imaginary.

A. J. F. (Douglas, I. of M.).—You are one of the converts, and evidently a thorough one. It's never too late for a stitch in time, as Inky might say.

J. A. J. (Halifax).—I like the sentiment of your verses, but they are not quite up to publication standard.

"A Loyal Ventnor Gemite."—We cannot get badges while the war lasts. Afterwards, perhaps! A threepenny Tom Merry yarn will appear before long. Not much in it between Tom Merry and Talbot as boxers, but Tom a trifle the best perhaps. Mr. Railton was invalided out.

G. W. (Edinburgh).—Most of the questions you ask are replied to in the Special Supplement to the Christmas Number. The Christian name of Toby, the page, is Toby!

J. F. (Birmingham).—The cost of sending the papers to the soldiers in France depends upon the weight of the parcel. You will find one address in this week's Replies.

H. S. (Leyton).—I hope you will not long have to say that you have no friends. Evidently you believe in sticking to it, and I thank you for the efforts you have made. If you have not succeeded in getting new readers, you have tried, and that's something.

"Peg."—No, Levison is not altogether bad, but I am afraid there is no hope of his complete reformation.

S. S. (Manchester).—My advice is to do as your father wishes. In years to come you will be far better off as an electrical engineer than you would be in an office or warehouse. And I doubt whether you would like either better. There is a lot of hard grind in any calling.

M. O. R. (Aintree).—Anything for the "Greyfriars Herald" should be sent to the address at the head of the Chat.

W. H. and R. A. S. (Portsmouth).—Afraid your "proof" of Portsmouth's pride of place (after London) in supporting the companion papers is not quite conclusive. Some people might say that if Portsmouth newsgagents were more enterprising there would be less difficulty in getting the papers. But I know that we have a lot of keen and loyal readers your way. "Tom Merry's Weekly" will come along very soon, I hope.

E. M.—Afraid it is scarcely possible to cut out the slang completely. If your physical exercises leave you exhausted you are evidently overdoing the thing. Try half as much. Sorry, but we have not time here to look through a file for a particular story vaguely indicated by some incident in it.

"A Very Old Reader."—Your suggestion is scarcely workable. The "sweethearting" business is out of place in school stories.

"Bobs" (Newmarket).—Sorry your earlier letter was unanswered. Mistakes will happen. It was not on account of your handwriting, I assure you. That is quite decent, and very easy to read. Thanks for good wishes.

(Continued on the next page.)

REPLIES IN BRIEF—continued.

E. W. (Whitley Bay).—Very glad to know you like the "Gem" so much. We have not often room for short stories.

J. H. (Oldham).—Sorry, but our Correspondence Exchange is closed, and we cannot make exceptions.

V. F. (Almondbury).—Yes, you will get plenty more Talbot stories; but Talbot cannot be the central character every week.

R. P. (Guernsey).—The Greyfriars footer colours are blue and white. Mason is close on eighteen.

"Photographer" (Charlbury).—Shall be pleased to see your local photographs. The best sportsman—but that is not quite the same as "sporting character," perhaps, though it means more—in the Sixth at St. Jim's is Kildare. Your method of using back numbers is quite all right.

R. Anthony (9, Marchmont Street, London, W.C.) has Nos. 201 to 300 of the "Gem," which he would sell for half-a-crown or exchange for 12 back numbers of the "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library.

A. H. (Lower Edmonton).—See reply to J. H. (Oldham).

A. H. (Barton, near Northwich).—Glad you like the "Gem" so much. "Tom Merry's Weekly" will soon be out, I hope.

W. H. T. (Sutton, St. Helen's).—We shall probably have a story with a Boy Scout interest before long.

Alan H. (Towser) is undoubtedly a thoroughbred 'un. The war has only hit us in one way—it has given those remaining on the staff double work to do, because so many have joined the Colours.

T. G. (Cattigtowhill).—Pleased to hear you like my papers so much.

P. (Nelson).—Football is certainly all right, and I do not think that it has any tendency to lead a fellow into bad company. The place you mention is quite imaginary.

"An Admirer of Tom Merry."—Tom Merry and Figgins are about 15. Crooke a few months older than either, and Kildare between 17 and 18.

"Gemite."—The place you mention is quite imaginary. Glad to hear you are so keen on the paper.

K. H. M. (Clapham).—So you think the "Gem" and the "Greyfriars Herald" ahead of all others? You have good judgment, evidently.

N. W. (Vancouver, B.C.).—We shall hope to have "Tom Merry's Weekly" on sale in Canada when it comes out. Have you not seen the "Greyfriars Herald" yet?

A. W. (Stepney).—Yes, the Shell comes next to the Fifth. You are evidently a very keen admirer of Talbot.

"Accrington Reader."—I note your suggestions re stories dealing with House rivalry at St. Jim's.

A. A. F. (Carmarthen).—Sorry, but your letter came too late for any chance of insertion before Christmas. The "Gem" is printed some time in advance, you know.

"Griff" (Oldham).—The amount that can be got upon a postcard depends upon the size of the writing, of course.

W. M. (Salisbury).—The "Gem" and "Magnet" artists are not the same.

"A New Reader" (South Shields).—If you will send your name and address we will let you have some back numbers of the "Gem."

E. F. (Mexborough).—Mark Linley is from Lancashire, not Yorkshire.

D. S. (Norwich).—We really have not room for a Stamp Column. The stories you mention will appear in due course. I cannot say just when.

