

TROUBLE IN THE THIRD!

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



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

TROUBLE IN THE THIRD!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Piggott & Co.

"WHO are you, anyway?" It was Piggott, the cad of the Third Form at St. Jim's, who asked that question, and he asked it of Wally D'Arcy—D'Arcy minor.

"I'm captain of this Form!" answered Wally stoutly.

"That means just about half of nothing at all!" retorted the agreeable Piggott.

And the worst of it was that Piggott was largely right. Captaincy of the Third meant very little more authority than the holder of the honour could enforce by the strong hand.

"What can you do to stop us—that's what we want to know?" asked Watson, who stood beside Piggott, with Kent.

Until quite lately Watson and Kent had been decent, if not distinguished members of the Form. But during the last few days they had chummed up with Piggott, and were walking with him the way of unrighteousness.

They had not yet been taken up by Racke and Gooke of the Shell, or by Cutts & Co. of the Fifth, as Piggott long ago had been.

But no doubt that would come in due course—unless they were stopped.

For the bold, bad blades of the higher Forms found it very hard to have fags to run their illicit errands for them.

As the three stood together in the Third Form-room, backing one another up against Wally & Co., Watson looked unusually pale and Kent rattled nervously at the keys in his pocket.

Kent had nothing but the keys to rattle. Yet only the day before he had cashed a postal-order for ten shillings—a sum which was regarded in the Third as wealth.

Part of it had gone in smokes, and the rest of it had found a way into the pocket of Piggott. Piggott played up much better than Kent and Watson did, having had lots more practice.

Watson's pallor was due to the smokes. Nemesis had pursued Watson, and after two cigarettes and half of a third, he had been very ill indeed.

But neither Watson nor Kent was prepared to drop it, for Piggott had painted for them a dazzling and roscate picture of the ways of the blade.

They certainly had not enjoyed themselves much so far; but they were expecting lots of pleasure in the future.

Wally replied to Watson quite in the same way, which was adapted to the understanding of the Third.

"I can jolly well give you a thick ear each, and I'm jolly well going to, if I have any more of your nonsense!" he snapped.

"It don't take a captain to hand round thick ears," replied Piggott. "I could do it myself."

"You bet!" If you got into the Second and were careful about picking the right man!" said Manners minor. "Little Dobbs would be about your weight!"

Little Dobbs was currently reported

still to wet the midnight pillow with tears for home, although the holidays were very near, and had about as much fight in him as a white mouse. But Piggott did not trouble to resent the insult.

Piggott, in fact, had no wish to quarrel with Manners minor. He would have preferred to make division in the ranks of Wally & Co.

They stood together now, facing the three would-be blades.

Levison minor had a hand on Wally's right shoulder. Joe Frayne stood on Wally's left. Upon these two D'Arcy minor could count through thick and thin.

And he thought he could count upon the rest—Manners minor, Hobbs, Cuddy Gibson, and Jameson, the last named the only New House fag of the band.

But Piggott fancied there were ways of getting at these four, and he had strong hopes of detaching them from their allegiance.

"The real question," sneered Piggott, "is what you can do as captain, D'Arcy. If you'll tell us that—"

He waited, and Wally, did not reply at once. It was not an easy question to reply to. D'Arcy minor's hands clenched and unclenched themselves.

It would be easy to punch Piggott's head—easy, and in a way, satisfactory. But it would not prove anything. And quite certainly it would not settle anything.

Piggott's head had been punched before. It was no longer in much danger of being punched in any real for the reformation of that rascally youngster. Wally & Co. had decided that Piggott was outside the pale, and might be left alone.

But now he was taking Watson and Kent outside with him; and to that Wally had the strongest objection—more on behalf of the Form than because of Watson and Kent, who had never been special chums of his.

"Can't you think of anything?" sneered Piggott.

"Yes, I could report you to the Head!" Wally snapped.

There was a sensation in the assembled Third.

The fags looked at one another uneasily. They did not know that Wally was only bluffing.

There are times when bluff is useful. It has saved lives before now.

But the bluff that pretends authority not possessed by the bluffer is dangerous. Wally was to find. The trouble which followed could be traced directly to that bit of bluff.

"Oh, I say, you know, Wally, that's off!" said Manners minor uneasily. "You know very well Tom Merry won't do that, and his job's a bigger one than yours."

Tom Merry was junior captain of St. Jim's, and, of course, a much more important person than the skipper of a mere fag Form. And it was quite true that only in the very last resort would Tom Merry do anything so drastic as the reporting of a fellow to the Head. It needed a good deal to force him to

report even to Kildare, captain of the school.

It was true—Wally knew it was true. But he thought that Reggie Manners had been in too big a hurry to say so.

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled Piggott. "I can just see you doing it—I don't think! Why, you silly idiot, the Form would jolly well send you to Coventry for sneaking if you tried that on!"

"You don't know what the Form would do. The Form don't love blagging rotters like you, Piggott!" retorted Wally.

"Don't I know? You think you're no end popular and all that, and can ride rough-shod over a chap you don't like. But see if the Form would stand you sneaking to the Head—just see, that's all! Why, even your own neck idiots of pals would bar that!"

Wally might be a hundred times right. Piggott a hundred times wrong; but it was plain that Piggott had correctly voiced the general feeling of the Third.

There were murmurs of assent among some of those who did not rank as special chums of the youthful skipper. And Manners minor and Hobbs and Jameson and Gibson had doubt plainly written on their faces.

They thought Wally was going too far. Better leave Piggott and his new disciples alone than to risk being held a sneak.

After all, Piggott didn't matter at all—that had long been settled, and Watson and Kent didn't matter a far lot!

But little Joe Frayne spoke up manfully.

"Ow do you know what we'd do, Piggott, you crawlin' worm?" he demanded hotly.

"Oh, I'm not talking about you, guttersnipe! 'Tain't likely you'd have any notion of the square thing, the way you were dragged up!"

Joe made a dash at the sneering cad. But Wally held him back. No one but Wally could have held him back without using more force than Wally did. The bond between those two was a very strong one.

"He ain't worth it, Joe!" said Wally.

"And I'm not talking about Levison. He's such a pious, mammy's darling, little prig, that I dare say he thinks sneaking to the Head a holy thing to do!"

"I can take that whence it comes, Piggott," said Frank Levison quietly. "Your opinion ain't worth worrying about."

And Wally felt that Levison minor was a tower of strength to him. Franky was so dead straight, so level-headed, and so utterly loyal.

