

ROUGH ON RAILTON!

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



BAGGY'S LITTLE WAY!

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ROUGH ON RAILTON!

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

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Going for Grundy.

"LOOKS like trouble," remarked Monty Lowther.

And Tom Merry and Manners nodded and grinned.

It did look like trouble for somebody.

The Terrible Three were chatting outside their doorway in the Shell passage when the army came along. There were eight of them—Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers. And their grim and deadly looks showed that they were on the war-path.

They did not come on to Tom Merry's study, however. They stopped at No. 3—the study shared by Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn.

There were Scrope, Crooke, Gibbons, and Boulton, of the Shell; and Smith minor, Kerruish, Bates, and Tompkins, of the Fourth. Some of them carried cricket-stumps. One or two had walking-sticks. One had a fire-shovel.

The Terrible Three stared at them.

"Looking for somebody?" called out Tom Merry.

Kerruish glanced along the passage to the Terrible Three.

"All serene! You needn't chip in!" he said. "We're going to call on Grundy."

"Nice little surprise-party!" grinned Lowther.

"Well, I think Grundy will be surprised," said Kerruish. "You see, Railton's gone out—gone down to the station to meet a friend. Linton's gone to a meeting in Wayland, and Latham's over in the New House. All the prefects are in the gym—every man jack of them. So we're going to call on Grundy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerruish kicked a thundering kick at Grundy's door, and it flew open.

"My hat!" murmured Manners. "This is going to be interesting! Let's get front seats. There'll be a crowd soon."

And the Terrible Three chuckled and drew near. They were not surprised that Kerruish & Co. had taken advantage of the absence of masters and prefects to call upon Grundy. What they intended to do to Grundy, probably, would not have been approved by masters or prefects.

Grundy of the Shell was not a bad fellow. He was, in fact, a good-humoured and quite generous fellow in many ways. But he had his faults. He could lick nearly anybody in the Lower School. In fact, fellows in the Fifth made it a point to be very civil to Grundy. Grundy was rather high-handed. He was ready to punch a fellow's nose one minute, and forgive him the next. Fellows whose noses were punched, however, did not enjoy the process, even if Grundy was quite good-tempered again five minutes afterwards. Nearly everybody in the Shell had fought with Grundy at one time or another, and generally the great Grundy had been victorious. Only Tom Merry and Talbot and Kangaroo really had a chance with him.

Evidently a collection of Grundy's victims had taken this opportunity, when

there were no prefects or masters about, to call upon George Alfred Grundy and tell him what they thought of him. And the cricket-stumps and walking-sticks and fire-shovel looked as if actions would follow words.

Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn were in the study. Wilkins and Gunn were waiting to do their prep. They couldn't begin, however, as Grundy was talking. Grundy was a fellow who required tact in management. Wilkins and Gunn liked him for his good qualities, but they found his other qualities a little wearing.

Grundy was laying down the law on the subject of football now. Grundy was explaining that by playing him—George Alfred—St. Jim's would be able to wind up the season in style—a regular triumphal march, in fact. Wilkins and Gunn waited patiently for him to leave off. He left off quite suddenly, as the door burst open and the army marched in.

"My hat!" ejaculated Grundy.

"Hallo! What do you want?" asked Wilkins, in astonishment.

"Grundy!" said Kerruish.

"Collar him!" shouted Crooke, keeping a little in the background.

"Go for him!" yelled Scrope, trying to get behind Crooke.

Grundy jumped up in wrath.

"What the dickens—" he exclaimed.

"We want you, you rotter!" said Gibbons.

Grundy glared.

"I've licked you three times this term already, Gibbons, and every one of you once or twice—"

"Exactly!" grinned Kerruish. "You're too fond of licking chaps who're not so big as you are, Grundy. We're going to give you a lesson! Mind, if you cut up rusty you'll get hurt."

"My word!"

"You fellows, Wilkins and Gunn, keep out of it," continued Kerruish. "We've got no row with you. We're going to make an example of Grundy, and teach him to keep his paws to himself. We don't like Huns in the School House."

Wilkins and Gunn grinned. They were not surprised by this visit. In fact, they wondered why a committee of licked juniors had never dealt with the great Grundy before.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" said Grundy. "And what do you think you are going to do, you asses?"

"We're going to rope you up and shut you up in the cupboard in Railton's study, and leave you there," said Kerruish coolly.

"You can stick there all the evening, and think over what a rotten Hun you are. If Railton finds you, he'll lick you, and serve you right!"

"Why, you—you—"

"That's the idea," said Scrope. "You're too hefty with your paws, Grundy. You can use your paws on Railton if you like."

Grundy gave his study-mates a look.

"Lend me a hand to kick these cheeky rotters out!" he said.

And, pausing only a moment to push back his cuffs, George Alfred Grundy

rushed at the army. Grundy never counted odds.

The next moment there was a terrific uproar in Grundy's study.

Wilkins and Gunn exchanged glances, and rose. As a matter of fact, their sympathies were not with Grundy in this instance; but they felt bound to back up their chief.

But the army were ready for them.

Wilkins and Gunn yelled, and retreated as the walking-sticks and the fire-shovel crashed on them.

They were driven into a corner of the study, and penned up there by three of the invaders, while the other five dealt with Grundy.

Crooke and Scrope backed out of the conflict; but three juniors piled on Grundy, and the big Shell fellow went down with a crash. Then, as the juniors sprawled on him, Crooke and Scrope joined in fast enough. And under five juniors, all pommeling, even the powerful Grundy had no chance.

"Leggo!" he roared. "Lemme gerrup! I'll smash you! Yow-ow! Leggo my ears, you rotters! Oh, crumbs! Yah!"

Grundy's head was being banged on the floor, and it hurt.

"Rescue!" he yelled frantically. "Tom Merry, you rotter, lend a chap a hand! Yaroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three from the doorway.

They had no intention whatever of chipping in. Grundy had brought this trouble upon himself by his lofty methods, and the chums of the Shell charitably hoped that it would do him good.

"Bai Jove! What's the wow?"

Crowds of fellows were being drawn to the spot by the terrific uproar. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came along from Study No. 6, with Blake and Herries and Digby. Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn came from the end study. Julian & Co., and Levison, Clive, and Cardew arrived at the same moment. They looked on, and roared with laughter. There was a plentiful lack of sympathy for the unfortunate Grundy.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help!"

"Bai Jove! You appeal to be gettin' it wathah in the neck, Gwunday!" remarked D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the struggling heap of juniors. "I must say that you have asked for it."

"Yah! Oh! Hah!"

"In fact, I have been thinkin' of givin' you a fearful thwashin' myself."

"Yow! Help!"

Wilkins and Gunn loyally made a rush, but they were collared, thrown down on the carpet, and sat upon. There was no help for Grundy.

"Got him!" panted Kerruish. "Quick with that cord!"

And Grundy, in spite of his struggles, was fastened up, great lengths of cord being wound round his arms and legs, and knotted, till there appeared to be nearly as much cord as there was Grundy. Then the victorious juniors rose from their victim, and Grundy of the Shell lay on the carpet and gasped.

CHAPTER 2. Peace Terms Rejected.

"GROOOOH!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Got him!"

"Yaroo!"

Grundy wriggled vainly in his bonds. "You young rotters! I'll smash you for this! Lemme go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're going to have a lesson, my pippin," said Crooke of the Shell. And he drew back his boot. Kerruish shoved him roughly aside. "None of that, you cad!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Kerruish. And Crooke dried up.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally could not allow anythin' bwutal! You are a wottah, Cwooke!"

"What on earth are you going to do with him now?" asked Blake of the Fourth.

"Shove him into Railton's study!"

"My only hat!"

"I say—" began Tom Merry.

Kerruish interrupted him.

"You dry up! We've got it all out and dried. Grundy's going to have a lesson he won't forget!"

"I quite approve of that!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "But, weally—"

"We've all stood up to him one time or another, but he's too big for us," said Kerruish. "But Grundy's going to learn that he can't bully!"

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Grundy indignantly. "I'll smash you if you call me a bully!"

"Grundy doesn't call it bullying," grinned Cardew. "He licks a fellow for his own good, don't you, Grundy?"

"Well, a lesson will do him good!" said Levison. "But suppose Railton finds him in his study?"

"That's Grundy's look out!"

"He may get a licking," said Clive.

"Let him!"

"Look here, I'll smash you!" roared Grundy, not in the least subdued yet. "I'll take you all, two at a time, and knock your heads together—Groooogh!"

Grundy's eloquence was cut off suddenly, as Kerruish jammed a duster into his wide-open mouth. Grundy spluttered and spluttered into silence. The Manx junior cheerfully jammed the duster well home, and began to wind string-round Grundy's head, to keep it in place.

Grundy could only look at him now, but his look was as eloquent as words, or more so.

"Now yank him up!" grinned Kerruish.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy was lifted out into the passage. The key was changed to the outside of the door, and the ragers having crowded out, the door was locked on Wilkins and Gunn. They had no chance of helping their great leader now. As a matter of fact, they had had enough, and were not sorry to be locked in. Cricket-stumps and a fire-shovel at close-quarters were distinctly unpleasant.

"Up with him!" said Kerruish.

"Shoulder high!" grinned Scrope.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

George Alfred Grundy was a good weight. But the eight juniors swung him up to their shoulders. Grundy struggled spasmodically as he was lifted; but his struggles ceased when he was on the juniors' shoulders. A fall from that height to the floor would not have been agreeable.

"March!" chuckled Smith minor.

And the ragers marched, with Grundy of the Shell upon their shoulders, followed by a roar of laughter.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's weally wathah too wuff on poor old Gwunday! Howevah, a fellow hasn't any wight to interfere. He weally did ask for it."

"Serve him jolly well right!" said Mellish.

"Well, it does serve him right," said Tom Merry. "But it's rather thick sticking him into Mr. Railton's study!"

"Kewwuish, deah boy—" called out Arthur Augustus.

But Kerruish did not heed. The ragers tramped down the stairs with their burden, followed by a grinning crowd.

They reached the door of Mr. Railton's study. They were well aware that the School House master had gone down to Rylcombe to meet a train, by which a visitor was coming to the school.

The wily Kerruish had, in fact, chosen his time well. An occasion when all the

Grundy was not likely to agree to those peace terms.

"Nod your head if you mean yer," said Kerruish.

Grundy did not nod his head. He shook it furiously.

"Mind, we mean business! We'll leave you here for an hour, and then come back, and ask you again," said Kerruish. "I don't suppose Railton will be back by then. But you'll take your chance of that! This is a way of putting the screw on, you know."

Another terrific glare.

"Now, last time of asking!" chuckled Boulton. "Will you do as you're told? Nod your wooden head!"

But Grundy did not nod.

"Obstinate brute!" said Crooke.

"Shove him in the cupboard!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerruish opened the cupboard door. It



Arthur Augustus surveyed the grinning faces around him.
(See Chapter 12.)

masters and prefects happened to be out of doors was rare, and could happen only by a chance. Kerruish had seized that chance to gather a number of fellows who had suffered under Grundy's heavy hand, and to deal with the high-handed, overwhelming George Alfred.

Gibbons opened the door, and the helpless captive was marched into Mr. Railton's study.

"Bai Jove! You weekless young asses!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally advise you to keep cleah of Mr. Wailton's quartahs!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Grundy was plumped upon Mr. Railton's carpet. The juniors thronged round the doorway to look on.

"Now, you rotter!" said Kerruish, grinning.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll let you off on one condition!"

Grundy glared.

"You've got to go round the School House, and beg the pardon of every fellow you've rowed with for the past week, on your knees!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

was a large wall-cupboard, and it was half-full of such things as foils, slippers, boxes, and other lumber. Kerruish pushed the lumber back to make plenty of room for Grundy. Then the unhappy Shell fellow was sat in the cupboard.

"Comfy there?" asked Kerruish.

"Gerrrrg!"

"Nod your head if you want to give in!"

Glare!

"Rightio! Good-bye for an hour!" said Kerruish.

And he closed the cupboard door.

"I suppose he won't suffocate in there?" chuckled Scrope.

"No; there's lots of air. I don't suppose he'll enjoy it, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors marched out of the study.

"I say, you're not really going to leave him there?" said Tom Merry. "I don't want to interfere, of course. Grundy's asked for a lesson. But—"

Kerruish grinned.

"That's all right! I'm going back in ten minutes, and by that time he'll give in. But he's not going to be let loose."

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till he agrees to crawl out of the study on his hands and knees, and beg pardon all round."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't quite see Grundy doing that!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! No!"

"Well, he'll stay there till he does!" said Kerruish grimly. "This is the first real chance we've had of dealing with Grundy. I think it will do him lots of good."

"But suppose Railton finds him there!" grinned Levison.

"Oh, rats! He'll agree to crawl out and come to terms before Railton gets back. Anyway, it's his business. We've stated our peace terms, and if the Hun doesn't agree to them, he can take the merry consequences!"

"Yaas, that's quite fair!"

Kerruish closed the study door. He remained on guard with Smith minor, while the crowd of grinning juniors dispersed.

He waited for ten minutes to elapse before visiting Grundy again. There was no doubt that it would seem like an hour to the unfortunate prisoner. But the ten minutes had not elapsed when the fat face of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth grinned round the corner of the passage.

"Look out, you know!" chirruped Trimble. "Railton's coming in!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Kerruish.

"He's got a chap with him," said Trimble. "They're coming in now. Better hook it. He, he, he!"

And Baggy Trimble hooked it himself promptly. Kerruish and Smith minor blinked at one another. They had not expected the Housemaster back from Rylcombe for a long time yet.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Smith minor. "What about Grundy?"

"We—we'd better yank him out—"

"Too jolly late!" gasped Smith minor, as a heavy tread was heard in the passage.

They knew the step of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House.

There was certainly no chance of yanking Grundy out. Like the gentlemen in "Macbeth," Kerruish and Smith minor stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once. They disappeared down the passage like rabbits as the Housemaster came in sight.

Mr. Railton was not alone. A tall gentleman in an overcoat was with him, and both of them paused to glance for a moment at the legs that were vanishing round the corner. Then they went on into the Housemaster's study, and the door closed on them.

CHAPTER 3.

Not Nice for Grundy!

"B AI Jove! What's the mattah, deah boys?"

"Grundy got away!"

Kerruish and Smith minor, by a roundabout course, arrived breathless in the junior Common-room. There they gasped.

"He, he, he!" cackled Baggy Trimble. "Railton's come in!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"And is Grundy still in Railton's cupboard?" exclaimed Tom Merry, aghast.

"Well, it wasn't our fault," said Kerruish. "We offered fair and square to let him loose if he'd come to terms—didn't we?"

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"He wouldn't," said Smith minor. "Of course, we didn't know Railton would be back so soon. Crooke heard him telling Linton that he was going to meet a friend who was coming down by train, and we supposed he was going to

the station. Only met him in the lane, after all, I suppose."

"Turned up like a bad penny," said Kerruish. "Well, it can't be helped. If Grundy keeps quiet, he'll be all right. I don't suppose Railton will go to the cupboard!"

The Terrible Three looked serious. The ragers had acted rather thoughtlessly, though really Grundy had only his own obstinacy to thank for what had happened. But there was no help for it now.

"If Grundy keeps quiet he's all right!" grinned Jack Blake. "But if Railton finds him—"

"Well, he can explain that he was being punished for bullying," said Trimble. "He, he, he!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Grundy won't give you chaps away," said Tom Merry. "He isn't that sort. He doesn't really mean to bully, either; it's only one of his little ways!"

"Perhaps he'll learn some new little ways after this!" grunted Smith minor.

There was no help for it; but the juniors could not help feeling uneasy as to what would happen if the Housemaster discovered George Alfred Grundy in his peculiar predicament. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wrinkled his noble brows in deep thought.

"The sillay ass ought to be rescued, deah boys," he said thoughtfully. "Suppose we get Wailton out of the study somehow while Gwunday is got away?"

"How, ass?" asked Blake politely.

"I refuse to be called an ass, Blake! Suppose you go to the end of the passage and shout 'Fiah—fiah!'"

"Eh?"

"Then Wailton and his visitah will come wushin' out, of course, and somebody can nip in and get Gwunday away!"

"You silly chump!" roared Blake.

"I wogard that expession as oppwobwious, Blake! Suppose you go to the end of the passage, Tom Mewwy, and shout 'Fiah—fiah!'"

"Catch me!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Levison, deah boy, would you care to go and shout 'Fiah!' outside Mr. Wailton's study?"

"No fear!" chuckled Levison. "I'll watch you do it if you like!"

"Ahem!" Cardew, suppose you go and—"

"Rats!" said Cardew promptly.