W. E. D. (Jersey).—Your writing is quite easy to read, and that is the main thing, after all. I cannot personally do anything to make the newsgates sit up and take notice, but I can assure you that I have plenty to do without that.

F. D. (Lewisham).—Thanks, old chap! Very glad you like my papers.

"Disappointed" (Rhondda Valley).—The information you want is not easy to get, and I have not been able to find anything definite. The value of such things is really what anyone can be found to give for them. Try a curiosity shop, if there is one anywhere near you.

T. C. (Birmingham).—Glad to hear you have converted your mother to a belief in the companion papers. To have done the school arms in colours would have been very costly.

"A Loyal Reader" (Bolsover).—But we do get letters from your district, and some of them quite as enthusiastic even as yours.

C. W. (Jersey).—I don't consider either Grundy or Skimpole exaggerated. They are unusual types, but, to my mind, thoroughly well drawn. I note your criticisms of the illustrations in the "Magnet."

T. L. (Market Drayton).—Not much the matter with the stories when your only complaint is that they are not long enough, eh?

F. S. (Leigh).—Quite right! The film at your picture palace showing a Boy Scout in bed reading the "Gem" was certainly quite a decent advertisement for us. All the same, reading in bed is not the best thing to do.

H. H. (Cardiff).—Mayne has passed into a higher form, and is working very hard for exams.

D. F. S. (Tufnell Park).—Afraid I can't publish your "poetry"—don't know what the consequences might be! Glad you are so keen on the "Gem."

"Anti-Malpas" (Gillingham).—Thanks for your loyal support. So you think Mr. Frank Richards and Mr. Martin Clifford are one and the same? And when do you think the "double" gentleman eats and sleeps?

J. T. (Middleton).—Sorry I cannot do what you wish. Our Correspondence Exchange is closed, and we must not make exceptions. I hope you are no longer feeling so lonely. Don't worry about false friends; they are not worth it.

"Ilfordian."—Glad to hear you are a supporter of the "Gem" now, though formerly you ran it down. As for the pamphlet enclosed, I really don't think it calls for any criticism. It is just the sort of thing which people who like that sort of thing would like, isn't it?

C. A. P. (Bushey).—Badges cannot be got while the war lasts. Newsgates are altogether outside my jurisdiction, but if you order a paper, no doubt you will get it. Not "Tom Merry's Weekly" yet, though, because it is not yet out. Herr Schneider's niece may come into some future story, perhaps.

G. S. (Lanark).—I have to leave these matters largely to Mr. Clifford. When a man is writing a story, you see, he uses the characters which come into the plot, and does not drag in others just to prove they are still alive. Into some of the yarns the girl characters could not be brought without dragging them in—and that would be no end rude!

"Sussex-by-the-Sea."—Badges impossible till after the war.

N. W. (Greenwich).—Sorry; no photo of Talbot available.

F. O'D. (Blarney).—Correspondence Exchange closed, and so I cannot insert your request.

R. B. (Chester).—No Chester boy at Greyfriars or St. Jim's, as far as I know. So you make loyal Gemites partly by the persuasion of the boot. Really—really! Still, a loyal Gemite is quite a useful article, so we won't inquire too closely into the process of manufacture.

L. G. (Brigg).—Glad to hear the "Gem" is such a favourite in your neighbourhood. There is no Remove Form at St. Jim's. Mr. Railton has been invalided out of the Army.

G. M. (Liverpool).—Joke not quite good enough. Glad to hear from you.

S. L. (You will hear more of Julian some day).

"A Loyal Gemite" (Plumstead).—Correspondence Exchange closed, so I cannot do as you wish. Pleased to hear of your Gem League, and also of the new reader you tell me about.

F. S. (Cranham Hall).—The supplement given with the "Gem" Christmas Number answers your queries.

"Faithful Reader" (Whitehall, S.W.).—Surely Levison is enough to the fore? Hammond does not appear so often, it is true. Do you mean adventure stories instead of the school yarns? That would never do. Try the "Boys' Friend"—plenty of adventure in that.

M. R. (Huddersfield).—I do not consider it necessary to insinuate your letter, but I will deal with the main points here, apologising for delay in doing so. In the first place, if Mr. Clifford wrote of school life exactly as it is, without exaggeration or embroidery, his stories would inevitably be dull, tame, and flat. Your second comment is: "Are not all the St. Jim's boys of a very reforming nature?" Frankly, I don't understand it. Dr. Holmes' action in resigning or threatening to resign because one of his pupils is expelled by the Governors seems to me quite rational in a man of strong character, with a hatred of injustice. I don't know the extent of Mr. Clifford's appetite. I have no reason to suppose that he has personal experience in the Fatty Wynn line. But I have known men and boys who could and did eat four times what an average person would, and four would make a small family.

F. T. (Winchester).—Sorry for delay in replying. Levison's name is pronounced as spelt. Your Fatty Wynn chum is certainly "some" grower, if he put on three miles or so round the equator every day. If he has to be helped into his nether garments in the morning, what happens at night, after he has had several solid meals within twelve hours?

"A Loyal Gemite, Heart and Soul."—Any letter is anonymous which does not contain the writer's name—not that it matters. Sorry yours has remained so long unanswered, but work is pressing, and there are only twenty-four hours in a day.

"A British Reader."—Talbot cannot help his cousin's faults. Some fellows don't get nicknamed, perhaps because they have no little absurd points about them. No, I should not say that Talbot stood higher in Tom Merry's regard than his old chums, Manners and Loythor.

Your Editor