"Ask the rest!" went on Piggott. "Ask Manners! Reggie's got some idea of being a sportsman, if the rest of you haven't!"

"Shut up!" roared Reggie Manners. Reggie had no wish to be reminded of his recent exploits in the sporting line by anyone; and to be reminded of them by an outsider like Piggott made him writhe.

"Ask them!" echoed Kent feebly.

"Why can't you leave us alone?" inquired Watson, with a sulky scowl. "We ain't your sort, and we don't want to be. If we choose to go about with Piggott, is that your bizney? You can't prove that we're up to any harm!"

"Going about with a scallywag like Piggott is enough," said Levison.

"I should think you ain't my sort!" snapped Wally, with lofty contempt that would have done credit to his brother, Arthur Augustus of the Fourth. "I wouldn't be seen dead with you!"

"They don't want to be seen with you, dead or alive," Piggott made reply.

"Why should they? You've got a dashed silly idea that the giddy Form looks up to you. It don't! Half the chaps snuer at you behind your back when you get on the straitlaced lay."

"Sneering behind a fellow's back ain't plucky," said Levison minor. "They don't do it to Wally's face, and I don't believe they do it at all. You always were a beastly liar, Piggott!"

"What I say is, let's punch the heads of all three of 'em, and have done with it," put in Jameson.

"Hear, hear!" cried Hobbs.

"We don't want to stand here all day jawing to these rotters," observed Manners minor.

"Take them one at a time," said Corly Gibson. "We'll stand the other two off for you, Wally, old scout!"

"Oh, Wally can take three like that with one hand," Frayne said.

"I expect I shall have to punch their heads," replied Wally, with judicial slowness. "They've asked for it. But that don't settle it—you know that very well, young Jameson!"

"That's enough, I think," said Reggie Manners.

"It ain't! They'll go on the randan after it just the same, you bet! Look at that kid Watson now! Pasty-faced and shaking, like some dissipated old crock!"

"Rats to you!" retorted Watson, taking care that he got behind Piggott and Kent before he spoke, however.

"The Form ain't responsible for what they do. It don't hurt the Form that they should blag," said Reggie.

"There you are! Listen to your pal Manners!" spoke Piggott, in triumph. "Leave us alone. That's all we ask for. We shouldn't value your approval; and we don't care about the other thing—as long as you stop cackling!"

CHAPTER 2.

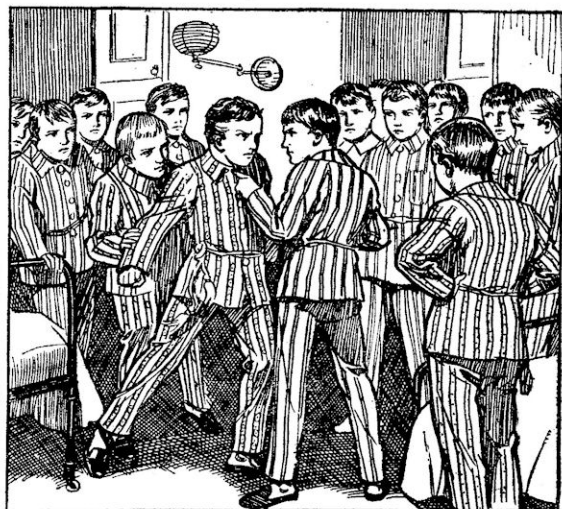
Levison Minor Fights.

"YOU'D better keep your silly head shut, Reggie!" said Wally, with friendly candour that was not taken in quite a friendly spirit. "You're trying to swizzle yourself that when you played the rotter it didn't hurt the Form. I say it did! Only a rank outsider like Piggott can get all on his own in doing a thing like that. These chaps jolly well know it, too!"

"It didn't!" howled Reggie. "You can't prove it did, D'Arcy minor! I don't see what you want to drag it up for at all. I ain't proud of what I did. I'll own that. I got my major into a peck of trouble, and my major's the best chap going! But it wasn't my fault—altogether. It was much more old ass Grundy's for being so rotten careless with his giddy bank-notes. And I don't see how it hurt the Form. It would have been a disgrace if he had stolen, of course."

He paused for breath.

"You've given the whole show away



Wally is Dared!
(See Chapter 5.)

by admitting that, Reggie," said Frank Levison.

"Oh, I don't see it!" Jameson said. "Why did we put ourselves to all that trouble about Reggie?"

"Because he was making himself a rotten disgrace to the Form!" snapped Wally.

"You'll be saying a bit more than I can stand soon, D'Arcy!" breathed Reggie.

"I don't care! Like it or lump it, that's why it was."

"I reckon it was because Reggie is a pal of ours," Jameson said.

"And Piggott and Watson and Kent ain't," added Gibson.

"That's where it is, Wally," said Manners minor, much more quietly. "I know you fellows did it because you were pals. You butted in; but I could stand that. I've looked over it. I admit it wasn't so very far wrong on the whole, and I'll do as much for any of our lot who starts the blagging game. But these rotters ain't pals of ours. They're mere dirt, not worth worrying about. They ain't the Form."

"D'Arcy & Co. are the Form!" sneered Piggott, with an evil light in his eyes. "We're mere dirt, you chaps! So are the rest of you! Wally's a great man, and Levison's almost a little angel, and so is Frayne, though he did come from some beastly slum! And Manners can go on the randan as long as it suits him, and then repent, and everything in the garden is lovely at once! And, of course, Gibson or Hobbs or Jameson could do the same thing, as they follow the mighty Wally! But if it's anyone else, it's quite a different thing! Then the mighty Wally will sneak to the Head!"

It was not often the Third Form-room heard a speech that length. As a rule, the patience of the fags proved insufficient, however interesting the topic discussed.

But this was more than interesting. Never before had Piggott dared to defy Wally so openly.

And there were a good many who had some sort of sympathy for Piggott's attitude—not for Piggott personally, perhaps—just now.

It was a fact that Wally & Co. held themselves the elite of the Form—as they were justified in doing. But the sneering sarcasm of Piggott, following the very injudicious speech of Manners minor, put this fact before the Form generally in a new light.

A dozen or more murmured approval. "That only served to draw Wally & Co. closed together—for the moment."

But the wedge that was to be thrust in among them only waited.

"I don't say we're any different from the rest of you," Wally said. "But I'm skinner, anyway, and these chaps do count for a bit more in the Form than measly blagging rotters like Piggott."

"What about Manners minor?" shrilled a voice from the rear.

"Better come out of that and ask him, young Harvey!" said Wally.

"Yes; come along, Harvey! I'll show you what about Manners minor!" yelled Reggie, turning up his cuffs in warlike manner.