Ralph Reckness Cardew, the new boy in the Fourth, was known to be a reckless fellow, but he was not quite reckless enough to carry out Arthur Augustus' valuable suggestion.

"You go and shout 'Fire!'" suggested Monty Lowther. "You're the man, Gussy. And we'll come and see what Railton does to you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, poor old Gwunday ought to be rescued somehow! Pew-waps one of you fellahs had bettah go and see what is happenin'."

"By gad, I'll do that!" said Cardew. "I've got lines for Railton, and he told me to take them in this evening!"

And Cardew dashed off to No. 9 Study for his imposition, and proceeded with it at once to Mr. Railton's study. A dozen fellows watched him from a distance. They were all curious to know what was happening to Grundy.

Cardew tapped at the Housemaster's door.

"Come in!" said Mr. Railton's voice, somewhat sharply.

The Fourth-Former entered.

Mr. Railton was seated at his table, and his visitor was seated in an armchair, his overcoat lying on the table. Cardew had a fleeting glance at him. He was a young man of about twenty-seven,

of very sturdy build, with a resolute cast of face.

Cardew could not help wondering why an evidently fit man of that age was not in khaki.

"Well, Cardew?" rapped out Mr. Railton.

"My lines, sir," said Cardew meekly, laying the imposition on the table.

"Excuse me a moment, Philip."

"Certainly, my dear fellow," said the visitor, in a deep, pleasant voice.

Mr. Railton glanced hastily at the impot.

"Very well; you may go, Cardew," he said. "Kindly let it be known that I am not to be interrupted again!"

"Yes, sir," said Cardew. "You told me to bring the lines this evening, sir."

"Yes, yes; you may go!"

The Housemaster was evidently anxious to get rid of the junior. Cardew quitted the study, and went down the passage, wondering a little. Mr. Railton was usually good-tempered, and kindness itself to the juniors, but his temper was not quite so good as usual this evening. His manner had been almost snappish.

"Well?" said a dozen fellows, as Cardew joined the crowd at the end of the passage.

The new junior grinned.

"No sign of Grundy there," he said.

"The cupboard door's shut, and Railton can't know he's there!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And Railton says he's not to be interrupted again. Seems to be rather snappy, too," said Cardew. "His visitor ought to be in khaki, I should say, and I fancy Railton doesn't like anybody to see that he isn't!"

"What rot!" said Manners. "Chap can't keep out of khaki at his own sweet will in these days!"

"Exempted, perhaps," said Tom Merry. "May be on important Government work. I'm jolly sure Railton wouldn't be friendly with a shirker!"

"Wathah not!"

"I say, it's a bit queer, though," said Baggy Trimble. "I saw him as he came in—a big chap, quite twenty-five! Ought to be a soldier, and no mistake! What is his name? Anybody know?"

"Railton called him Philip," said Cardew.

"Must be a relation, if he calls him by his Christian name," said Trimble. "Fancy old Railton having a relation who's keeping out of the Army now!"

"Wats! You are a sillay ass, Twimble!"

"Yes, shut up, Trimble!" snapped Tom Merry. "You don't know anything about it, so don't let your silly chin wag so much! You chaps coming to do your prep?"

And the crowd of juniors dispersed.

Baggy Trimble did not follow them, however. His fat face had an eager expression, and his round eyes glistened. Baggy Trimble's besetting sin was curiosity.

It was not the slightest business of his who Mr. Railton's visitor might be, or why the young man was not in khaki; but Trimble felt an irresistible yearning to know something about it.

Baggy had no scruples about obtaining information by any means that offered. Baggy was quite a Prussian in some respects; and he knew that the masters, with the exception of Mr. Railton himself, were out. Baggy wanted to know, and Baggy meant to know. He waited till all the fellows had cleared off, and then he tiptoed into the passage, and reached up to the switch and turned off the corridor light.

The passage was quite dark from end to end at once. Only from under Mr. Railton's door came a glimmer of light.

Baggy chuckled softly, and tiptoed down the passage towards the glimmer of light under the door.

CHAPTER 4.

The "Conscientious Objector."

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY, meanwhile, was not enjoying himself.

Grundy had felt quite assured that the raggers did not really mean to leave him fastened up in the study cupboard till the Housemaster came home. Rather than have risked being found in that ridiculous plight by the Housemaster, he might even have acceded to Kerruish & Co.'s terms of peace. But the unexpected return of Mr. Railton had disconcerted the plans of the raggers, and disconcerted Grundy.

The Shell fellow groaned in spirit as he heard the two men enter the study, and recognised Mr. Railton's voice.

He knew that the Housemaster had a visitor, though he could not see the man; the cupboard door was closed and latched.

How long were they likely to stay?

Grundy wondered.

Probably the Housemaster would not come to the cupboard, especially as he had a visitor. But the prospect of being a prisoner there, perhaps for hours, worried Grundy extremely.

He could not speak—he was too securely gagged—he could not call out to be released, even if he wanted to. He could not move without danger of bringing down upon him the lumber the raggers had hastily shoved back to make room for him. Grundy wondered whether he had better bump his feet on the door to attract the Housemaster's attention. But he shrank from that. Mr. Railton would certainly have been astounded to find him there, and Grundy's palms tingled in anticipation. Certainly, Grundy wasn't to blame—from his own point of view, at least. But if the whole story came out, very likely the Housemaster would think he had been bullying. More than once already Grundy had found that Mr. Railton's opinion did not agree with his own as to what was and what was not bullying. Grundy felt bitterly that he was misunderstood, and that it would not do to risk still further misunderstanding.

But that was not the worst. Worst of all was the humiliation of being discovered, trussed up like a turkey, and gagged with a duster. Grundy felt as if he would never get over that, if Mr. Railton did find him—him, George Alfred Grundy—in that ridiculous and humiliating situation! Grundy valiantly resolved to stick it out, hoping that the Housemaster would soon go.

The voices in the study were quite audible in the cupboard, but Grundy was not listening. He was too busily occupied with his own painful thoughts, and with the pins and needles that were creeping along his limbs. It was not till Cardew came into the study that he began to take note. He heard the junior's voice, and heard the door close after him. Before that, Mr. Railton had been speaking about tea, and he went on:

"You must have some tea, with me, Philip."

Grundy suppressed a groan as he heard that. If "Philip"—whoever Philip was—was going to stay to tea, Grundy felt that the game was up. Before tea was over the pins and needles would be too much for him. But, to his relief, the deep voice of the visitor replied:

"Really, no. I am not going to keep you long. I must take the next train, or I shall not get back to London to-night. I had some sandwiches on the train. Now—"

"Then there isn't much time to spare," said Mr. Railton, with a glance at the clock on the mantelpiece. "We had better get to business."

The Shell fellow in the cupboard was glad to hear it. The sooner they got to business, and got the business over, the better Grundy would like it. He was worried by another thought, too. He couldn't help hearing what was said, and he hoped sincerely they would not begin to discuss private affairs. Grundy had his faults—in fact, their name was legion—but he was incapable of meanness.

"You told me in your letter," Mr. Railton went on, "that you wished to ask my counsel. Though there has been great difference of opinion between us, Philip, with regard to the war, you know that I am always your friend as well as your cousin, and you can depend upon me to advise you to the best of my ability."

So it was only going to be "war jaw." Grundy thought to himself. He thought it odd that a man should come down from London for a "war jaw" with a Housemaster at St. Jim's.

There was a long pause.

Philip Railton's brows were knitted, and he stared into the fire for some minutes. The Housemaster watched him without speaking.

It was Mr. Railton who broke the silence.

"Does this mean, Phil, that your views have undergone a change?"

Philip Railton looked up.

"It does!" he said.

"I am glad to hear it."

"But—there is a but—"

"Go on, my dear fellow," said the Housemaster cordially.

"When the war broke out, we took different views," said Philip quietly. "You approved of it with your whole heart, and you joined up. I did not approve of it, and I did not join. I was given a white feather on a dozen occasions. Only you, I think, still believed that I was not a coward." His face flushed. "You, at least, did me that justice, Victor."

"The Railtons are not cowards," said the Housemaster quietly. "They may be cranks—excuse me—but not cowards!"

"Then came conscription," said the other. "Before that time, you had come home wounded, and discharged from the Army. I had not joined. But under the new law, I was bound to join. But the Act of Parliament specially exempted all conscientious objectors. I objected—conscientiously. Right or wrong, I did not believe in the war. I believed that two great nations, who asked nothing better than to live in friendship, and peace, had been hurled at one another's throats by the stupidity of politicians on both sides, and that a patriot's duty was to work for peace. The hideous outrages of the Prussians did not shake my opinion. They were the work of the Prussian Government—the vilest government that ever existed among men outside Turkey—a government that oppressed Germany as it sought to oppress others. I deemed it my duty to resist, with all my strength, the introduction of militarism into England; and—and, in spite of misgivings that I could not wholly repress, I kept on in the same way."

"I knew that you must have had misgivings, Phil."

"I had. But—but I thought that I was right, and I kept on. Under the Act, I obtained exemption as a conscientious objector. I faced the storm of contempt that followed. It was not easy to face. It would have been easier to face the poison gas, or the most devilish contrivances of the Prussians!"

"I agree with you."

"Needless to say, I was not one of the idiots who object to all warfare under any circumstances, even if attacked by cannibals," said Philip. "There are such men; though what they are doing outside lunatic asylums, I do not know. It was between two civilised nations I objected to. I believed it was brought about for the sake of war-profits in both countries, to enable the rich to grow richer while the poor killed one another by the thousand. There have been such wars, old man!"

Mr. Railton was silent.

"How was I to know this was not another of them, especially when I could not help observing—at that time—that even the Government seemed hardly in earnest in the war? German interests were protected; the blockade was not enforced with proper strictness; Germans swarmed in the country; even many of the fiercest of the war-party declared that the war was not being seriously waged. You know it."

"I know it; it was so then," said Mr. Railton. "It is not so now."

"I could only judge by what I saw. I saw war-profits piling up to undreamed-of sums, while men were taken forcibly to fight for a shilling a day. I saw the most patriotic papers denouncing the Government for slackness. And I stood out for my opinions. But—but—"

"And what caused the change? For there has been a change," said the Housemaster.

"There has been a change," said Philip Railton. "It came upon my mind—gradually at first, then with greater force—that there was more in this terrible struggle than I had understood. I realised that I had been blind. My attention had been fixed upon trifles that hardly affected the great problem itself. It came upon me at last what the struggle really was—a struggle to the death between freedom and slavery—between nations that stand for liberty, and nations that stand for despotism. That, even for the sake of Germany itself, it is an honest man's duty to work his hardest to overthrow Prussia. That Prussia stands for despotism, slavery, cruelty, ignorance, and darkness—for everything the rest of the world has struggled out of for many centuries. That a Prussian victory would mean stopping the clock of civilisation."

"As I told you at the beginning, Philip," said Mr. Railton, with a slight smile.

"I could not see it then. But—" Philip Railton drew a deep breath—"I do see it now, Victor. And—and—" He broke off.

"I am glad, Phil. And now—" said the Housemaster gently.

"And now, what can I do?" said Philip. "You know what I am—an exempted conscientious objector. I have declared my opinions in public; I have suffered for them. Can I now throw over all I have said—eat my own words—and take my place with the men in the firing-line? Will not it be said that I have been shamed into it; that I have played the hypocrite to save my own skin, but that scorn and contempt have driven me at last to do my duty?" His face was crimson. "You will not think so, Victor. But—but the rest—"

"Many may think so," said Mr. Railton quietly. "But, now that you see the truth, you are bound to stand by the truth, whatever others may say. You faced scorn and misunderstanding once for your honest opinion; you must face it again, now that you have seen the light. I understand you. Your present friends and associates, the Pacifists, will regard you as a deserter. They will

believe that you have yielded to pressure from cowardice—from want of strength of character. It will be bitter enough, if you respect them; but you have to face it."

The young man was silent.

"You came to ask my counsel," said the Housemaster. "That is my counsel, act according to your conscience. You did so when it led you astray; you must do so now that it leads you aright."

"To admit," muttered Philip, "that I have been a fool, if not worse—that I have persuaded others to do what I now acknowledge to be wrong," though Heaven knows I was sincere—"

"You will be sincere still," said Mr. Railton. "You will return to London, Phil, and you will apply for your certificate of exemption to be cancelled; you will join up, and Heaven speed you!"

Philip smiled faintly.

"I knew what your advice would be," he said. "I need not have asked it. But—but I was anxious to set myself right with you. I should not like you to think that mere mockery and sneers have led me to change my views. But for that mockery, those sneers, I think I should have changed sooner. But they roused obstinacy, as persecution always does, and the change came slowly. But you believe me, Victor—you believe that I was sincere then, and that I am sincere now?"

"I know it," said the Housemaster; "and I have still hope that other men of your way of thinking will come to the same conclusion in the long run, and that in the final struggle every man of British blood will be found shoulder to shoulder against the enemy. And your example may do much good, Phil; it may influence others to a better way of thinking."

There was a long silence in the study.

Philip Railton rose to his feet at last.

"You are right," he said. "I wish I had taken your advice in the beginning, Victor. But now, at least, I can make up for lost time. The struggle is not yet over, and there is work for a man to do out there. And those who called me coward and shirker shall see that I do not fear to face death!"

The Housemaster grasped his hand.

"I felt sure that this would come," he said. "You have made me a happy man, Phil! When you have joined up, you will get leave, and you will come and see me again."

Philip Railton smiled.

"You would like to see me in khaki," he said.

"I admit it," Mr. Railton smiled, too. "You might have been my comrade out there, Phil. How glad I should have been to have you! But when the war is over we shall often fight old battles over again in this study, I hope. You—" The Housemaster broke off suddenly. "What is that?"

From the study cupboard came a sudden crash. Grundy of the Shell had been unable to stand the pins and needles any longer. He had given a desperate wriggle, which had brought a pair of foils and two or three boxes tumbling over on him.

Mr. Railton swung round to the cupboard, and threw open the door. His eyes almost started from their sockets at the sight of Grundy of the Shell.

CHAPTER 5.

A Secret for Grundy.

"GRUNDY!"

"Mummmmmmm!"

"What on earth—" exclaimed Philip Railton, in astonishment.

The Housemaster stooped, grasped the THE GEN LIBRARY—No. 478.

Shell fellow by the shoulder, and dragged him out into the study.

"A—a boy?" ejaculated the visitor.

"What is the matter? He is tied—"

"Some absurd joke of the juniors, I suppose," said Mr. Railton, with a brow like thunder.

It flashed into the Housemaster's mind at once that the hidden junior must have heard all that had been said in the study. His cheeks burned at the thought.

Mr. Railton knew his cousin well. They had been chums from childhood. He had known him well enough to make allowances for his peculiar opinions. But he knew that others would not make such allowances. At St. Jim's not a word had been breathed on the subject. The Housemaster, who had faced German guns and poison-gas without a tremor, could not face the derision that would follow the knowledge that his near relation was a "conscientious objector." For the deluded young man his friendship had never faltered; but he had said no word—he could not. And now a junior knew! In an hour the story would be over the whole school, with endless mockery to ensue!

Mr. Railton knew that Philip was no coward and no shirker. Nobody else knew it. By everyone else he would be set down as a funk—a miserable wretch who chose safety while his fellow-countrymen faced death—as one who brought shame upon all of his name and blood. Fellows who had brothers, uncles, and fathers in the firing-line were not likely to make nice distinctions. They were not likely to understand the shades of conscience that kept a man in his safe home, whilst others went out to wounds and death.

It would be the talk of the school.

The Housemaster's brow was black as he looked down at the unhappy Grundy. Philip understood his look and his thoughts, and his cheeks burned.

Mr. Railton stooped, and dragged the string and the duster away, and Grundy recovered the use of his voice.

"Boy, what does this mean?"

"Groogh!"

"Grundy!"

"Yow-ow!"

The Housemaster opened a penknife, and cut through the cords. His strong hand jerked the burly Shell fellow to his feet.

Grundy wriggled painfully. The pins and needles were still excruciatingly painful.

"How did you come there?" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Answer me, Grundy!"

"Yoop! I was shoved there, sir. Yow-ow!"

"He can hardly have gone there of his own accord," remarked Philip.

"I suppose not. It is what the juniors call a rag, I believe," said the Housemaster. "Phil, will you wait for me while I deal with this boy? I will join you in a few minutes."

"Certainly."

Philip Railton took his coat and hat, and left the study. All was darkness without. But he walked down the dark corridor towards the glimmer of light in the hall.

Mr. Railton closed the door, and then fixed his eyes sternly upon the wriggling Grundy.