Harvey had no great wish to come forward. He had not counted upon his voice being recognised. But Harvey's friends were seeing to it that he did not disgrace himself by finking Reggie.

He was pushed into the front, and stood there, shifting his feet uneasily and licking his dry lips. Reggie had rather a reputation in the Third as a fighting man.

"Apologise, fight, or be licked!" snapped Reggie.

"I shan't apologise," answered

Harvey: "but I don't particularly want to fight you."

"Rats! You mean you particularly don't want to fight me! Take your licking, then!"

"And now Harvey's to be licked for saying two words about Manners' minor!" sneered Piggott. "Wally and the rest can say what they like about us, of course. But Harvey's only dirt, and mustn't speak!"

"I'm not going to take a licking!" said Harvey, mustering up all his pluck.

"And I never said you were dirt, or thought so, kid," answered the magnanimous Reggie, turning down his snuffs again. "You practically called me a blagging rotter, but—"

"I didn't mean it that way, Manners, really! Look here, I'll apologise if you reckon I meant that."

"Punk!" howled someone.

"That was Gladwin," said Wally. "Step out and put your fists up to Reggie yourself, Gladwin!"

"He ain't up to my weight—nowhere near it," said Reggie, as Gladwin was thrust forward. "Let him take on Harvey!"

"That's the way!" sneered Piggott. "When Wally & Co. find themselves cornered in an argument, they set chaps fighting so that they can wriggle out!"

"It would be more than they could do to set you fighting, Piggott," said Frank Levison.

"I'm ready to fight you, and chance it!" Piggott snarled.

Frank's reply was a smack of the face for Piggott. Everyone was surprised—even Levison minor's own chums.

No one really doubted little Frank's pluck. He had shown it in many ways. And he had fought before now, in defence of his brother's good name. But everyone knew that he was not quarrelsome. He was certainly the most peaceable member of the Co.

And Angott was bigger and heavier and stronger than he.

None of them quite understood what Frank had done it for. And he could not have explained. He had acted as if on instinct. At the back of his mind there may have been some dim, vague thought that the war of words had gone on too long, and that a battle of fists would clear the air.

Not a battle between Harvey and Manners' minor. Harvey had merely been dragged into the controversy. He did not count. Still less a battle between Harvey and Gladwin—a ~~his~~ squabble!

"You'll have to fight me now!" roared Piggott.

"That's what I want," answered Frank calmly.

"You can't wangle out of it—like Manners!"

"If there's anyone wants to wangle out of this, 'tain't Franky!" said Manners pointedly.

"I shall lick you!" Piggott snarled.

"You've plenty of tongue," said Jameson contemptuously, "but you can't give Frank the sort of licking you mean with that!"

"Try fists for a change, Piggy!" suggested Hobbs.

"It ain't really a fair match," protested Piggott. "I might hurt the kid, and then—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Third in chorus.

"Go on, Piggy! They'll think you're faked," urged Wally.

"So he is!" growled Kent.

"I don't want to hurt him," said Piggott generously.

But the Third knew how to value Piggott's generosity.

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"Yah! Punk!"

"He smacked your face, Piggy!"

"Go for him!"

"No fear! Piggy's better at talking than doing!"

"Hit him again, Levison!"

Suddenly Piggott hurled himself forward, and hit out—right, left!

They were foul blows actually, though they might not be so in the letter of the law, since Frank was presumably on the defensive.

But Frank had ceased to expect Piggott to fight, and his arms were down. The blood gushed from his nose, and a bruise showed on his right temple.

"You cad, Piggott!" howled Wally.

"Go it, Franky! Mop up the floor with him!" yelled Manners.

Levison minor went it, hammer and tongs. His reach was shorter than Piggott's, and if Piggott's guard had been only moderately good he could have kept his opponent off.

But Piggott's guard was about as good as Piggott's heart, and that is to say little enough for it!

The waster of the Third roared out in pain when Levison's hard little fist got him on the mouth. Frank's knuckles were cut, but he paid no heed to that. Piggott's lips were cut, and for Piggott that was the beginning of the end.

His nose streaming blood, his fists hitting out quickly, Frank pressed the cad back. Piggott, having begun to give ground, kept on giving it, the crowd making way for him, and closing in again behind Frank.

But at last Piggott had reached the wall, and as it would not open to let him through—which he would have preferred—he took to the offensive again.

He dealt Frank a blow between the eyes which staggered him, and followed it up with one which any referee would have denounced as a foul—it was distinctly below the belt.

Frank gasped in pain. His ears were ringing, and there was a mist before his eyes. But his courage did not fail.

He gave Piggott a punch in the chest that made the outsider gasp in turn, and followed it up with one on the right ear.

"You! Stop it! I've had enough!" barked Piggott.

"Do you mean you own you're licked?" snapped Wally.

"No! Yes! If you like! I—I don't want to hurt him! He ain't up to my weight! I—"

Piggott ceased suddenly. A hush fell upon the Form-room.

Mr. Selby, their master and tyrant, stood inside the door!

CHAPTER 3.

Wally Dares!

"WHAT does this mean? Such an unparalleled scene of turmoil I never set eyes on before!" stormed the Form-master, as he entered the room.

If it was really as bad as that, it must have been very bad indeed, for scenes of turmoil were far from rare in the Third. But when a scene of the Third kind had Mr. Selby, and considered him the limit in the way of asking utterly puffing questions.

He would barge in while a row was going on, and demand what it meant—as he did now.

How could they reply to anything so absurd? It meant nothing, except that there was a row, and he could see that for himself!

Somebody was usually getting hurt, of course; but what did that matter to old Selby? If he objected to the Third being hurt, why didn't he go easier with that beastly cane of his?

Muting, flat and open, was never far out of the minds of the Form. They could have borne Mr. Selby's severity if he had only been fair. But he never was.

He was not fair now. His eyes fell upon Frank Levison, and he was down upon the youngster at once.

"You have been fighting, Levison minor! Now, do not deny it!"

"I wasn't going to deny it, sir," said Frank.

"Don't bandy words with me! I will not brook impertinence!"

"Silly old geezer! How could Frank deny it with a mug on him like that?" whispered Wally to Reggie.

"With whom were you fighting? Tell me that!" snapped Mr. Selby.

Frank did not answer. Piggott did not answer either, though everyone naturally expected him to.

Levison minor's bleeding nose and battered face pointed him out at once as one of the combatants. But, though Piggott had had enough to cause him to throw up the sponge, he was far less marked.