"Grundy!"

"Yow! Yes, sir. Ugh!"

"Tell me how you came to be hidden in my study."

"Yow-ow! I was shoved in there by a gang of rotters, sir—yow-ow! I'll—I'll smash 'em—ahem—I mean—"

"Some juniors you have been bullying. I suppose?"

"Oh, no, sir! I'm not a bully! Chaps I'd licked, that's all."

"I have had to speak to you before about bullying, Grundy!"

"I assure you, sir—"

"Their names?"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"You hear me, Grundy?"

"Grooh! I—I can't give you their names, sir," mumbled Grundy. "You see, sir, the fellows would call that sneaking."

He rubbed his wrists and mumbled.

"Grundy," said the Housemaster, changing the subject, "while you were in that cupboard you must have heard what was said in the study."

"Most of it, sir. Ow-yow!"

"You have listened?"

"How could I help it, sir?" said Grundy indignantly. "I hope you don't think I'd listen if I could help it!"

"You should have let me know you were there."

"I didn't want a row, sir."

"Ahem! I suppose not. But it appears, Grundy, that you have heard what my cousin has told me."

"I couldn't help it, sir. I didn't want to. Blessed if I'd have ever thought you had such a rotten cousin, sir!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, sir—" Grundy stammered helplessly.

"You are aware, Grundy," said Mr. Railton, compressing his lips, "that my cousin is what is called 'a conscientious objector.'"

"Yow! Yes. Ow!"

"You must also be aware that I do not wish the matter to become the talk of the school?"

Grundy grinned.

"Yes, rather, sir. There'd be a howl about it, I can tell you. The fellows would make a fuss!"

"Can I rely upon your discretion, Grundy?"

"Eh? Ow!"

"You have heard what was not intended for your ears, Grundy. Will you give me your solemn word of honour not to repeat a single word of it, and not to mention my cousin or his affairs in the school?"

Grundy nodded at once.

"Certainly, sir! I never meant to. I know what I'd feel like if it got out that I had a relation like that. Not that I have, of course. If my cousin was a conscientious objector, I know I'd jolly well whop him!"

"You give me your word, Grundy?"

"On my honour, sir," said George Alfred, with a great deal of dignity.

The Housemaster looked at him hard. He knew that Grundy was every kind of a duffer, and that he was given to high-handed dealings with other fellows, which only Grundy himself could distinguish from bullying. But Grundy was an honourable fellow. He could keep his word. His faults were faults of the head, not of the heart.

"I will trust you, Grundy," said Mr. Railton at last. "I rely upon your promise, and I will, therefore, say nothing more about this ridiculous escapade. You may go."

"Thank you, sir," said Grundy.

And he went—promptly. He was glad enough to escape so cheaply.

Mr. Railton stood for some moments with knitted brows, in deep and not pleasant thought. Then he left the study. He uttered a slight exclamation as he found that the light was out, and groped for the switch and turned it on. Then he joined his cousin in the Hall.

From the stairs Baggy Trimble of the Fourth watched him with a curious expression upon his fat face. Baggy Trimble's fat ear at the keyhole had

placed him in possession of a thrilling secret, and his precaution in turning out the light had enabled him to scuttle away unseen. Baggy Trimble was bursting with his knowledge. But one painful thought was in Baggy's mind, that if the Housemaster should discover that Baggy had listened at his keyhole, Baggy's punishment would be of the most terrific character. That was a drawback. And Baggy Trimble resisted his strong inclination to rush into the junior Common-room and impart the wonderful information to half the School House at one fell swoop!

CHAPTER 6.

Trouble for Trimble!

"O H! Ow! Yow!" Grundy was mumbling to himself as he came upstairs. Pins and needles were still troubling his burly limbs to some extent. Trimble grinned at him from the landing. "Did Railton lick you?" he chuckled. Grundy stopped and stared at him. "You were one of them!" he snapped. "No; I wasn't!" Trimble backed away in alarm. "Not at all, Grundy! I—I hadn't anything to do with it, you know. Yaroooh!"

Grundy's heavy grasp was upon him. "You were grinning when they raked me downstairs!" he snorted. "I—I wasn't! Yow-ow! So was Tom Merry, then. Go and talk to Tom Merry! Yooop!"

"I'll talk to you first!" said Grundy grimly. And he rushed Baggy Trimble along the Shell passage to his study. "I've got a cricket-stump for you!" "Yow-ow! Help! Rescue!" roared Trimble.

Grundy found his study door locked, and the key on the outside. He unlocked the door, and hurled it open. Wilkins and Gunn were finishing their prep, and they looked up, manfully subduing their smiles.

"Oh, here you are, Grundy!" said Wilkins cheerfully. "We've been locked in, you know."

"What are you going to do with Trimble?" asked Gunn, in astonishment. "Lick him!" snorted Grundy.

"I say, Grundy—" "Yow-ow! Leggo!" roared Baggy Trimble. "Yaroooh! Keep that stump away, you rotter! Yow-ow! Rescue!" Whack, whack, whack!

"I say, what has Trimble done?" gasped Wilkins.

"He was cackling when those rotters were ragging me," said Grundy indignantly.

"Oh, my hat! Are you going to lick everybody who was cackling?" ejaculated Wilkins.

"Certainly!"

"You'll have your hands full," grinned Gunn. "You'd better chuck it, Grundy, old man. Do you want to be stuffed into Railton's cupboard again?"

"Yaroooh! Help! Yooop!" roared the unfortunate Baggy, as the cricket-stump played on his fat person.

"Hallo, slaughter going on?" asked Tom Merry, looking into the study with Manners and Lowther. "Here, chuck that, Grundy!"

"Rats!" snapped Grundy.

"Let Trimble alone at once!" exclaimed the captain of the Shell, frowning.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Whack, whack, whack!"

Tom Merry ran into the study, grasped Grundy by the shoulders, and dragged him away from Trimble. Baggy sat on the carpet and roared.

"Let go, you cheeky rotter!" shouted Grundy wrathfully.

"Lend a hand here, you fellows," said Tom quietly.

Manners and Lowther grinned, and lent a hand. Grundy was bumped on the floor, and Tom Merry picked up the stump.

"Now, Grundy, there's going to be an end to your bullying," he said.

"Are you calling me a bully, you cheeky cad?" bellowed Grundy. "I'll lick you for that!"

"Are you going to chuck it?"

"No, I'm not!"

"Here, Trimble! Hallo, he's gone."

Baggy Trimble had whipped out of the study while the truculent Shell fellow was struggling with the Terrible Three.

"Never mind, I'll do it. You're going to have the same that you gave Trimble, Grundy!"

"You—you—you—"

"Roll him over!"

Grundy was rolled over by Manners and Lowther. Wilkins and Gunn looked on, grinning. They felt that it was about time Grundy had a lesson.

Tom Merry handled the stump as vigorously as Grundy had handled it a few minutes before. The dust rose from Grundy's garments, and loud yells from George Alfred himself. Tom Merry, with great calmness and precision, laid on a dozen of the best.

Grundy's yells drew a crowd round the study doorway. There was a howl of laughter mingling with the anguished howls of Grundy.

"Bai Jove! What a carpet-beat you would make, Tom Mewwy!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "Does it hurt, Gwunday?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going to stop bullying, Grundy?"

"I'm not bullying anybody, am I? I'm going to lick all those chaps who ragged me, of course!"

"Whack, whack, whack, whack!"

"Yaroooh! Help! Oh, crumbs!"

"What's your answer now?"

"Yaroooh!"

"Keep it up!" grinned Levison.

"Grundy's bags won't want dusting for a long time after this."

"Rescue!" howled Grundy. "Wilkins—Gunny—"

"Better make it pax," sawned Wilkins.

"It's your own funeral, Grundy! You will ask for these things, you know. Why couldn't you let Trimble alone?"

"I'll pulverise him! I'll— Yow-ow-owwoop! Leave off, you beast!"

"Are you going to keep the peace, then?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yow! No. Wow!"

Whack, whack, whack!

The captain of the Shell was in deadly earnest. Whether Grundy's peculiar line of conduct was bullying or not, there had been enough of it, in Tom Merry's opinion; and he was making his opinion felt. The crowd of juniors round the doorway grinned approval. It was high time that Grundy was brought to his senses; and he was being brought now.

"Oh, oh! Ah! Yah!" gasped Grundy. "Will you leave off, you beast? I—I'll do anything you like! Yow-ow! I won't lick the cads! Yaroooh!"

"Good enough!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

He pitched the stump into a corner of the study.

"Oh, crikey!" groaned Grundy. "Oh, dear! I'll smash you—"

"What!"

"I—I mean I won't smash you!"

gasped Grundy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've got to keep the peace," said Tom Merry. "You're too quarrelsome, Grundy. It's beastly bullying to tackle a chap who can't stand up to you; and a chap who can stand up to you doesn't

want a fight on his hands every other day. See? You're a Prussian, and Prussians have to be squashed!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Yaas, wathah! I trust this will be a warnin' to you, Gwundy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy seriously.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Manners and Lowther released the great man. The great man sat up and gasped. The Terrible Three left the study grinning. Grundy groaned and gasped and mumbled, and Wilkins and Gunn grinned. Like Arthur Augustus, they hoped it would be a lesson to Grundy. Grundy's habit of introducing a big fist into every discussion rather got on his study-mates' nerves.

Tom Merry looked into Trimble's study. Melish was there, at his prep. But Baggy Trimble was not thinking of prep yet. He was bemoaning his injuries. "Cheero!" said Tom. "We've licked Grundy, and he's going to leave you alone, Trimble!"

"Wow-wow!" said Trimble. "I'll make him sit up, the beast! I know a way, too! I'll make him squirm!"

"He's squirmed already," said Tom.

"I'll make him squirm a bit more before I've done with him!" said Baggy Trimble savagely.

Tom Merry laughed, and turned away. He did not think that Baggy Trimble was likely to be able to make George Alfred Grundy squirm. It was because of this that Tom had taken the matter into his own hands. But the captain of the Shell did not know the thoughts that were working in the cunning brain of Baggy Trimble.

CHAPTER 7.

The Slander.

"RATS!" "Bosh!" "I don't believe a word of it!"

"Well, I don't myself," said Cardew. "But that's what the fellows are saying."

"Wubbish!"

"It can't be true!" said Jack Blake.

"It's all piffle. Where did you hear it, Cardew?"

"I had it from Smith minor."

"Where's Smithy?"

"Here I am," said Smith minor. "I don't say I believe it, but it seems to be all over the place."

"I regard it as vewy wewpwehensible of you to assist in spewadin' such wotten weports, Smith," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Oh, rats!" said Smith minor cheerfully.

"Lots of fellows are saying so," said Levison. "I've heard it from two or three myself. I don't know whether there's anything in it."

"There is certainly nothin' in it, Levison."

"There's no smoke without fire, you know," remarked Crooke of the Shell, with a sneer.

"Wubbish!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came into the Common-room, and found the somewhat excited discussion in full swing. They came over to the group of juniors. Monty Lowther made a soothing gesture.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "Tell your Uncle Monty all about it."

"Weally, Lowthah!"

"It's only a yarn about Railton," said Levison. "Nobody seems to know how it started. The yarn is that he's got a cousin a conscientious objector—a chap who's too proud to fight."

"What rot!" said Tom Merry at once.

"Well, it does sound like rot," agreed

Levison. "But somebody says that it was that chap who came to see him yesterday. His name's given, too!"

"I don't see how anybody could know his name," said Tom Merry.

"Well, I heard Railton speak to him as Philip," said Cardew. "I don't know his other name. But this yarn is that his name is Philip Railton, and he's a cousin of old Railton."

"Lots of the fellows noticed that he's a young fellow who ought to be in khaki," said Herries. "I thought of that myself. But I never thought a cousin of Railton's could be a conscientious objector!"

"He couldn't be!" said Digby. "It's not sense."

"The man might have a thousand reasons for not being in khaki," said Tom Merry, frowning. "He looks healthy enough, but he might have heart disease, or something. Lots of people with heart disease look quite healthy, though they might drop down dead if they were pushed."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Don't think I'm saying there's anything in it," said Levison hastily. "But the point isn't quite that—tain't only that the chap looks fit to serve. The yarn is that he told Railton he was a conscientious objector."

"Well, that's rot on the face of it," said Tom. "Nobody but Railton would know that. And Railton hasn't started the yarn, I suppose?"

"Somebody must have overheard, of course, if that's the case."

"Then whoever has started the yarn confesses that he's a sneaking eavesdropper, in the first place. A chap like that would be a liar, too!"

"Yaas, wathah! I quite agree with you, Tom Merry. Besides, how could anybody have heard the chap talkin' to Railton when they were shut up in the study?"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Crooke.

All eyes turned on Gerald Crooke.

"Well, what do you know about it?" asked Blake.

"Grundy!"

"Eh? What about Grundy?"

"Grundy was in Railton's study all the time!" exclaimed Crooke excitedly. "He must have heard every word they said."

"Oh!"

"Great Scott!"

There was a silence. That thought had not occurred to the juniors before, but it was obvious enough now that Crooke pointed it out. Grundy certainly must be in full possession of everything that had been discussed between Mr. Railton and his visitor.

"But it's all rot!" said Tom Merry uneasily, at last. "Grundy isn't the chap to start a yarn like that. He's a silly ass, but he's not a rotter, and that would be a rotten thing to do!"

"He wouldn't tell lies," said Wilkins loyally. "And that yarn about Railton is a lie. We know Railton went out and got winged fighting the Huns. As if his cousin could be a sneaking ehirker!"

"Yaas. It's uttah vot!"

"But the yarn's going round the school," said Racke of the Shell, with a grin. "I heard it from Clampe, over in the New House. Figgins & Co. have been talking about it, too. I heard Figgins say Trimble had mentioned it to him, and he dotted Trimble on the nose for it."

"Where's Grundy?" said Tom Merry abruptly. "The yarn is all rot. And as Grundy happened to be in the study at the time, he can prove it's rot!"

"Yaas. Grundy will be able to give evidence, as it happens," said Arthur Augustus, with much satisfaction. "That

will knock the wotten yarn on the head. It would hurt old Railton feahfully if he came to hear of it."

"I'll jolly soon fetch Grundy," said Wilkins.

And he left the Common-room, leaving the juniors in excited discussion.

Nobody seemed to know how the story had started. Every fellow who heard it had heard it from somebody else, who apparently had heard it from somebody else. It was the most unpleasant kind of scandal that could have been started in the House. Mr. Railton was immensely popular with everybody but slackers like Racke and Crooke and Trimble. "Old Railton" had gone out as a private to fight the Huns, and had come home wounded with the rank of sergeant. And all St. Jim's gloried in Sergeant Railton. That he had a near relation, bearing his name, who had joined the ranks of the "conscientious objectors" was simply incredible; it was an insult to the Housemaster and to the House. And Tom Merry & Co. regarded it as quite fortunate that, owing to Keruish's rag the previous evening, Grundy of the Shell would be able to give evidence that would knock the unpleasant libel right on the head.

Grundy came in with Wilkins, looking somewhat sourly. His temper had not quite recovered from the events of the previous evening.

"Gwundy, deah boy—" began Arthur Augustus.

"Have you heard the yarn about Railton?" asked Tom Merry ruthlessly, interrupting the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh, bother Railton!" grunted Grundy.

"Weally, Gwundy—"

"There's a yarn about our Housemaster," said Tom Merry. "Somebody says that the chap who came to see him last night is his cousin, and a conscientious objector, and that he told Railton so."

Grundy started.

"Of course, we know it's a rotten lie," said Tom. "But as you must have heard them jawing in the study, you can tell us for certain, and nip it in the bud—see?"

"Yaas, wathah! Of course, Gwunday, undah ordinawy cires it would be wotten to wepeat what you may have heard in Railton's study, but—"

"We don't want you to repeat anything, Grundy, and we shouldn't listen to you if you did," said Sidney Clive. "We only want you to say out plain that that isn't true!"

"Yaas; that's what I was goin' to say when you intewwupted me, Clive."

"Well, Grundy?"

George Alfred Grundy stood silent, his cheeks reddening. The eyes of all the juniors were upon him, and those eyes were very curious.

"Speak up, old scout!" said Wilkins. "You know the facts, and you can knock this rotten slander on the head!"

"Go it, Grundy!"

"Why don't you speak?" exclaimed Tom Merry impatiently. "You know that Railton's cousin, if it was his cousin, never told Railton that he was a conscientious objector, as you were in the study. You're bound to say so, to stop this sneaking libel!"

"Perhaps Grundy likes conscientious objectors!" sneered Crooke.

Grundy glared.