He was sucking at his cut lips, but he did not push himself under the master's notice. His modesty went so far as to take him into the shelter of a blackboard. "You will take five hundred lines, Levison!"

Still Frank was silent. He would have to do the lines, of course, and he might get more if he did not answer. But Mr. Selby had no right to ask him with whom he had been fighting—according to the code of the Third. No master had any right to ask a boy to sneak, so they held.

The proper question would have been: "Who has been fighting with Levison?"

He asked that now. The Form did not half believe that there was any need for him to ask it. Most of them thought he must have seen as he stood at the door.

But he had not. It was only Frank's damaged face that had enabled Mr. Selby to pick him out so readily as one of the offenders. And no one else revealed to the roving eyes of the master damages like those Frank bore.

He repeated his question with added snap. Some of the Third looked hard at Piggott. But Wally & Co. did not. They looked rather markedly the other way. Piggott ought to own up without any pressure.

"Very well! Very well indeed! The whole Form will be detained on the next half-holiday!"

"Oh, crickey!" gasped Harvey.

"What did you say, Harvey?" thundered the master.

"I—I— Nun-nun-nothing, sir! At least—oh, crickey, sir! But I didn't mean it!"

"As the absurd exclamation has no meaning, that is an unnecessary observation. Two hundred lines, Harvey! Learn to speak English—in my presence, at least. What is it, Piggott?"

The cad of the Third, still sucking his cut lips, had emerged.

Piggott did not care much about public opinion in itself. But in the Third public opinion was apt to be expressed in ways which Piggott objected to strongly. If the Form had a half-holiday in detention owing to Piggott's reluctance to speak up, it would be exceedingly painful for Piggott.

"If you please, sir, I'm sorry, but I was fighting with Levison. I didn't really want to. I said I was above his weight, but—"

"From the fact that Levison is badly marked, while you show no signs of the conflict, there would appear to be some weight in your objection. But

you could not have been forced to fight if you had had the moral courage to refuse. And as you have had the moral courage to own your fault, that would not have been too much to expect of you. Two hundred lines, Piggott!"

"Yes, sir," replied Piggott, meek as any dove.

"My hat!" gasped Wally.

Five hundred for Frank—only two hundred for Piggott! Just if Piggott's slowness in owning up yielded punishment for the whole Form, surely Piggott deserved more than his antagonist!

As for Piggott's moral courage, that was worth about as much as Mr. Selby's sense of fair play.

The master turned in wrath. He was not sure who had spoken.

Joe Frayne tried to avert the inquiry that was upon his lips.

"We don't 'ave to stay in now Piggott's owned up, sir, I s'pose?" asked Joe.

"And why should you suppose anything of the sort, Frayne?" snapped Mr. Selby.

"Why, it stands to reason, I think, sir," said Reggie Manners. "It was because the other chap didn't own up that we were to be punished. Now he's owned up—though he took his time about it—well, then—"

"Are you not aware, Manners, that I do not permit argument as to my methods of discipline? I asked a question of the whole Form. The Form was obstinately silent. Levison, specially addressed, has been specially punished for his recalcitrance. Piggott, for fighting, has been given two hundred lines, and for his hesitation in answering will share detention with the rest of you. I trust that you all follow me? Perhaps even your rudimentary brains and absurd notions of discipline, will hardly so obscure my points as to make them unintelligible!"

Having said that he would not permit argument, Mr. Selby had weakly gone on to argue, and there was not a boy there whose brains were so "rudimentary"—though they might not have known what that meant—that he did not perceive the explanation to be unsatisfactory.

"But, sir—"

"Be silent, D'Arcy!"

"I think, sir—"

"You had better think twice before you presume to say another word!"

But Wally's hot resentment against the injustice of it all would not let him heed the danger-signal.

"You told us how you saw it, sir. I don't see what you did that for, if we're not to say a word about how we see it!" he said doggedly.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy!"

Wally obeyed. Mr. Selby whipped a cane from behind his back. It was seldom indeed that he came into his Form-room without one. He had, by the way, no particular business there just then. A wet half-holiday had kept the fags under cover, and at such times the masters made allowances for a little more noise than usual.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Three times the cane came down cruelly across Wally's hand.

He did not even wince. And after the third stroke he still looked the tyrant straight in the face.

"Do you still wish to argue the point, D'Arcy?"

"Yes, sir!" answered Wally.

"I give you fair warning that if I consider your argument worthless I shall order you to hold out the other hand!"

In a silence that could be felt, Wally held it out at once

"Is this impertinence, D'Arcy?" stormed Mr. Selby.

"No, sir. But I don't expect you to agree with what I say, and I may just as well get it over before I speak." Wally replied doggedly.

"Oh, cheese it, Wally!" whispered Jameson. "It's no good jolly well asking for it!"

"I do not think you will desire to speak after I have done with you!" snapped the Form-master.

"I think I shall, sir," said Wally steadily.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Mr. Selby put all he knew into those three strokes. At the third the cane split up its length.

But Wally, with tingling palms and a burning heart, still faced the master.

"That will do, D'Arcy!"

"But you haven't heard me yet, sir!"

"I have no wish to hear you."

"Oh! 'Taint fair!"

"Was that you, Frayne?"

"Yes, sir."

"It isn't fair!"

"Frayne's jolly well right!"

"You ought to listen to him!"

"Tell him, Wally!"

Piggott and a few more faint hearts drew aside. They wanted it to be evident that they had no share in this. But the majority of the Form joined in those shouts.

"I can't while you chaps are howling like that," yelled Wally.

Silence fell.

"Now, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Selby, with a cruel look in his eyes.

"It's only this, sir, and I don't suppose you'll think it's much. But the way we look at things, nobody but Piggott had any right to say who the other chap fighting was. It ain't for anyone else to sneak."

"You call it by the absurd term of sneaking when an answer is required of you by a master?"

"Yes. It ain't anything else—it can't be!"

"But, you impudent cub, that is to deny my right to put the question! That is to criticise me—me!"

"No, sir. Of course, you've a right to ask who was fighting. But only the other chap has a right to answer—not the rest of us."

It was clearly enough put. Mr. Railton or Mr. Linton or Mr. Latham would have seen the point at once. But no one of the three would have argued such a matter, or have put himself into a position for any argument concerning it to arise.

"That's the way we see it, sir," chorused a score of eager young voices. "You need! Let everyone who sees disobedience as a right and has the temerity to say so, come forward!"

"I dunno what temerity is, but I'm jolly well backing up old Wally, and chance it!" said Manners minor to Gibson.

And Reggie stepped boldly forward. But he was not first. Frank Levison and Joe Frayne got ahead of him. Gibson, Hobbs, Jameson, Harvey, and half-a-dozen others followed.

But some of those who had lifted voice hung back now, and Piggott and the weaker spirits generally took especial care that they made no move that might carry them nearer the bold few that you have a right to disobey me?" thundered Mr. Selby.

It was not a fair way of putting the case, for Wally had not argued for disobedience as a right. But Mr. Selby never was fair.

"Nobody said—"

"I will not hear another word from you, Levison, you disgraceful little hooli-

gan! Nor from you, Manners!"—Reggie had thrust forward—Considering the disgrace you have recently brought upon the Form, I cannot believe that even the most densely ignorant in it would attach any value to your opinion! No, nor from you, Frayne! It is not to be supposed that your upbringing has qualified you to express yourself luminously on such a subject! Leggett, what have you to say?"

The malcontents fairly groaned. Wally had said his say. Levison was to be dumb because he had been fighting, Manners because of faults in the past, Frayne because of something that was certainly not his fault! And Mr. Selby's sense of justice made him choose as spokesman—not Gibson, who was nervous, but could have spoken out, not Hobbs or Jameson, neither eloquent, but each bold enough—but poor, stammering Leggett, a decent, plucky youngster, but of no note in the Form, and so tongue-tied by his affliction that it was hopeless to expect anything of him!

But Leggett was a favourite butt of the Form-master, and through him the rest could now be heard.

Leggett tried his best.

"T-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t, a-s-sir!" he managed to get out.

"I haven't the whole afternoon to spare, Leggett! Come here! Fetch a cane from my desk, Piggott! No, fetch half-a-dozen!"

Piggott had no joy in the errand. He would have preferred to stay in obscurity. It would not be forgotten that he had been chosen to fetch those canes.

But he quite enjoyed what followed.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Leggett, Manners minor, Frayne, Levison minor, Harvey, Butt, Jameson, Hobbs, and the rest—one by one they came forward at the master's call; and one by one they took their punishment, three across each hand. And most of them took it without a cry; and none held it against those who did give vent to their pain by a yell. It was the flesh, not the spirit, that was weak.

Four split canes lay by Mr. Selby's side now, and the beads of perspiration stood out on his unpleasant face.

Denton stepped back with his hands under his armpits, and his face weirdly contorted, and Wally D'Arcy stepped forward.

"Are you asking for more, D'Arcy?" snapped Mr. Selby.

"I didn't suppose you'd let me off my share of this lot," replied Wally, his lip curling.

Mr. Selby, caught him by the collar, and made the cane writhe round him. Wally did not struggle. He set his teeth hard, and took it like a stoic.

"Shame!" cried Frank Levison and Reggie Manners.

"Sus-sus-sus-shame!" stuttered Leggett.

"Shame!" yelled Hobbs, roared Jameson, uttered Gibson, waited Levison.

For a moment it looked as though the punishment would begin all over again. But then Mr. Selby hurled Wally from him into the arms of Frank Levison, and threw down the cane and stalked from the room.

CHAPTER 4.

Good Counsel.

"MY hat, Frank! Somebody's been putting you through it!" said Ernest Levison, when his minor turned up in Study No. 9 on the Fourth Form passage that evening for help with his Greek.

Frank would have stayed away, if staying away for one evening would have been of any use. But for a week or more

to come he must bear the marks of conflict; and to keep out of his brother's sight for a week was impossible.

Clive had not finished his prep yet. He looked up from it with interest at Levinson's minor's face.

Cardew had done all the prep he meant to do. He was now deep in a volume of O. Henry, the American author, for whose work he had contracted quite a craze. He looked up, too.

The chums of Study No. 9 were all three almost like elder brothers to Frank. Cardew and Clive were genuinely fond of him, and perhaps Ernest Levinson's affection for the youngster went deeper than any other feeling he had. Levinson major was frowning now. He did not relish seeing the bright, innocent face so marred.

But Cardew grinned. He knew how Frank would take it.

"Are you just emerged from a promiscuous an' unremediated engagement with a chaff-cutter, kid?" he asked.

"No. It was Piggott. It's all right, Ernie! It don't really hurt much," said the lad.

"Did you lick him?" inquired Sidney Clive.

"Yes. I—well, anyway he choked it. Said he didn't want any more. That's good enough, I suppose?"

"Piggott's face must be quite an interesting sight—polychromatic, by gad!" said Cardew.

"Polly what? It wasn't about a girl—don't be silly, Cardew!"

"Sarcastic, not silly," said Levinson major. "He means—"

"I don't mind about that. It comes to the same thing. But Piggott ain't marked much—hardly at all!"

"What did you fight about?" asked Levinson major.

"Oh, I don't know exactly. There was a bit of an argument, and Piggott talked like a rotten cad. He is a rotten cad, you know."

"Wherefore, youngling, it should not have surprised you that he talked in the manner of one," remarked Cardew.

"It didn't. But someone had to punch his head, and I did it. Any of the chaps would have done. It just happened to be me, that's all. Don't let's talk about it."

But the three Fourth-Formers seemed to find the topic interesting.

"I've told you to steer clear of Piggott," said Ernest Levinson.

"I know. So I do when I can. But I couldn't just then. Wally was going to stop him."

"It's rather a pity Wally didn't," said Clive. "It would have been much healthier for your innocent young mug if he had."

"I don't mean that. Of course, it wasn't for anyone to stop us when we'd started. And old Selby came in, and there was a jolly row, and a lot of us got six each, and we're detained for the next halfer, and I've got five hundred lines."

"For a righteous young person, Frank, you do really seem to have gone 'round it some," remarked Cardew quizzically.

No one asked about Mr. Selby, and why he had come down on the Third so heavily. Everyone knew that Mr. Selby was unfair and tyrannical. But Levinson major was interested in something his minor had let slip.

"What was Wally going to stop Piggott at?" he asked.

"Oh, well, there can't be any harm in telling you chaps, can there?"

"On the contrary. Tell your kind uncles, an' relieve your mind, by gad!" Cardew answered lazily.

"Piggott's been getting those two young asses, Kent and Watson, to go blagging. And Wally won't have it. He

says it's a disgrace to the Form; and I think so, too. But Reggie and some of them don't."

"And has Wally stopped it?" inquired Clive. "He's quite right, and so are you, Frank. It's all very well to talk about a chap minding his own bizney, but it can be carried a blessed sight too far."