"If I had one in my family, I'd wring his neck!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, then, you can see how rotten it is for such a yarn to be started about Railton," said Tom Merry. "You can give it the kybosh at once!"

"I—I can't!"

"Why can't you?"

Grundy did not speak. His rugged face was very red.

A silence fell upon the juniors.

"My only hat!" said Crooke at last. "You don't mean to say it's true, Grundy—that the chap really was a conscientious objector?"

"I don't mean to say anything!" growled Grundy.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't!"

"Look here, Grundy," said Tom Merry quietly, "you ought to speak out, for Railton's sake. You know what he'll feel like if the yarn gets to his ears, and it's bound to, in the long run, with all the fellows burbling about it. Railton's a splendid chap—he was crooked in the trenches standing by the old flag—and it's not fair on him. You can nip this rotten yarn in the bud with one word. Why don't you do it?"

Grundy did not answer.

"Then it's true," said Racke, with a sneering laugh. "If it wasn't true, Grundy would say so at once."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Is it true, Grundy?"

No reply.

"There's another thing, Grundy," said Tom. "This yarn was started by somebody. If it's true, only one fellow can know it—the fellow who was hidden in Railton's study and heard what was said. Did you begin the yarn, then?"

Grundy clenched his fists, and his eyes blazed.

"Why, you rotter—"

"Easy does it!" said Tom. "I don't say you did, and I don't think you did; but if you don't knock the yarn on the head, it will look—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Why won't you say that the yarn isn't true, then?"

"I—I've got my reasons!" stammered Grundy.

"Give us your reasons, then!" said Blake.

"I can't!"

"Why can't you?" demanded a dozen voices.

"Because I can't!" growled Grundy. "I—I—I can't explain very well; but, look here, you know Railton found me in the study. I heard them talking. He asked me to promise not to repeat what I'd heard—about their private affairs. I shouldn't have repeated it anyway, of course. But a promise is a promise. I'm not going to say a single word about what I happened to hear in Railton's study."

"Yaas, that is quite wight," said D'Arcy.

"Yes, right enough!" agreed Tom Merry. "Not a word about what you heard. But you heard all that was said?"

"Yes."

"Then you can say that you didn't hear what you didn't hear?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"That will be all right, then. You can say that you didn't hear Railton's cousin tell Railton that he was a conscientious objector."

The crimson in Grundy's face grew deeper, but he did not speak. The juniors were exchanging very curious glances now.

"Do speak up, old scout!" urged Gunn anxiously. "Nobody wants to know a word of what you did hear, you know. But you can say what you didn't hear."

"That's all I'm asking," said Tom.

"I'm not going to say anything!" growled Grundy.

And he turned, and strode out of the Common-room.

CHAPTER 8. Rough on Railton.

"MY hat!" A buzz followed George Alfred Grundy's sudden departure. His chums, Wilkins and Gunn, looked puzzled and dismayed. Racke and Crooke and Trimble exchanged grins. But the other fellows were serious enough.

Tom Merry's face was very sombre. Grundy's inexplicable conduct could only give one impression. Grundy had heard Philip Railton mention that he was a conscientious objector. He could not say that he didn't hear it, because he did hear it—he could not deny it, because it was true.

It was true! Railton—old Railton, who had thrown up everything to go and fight the Huns, who had been received with wild enthusiasm when he came home from the War—had a cousin, of his own name, who was a—what? To the juniors, not much given to reflecting upon mixed motives, a "conscientious objector" meant a funk, a shirker, a fellow who stayed at home and left his fighting to others. And old Railton's cousin was that.

Even in Tom Merry's mind there could be no doubt of it. Grundy's silence could only mean that.

"Bai Jove, it's wotten," said Arthur Augustus slowly.

"It's true!" grinned Crooke. "Fancy old Railton, with his giddy uproarious patriotism, and a merry conscientious objector in the family!" chuckled Racke. "Disgrace to the school, I call it!"

Jack Blake gave the heir of Messrs. Racke & Hacke a savage look. The heir of unlimited war profits was not the fellow to pass judgment, anyway.

"Well, even a conscientious objector is better than a war-profitteer!" growled Blake. "He doesn't make any money out of the war, anyway!"

"Racke would be down on 'em, of course!" smiled Monty Lowther. "If everybody was a conscientious objector, what would Messrs. Racke & Hacke do for a living? They'd have to take to honest work. Perish the thought!"

"It's rotten!" said Tom Merry, unheeding Monty's pleasantry. "But look here, you fellows, it's nothing against old Railton."

"Wathah not!"

"A chap can't help what his cousin is," said Tom. "Look at Talbot, for example—Crooke's his cousin, and Talbot can't help it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crooke scowled furiously. He was not at all pleased by that illustration.

"Yaas, that wemark is vewy much to the point," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust that nobody will be ass enough to think worse of old Wailton because his cousin is wathah a vottah."

"Besides, the chap may have all sorts of motives," said Tom Merry hesitatingly. "May be a bit potty, or a crank, you know. Anyway, it's nothing against Railton, and the best thing to do is to forget all about it, and let it drop. It would hurt Railton no end if he knew we all knew."

"I don't see it," said Crooke coolly. "Railton's down on a chap if he catches him smoking a cigarette—he's caned me for it. I don't see why I should keep his rotten secrets."

"Why, you rotter—"

"He ought to resign from here!" said Crooke loftily. "I've got an uncle out there fighting the Huns, and I don't like shirkers!"

"Is old Railton a shirker, you cad?"

"I don't say he is, but his cousin is, and that reflects on him, and on us, too, as he's our Housemaster. I'm not going to keep it quiet for one!"

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

Crooke backed away hastily, and left the Common-room, with Racke and Trimble. Tom's hands clenched, but he unclenched them again. It was not much use giving Crooke a thick ear. That would not stop the talk.

"It seems that the yarn's true, after all," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "It's true, but nobody had a right to start it, all the same! Who started it? We ought to rag the cad who did that!"

"Who could have started it?" said Tom Merry bitterly. "Only Grundy can have known what was said in Railton's study last night."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Grundy, of course!" said Clive.

"I don't believe it!" said Wilkins stoutly. "Grundy isn't that kind of chap. He says himself he promised Railton not to say a word about what they were talking of."

"Then how did the yarn get out?" asked Gore.

"Blessed if I know!"

"Bai Jove! It must have been Gwunday, and, accordin' to his own words, he pwomised Wailton to say nothin'!"

"The rotter!"

"I suppose the silly ass got chattering, without stopping to think!" said Tom Merry savagely.

"He didn't chatter to us," said Wilkins and Gunn at once. "We never heard a word of it from Grundy!"

"Somebody did, or it wouldn't have been out!"

"The cad ought to be sent to Coventry!" growled Herries.

"By gum, I wish we hadn't shoved

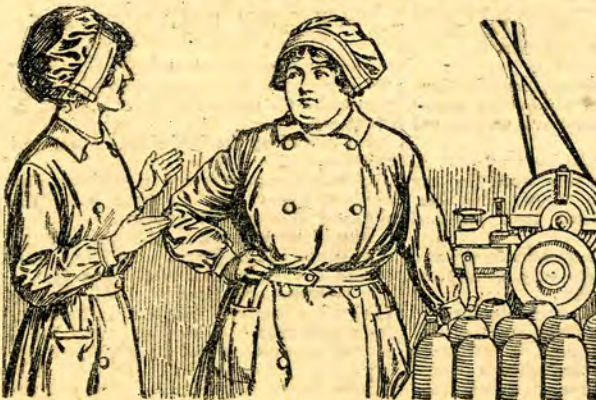
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him into Railton's study, after all!" said Kerruish dismally. "But who'd have thought of anything like this?"

The group of juniors broke up, many of them with clouded faces.

Deep and strong as was the prejudice against conscientious objectors, they were not unjust enough to visit upon their Housemaster the failings of his cousin. Old Railton couldn't help what his cousin did. Their chief thought was the rankling humiliation the popular Housemaster would feel when he learned that the whole school knew. So far as the juniors knew, Philip Railton and his peculiar view had never been mentioned in the school at all, which showed that the Housemaster was desirous of keeping the matter from general knowledge—as was only natural. Now it was all out, and sooner or later he would know it, and it would be a bitter blow to him.

Wilkins and Gunn went up to their study, whither Grundy had gone. They found George Alfred with a moody brow.

"You were a chump, and no mistake, Grundy!" said Wilkins.

"What have I done?" growled Grundy.

"Well, letting that rotten business out—"

"I didn't let it out, you silly fathead! I haven't said a word about anything I heard in Railton's study!" exclaimed Grundy fiercely.

"Then how did it get out?" asked Gunn.

"I don't know anything about it."

Wilkins and Gunn exchanged glances.

"Don't you believe me?" roared Grundy, doubling his big fists, and pushing back his cuffs.

"Oh, don't begin any of your rot!" said Wilkins tartly. "You can't fight every chap who thinks you did it—everybody in the House thinks so! Nobody knew anything about it but you, and now it's all out!"

"I haven't said a word!"

"Then it's jolly queer!" grunted Wilkins.

Grundy knitted his brows.

"I suppose all this jaw will get to Railton sooner or later," he said.

"Jolly sure to! I could see that Crooke and Racke are going to make capital out of it somehow!" growled Wilkins. "They're up against old Railton, because he's down on the smoky, slacking rotters."

"Then Railton will think I've been letting the cat out of the bag!" exclaimed Grundy in dismay.

"Of course he will!"

"But I haven't!" Grundy's voice was almost beseeching now. "I give you my word of honour that I haven't said a word!"

Wilkins and Gunn did not reply. Grundy looked ferocious again for a moment; but then he unclenched his fists. It was not much use hammering his study-mates for believing what the whole House believed. The burly Shell fellow strode out of the study, and slammed the door behind him.

"Well, this is a go!" said Gunn dismally. "That silly ass has done it at last! He'll be sent to Coventry for this!"

"Serve him right!" growled Wilkins. "Why couldn't he keep his silly tongue quiet, especially after promising Railton?"

George Alfred Grundy went down to the Common-room. The looks he received there showed him pretty plainly what the juniors were thinking. He strode up to the captain of the Shell.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, don't talk to me!" said Tom

angrily. "You've done a bit too much talking lately!"

"I've never said a word about Railton's cousin."

"Who started the yarn, then?"

"I—I don't know."

"Well, until you know, and can say, you'd better keep off that subject," said Tom Merry drily. "I suppose the yarn didn't start itself, and nobody knew anything about it excepting you, in the first place."

"But I tell you—"

"Oh, rats!"

Tom Merry walked away, leaving Grundy standing, with a crimson and furious face.

CHAPTER 9.

Mr. Ratcliff Enjoys Himself.

M R. RAILTON was puzzled.

During the two or three days that followed his cousin's visit the Housemaster was thinking a good deal of Philip Railton. He was expecting to hear from him, to hear that the one-time conscientious objector had gone into khaki, and thus proved to all that he had the courage of his opinions, as much when he was in the right as when he was in the wrong. He had faced insult and misunderstanding once in a bad cause—surely he would have the firmness to face it again in a good cause? The Housemaster was sure of it, but he was anxious to hear that Philip had actually taken the decisive step.

But Mr. Railton had other matters to think about as well as the weird vagaries of his cousin's conscience.

The School House master was not a suspicious man, but he was keen and observant, and it was forced upon his attention at last that something was going on in the House—something he did not know.

Most of the fellows were making it a point to be unusually good when they came in contact with him. Tom Merry & Co. seemed to desire to make it more than clear that they respected him deeply. But fellows of another kind, like Crooke and Racke, appeared to be labouring, as it were, under a suppressed impertinence, which they did not dare to put into words or actions, and yet which could scarcely be mistaken.

There was something in the manner of the Sixth-Form fellows, with whom, of course, Mr. Railton frequently came into contact. There was something—a strange reticence—in the manner of his colleagues—Mr. Linton, Mr. Lathom, and the rest. And Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, who had no liking for him, had given him many glances he could not understand. He was perplexed and troubled.

If Philip and his queer, conscientious troubles had been known in the school the Housemaster could have understood it easily enough.

But how could they be known?

Grundy had given his word to say nothing of what he knew, and Mr. Railton could not think that he had broken it.

Yet there was certainly something, and the Housemaster could only connect it in his mind with Philip.

Mr. Railton made allowances for the uneasy, overstrained conscience of his cousin, whose good qualities he knew well; but he knew that others would make no such allowances—they could not be expected to. And his cheeks burned at the thought of all St. Jim's knowing that his near relation was what they would have termed, without hesitation, a shirker and a coward. Did they know? He could have ascertained by asking a question, but he shrank from mentioning

the matter, with a very natural shrinking.

But it came to a head at last. As he came away from the Sixth-Form-room one afternoon, he found some of the Shell in the passage. Racke and Crooke were talking, and they raised their voices as the Housemaster came by.

"I know how I'd deal with conscientious objectors," said Racke. "I'd shove 'em into the front trenches to steady their nerves."

"Not a bad idea," grinned Crooke. "Must make a chap feel awfully rotten to have such howling rotters in the family. Yaroooh!" roared Crooke the next moment, as the Terrible Three bumped into him and sent him sprawling.

Mr. Railton walked on, apparently blind and deaf. But the incident brought the colour flooding into his cheeks. Why had the two juniors been talking in that strain? Why had Tom Merry and his chums bumped into them at that moment, if not for the purpose of stopping talk that they knew must be disagreeable to the Housemaster's ears?

The master of the School House went to his study, and sent a fag for Grundy.

Grundy came in a grim mood. He was not feeling happy, and he felt quite dismal when the Housemaster's clear eyes were fixed on him.

"Grundy, you remember the incident in this study of three days ago?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Grundy.

"You gave me your word to repeat nothing of what you heard here?"

"I've kept my word, sir."

"You have said nothing of the private affairs you so unfortunately overheard, Grundy?"

"Not a syllable, sir!"

The Housemaster gave him a searching look.

"You are sure of that, Grundy?"

"On my honour, sir!"

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, "you may go."

Grundy was glad to go. After he had gone the Housemaster paced the study for some minutes in deep and painful thought. Was the wretched secret out, he wondered, or was it merely his fancy? He was not a man much given to idle fancies.

He went to his table at last and opened the drawer to take out some exam papers he had to work upon. Then he gave a violent start.

On the top of the papers in the drawer was a half-sheet of notepaper, and upon it was written, in capital letters—evidently in order that the writer should not be betrayed by his handwriting—

"SHIRKERS' RELATIONS ARE NOT WANTED HERE!"

The Housemaster stared at the insulting message, as if it had been some poisonous snake he had suddenly discovered in his study.

He picked up the half-sheet at last and examined it.

It was cheap, common notepaper, and neither paper nor writing gave the slightest clue to the writer.

The bitter gibe came from some young rascal in a junior Form. He knew that, but he could guess no more than that.

"Shirkers' relations!" He was a shirker's relation. Whatever allowances he might make in his own mind for a morbid conscience and its strange workings, the fact could not be denied. He, who had faced the German guns with the best men of Britain, who had lost the use of his arm for his country's sake, was a "shirker's relation." Was that what St. Jim's thought of him?

The bitterness almost as of death was in the Housemaster's heart at that moment. Philip had brought this upon

him—that the finger of scorn was pointed at him in his own House! Only a miserable, small-minded fellow could have been guilty of that insult to him, for how could he be held accountable for a relation's action? But the taunt was there all the same.

There was a tap at the door.

Mr. Railton hastily thrust the paper into his pocket. He did not wish any eyes but his own to see it.

"Come in!" he said. For once his voice was unsteady.

It was Mr. Ratcliff who entered the study.

The School House master composed himself and gave his colleague a friendly nod. There was no love lost between the two Housemasters of St. Jim's, but both were very careful to keep upon outwardly cordial terms. The New House master's manner was very friendly now, but Mr. Railton knew him well enough to guess that this meant that something unpleasant was coming.

"I hope I am not interrupting you," remarked Mr. Ratcliff smoothly.

"Not at all! Pray sit down."

The New House master sat down.

"I am going to take what you may regard as a liberty, Railton," he said. "But I feel it my duty to speak. I have considered the matter very carefully."

"Indeed!"

The School House master knew what was coming then. The whole story was out, and the master of the New House knew it. That accounted for Mr. Ratcliff's peculiar glances of the last day or two. Mr. Ratcliff's view on the subject of conscientious objectors was well known—a very severe view indeed. Which was really rather cool of Mr. Ratcliff, for had he been of military age he would certainly have objected very strongly to service himself. He was not of the self-sacrificing kind.

"There is a story—I may say, really a scandal—going about in the school," continued the New House master. "It concerns you, Railton. It has come to my ears. I feel it my duty to acquaint you with it."