"Qui' ri', old Springbok!" said Cardew. "Frinstance, where should I have been by now, by gad, if you an' Levinson an' some of the others hadn't butted in good an' hard for my benefit? I didn't feel properly grateful at the time, but now I can see you meant well. An' you have my very best thanks—an' complete forgiveness, too, by gad!"

Clive flushed, but Levinson major only laughed. The three were the best of chums now. But perhaps Clive would never understand Cardew's wayward nature as Levinson understood it.

"Wally couldn't stop it," replied Frank simply. "It's a bit of a fix, you know. Of course, he can punch Piggott's head; but, as he says, that don't really settle anything."

"He joves, Wally's learnin' things!"

"He knows a heap now," said loyal Frank. "You chaps think he's only a kid, but I tell you Wally's no end of a—"

"—Oh, I don't know how to put it!"

"Here, let's say!" suggested Cardew.

"Well, so he is! You'd have said so if you'd seen how he stood up to that old beast Selby!"

"Tell you what Wally might do, Franky, and that is have the gloves on with you now and then," said Levinson major. "I know Piggott's above your weight, but if you'd any guard worth mentioning he'd never have been able to play postman's knock on your face like that."

"Oh, he will! He says so. I don't often fight, you know, Ernie; and we've been wiring in jolly hard at cricket. There hasn't been much time for boxing. Look here. Wally threatened Piggott with reporting him to the Head. Would it be the thing for him to do that?"

The faces of all three of the Fourth-Formers were very serious for a moment. Cardew's was the first to break into a smile.

"By gad, that's drastic!" he said.

"Can't be done, Franky!" Levinson major said.

"No; of course it can't," said Clive.

"But I don't blame Wally for thinking of it. It's pretty rough, the way a rotter gets you because you won't sneak!"

"Reggie says those chaps say it can't. I don't know."

"Would you do it yourself, Franky, in Wally's place?" Cardew asked curiously.

"No; I'm not sure, though. It's beastly, because Kent and Watson ain't really rotters. I know one thing. If Wally does it I sha'n't cut him for it."

Piggott says all the Form will. But I sha'n't, and Frayne won't!"

"What about the rest?"

"I'm afraid they will, Clive. They'd back Wally up in anything else—ducking Piggott, or ragging him bald-headed, but not sneaking, they say. Clive, it's really, truly sneaking—when it's like that, I mean."

It was not lightly that Sidney Clive answered. He was the strongest, and yet, in a way, the simplest of the three chums. The simplest, because his nature had none of the queer twists and turns that made both Cardew and Ernest Levinson hard to read.

Clive's was the clear vision of the fellow who had always gone by one standard. He might judge wrongly, but always his judgment would be honest.

The other two looked at him as he replied:

"Franky, I wouldn't advise Wally or anyone to do just that. It's the sort of

thing that the chaps bar, and there's lots of reasons why they bar it. But I'd not cut the chap who did it in a case like this—banged if I would! I should know he hadn't done it for fun, or for spite. That's my opinion for what it's worth. But keep Wally off it if you can. It's jolly near the end of term, and things may be different when we come back."

"There's a sermon for you, kid; an' it ain't half a bad one, by gad!" said Cardew.

Frank rather wished Wally could have heard. But he knew that the advice of Clive would not seem as important to Wally as it did to him.

Eutropius now claimed the Third-Former's attention, and he and his brother bent over the book together, while Ernest Levinson patiently made plain the difficulties which would have been all too big for Frank's aching head but for his brother's help.

"Dashed affectin', ain't it, Clive?" said Cardew, meeting the South African junior's eyes as he looked up from "Roads of Destiny."

"Nothing to jeer at in it!" said Clive shortly.

"My dear man, I ain't jeerin'! I wouldn't think of doin' it. I've a high respect for Franky, by gad!"

CHAPTER 5.

Wally Is Dared!

"WALLY going to put that cad Piggott through it to-night, Franky!" said Wally cheer-

fully, when Frank Levinson rejoined his chums.

"But not for bashing your dial, young Levinson," added Reggie Mannars.

"Ass! Of course not! It's for getting us all detained, I suppose, Wally?"

Wally nodded.

"He can tell Selby if he likes," said Hobbs.

"Not very well, after what he said to Wally," objected curly Gibson. "Anybody got any bread? 'Cause I've got a tin of bloater-paste, but it ain't much without bread."

"I've got some biscuits," said Hobbs. "They're sweet ones, though."

"What's the odds?" Wally rejoined.

"Not much, as it's Piggott," said Frank. "He wouldn't bar sneaking himself if he did—"

"Seems to me you've got Piggott on the brain, kid. I ain't talking about Piggott," interrupted Wally. "I'm talking about Hobbs's biskies. I don't see why they shouldn't go all serene with bloater-paste."

"It ain't bloater; it's anchovy, after all!" said curly, producing his treasure.

"What a sell! The rotter sold it to me for bloater, too!"

"Why didn't you look at the label, you chump?" said Reggie.

"Anchovy's all right; goes further," said Wally. "Who's got a knife? No, not yours, Hobby. I saw you digging for worms with it. And young Joe cuts his toenails with his. I ain't as peckish as all that! I've lost mine. Where's yours, Franky? You've got cleaner ways than these bouncers."

"I lent it to my brother."

"Chump! Fathead! No telling what he'll go and use it for. And it was the only clean one we'd got among us. Giv me a penholder, somebody! I'd better share that stuff out, young Gibson; then there won't be any grumbling, because I shall give anyone who grumbles a nice tight ear—see?"

"Let me count the biskies, Hobby," suggested Reggie.

"Whafor? They're mine!"

"Not likely! They belong to the firm now. Lemme see 'em. Seven of us—no, six! Jimmy's had to toddle off to his kennel in the New House, of course. Spread

'em out in rows of six each. Why, the blessed things have got sugar on them!"

"What's the matter with that? You don't often get sugared biscuits now." "Ethead!" Who wants sugar with anchovy paste?"

"Well, I don't mind licking the sugar off them all first," said Hobbs liberally.

"You'd be sick," Frank said.

"You mean we should," corrected Wally. "Go and wash your paws before you touch those biskies, Hobbs."

"Ethead! My own biscuits! Jiggered if I will! Besides, my hands ain't any dirtier than anybody else's!"

"Well, I dunno that they are, come to that," admitted Wally. "I think it's about time the Third backed up and washed! Here's your dab, Franky. It's your potato-trap you put it in; it ain't onment for the Piggoty bashes, you know."