The School House master inclined his head.

"From what I hear, the story began among the juniors, but it reached the prefects from incessant repetition," said Mr. Ratcliff. "From the prefects, I presume, it reached the masters finally—all, apparently, excepting yourself. Monteith, the head prefect of my House, punished a junior for repeating it. I inquired into the incident, and learned the whole facts—or, rather, fiction, for, of course, I am assured that the story is false."

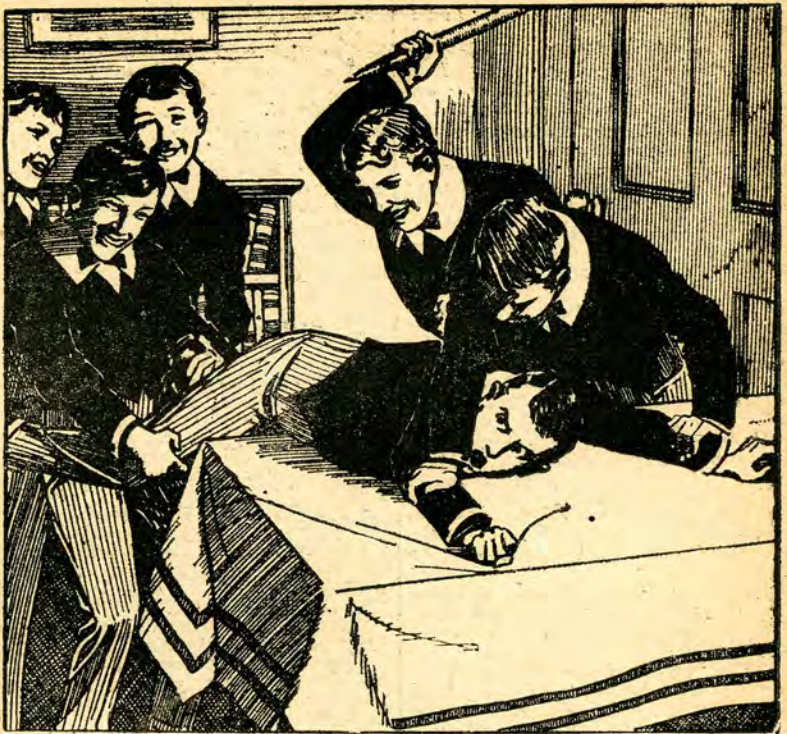
"Please come to the point!" said Mr. Railton, with much less than his usual good-humour.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled.

"I am coming to it, Railton. The story, then, is that you have a near relation—a cousin, in fact—who is one of those curious beings known as conscientious objectors, generally termed shirkers, cowards, and wasters." Mr. Ratcliff smiled again as the School House master winced. "I am sure it cannot be true, but such is the wretched story—that you not only possess such a relation, but have actually received him as a visitor in this school! I am sure that you have too much regard for your own honour, and for the honour of the school." Mr. Railton winced again, much to his amiable colleague's satisfaction. "But such is this wretched slander, started I know not by whom. I deem it my duty to bring it to your knowledge, so that you can quash it immediately."

"Thank you!" said Mr. Railton.

The New House master waited, but Mr.



Even the powerful Grundy had no chance against five.
(See Chapter 1.)

Railton said no more. Mr. Ratcliff bit his thin lip and rose.

"I am sure you understand, Railton, that it was with the friendliest intention I mentioned the matter to you?"

"I quite understand your motives, Mr. Ratcliff!"

The sallow face of the New House master flushed a little. There was an under-meaning in his colleague's reply, which did not fail to reach the mark.

"Very well. I am glad you see it in that light," said Mr. Ratcliff, compressing his lips a little. "Have I your authority for saying that the story is false?"

"Please do not trouble yourself about it at all in any way!"

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered.

"That is scarcely possible, Railton! It has come to my knowledge. The boys in my House are excited about it—some for, some against. It is surely my duty to make an official statement to set the matter at rest! Whatever you tell me, of course, will be accepted without question. Your simple statement that the story is false will satisfy the whole school."

Mr. Railton breathed hard.

"I do not feel called upon to make a statement," he said.

"Pray reflect, my dear sir!" urged Mr. Ratcliff. "I have, as a matter of fact, told Monteith that I should speak to you, and obtain your authority for denouncing the story as a falsehood. I must tell my prefect something. What am I to tell him?"

"Perhaps it would be wise to tell him not to concern himself about matters that are not his business," said Mr. Railton calmly.

"I can only conclude from that, Railton, that the story is true."

"You are, of course, at liberty to draw any conclusions you think fit," said the School House master unmoved.

There was nothing more for Mr. Rat-

cliff to say. He had rubbed it in thoroughly enough, and he took his leave. The New House master was looking quite cheerful as he walked back to his own House. Horace Ratcliff had no sympathy to waste upon a man who was down.

Mr. Railton's handsome face was quite calm till his colleague had gone. But his calmness deserted him when he was alone. His brows contracted with troubled thought, and he moved restlessly to and fro in the study. He felt that he could not settle down to work. He left the study at last, and went out into the quadrangle.

"Speaking of conscientious objectors—" It was Racke's voice, as he passed Racke and Crooke and Scrope in the quad.

Mr. Railton quickened his steps.

CHAPTER 10.

Sent to Coventry.

"**B**AI Jove! Here's Wailton!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

It was some time later. Prep was over, and most of the School House juniors were in the Common-room. Racke & Co. were discussing conscientious objectors and their weird ways, as much for the purpose of irritating Tom Merry as anything else. Grundy was sprawling in an armchair, with a gloomy brow, by himself. The burly Shell fellow was much subdued of late. Kerruish & Co congratulated themselves on the effect of their rag; but, as a matter of fact, it was not the ragging that had subdued George Alfred Grundy. It was the injustice of which he felt himself to be a victim. Everybody knew now that the story of the conscientious objector was true, but everybody agreed that it was the rottenest kind of conduct in Grundy to start the story, after his acknowledged promise to Railton to say

nothing of what he had heard. And it was in vain that Grundy made the most frantic denials of having started the story. If he had not, who had? Even his own loyal followers—Wilkins and Gunn—would not believe his denial.

There was a hush in the Common-room as Mr. Railton came in. The juniors had wondered when the Housemaster would know what all the House knew; and the changed look on his face showed that he knew now. It had reached the Housemaster at last. Mr. Railton had a paper in his hand.

"My boys," he said quietly, "I have a few words to say to you. This paper has been placed in my study by an unknown hand."

He held up the paper, and the juniors looked at it. Big, capitals sprawled on it, and the sentence ran:

"GO AND JOIN THE OTHER SHIRKERS!"

Tom Merry's face flushed with anger. His eyes dwelt for a moment savagely on Racke & Co. Baggy Trimble gave a faint giggle. Mr. Railton did not appear to notice it.

"I need not express my opinion of the impertinence of this," said Mr. Railton. "I am sure that my boys condemn such an insult to their Housemaster."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"It's infamous!" broke out Tom Merry. "You can't think, sir, that any decent chap in the school would have a hand in a dirty trick like that!"

"I'm sure of it, Merry! This is the second time that an insulting paper has been slipped into my study. I wish it to be understood that if it happens again I shall request the Head to inquire into the matter, and the result may be serious."

Crooke, drew a sharp, quick breath, and his eyes dropped.

"Is Grundy here?" added Mr. Railton.

"I'm here, sir."

"Come forward, Grundy."

The burly Shell fellow came forward, uneasy under the keen, steady look of the Housemaster.

"Grundy, you overheard certain things that were said in my study when my

cousin visited me. I did not punish you for that, as I found that you had been there against your will. I simply exacted a promise that you would not repeat the purely private affairs you had overheard by accident. You have broken that promise, Grundy."

"I haven't, sir."

"The private matter you heard discussed, Grundy, is now the talk of the whole school," said the Housemaster.

"I know it, sir," mumbled Grundy miserably. "But I'll swear that I never said a single word!"

"Indeed! Then how did the matter become known?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"No one but yourself, Grundy, knew what was said in my study. Yet now the whole school knows! You played the eavesdropper unintentionally, but you have played the tale-bearer and tattler intentionally, and you have broken your promise. For that you will be punished."

"You can punish me as much as you like, sir," said Grundy desperately. "But if I were going to be sacked for it I'd still say the same—I never said a single word!"

Mr. Railton hesitated.

"Heaven forbid that I should be unjust," he said. "I cannot account for my personal affairs becoming the talk of the school, Grundy, unless you broke your promise to me. But if you deny it explicitly—"

"I do, sir. I never said a word!"

"Very well, Grundy, I shall try to believe you," said Mr. Railton; and he quitted the Common-room.

Grundy drew a deep breath.

"He's a brick," he said—"a real brick! He knows when he can take a fellow's word."

"Fat lot your word's worth!" grunted Gore of the Shell. "You were lying to him, and you know it!"

Grundy clenched his fists.

"Faith, it's a Prussian yo are, Grundy," said Reilly of the Fourth. "And you ought to have a House raging, bedad!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I never said a word about Railton's

dashed cousin!" roared Grundy. "And I'll fight any chap who says I did!"

"Wats!"

"Fighting every chap in both Houses won't alter the facts," said Tom Merry scornfully. "You could see by Railton's face how hard he's hit by this. You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!"

"I tell you—"

"Oh, dry up!" Tom Merry looked round. "What do you chaps think?"

"It seems clear enough," said Talbot of the Shell. "But—"

"Oh, blow your butts!" said Manners.

"It was a dirty trick to give it away, especially after promising."

"I didn't!" howled Grundy.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," sang out Monty Lowther, "Grundy's told tales about old Railton, and worried our respected and merry Housemaster. I vote that the House passes sentence on him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Send the rotter to Coventry!" growled Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You hear that, Grundy?" said Tom Merry. "You're sent to Coventry!"

"I tell you—" raved Grundy.

Tom Merry turned his back.

"Look here, Blake—"

Blake walked away.

"Lowther, you fathead—"

Lowther stared at the unhappy Grundy without replying. The sentence was already in force.

Grundy gave the grim-looking juniors a furious look. He fixed his eyes at last upon Wilkins and Gunn.

"Are you going back on me, too?" he asked, almost huskily.

The two Shells fellows looked very uncomfortable.

"Well, you shouldn't have done it," said Wilkins at last. "Why couldn't you keep your mouth shut?"

"I never said a word!"

"Oh, rot!" said Gunn.

Grundy gave them a bitter look, and strode out of the Common-room. And the silence that followed his departure was broken only by a cackle from Baggy Trimble of the Fourth:

"He, he, he!"



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CHAPTER 11.

Tact and Judgment Required.

COVENTRY, as Grundy of the Shell soon discovered, was a very dismal place of abode.

But there was no help for it.

The next day George Alfred Grundy was looking extremely down in the mouth.

He tried once to break the icy circle, as it were, by his old methods. When Kerruish did not answer a remark, Grundy fell upon him, and smote him hip and thigh. But the House soon put a stop to that. Grundy was collared by a dozen pairs of hands, ragged, bumped, and his head ducked in the fountain—all without a word being addressed to him.

After that lesson Grundy did not try his old methods any more. He took it as calmly as he knew how.

Wilkins and Gunn were his only refuge from solitude. His chums did not refuse to speak to him, in spite of the sentence of the House; but the icy silence that greeted him everywhere outside his own study worried him. Grundy was a talkative fellow—extremely so. He had a way, in fact, of introducing himself into anybody's conversation with a loud voice, and taking the lion's share of it. Now if he chipped in with a remark, fellows walked away as if they were stone deaf. Even Baggy Trimble, the most hopeless funk in the school, sneered loftily in Grundy's face, and turned his back upon him, secure in the protection of the House. And the New House fellows were as down on him as the School House.

Mr. Railton was popular in both Houses. Even Figgins & Co. had little to say for their own Housemaster, the acid-tempered Ratty. But Railton was the hero of the juniors. The man who had come back winged from fighting the Germans was a man St. Jim's delighted to honour. The fellows felt sorry for him having that extremely objectionable relation, whose conscience was so obstreperous, but they respected him none the less, and they resented the trouble and humiliation that had been brought upon him by a tattling tongue. And the owner of the tattling tongue was made to feel what the school thought of him.

Grundy found it hard to bear. Even his own study-mates did not credit his frantic assertions that he hadn't tattled. If he hadn't, who had? And that was a question Grundy could not answer.

That day was extremely unpleasant to Grundy, and the once loud-voiced and overbearing Shell fellow was very subdued.

The following morning, when the Shell turned out at rising-bell, Grundy forgot for the moment the sentence that was upon him, and remarked to Kangaroo that it was a fine morning. The unseeing stare of Kangaroo recalled him to himself.

"Look here, how long are you silly idiots going to keep this up?" roared Grundy furiously.

No reply.

"I tell you I never said a word about Railton and his measly conscientious objector!"

Silence.

Grundy stamped angrily out of the dormitory. He was greatly inclined to run amuck among the Shell fellows, hitting out right and left. Probably they would have said something then. But they would also have done something, and it would have been very painful to George Alfred. So Grundy contained himself, and tramped out into the quadrangle with his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a deep, worried frown upon his brow.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sauntered out a little later, first out of the Fourth, look-

ing as clean and fresh as a new pin. Grundy gave him a lowering look.

"Hallo, D'Arcy!" he said hopefully.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass, and surveyed him.

"Pway do not address me, Gwunday!" he said. "I wefuse to weply a single word to you."

Grundy grinned faintly.

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"Wats! Don't address me, you tattlin' wottah! Look at the fealful wovvwy you've caused poor old Wailton."

"I haven't!"

"Wats!"

"Look here, D'Arcy," said Grundy desperately, "you—you—you're a fellow of—of tact and judgment, you know. You ought to know that I didn't do it, you know, when I tell you I didn't."

Arthur Augustus thawed a little. He prided himself upon his tact and judgment, which other fellows never would acknowledge. Certainly he had never expected Grundy of the Shell to acknowledge those gifts of his. But circumstances alter cases.

"I am sowwy, Gwunday, that I cannot accept your assurance," he said. "It is perfectly howwid to doubt a fellow's word. But you were the only chap who knew anythin' about Railton and his shirkah—"

"I—I know. But I kept it dark—awfully dark! I never said a word to my own chums. They'll tell you that much. Now, if I was going to tell anybody, shouldn't I have told Wilkins and Gunn?" urged Grundy.

"Bai Jove! That sounds very pwob."

Arthur Augustus unbent still more. There was something touching in the burly, overbearing, big-fisted Grundy throwing himself on a fellow's mercy in this way. The tender-hearted swell of St. Jim's simply could not find it in his heart to repulse him.

"The fellows ought to take my word," said Grundy bitterly. "There's a set against me, that's what it is—same as there was over the footer."

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"Wubbish, Gwunday! You were kept out of the footah because you can't play, you know."

Grundy glared. But his glare died away at once. Glaring was no use to Grundy in the present circumstances.

"Well, n-n-never mind the footer," he faltered. "But I give you my word of honour I never gave Railton's secret away to anybody."

"I cannot wefuse to accept your word of honah, Grundy," said Arthur Augustus. "I cweedit your statemently deah boy. But it is very remarkahle. Howevah, I'll tell you what I will do. I will look into the mattah, and see what can be done. You can wely on a fellow of tact and judgment to get at the twuth."

Arthur Augustus walked away thoughtfully, leaving Grundy feeling a little comforted. He had no belief at all that Gussy would get at the truth—having no faith in his celebrated tact and judgment. But, at least, D'Arcy's example was one the other fellows might follow, and the icy silence of Coventry would be broken.

"You've been jawing to Grundy," said Blake severely, as he joined his noble chum in the quad.

"Yaas, deah boy," said D'Arcy calmly.

"Don't you know he's in Coventry, ass?"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Blake! I have let Gwunday out of Coventry, as he has given me his word of honah—"

"You've let him out!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And who are you to stick up against the sentefice of the House?" demanded Blake.

"I am a fellow of tact and judgment, deah boy, and I am goin' to look into the mattah and get at the weal facts."

"You'll get a thick ear, more likely," growled Blake.

"I should wefuse to have a thick eeah, Blake!"

"You silly ass!"

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus went calmly in to breakfast.

During the day, the swell of St. Jim's was in a thoughtful mood. Having accepted Grundy's word of honour, Arthur Augustus had to think out how the secret could have transpired without Grundy's agency. It was a difficult problem; but Gussy's reliance upon his own judgment was fortunately unbounded. He spoke several times to Grundy, in an encouraging way, and narrowly escaped several bumpings for doing so; but the juniors, who always took Arthur Augustus more or less humorously, let him "have his head," as Blake expressed it.

It was not till the fellows gathered in the Common-room in the evening that the result of Arthur Augustus' deep

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nothing was in his mind. The elegant fourth Former came in, and glanced around, and found most of the School House fellows present, and gave a nod of satisfaction.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I have a few words to say—"

"Go and say 'em in the passage," suggested Lowther. "Don't talk while a chap's playing chess."

"This mattah is more important than chess, Lowthah. I have been thinkin'—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Lowther, in astonishment. "You don't say so!"

"Pway don't be a funny ass, Lowthah! I have been thinkin' about that affair of Wailton and his disgustin' welation. It appears to me possible that Gwunday did not give the mattah awah."

"Rats!" said Blake.

"If you say 'Wats' to me, Blake—"

"Rats!"

"I have no time to give you a feahful thwashin' now, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Gentlemen, I claim your attention for a few minutes. I am suah you all want to see justice done, even to a sillay, obstwepewous ass like Gwunday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You burbling chump—" began Grundy, not at all flattered by the description of himself.

"Pway dwy up, Gwunday! Gentlemen, as Mark Antony wemarks in the play, pway lend me your eeahs."

And the juniors grinned, and lent Arthur Augustus their ears.

CHAPTER 12.

Gussy Does the Trick!

HAVING succeeded in obtaining general attention, Arthur Augustus paused to polish his eyeglass. That important operation completed, he replaced it in his eye, and surveyed the grinning faces round him.

"Gentlemen— Don't throw that cushion at me, you ass! Gentlemen, I suggest a vewy careful investigation into the mattah. It appears to me pwoob that if Gwunday had tattled about Wailton's affairs, he would have told his own pals. Wilkins and Gunn are wequied to give evidence."

"He never said a word to me," said Wilkins at once.

"Nor to me!" added Gunn.

"He did to somebody, all the same," said Blake.

"Pway don't intewwupt the judicial pwoceedin's with iwwelvant wemarks, Blake. Gentlemen, if Gwunday wepeated this mattah to anybody, he must have wepeated it to somebody—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is no occasion for cacklin'! That somebody who first heard the stowy fwom Gwunday, is wequished to come forward and say so."

"My hat!" said Talbot. "There's something in that. If Grundy told a chap, the chap can say so."

Grundy's face brightened up. That consideration, simple as it was, had not occurred to Grundy's mighty brain.

He jumped up.

"That's right on the wicket!" he ex-

claimed. "Let any chap stand out and say I told him, if he can!"

There was a general silence. Tom Merry looked round.

"Well, isn't there anybody going to speak?" he asked.

"The chaps aren't all here, you know," exclaimed Trimble. "Besides, Grundy may have told a New House chap in the first place."

"That's not so!" put in Levison.

"The yarn was about this House before the New House fellows got hold of it."

"We'll go into this," said Tom Merry. "If nobody can say that Grundy told him, it will look as if it might have got out some other way. Grundy's a thumping idiot, but he's got to have fair play!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Better call all the fellows in," suggested Talbot.

"Pass the word round for a House meeting," said Tom.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy smiled with satisfaction. He had certainly scored a point, and caused, at least, an admission of the possibility that the unfortunate Grundy was not guilty. It did not take long for the remainder of the School House juniors to gather in the Common-room. It was a full junior House meeting, and when the question was asked, not a fellow present could say that he had heard the story in the first place from George Alfred Grundy. Fellows had heard it from one another, or had heard other fellows speaking of it, and it was difficult to say where, when, or from whom they had first heard it; but there was no doubt on one point—Grundy had not told them. Nobody remembered having heard Grundy speak on the subject till after it was public property.

Tom Merry looked perplexed.

"Perhaps you believe me now!" growled Grundy, something of his old lofty manner returning.

"But somebody started the yarn," said Cardew. "If Grundy didn't, who did? Have you got that up your sleeve, D'Arcy?"

"It appears," said Arthur Augustus, "that Gwunday did not tell anybody pwsent. If Gwunday did not, another fellow did."

"But nobody else knew!" exclaimed Trimble anxiously.

Arthur Augustus's eyeglass glimmered on Trimble for a moment.

"That remains to be pwoved," he said calmly. "Gentlemen, there are in this House sevewal Pwussians who are not above listenin' at a keyhole. F'winstance, Twimble—"

"Look here, you know—" stammered Trimble.

"Or Wacke—"

"You cheeky idiot!" howled Racke.

"Or Cwooke—"

"You confounded fathead—"

"Or Mellish—"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Mellish.

"Or Sowope—"

"Do you want your silly head punched?" roared Scrope.

"And one or two othahs," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Fellows who are known to be capable of such wotten twicks are wequied to prove that they didn't listen at Wailton's door— Where are you goin', Twimble?"

"I—I've got some lines to do—"

"Nevah mind your lines now, Twimble. Wemain where you are."

"Look here, you know—"

Blake closed the door and put his back to it. Trimble eyed him savagely, but he had to remain where he was.

"It's a bit thick," said Crooke, with a sneer. "How could anybody listen at Railton's door? Anybody might have come along."

"The masters and pwefects were out that evenin', Cwooke."

"Yes, rather! That's why we went for Grundy!" said Kerruish, with a nod.

"And the light was out in the passage!" exclaimed Grundy. "I remember, now. I noticed it at the time. Some cad turned the light out so that he could listen at the door without being spotted."

"Rats!" snapped Crooke.

"That's true!" said Talbot quickly. "I passed the end of the passage, and wondered why the light was out. That was while Mr. Railton's visitor was there."

"I—I say, you're mistaken, you know!" mumbled Trimble.

"Railton would prove what I say!" exclaimed Grundy. "He must have noticed the light was out."

"We can ask him," said Talbot.

"Trimble was hanging about there, too," said Grundy. "I met him on the stairs when I came away. I dare say it was Trimble."

"It—it wasn't!" stuttered Trimble.

"Trimble!" exclaimed Tom Merry, a light breaking on him. "Trimble, you fat rotter, was that what you meant when you said you were going to make Grundy squirm for licking you?"

"I—I didn't!" howled Trimble.

"What?"

"You—you're mistaken! I never said anything of the sort!" stammered Trimble. "Some—some other fellow may have, you know."

"You Prussian fathead!" snapped Tom Merry. "Don't tell any of your whoppers now!"

"I—I don't choose to discuss the matter with you, Merry! You—you're not truthful!"

"What?" roared Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, you keep off!" yelled Baggy, dodging round the table. "Look here, you fellows, I never said anything of the sort! You know you won't take Tom Merry's word against mine!"

There was a roar of laughter in the Common-room. The School House juniors would almost have taken the Kaiser's word against Baggy Trimble's. Trimble's wonderful powers as a fabricator were rather too well known. Tom Merry himself joined in the laugh. When it was a question of his word against Baggy Trimble's, there was not much doubt of the result.

"So Twimble said he was goin' to make Gwunday squirm?" grinned Arthur Augustus. "How were you goin' to make him squirm, Twimble?"

"I—I wasn't. I never said anything of the sort!" roared Trimble. "I—I mean I wasn't referring to Grundy, you know. I—I meant I was—was—was going to—to—to squirm because Grundy had licked me, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We want the truth now, Trimble," said Tom Merry quietly. "You'd better own up."

"Out with it!" roared Grundy, in quite his old manner. "I'll smash you—"

"No, you won't!" said Tom Merry, pushing Grundy back. "You've brought this on yourself, Grundy, with your rotten bullying. If you'd let Trimble alone, it wouldn't have happened. He's a mean beast, but—"

"Look here—"

"Oh, dry up! Now, then, Trimble, out with it! You knew what had been said in Mr. Railton's study, and you knew Grundy knew, so you put the yarn about to make us think Grundy had been telling tales, to get us down on him. That was how you were going to make him squirm."

"Yaas, wathah!"

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"I-I-I—" Trimble stuttered. "I—I— You know the beast licked me with a cricket-stump, and—and I couldn't lick him, could I?"

"That's no excuse for playing a dirty trick," said Tom Merry, frowning. "But what we want now is the truth. It was you spread the yarn about Railton's cousin, and left us to think that it was Grundy?"

"I—I— Of course, I didn't know what you would think!" groaned Trimble. "Besides, I—I don't approve of conscientious objectors, you know, and—and I thought the rotter ought to be shown up. I—I just mentioned it in confidence to Crooke."

"So Crooke was in the game?" growled Blake.

"Well, Crooke said the fellows would think Grundy was spreading a yarn about Railton, and—and they would be down on him, and serve him right for being a beastly bully, and—and—and"

"You rotter, Crooke!"

Crooke burst into a sneering laugh.

"Well, so it does serve him right," he said. "It may be a lesson to him about punching fellows' noses."

"I'll jolly well punch yours!" roared Grundy, and he rushed at Crooke, and they rolled on the floor together.

"And I'm going to smash that fat villain, Trimble!"

"You're going to shut up!" said Tom Merry. "Trimble, you rotter—"

"I—I say, it—it was really a joke on Grundy, you know," stammered Trimble. "I—I was really going to tell you fellows—"

"Stop your whoppers, you toad!" said Blake, in disgust. "I vote for a House ragging!"

"Ow!"

"Lemme get at him!" roared Grundy. George Alfred was quite his old self again.

"Wats! Gentlemen, the twuth has now been discovahed, owin' to a fellow of tact and judgment takin' the mattah up—"

"Bow-wow!"

"I wegard that as a widiculous ejaculation, Mannahs! Twimble is the guilty partay; but it weally serves Gwunday wight for bullyin' him—"

"You silly tailor's dummy!" shouted Grundy.

"That's the Grundy brand of gratitude!" chuckled Wilkins. "Do shut up, Grundy, you ass!"

"I wegard your wemarks with

despision, Gwunday—I mean contempt. I wefuse to allow you to touch Twimble; but Twimble must set you wight with the Housemastah. Twimble, you will kindly pwoceed to Mr. Wailton's studay and acquaint him with the fact that you spwead the yarn about his cousin, not Gwunday, and that Gwunday did not break his word!"

Trimble gave a howl.

"You—you ass! He would lick me!"

"We shall lick you if you don't," said Tom Merry grimly. "You'll get a House ragging, you Prussian toad! And Railton will be told, anyway; that's only fair to Grundy."

"Good egg!" said Grundy. "I'll let it go at that. You come along to Railton with me, you fat Hun!"

And Baggy Trimble, despite his frenzied objections—he was an objector, though not a conscientious one—was marched away to Mr. Railton's study with Grundy's heavy hand on his shoulder.

Five minutes later Grundy came back into the Common-room, looking very cheery.

"All serene," he said. "Railton's said he's sorry he doubted my word; couldn't say fairer than that. He says it was clever, the way I got out the truth—"

"Gweat Scott!"

"The way you did!" yelled Blake.

"Didn't you tell him it was Gussy?"

Grundy sniffed.

"I told him the facts; that I'd investigated the matter with the help of some fellows, and got the truth out. He said it was clever, and so it was. I don't expect you fellows to admit it; you can't get over your jealousy of a fellow with brains, and I don't expect it."

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry, delighted by the expression on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face.

"Well, of all the cheeky idiots!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Is that your thanks to me, Gwunday, for gettin' at the facts?"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Grundy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you, Gwunday— Bai Jove, what's that?"

"That" was a wild howl of anguish in the distance. Baggy Trimble was paying the piper for having played the eavesdropper and the tell-tale, and, to judge by the din, he was paying pretty dearly.

"Halle! A soldier chap!" said Moniy Lowther, as the Terrible Three came out on Saturday afternoon. A man in khaki had sauntered in at the gates, and was coming towards the School House. "My only hat! It's—"

"Railton's cousin!" ejaculated Manners.

"The giddy conscientious objector!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Well, either Trimble had the yarn wrong, after all, or the chap's got more sense now than he had last week."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

All eyes in the quadrangle were turned on the sturdy, athletic figure in khaki. There was a buzz among the juniors. Certainly Philip Railton did not look much like a conscientious objector now. His conscience, in a somewhat healthier state than of old, had led him to don the khaki—the "objection" having apparently vanished. Tom Merry & Co. capped the young soldier with great respect as he passed them.

Mr. Railton met him in the doorway of the School House. The Housemaster's face was very cheery.

"Phil, old man!" he exclaimed, as he grasped his cousin's hand. "My dear fellow—"

Philip Railton smiled.

"I feel better now," he said. "I thought you'd be glad to see me—like this!"

"More glad than I can say!" said the Housemaster heartily.

"Thwee cheeahs for khaki!" sang out Arthur Augustus, from the quad.

And the juniors gave them with a will, and Philip Railton smiled as he walked into the house with his cousin.

The conscientious objector was no more; he had vanished for ever, and in his place was a soldier ready to face shot and shell in the great fight for freedom and the old flag. And most of the fellows came to the opinion that that stalwart fellow in khaki never had been such a queer fish at all, and that Baggy Trimble had evolved the whole story, or most of it, from his own Prussian brain; and Baggy was given an extra bumping for his own good. Which was certainly no more than he deserved.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's —"BREAKERS OF BOUNDS!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"BREAKERS OF BOUNDS!"

By Martin Clifford.

Cardew and Levison major figure very prominently in next week's fine story, which turns upon a proclamation by the Head, putting a certain district near the school out of bounds, for reasons which he leaves unstated. Other characters who play considerable parts are Levison minor, Kerr, and the peppery Mr. Ratcliff, whose sleuth-hound pursuit of three fellows who know he is on their trail, and have no intention of breaking bounds, anyway provides some very humorous reading. A first-rate story in every way, with a strong plot, and lots of incident—one of the very best in the series which lately began!

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Your Editor

EXTRACTS FROM

"Tom Merry's Weekly" & "The Greyfriars Herald."

Catching the Caterpillar!

By TOM BROWN.

FISHER T. FISH is a Yankee, so he hasn't much sense of humour; but he can be funny sometimes. But the funniest thing he ever did was catching the Caterpillar.

The Caterpillar—his name is De Courcy really—belongs to the Fourth Form at Highcliffe. He is a champion slacker, and looks as if he finds it too much trouble to breathe; but we noticed that he can play footer jolly well when his chum Courtenay bucks him up. As a rule, he's like the nobleman in the play, who did nothing, and did it very well. The Caterpillar isn't really half so sleepy as he looks, as Fishy found out rather too late.

But Fishy said he was a "dude," which is an American word for "nut," and he guessed that a cute Yankee could gub him from the word go—that was how Fishy expressed it. Fishy's native language is nearly as puzzling as Hurree Singh's till you get used to it.

So that was how they came to take that walk. Courtenay had been over at Greyfriars watching the footer, and the Caterpillar was coming over to tea. As there weren't any taxicabs to be had at Highcliffe, he had to walk; he said he found biking a bore.

Fishy said he would go over for the Caterpillar, and show him a new short cut. Of course, the Caterpillar would have been glad to hear of a short cut. He would have put up with Fishy's company to save fifty yards on the walk.

"But there's only one short cut, and De Courcy knows that," said Wharton.

Fishy grinned.

"I guess I'll spring another on him," he said. "That's the stunt. I'm goin' to tell him I've found a new short cut—see?—and take him for a jaunt about two miles and a half, and wear him out. He'll get to Greyfriars crawling on his hands and knees."

Two miles and a half was about Fishy's own limit as a walker. He talked a lot about what he could do in that line, but he never did it. He was chuckling away like one of his native cheap alarm clocks at the idea of that joke on the Caterpillar.

He described how the Caterpillar would look when he found that he was in for a long walk instead of a short one, and he cackled no end at the idea of De Courcy crawling in at Greyfriars in an exhausted state, and having to go home in a cab.

He reckoned that the "dude" would crock after the first mile, and then he would chip him all the way, and tell him how they did things in New York. Fishy was looking forward to it with great enjoyment, and we let him rip. Some of the fellows said they would be at the gates to see the Caterpillar come crawling in.

That was how it came about. Fishy called at Highcliffe for the Caterpillar, and found him yawning his head off in his study. The blessed slacker was try-

ing to make up his mind to start on the walk to Greyfriars.

"I guess I've called for you," remarked Fishy, as he looked into the study.

"Thanks awfully!" said the Caterpillar. "I'm not startin' yet!"

"I guess you'll be late for tea."

"Never mind," said De Courcy.

"When are you goin' back?"

"I calculate I'm going now."

"Then I'll start in ten minutes."

"I guess I can wait ten minutes for you, old sport."

"Sorry; I meant twenty minutes."

"I don't mind waiting twenty minutes."

"By gad! On the whole, I think I shall leave it for half an hour."