"Lucky for young Levison he'd a funk like Piggy to deal with," said Reggie Manners, with his mouth full of biscuit. "I must say he didn't make much of a show. On that form I could lick him with one hand tied behind my back. Even Curly could lick him!"

"Well, I could lick you, young Manners!" retorted Gibson.

"Rats! Wally might—not any of the rest of you. I ain't saying Wally could, mind you—but he might."

"Just as well you admit that much, Reggie," said Wally cheerily. "But I can tell you this: There ain't a man among you except me who could knock Franky—unless he had the luck to knock the kid out. And you ain't much at knocking anybody out; you don't know within a foot or two where you ought to hit 'em to do it."

"How do you make that out?" growled Hobbs.

"I should like to know that. It ain't because young Levison's so clever a boxer, any road, for he don't know more than the first thing about it," Reggie said.

"He's got a lot to learn; but he'd pick it up jolly soon, and I ain't so sure as you of your duffers would."

"And when he'd picked it up, I suppose he'd be able to whack you, Wally," said Gibson, spreading anchovy paste over a red-sugared biscuit.

"I don't say that. I'm bigger and stronger and heavier than Franky, and I couldn't teach him more than I know myself, so—"

"Then you wouldn't teach him a fat lot," said Hobbs.

"Anyway, Frank ain't Wally ain't never likely to fight," said Joe Frayne.

"I guess not," said Wally gravely.

"I'm pretty sure we'd never want to," Frank said.

And not one of the three had any foreboding that within three days D'Arcy minor and Levison minor would be facing each other for a fight to the finish!

"Don't you chaps know it's bedtime?" said Butt, sticking his shock head in at the Form-room door. "Oh, grub going, is there? Bag some!"

"None left, Buttercup!" answered Wally, getting off the desk he had been besting.

"Here's a biskier," said Hobbs. "I've sucked the sugar off it—"

"Then you can have the rest!" snorted Butt.

He drew closer to Wally and Frank as they passed out behind the rest, and said:

"I say, D'Arcy, that cad Piggy's got something up his sleeve, you know!"

"Oh! Can't say I mind," replied Wally.

"Well, a warning won't hurt you. He's told the fellows—some of them—that he's going to take your swank down."

"First I've heard about having any, Buttercup. Never mind, you mean

well, kid. But you needn't suppose I care a rap for anything Piggy can do."

Piggett looked sulky in the dormitory; but he refrained from looking Wally's way.

The cad of the Third was not precisely popular just then. He never was, for that matter; but the lost halfer, and the caning which a number of the Form had had, combined to make him particularly disliked that evening.

It was known that Wally & Co. meant to punish him for getting them into trouble with Mr. Selby. And it was known that Piggett had boasted of a scheme he had for making D'Arcy minor sit up.

Piggett's great wheeze would be a talky-talky one, of course. All felt sure that that—as sure as they were that Wally & Co. would go in for nothing so cheap as talky-talky.

D'Arcy came in and put out the lights and for some five minutes thereafter silence reigned in the Third dormitory. It was injudicious to start operations before the prefect had had time to get through his task and go downstairs.

Wally broke the silence.

"Piggett lost us all a halfer to-day," he said. "Has anyone got anything to say against Piggett's getting to for it?"

"I have!" growled Piggett.

"You don't count. Ain't you going to speak up for your pal, Kent? Or you, Watson?"

"Well, we've lost the halfer, too," said Kent.

"You ain't quite as big a fathead as I took you for!"

"And three of us wouldn't stand any chance against you lot," said Watson.

"Signs of sense about you, too!"

"Gerout, Piggy!" said Reggie Manners.

"Shan't! You'll just leave me alone, or—"

"Or what, Piggy? Shall you sneak to Selby? He took your part this afternoon—said you'd got moral courage," said Hobbs. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he don't really love you," added Curly.

"You never can tell," said Reggie Manners. "Perhaps Piggy is the sort of thing old Selby really could love!"

"Selby had a little pig."

With fleece as white as ink; And Selby's pig was popular; Like Selby—I don't think!"

sang Curly Gibson. Curly fancied himself as a poet at times. He was no great shakes as a poet, but he had a singing voice.

"Are you going to shin out, Piggett?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Because we're going to slipper you. Two chaps of every chap who is docked the halfer, one extra by everyone who was caned—and me two extra, because I was caned twice!" said Wally.

"Well, I don't want to be slipped, so I'll stay where I am!"

"Quite a good where—if we'd only let you. But we ain't getting to, you see."

"I'm not getting out for anyone!"

"Your mistake! You're getting out for me!"

Piggett was unusually defiant; but whatever he had up his sleeve was evidently no defence against force. He was tumbled out, and the fags crowded him half an hour in bed; but round him.

A few stayed in bed; but round him the majority felt that Piggett deserved some punishment for what he had done—or failed to do—and a slipping, even by the greater part of the Form, was not really so bad as three across each hand from Selby.

"Now's your chance, if you want to sneak to Selby!" said Wally, after he had brought a thick but pliable slipper down four times upon Piggett's anatomy. "Nobody but me has done anything to you, and we won't stop you if you try to cut off and tell."

"I'm not a sneak!" replied Piggett, from between clenched teeth.

"You mean you want the rest?"

"Oh, go on, you bullying young cad! You've got the dashed Form to back you, and—"

"That's enough, Piggett! I don't need anyone to back me against you. Look here, you chaps, will you let the slimy beast off—on conditions?"

"Depends upon what the conditions are," said Reggie, flicking a bedpost with the slipper he was burning to use upon Piggett.

"Only that he shall chuck taking those two young idiots about with him; that's all."

"Oh, cheese that, Wally!" cried Manners minor. "I've got three whacks to give the rotter, and I'm not going to be done out of it for two snivelling kids like Kent and Watson!"

"We're no more snivelling than you are, Manners!" blasted Kent, not caring for the Form, you see," replied Piggett venomously. "But I tell you what. You've bragged about that you'll report me to the Head—"

"There wasn't any brag about it," said Wally, a trifle uneasily.

"Oh, you're backing down now, are you?"

"No, I'm not. But—"

"You are! Funk! You are!" Piggett's voice rose almost to a shriek. "I dare you to do it—there!"

"That's all—very well," returned Wally. "But there ain't anything just now to report—not anything particular, I mean."

"But there's going to be! Before two days are over I'll jolly well give you something, and then we'll see whether you'll fly in the face of the whole Form—except your toadies, Levison and Frayne. I dare you! Don't say afterwards you didn't understand!"

"Oh, come away, Wally! The rotter makes a chap feel sick," said Frank Levison.