"Good!" said Fish. "I'll make it half an hour too!"

The Caterpillar groaned. He never could stand Fishy; but Fishy has a skin like a rhinoceros, and he didn't mind. So the Caterpillar got up and yawned.

"By gad, may as well start now, then!" he said. "Suppose you go on ahead and tell 'em I'm comin'?"

"I guess I'm going to show you a new short cut I've found," said Fishy. "It saves you a quarter of the distance!"

Fisher T. Fish isn't quite so particular as George Washington was supposed to be.

George Washington was the Yankee who said that he couldn't tell a lie. Skinner says that's the biggest one even George Washington ever told.

The Caterpillar brightened up a lot when he heard of that short cut. He became quite affable to Fishy.

"Good egg!" he said. "So good of you to come along, Fish! Let's get off, dear boy!"

So they got off.

Fishy grinned when they started. Instead of making for Courtfield, to get into the Greyfriars road, Fisher T. Fish headed across the meadows.

The Caterpillar looked at him.

"Is this the short cut?" he asked.

"Yep!" said Fishy.

"But this footpath leads to Esdaile."

"Yep! Round that way saves a lot of walking!"

"By gad, does it?" said the Caterpillar simply. "So good of you to point it out to a chap!"

Fishy grinned again. Anybody but a "dude" would have seen that he was being spoofed; but the Caterpillar didn't seem to see it. Fishy hadn't any doubt that he had the Caterpillar on toast, and they tramped on.

They passed through Esdaile village, and took the road towards Redclyffe.

Only the duffiest duffer could have failed to see that they were going a long way out of the way; but the Caterpillar didn't seem to see it.

He just lounged on, with his hands in his pockets, looking as sleepy as usual, while Fishy was trotting on in his jerky way.

"We go through Redclyffe?" the Caterpillar asked at last.

"Nope!"

Fisher T. Fish was getting a bit tired by that time, and he meant to head straight for Greyfriars. It was a mile and a half across the fields. That would be enough to double up the Caterpillar like a jack-knife, Fishy thought.

"Oh, let's keep on through Redclyffe!" said the Caterpillar. "We can get some ginger-pop there; it's my treat!"

Fishy agreed. He would always go out of his way to get anything for nothing.

But he wasn't sure of the way to Redclyffe. Fishy didn't go out biking or scouting like the other chaps, and he didn't know much of the country excepting just close to Greyfriars.

But the Caterpillar seemed to know, and he struck off by a footpath over the heath.

Fishy trotted along, chuckling to himself at the way De Courcy was playing his game for him. After getting to Redclyffe there would be over three miles to walk home, and Fishy pictured the Caterpillar tottering along, with the perspiration running down his face, and his knees giving way.

The only trouble was that Fishy wasn't such a very good walker himself, and he was beginning to get a bit pumped.

But he kept on.

The Caterpillar, so far, hadn't turned a hair. It was high time for him to crack up, but he hadn't cracked up yet.

In fact, he was stepping out quite briskly now, and Fishy found it a bit hard to keep up with him.

They covered a mile over the heath by the footpaths, and then Fishy began to get anxious.

"Sure this is right for Redclyffe?" he asked.

"Yaas," said the Caterpillar.

"How far off is it now?"

"About eight miles, the way we're goin'."

Fisher T. Fish nearly fell down.

"Eight miles?" he gasped.

"Yaas."

"But that ain't the quickest way, sure?" yelled Fishy.

"Wall, there's another way," said the Caterpillar reflectively. "Would you rather take the other way? I know all these paths—don't you?"

"Nope! We'll take the other way!"

"Right!"

They turned off by a cattle-track across the heath. There wasn't a house or a farm or anything in sight—nothing but some cattle grazing in the distance. The path was pretty lumpy, and Fisher T. Fish was getting pumped and footsore.

He was beginning to limp now. What was most extraordinary was that the Caterpillar was as fresh as a daisy. The Caterpillar has rather long legs, and they seemed to go like machinery.

"I guess I'll go a bit slower," gasped Fishy at last.

"Certainly."

"I—I say, is it far to Redclyffe now?" asked Fish weakly.

The Caterpillar reflected. "About fifteen miles," he said. Fisher T. Fish gave a yell like a Hun with a bayonet behind him. "Fifteen miles, you jay?" he roared. "Yaas."

"But you said this was a shorter way!" shrieked Fish.

The Caterpillar looked surprised. "No. I said this was the other way," he replied. "Do you want a shorter way?"

Fishy looked at him as if he would have liked to eat him. The Caterpillar was looking very simple and mild, and Fishy thought he'd never met such a thumping idiot.

It hadn't occurred to him that the Caterpillar had tumbled to his little game, and was pulling his Yankee leg. It would have taken a lot to make Fishy believe that a played-out British aristocrat could pull a cute Yankee's leg!

"Did I want a shorter way?" he gasped. "Oh, Jerusalem crickets! Look here, we're jolly well not going to Redcliffe at all."

"Just as you like, of course," said the Caterpillar, in his polite way. "It's such a pleasure to walk with you, Fish, that I'd rather keep on a bit. But please yourself, of course!"

"I guess we're just going to head for Greyfriars instanter."

Fisher T. Fish had quite given up the idea of walking the Caterpillar off his legs by that time. He was jolly near walked off his own legs, and the thought of the distance to Greyfriars made him shudder.

"You'd rather head for Greyfriars, dear boy?" asked the Caterpillar, in a regretful sort of way.

"Yep!"

"Go ahead, then!"

Fishy blinked round at the heath. It lay round him for miles, and it was getting dusky. There were cattle-tracks on the heath, but not a sign of a path, and Fishy could no more have found his way to Greyfriars than to the Dardanelles.

"Don't you know the way?" he gasped.

"Certainly! I know all these paths."

"Then head for Greyfriars."

"Right-ho!"

The Caterpillar's long legs started again, in a new direction. Fisher T. Fish limped after him, mumbling.

How many miles they had done already Fishy didn't know. It seemed to him like thousands.

He limped on after the Caterpillar, with a deadly look in his eyes. He thought the Caterpillar was a sillier idiot than he had supposed. He would have given ten cents not to have thought of that ripping wheeze for japing De Courcy. The "dude" wasn't turning a hair—he was going on like clockwork. Fishy felt as if his feet were lead.

"Oh, crikey!" stuttered Fish at last.

The Caterpillar looked round.

"Anythin' wrong?" he asked.

"Yow! Nope! How far is it to Greyfriars now?"

"About nineteen miles."

Fisher T. Fish simply sat down on the ground and groaned. There he was, planted in the middle of the heath, not knowing south from north, or east from west, and that awful Caterpillar told him it was nineteen miles to Greyfriars! Certainly it wasn't the Caterpillar who was likely to crawl in on his hands and knees.

"Sittin' down to rest a bit?" said the Caterpillar agreeably. "Right-ho! I'll wait. Rather serious if we get caught by night here, though—I mightn't know the way after dark. Would you much mind campin' out?"

Fishy jumped up as if he had been electrified.

"Camping out!" he stuttered. "In this weather—in Etons! Oh, you jay! You mugwump! You played-out, slab-sided guy!"

"Anythin' the matter?" asked the Caterpillar, in surprise.

"Let's get home, you jay! Oh, crumbs! Look here, it can't be nineteen miles to Greyfriars by the shortest way!"

The Caterpillar nodded.

"No; that's the longest way!"

"Take the shortest way, then, you mugwump!" roared Fisher T. Fish.

"Well, come on!"

They had been walking round the wide heath in a circle, though Fisher T. Fish didn't know it. He was limping, and bending forward, and gasping and groaning, as he hobbled on after the Caterpillar again.

The Caterpillar was as fresh as a daisy. This was the chap Fishy had intended to walk off his legs, by way of a joke. There didn't seem much joke in the matter to Fishy now.

"Are you going the shortest way, you blithering galoot?" he groaned at last.

"Certainly!"

"How far is it?"

"Six miles."

"Six miles the shortest way!" groaned Fish. "Oh, by gum! Sure there isn't another way?"

"Yaas; there's another. That's nine miles—"

"Oh, you jay!"

"And another. That's twenty-seven—"

"Keep on this way, for mercy's sake!" howled Fishy.

"Yaas."

So they kept on. Fishy hoped that they would pass through some village, where he could pick up a cab or a cart or something. He was so played out that he would even have spent his own money to get home to Greyfriars without any more walking. But the Caterpillar, whether accidentally or not, didn't pass through any villages. They were going very slow now, and it was getting dark. Fisher T. Fish let out a moan at nearly every step.

"Tired?" asked the Caterpillar presently.

"Ow!" moaned Fish.

"Better buck up a bit, or the gates will be locked."

"Yow-wow!"

"Rather a pity we didn't take the usual road, after all—what!" said the Caterpillar thoughtfully.

"Groooh!"

"These blessed short-cuts—they're rather deceivin' sometimes," remarked the Caterpillar.

"Oh, you jay! You guy!" groaned Fisher T. Fish. "I believe you guessed the stunt all the time!"

"May a chap whose education has been neglected beg for a translation of the word stunt?" asked the Caterpillar, in his polite way. "Is it Latin?"

"Oh, don't be funny!" groaned Fish. "You froze on to the stunt, and you've been playing me for a sucker!"

"By gad! I wonder what a sucker is?" remarked the Caterpillar.

"Oh, Jerusalem! How many more miles?"

"Only three."

"Three! Oh, Christopher Columbus! Oh, great Washington! Oh, you slab-sided galoot! Oh, my legs!"

The Caterpillar smiled sweetly, and walked on. It struck Fishy that the Caterpillar must have been a pretty good walker, to cover all that distance without turning a hair. He looked as fresh as paint.

How Fishy got over those last miles he never knew.

He limped and stumbled, and dragged, and jolly nearly crawled. It was like a hideous dream to him. Every minute or two he was calling to the Highcliffe chap to slacken for him. He was afraid of being left behind, to find his way home in the dark, which he couldn't have done, being as big a duffer as ever duffed. It was only the fear of being left out all night that prevented him from chucking himself down in the grass and staying there.

They came out in the Friardale road at last, past the village, and Fishy gave a moan of relief as he recognised the road. It was only a quarter of a mile more to Greyfriars.

But that quarter of a mile was a twister for Fishy.

His legs were aching from his ankles to his hips, and felt as heavy as lead, and his bony knees were knocking together. He lifted his feet as if they were heavy weights, or dragged them along in the dust.

He could have wept before the school gates came in sight at last.

There was a crowd of fellows at the Greyfriars gates. They were wondering why the Caterpillar and Fishy hadn't come, and wondering what on earth had become of them. Courtenay was ready to go back to Highcliffe, but he had to wait for his chum. There was a shout as the Caterpillar came in sight, walking along as if he had only just started.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Here's the Caterpillar, and he's coming up from Friardale. He's been a long way round!"

"But where's Fishy?" asked Wharton. The Caterpillar came up and stopped and smiled in his cheery way.

"Sorry I've missed tea, you fellows," he remarked. "No time for tea now. We'd better be getting back to Highcliffe, Franky."

"It's time we did," said Courtenay, who was a little puzzled. "But what have you been all this time about?"

"Havin' a pleasant little walk with Fishy," explained the Caterpillar. "He mistook a long cut for a short cut. Queer mistake for a cute Yankee to make—what!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Fishy!"

"Fishy, by gum! Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a regular roar as Fisher T. Fish staggered up. He looked as if he had found that life wasn't worth living. He was clammy with perspiration, and thick with dust, and drooping like a bent tree. He just clung on to the gate and pumped in breath, and groaned.

"Had a good walk, Fishy?" asked Squiff.

"Groooh!"

"Did you walk the Caterpillar off his legs?"

"Yow!"

"Looks as if he did, doesn't he?" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Somebody's been walked off his legs, but it doesn't seem to have been the Caterpillar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think Fish must have gone round a longer way than he intended," remarked De Courcy. "We've had rather a faggin' walk—about a dozen miles!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow!" groaned Fishy. "The slab-sided galoot got me out on the heath—yowow!—and I didn't know the way—groooh!—and he's nearly killed me—yowow!—Help me into the house, somebody—yowp! I c-c-can't walk across the quad. Oh, dear! Lemme lean on your shoulder, Wharton. Oh, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 473.

Jerusalem! Wow-ow-ow-ow! I guess I shall never get over this! Wow!

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Good-bye, Fishy!" said the Caterpillar cheerily. "Always at your service when you want a little walk! Come on, Franky; we've got to walk home! Would you like to see us as far as Highcliffe, Fishy?"

Fishy didn't answer that question, and Courtenay and the Caterpillar walked off grinning. We took hold of Fishy and helped him in. He simply couldn't walk across the quad. He was fairly done. He crawled upstairs on his hands and knees, and pitched on to his bed in the dorm, and groaned, and he was still stretched there, mumbling, when we came up to bed hours later.

For three or four days after that Fisher T. Fish was limping about Greyfriars with a dozen aches in his legs. And he didn't try his hand again at Catching the Caterpillar!

THE END

NEXT WEEK!

**A DORMITORY RAG.
BAGGY'S BAG.
A RARE WASH-OUT.**

Don't forget to order your copy!

ST. JIM'S LIMERICKS.

By A. M. ADMAN.

I really don't know whether Skimpole
Was born—or p'raps hatched out—at
Wimpole;

But it wangles a rhyme
Hard to compass; and I'm
Sure when donkeys have votes they'll let
him poll!

In the past he esteemed it no sin
To stuff himself up to the chin.
Now he shakes his head sadly;
"I'm not doing so badly
On the rations," says staunch Fatty
Wynn.

His brains would be lost in a thimble;
He is ugly and fat and un-nimble.
To him, it is reckoned,
Ananias comes second.
So you've guessed it in once?—Baggy
Trimble!

Remarks have been passed on Bob
Cherry's
Ample feet; but coal-barges or wherries
Are knocked out—so they state—
By the mighty, the great
Understandings of burly George Herries!

He's an earl's son—no odds!—and he's
brassy;
His clobber and accents are classy.
If his head's a bit wooden,
His heart's a real good 'un—
The Honourable Arthur A. D'Arcy!

A thing isn't blue 'cause it's bluish;
Nor absolute truth 'cause it's true-ish.
Manx cats have no tails;
I regret if this fails
To be sense, but I've rhymed to
Kerruish!

Brains are plenty with him—so is tin;
His delight is to take others in
By his many inventions.
It's quite poss his intentions
Are good; but a spoofer is Glyn!

"T. M. W."

Correspondence Column.

A. T. (Greyfriars).—The Editor of the "G. H." should certainly have known better than to turn down your brief article—not more than 30,000 words—on Missionary Activities in the Gooby-Booby Islands, with an addendum dealing with the urgent need of bell-bottomed breeks, pictorial pocket-handkerchiefs, and top-hats for the use of the interesting natives. Send it along to us, as you suggest, written on one side only.

"Doubting Thomas."—The story of the shortage of paper is not an invention of publishers, designed to give them an excuse for cutting down pages and increasing prices. We ourselves have felt it, and since paper has been served out in smaller quantities have been compelled to write our copy for this journal on the backs of rejected MSS.

"Poeticus."—I print the first four lines of your weird effusion;

"Here's to 'Tom Merry's Weekly'!
It's tone is high and meekly;
It's stories are very glorious,
And it's Comic Collum is laborious."

Go to! You are weak on the possessive pronoun; you don't know an adjective from an adverb; your epithets are idiotic. There is nothing "meekly" about us; and as for your comment on the masterpiece of erudite wit which is my special province—well, it only shows what an utter ass a chap can be!

G. G. (Third Form, Greyfriars).—You have, you say, "grate abalities for journalism," and would like to contribute to our paper. But at the present moment fires are getting out of date, and the result of your "abalities" might fail to reach their proper place. But send the stuff along. Mind you write on one side of the paper only, however, and don't make ink-smudges on the really important side. This is the side left blank.

H. W. (Greyfriars).—All serene! I will send you along something. No need to sack P. T. His stuff is all very well in its way, but no sane person could ever mistake it for mine. There is a gulf between true genius and mere talent.

H. T. (Fourth).—You assert that the story recently told about you in our columns by Mulvaney minor is untrue and grossly exaggerated. Have it both ways if you like, but settle it with Mulvaney. We will come along and hold your jacket with pleasure.

E. L. (New House).—Yes, it certainly is too bad for masters to ransack our columns on the pry for anything that may seem to refer unfavourably to them. On the other hand, it is the most natural thing in the world that masters should wish to read so interesting a paper as this, and uncomplimentary allusions to them are in the worst possible taste. Redfern having already got it in the neck—or elsewhere—for his action at the pacifist meeting, it seems tyrannical that you should get it in the neck—or elsewhere—for merely recounting the facts. But we of this journal have a profound respect for authority in general, and for your Housemaster in particular. (This may be thought inconsistent in parts; but it is so written that whether Mr. R— reads it or does not read it, he cannot well take offence—provided he exercises judgment as to which set of opinions he accepts.)

J. B. (Study No. 6).—Your "Pro-

verbial Philosophy" pars, while not attaining our high standard for publication, are of merit as the product of a youthful mind—or what, if cultivated, may in time become a mind; and, in order to encourage you, I am giving a sample of two of them hereunder. Try again, sweet child!

"There is nothing like leather, but Choppem's steaks run it jolly close!"

"Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves—anyway, you won't be bothered with looking after them!"

"A stitch in time saves nine—but a safety-pin is a useful thing when your brace-buttons have gone west!"

Tut, tut! Remember that this is a high-class paper!

"Third-Former."—I understand the Amalgamated Press does not cater for the demand for "Deadeye Dick" stories. Unless you are one of those who resolutely refuse all imitations, I think you might get something of the sort from an occasional contributor of ours—he has been crowded out lately—F—s of the N-w H—e.

R. A. D. (Fourth).—Why "a handful of marmalade"? A rotten way of measuring sticky stuff, you think. So do I. But why anything? Why the dumplings at all? You might have guessed they wouldn't be nice!

GREYFRIARS LIMERICKS.

By A.N.O.N.

Though his foeman may foul, the fight's
fought on
The square by him. No better sort on
This planet you'll find
Than the chap I've in mind;
Three times three, then, for staunch
Harry Wharton!

From the Wash to the Kingdom of
Kerry,
From Scilly to Shetland, so merry
A chap won't be found.
Though you search the year round,
As that best of good fellows, Bob
Cherry!

He is often the butt of the joker;
I've heard him set down as a moke, or
A champion ass,
Or a donkey most crass;
But he has his good points, has old
Coker!

In the old days nicknamed "Vaseline,"
He's less slippery now; yet we've seen
Him backslide now and then,
But he's pulled straight again.
There are worse chaps than P. Hazel-
dene!

As Berlin's on the Spree—not the Oder—
A confirmed and most frequent exploder,
(One who's oft "on the bust,"
I mean) merits disgust
As a Prussian; we have one in Loder!

He speaks glibly the thing which is not;
He thinks going straight "silly rot."
But than Snoop or than Skinner
He's a less hardened sinner—
That's the best I can say about Stott!

At "blagging" he's no mere beginner;
He prefers it to eating his dinner.
He once got the sack,
But somehow wriggled back.
Never more! So be warned, shady
Skinner!

THE BIG PUSH THAT'S COMING!

By DICK BROOKE.

Victory! The sound is ringing
Down through every crowded way;
And the glorious news is spreading
Of another hard-won fray.
And the armies of ten nations,
Like the maelstrom of the sea,
In sweeping circles close around
The city on the Spree!

Long, long our men have waited
For the time that's now drawn near.
Now like lions to the fray they rush,
With hearts that know no fear.
And though a heavy price is theirs—
And ours—wounds, death, and tears;
Yet victory is our heritage—
Bear witness, all the years!

And on the perjured city's streets
And on the gleaming walls
Of the Arch-Murderer's palace high
The lion's shadow falls!
Who held the Briton's valour gone,
By ease and wealth estranged?
The world hath seen it still lives on,
Unbroken and unchanged!

THE NON-COMBATANT.

By R. R. CARDEW.

I.

THIS is a true story of something that happened at my last school. I don't suppose some of the chaps there would thank me for telling it; but as I have altered all their names, and have not given even the name of the school—which no one at St. Jim's knows—it will not matter much. I shall send a copy of the mag. to the chap I have called Bigwood, for he was never a friend of mine.

As for literary style, don't expect it! I'm not like that Greyfriars chap, Linley, who will end by becoming a professional author if he is not careful, though the beggar certainly can play footer. I tried to get Levison major to write this for me; but the bouncer said I had better tell it in my own nasty, sardonic style—and who was being sardonic then, I should like to know? I believe Levison could write pretty well if he chose, though.

I will begin where Renton, who was our footer skipper, seized Bigwood by the collar and yanked him fairly off his feet.

Renton was the only chap in the school who could have done it, for Bigwood was a weighty lout. And Renton couldn't have done it to Somervell, with whom Big was trying to quarrel.

Trying is the right word. You could not really quarrel with Somervell—not up to fighting point—because he wouldn't!

And yet he was as big as most of the fellows in the Sixth. I never saw such a chap for a bit over fifteen, which was his age. He was six feet all but an inch or so, and no lamp-post, like some fellows who shoot skywards. And he could box—he didn't mind standing up to old Renton himself, though Renton weighed eleven stone odd, and had the strength of a navy.

No, he wouldn't fight—nothing would make him! And at first we reckoned—all but two or three of the sort who never give a chap credit for decent motives—that it was because we were all so much

below his weight. We looked like kids beside him.

But it wasn't that. For by-and-by it got so that half a dozen of us were fairly spoiling for a licking from him—and didn't forget to let him know it, either! We should have been licked. I fancy Somervell could have wiped up any two of us together. But we told each other we weren't minding that. If only we could get the silent old beggar to fight!

For Somervell was about the least conversational chap I ever met. He would answer you civilly; but he seemed to hate wasting a word. And there was something about him that marked him out from the rest of us. He was almost like a man among a lot of boys. I can understand it now, and see that at heart he was as much a boy as any of us, only—but I must keep that back.

We called him the Quaker at first. But that seemed silly, somehow. So it got changed to the Non-Combatant. If it had gone on till now I suppose he would have been named the Conscientious Objector. And of all the silly names for old Somervell that would have been the giddy limit!

Bigwood was above a bit of a bully, and lorded it over most of the Form. Not over me, or some half dozen others; but we were the chaps who did not mind fighting. I regret to say that some of us were among those who baited Somervell most. But none of the rest of us was so offensive as Big, who was born offensive, and had never got over it.

Renton, though he had no knowledge of Somervell's secret, liked and respected the chap. Somervell had walked straight into the footer eleven—I mean the school eleven—and I doubt whether we had ever had a better right-back. To see him charging you would never have suspected the fellow of objecting to a scrap.

The Sixth seemed to think Somervell ought to be one of them. And I believe that it was because he wanted to lift himself out of the ruck as soon as possible that he worked so jolly hard. But, though no duffer, he was not brilliant, and it could not be done in five minutes.

Renton clumped Big's head—hard!

"I'll jump on this bear-baiting business whenever I see it," he said. "One day Somervell might turn round on you kids, and an inquest would be a scandal it would take the school a long time to live down. Besides, Somervell might suffer from pangs of remorse—though I'm hanged if I should if I were he and committed justifiable homicide on Bigwood!"

Somervell smiled that queer, slow smile of his, and walked away without a word.

II.

SOME of those town louts collared little Carter to-day, and rolled the poor kid in a mud-heap," said Wilberforce indignantly. "He crawled back just about half dead. A delicate kid like that, too!"

There was a town within a couple of miles of us. A rough place, full of factories. I've nothing to say against factory fellows as a class—don't know enough about them. But some of these louts were the absolute limit! Most of the town was out of bounds; but it was our nearest station, and because of that the main street and a street or two besides, were included in bounds.

But the question of bounds never worried us when we had an expedition on against the Longham roughs. Not much at other times, as far as the Fourth were concerned, either.

Bigwood fired up. It was queer. Big loved bullying kids. Yet no one was

hotter than he was if they got put through it at Longham.

"Let's make a foray," he said. "You on, Cardew?"

"Oh, I'm on," I answered. "Don't see how you're going to pick out your particular louts, though."

"What's the odds? Any of 'em will do. You coming, Wilber?"

"Yes. But I'd prefer getting the right louts."

"We'll take Carter along to identify the rotters. You coming, Somervell?"

"I'm not."

"Why not?"

"Don't choose."

"Where should we be now if chaps hadn't chosen to enlist against the Huns?"

"I wonder," replied Somervell, with a curiously far-away look.

"Do you agree with kids being treated like this?"

"No."

"Are you afraid—"

Somervell turned round, and began to walk away.

"Here, hold on! I was going to say are you afraid of getting crooked for the match on Saturday?"

"No."

He went; and Big muttered that the chap was beyond him.

"Some day you'll rouse him," said Wilberforce, "then we shall have to sweep up the pieces."

The expedition was planned for next day. But it did not come off then. Little Carter was the stumbling-block. Big had reckoned the kid would be so keen on vengeance that he would be glad to go along. But Carter did not take it at all like that, rather seemed to feel that he would prefer never to see Longham again until the day came to go home for the holidays.

When he was discovered hiding in an underground box-room, it was too late for that day. But Big looked after him on the next day, and the expedition duly set out. A dozen or so of the heaviest chaps in the Fourth, with little Carter of the Second to point out, if possible, the particular roughs who had put him through it.

Somervell had to go to the station that morning, to meet his uncle, who was also his guardian. We knew nothing of that till afterwards; but it may make things clearer if I tell it here.

The road to the station did not take him through any of the side-streets, which were out of bounds; and by the time he reached Longham we were busy in those streets.

III.

RATHER more than busy, as a matter of fact. We were getting it very hot indeed!

We ran right into a small army of them. And, of course, we could not retreat; the honour of the school was involved. So we held. And it would have been difficult if we had tried, for they were all round us. It was the hottest thing I was ever in.

Little Carter got away somehow. A good thing, too, for the kid might have been killed. He rushed into the main street, and there he saw Somervell.

"Oh," he gasped, "they've got them cornered! They'll kill them! Oh, help, Somervell! Rescue, rescue!"

Just then up dashed Simpson, of our Form, a level-headed chap, who had told Big he didn't go about asking for trouble. But now he had heard what the kid said, and he was going to ask for it.

"Come along, Somervell!" he cried. "School, man, School! School to the rescue!"

THE NON-COMBATANT.

(Continued from previous page.)

Simpson dashed off again. But Somervell stood still. He had to fight a battle with himself.

He stood still. And little Carter told us afterwards that his knuckles were white from the digging of his nails into his palms, and his eyes were ever so strange.

And no wonder! The call of battle rang in the ears of a born fighter, and he might not answer it!

Simpson dashed up to our aid. We needed bigger reinforcements than Simpson. Old Bigwood really was going some—I must do him that justice; and Brampton, and Wilberforce, and Witley, and the rest were all keeping up their ends. But Somervell would have made heaps of difference.

We fought our way out inch by inch—hot work! We were a bruised and battered crew, when on a sudden there came a yell of "Police!"

Then it was all over. The opposing army simply melted away.

Somervell waited at the top of the street. What for? So we all wondered. Was it that we might have the earliest possible opportunity of telling him what we thought of him? It looked rather like it.

Big began to tell him at once, of course.

"You're a funk!" he said.

"Hear, hear!" cried the rest of us, though somehow it wasn't easy even then to believe Somervell a funk.

His reply was as direct as Bigwood's charge.

"That's a lie!" he said.

We hissed him—all of us, I fancy. If there was an exception, it wasn't me, anyway. We were worked up, you know, and the case did look black.

"Easy to call a fellow a liar when you know that you won't fight him," said Brampton. There was a hole somewhere in Brampton's argument, but I don't know now quite where it was.

"Oh, come along!" Big said. "Leave him alone in his glory!"

We marched off, and we were nearly half-way back before someone said:

"Where's that kid Carter?"

We looked at one another, and felt uncomfortable. Everybody had forgotten the youngster.

Big swung round, and started back. It was not easy for any of us to raise a trot, but we all ran after him.

Within a stone's throw of the place where the battle had been fought we found Carter. And we found Somervell, too.

Carter was huddled up in the angle of two walls, his face in his hands, half-crazed with fear. And in front of him, shielding him with his body from the brutal assault of three hulking louts, stood our non-combatant.

He was true to his name still. His face was wealed with brutal blows; his nose bled; and we saw one of the louts slash him over the head with a stick that had a head like a club. But he never hit back once. Only, with body and arms, he shielded little Carter.

We rushed to the rescue. And as we rushed Somervell went down like a man shot, and lay there nearly senseless.

The louts fled.

IV.

"WHAT'S this? Donald, you have been fighting!"

I never saw in my life a weirder-looking specimen than the man who spoke, or heard a man speak in a more querulous, old-womanish voice.

He looked like someone out of one of those old Bible-pictures. He wore a long, dark robe, and no hat; his beard was long and flowing; and he actually had sandals on his feet.

"Well, suppose he has? That ain't your affair, is it?" snapped Bigwood.

"But it is. He is my nephew and my ward; and when I forced the Army authorities to give him up and sent him here to make a fresh start, it was with his promise that under no provocation would he fight."

Whew! We gasped. You could have knocked me down with a broomstick—that old feather wheeze is too thin. But I wasn't very firm on my legs just then, any way.

Out of the Army! Somervell—a chap of fifteen! Oh, of course he looked eighteen, or thereabouts, all right, and they did take fellows who weren't more than fifteen even on their looks in those days; but Somervell, the non-combatant, the—no, we should never have called him a funk again after seeing him stand over that kid Carter!

"Well, he didn't—and he hasn't—and you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!" said Big.

And I had never liked Big half so well before as I did in that minute. Because it seemed to me he had got the whole thing, from our point of view, which naturally mattered most to us, into those few words.

Wilberforce explained. He sounded tame after Big; but he suited the queer merchant's taste much better. Wilberforce looked brainy, though at that moment he was a bit spoiled by a couple of black eyes and various other little gifts of the roughs.

I think Somervell must have gone clean off. For when we lifted him he seemed to be coming out of his sleep, and he muttered:

"I'm all—right. Got—to-go—to—station."

"I am here, Donald," said his uncle, and he spoke very gently.

"I—didn't—fight!"

"I know. Donald, I tried you too hard! I release you from your promise now."

And I thought: "This means a rough house for old Big—and for some more of us, too."

But it didn't.

Any more to tell? Well, I think you might guess the rest. Oh, no, you couldn't, though, for I have not even mentioned Somervell's young brother; and in a way he was at the bottom of it all.

They were the only two; and this queer merchant of an uncle, who was a Pacifist, and a vegetarian, and a no-batter, and several other kinds of cranks,

had really been no end good to them. But he did not cotton a little bit to public schools; and, though he sent this big, hefty fellow to one, he meant to have the younger brother, who was delicate, educated by tutors. And the kid was just wild to go to school, and our man Somervell was no end keen on his going. But he mostly came home with black eyes, and the uncle could not bear the idea of ornaments of that sort on young Ronald's frontispiece.

Somervell didn't get on too well with dear uncle, of course. And when the war broke out he just cut off and joined up—said he was eighteen, I suppose, or didn't say he wasn't—which mostly did as well then. And within three calendar months he was over there, and was even mentioned in despatches. Yes, our man Somervell, who had let those louts lam him, who had stood his cheek and Big's—which was worse—and others, had killed Huns and crawled through No Man's Land, and, in short, conducted himself like the fighting man he naturally was!

Then uncle found him out, and fetched him out—there being a big bobby about enlisting boys just then—and sent him off to another school—our show—and made him promise not to fight, and promised him that if he stuck to it like a good little Pacifist, young Ronald should go to school as soon as he was thirteen.

So he stuck it—for his oath's sake and his young brother's—and somehow, in a queer sort of way, I fancy, for the mad uncle's. For old Bible-picture really had done heaps for them.

Somervell never went for any of us. He would never have explained. It was his uncle who told Wilberforce. The old crank took a liking to Wilberforce—a jolly left-handed compliment! Uncle stayed three days. Rummy thing, but he had come along to tell Somervell that he had changed some of his views. I forget why—something the merry Huns had been doing that convinced him that Hun-killing, and murder were two different kinds of amusement.

Have I heard of Somervell since? I have. Somehow or other he got back into the Army again—with a commission this time—well before his seventeenth birthday. Things can be worked, you know, and I shouldn't wonder if he is a major at least before he reaches military age. His young brother took his place at my old school, and had three fights in his first week, they say. He won't be delicate long at that rate—either cured, or dead.

Another queer thing. After his uncle had cleared off, Somervell went over to Longham alone and found two of those three louts, and put it over them in rare style. I know, for it was one of them who told me. They came up to apologise to young Carter, and Somervell certainly had tamed them; but they were full of admiration for him. One of them has got the V.C. since, and the other has been out.

People really are about the queerest things going; but it's a bore writing yarns, so here goes for

THE END.

To Mr., Newsagent.

Please keep for me a copy of the
GEM LIBRARY each week until further
notice.

(Signed),