"Get out of the road, Wally, old son! I haven't had my whacks at him yet," Reggie said.

D'Arcy minor allowed himself to be bundled aside. The slipping went on; but he seemed to have lost interest in it.

Frank Levison wondered what he was thinking about as he sat up in bed, unusually silent. Whatever the subject of his thoughts was, he was certainly thinking hard!

CHAPTER 6.

Piggett & Co.—Adventurers!

"I WISH we hadn't come," said Watson, shivering.

It was not the cold that made Watson shiver. The night was quite warm.

Piggett and Watson and Kent had been to the Wayland Cinema show.

They had not enjoyed themselves greatly.

Watson and Kent said it was about the rottenest show they had ever seen. But if it had been quite otherwise they would not have cared much about it. One's joy in a thing is rather spoiled by the fact

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that one is shivering in one's boots all the time.

Kent and Watson were not cut out for desperadoes. There was no real vice in them. Cigarettes affected their internal arrangements in a very unpleasant way—especially Watson's. And neither liked losing at cards cash that might have been spent to much greater advantage. Kent, who was reputed "rather minky" in the Third, especially objected to this.

It was their first escapade in the way of breaking bounds at night. They had not told Piggett—they had not even confided it to one another—but each of them had made up his mind that it should be his last.

Piggett—who had paid for the unappreciated treat—was sulky.

He did not believe that Wally would carry out his threat of reporting. If he did so, there would be heavy trouble for the three; but not such heavy trouble as would have been the case if the night expedition had been to the Green Man, or some such haunt.

A fellow would not be sacked for going to the cinema after lights out, Piggett thought.

But Wally would not carry out his threat; he would never have the nerve to face the Head first, and afterwards the just wrath of the Form.

Wrath there would be—wrath and contempt. An angel from heaven could not have convinced the majority of the Third that to report to the Head was anything but sneaking. Wally, captain of the Third, though he was, had no standing such as would justify a report, and if the Head had held him justified, the Third would not.

The three were just outside Wayland when Watson spoke.

They were clear of the throng that had pressed out of the picture palace, and before them in the moonlight stretched Wayland Moor.

It had not seemed late until then; but now, with no one but themselves on the road, they began to realise the lateness of the hour and the loneliness of the moor.

So Watson said that he wished they had not come.

"Oh, buck-up, kid!" said Kent.

But Kent did not sound too cheerful.

"I'm hanged if I'll take you two lashed little worms out again!" snapped Piggett.

Watson suddenly developed spirit.

"I'm hanged if you will!" he retorted. "At least, I don't know about Kent; but I know jolly well I shan't be on. Wally's about right. This is a silly mug's game."

"Wally won't find himself right to-morrow," sneered Piggett.

"Why not?" Kent asked.

"Because he's got to back down and own that he was only bragging when he said he'd report us to the Head, or else

"Or else what?" inquired Kent uncomfortably. "Look here! You know, Piggy, he might do it! I never really thought of that!"

"Wally ain't the chap to take a dare," said Watson. "He'll do it. And then—Oh, you silly idiot, Piggett! A nice mess you'll have got us into with your blagging!"

"Well, if he does," said Piggy, "we shan't be sacked for this. You two kids don't know what real blagging means. We've only been to the cinema. It's breaking bounds, but 'tain't blagging—not by long chalks!"

Piggett spoke as if his undoubted superiority in the blagging direction was something to be proud of.

"That's all very well," Watson replied. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 501.

"But there'll be a beastly row. Like as not we'll be birched. It ain't worth it—is it Kent?"

"Not jolly likely!"

"But it will be the merry dickens of a score over D'Arcy minor, the swanking ace! The whole blessed Form will cut him!"

"Do you want the Form to cut Wally, Kent?" asked Watson.

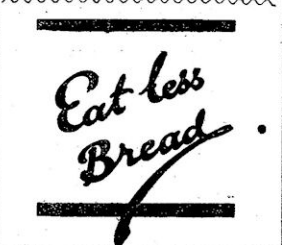
"I dunno! No, I don't! Wally's worth a thousand of this sneering cad! I wish we'd listened to him. I say, Watson, ain't that someone on in front? My hat, if we're seen!"

"It's a gorse-bush throwing a shadow across the road," said Piggett, with an air of boldness, though for a moment his teeth had chattered. "You kids are rotten funks. I don't care a dash about you, and if it wasn't for myself I should rather hope the Head would birch. He may. But D'Arcy minor will be nicely had when he tells the old man we've been blagging, and we prove that we've only been to the cinema!"

"Oh, crumbs! Shall we be able to prove it?" groaned Watson.

"He's bound to take the word of three of us!" Piggett replied.

"Oh, is he?" said Kent. "Everyone knows what an awful young liar you are, Piggy! And I shouldn't wonder if we're



taken for liars, too, through going about with a sweep like you!"

"See here, young Kent—"

"Watty, shall we give him a jolly good hiding? He deserves it, for leading us into this blessed scrape!"

"Good egg, Kent! Let's try!"

"You'd better not try it on!" said Piggett, in alarm. "Here, stopp! You silly fatheads, stopp!"

The two had gone for him. They were fed up with the whole escapade, and the knowledge that Piggett had simply made tools of them in a plot against Wally was the last straw. Even if they had felt any gratitude towards Piggett for standing treat, it would have taken unto itself wings now. But, as it was not there, it did not need wings wherewith to depart.

"Yooop!" howled Piggett, as they tumbled him over into a gorse clump, after a few blows on either side had been given and taken. They were random blows, and they did not hurt anyone much. But the gorse prickles were another matter. There was no doubt about their hurting.

"Let's cut on and leave the rotter there!" said Kent.

"Don't be such cads!" burred Piggett.

"No, I don't think we'll do that," said Watson, who felt that three had scarcely been a sufficient company for the lonely moor road.

So Piggett, much disgruntled and very discomfited, was allowed to resume the journey with the mutineers.

All his influence over them had gone.

But he was not worrying about that. It was not worth much, anyway. What worried him was the fear that, after all, Wally might report. It wasn't the safest of things to dare a fellow of Wally D'Arcy's sort to do something the effects of which would be heavy upon yourself if he refused to sit down under the dare!

It was a relief to all three when they reached the wall of St. Jim's.

But three hearts were in the mouths of their respective owners when from the shadows spoke a voice—a voice which asked:

"Who's there?"

They also were in the shadows, and they stood still. Mr. Latham was not the keenest meter at St. Jim's. There was a chance that he might think that he had made a mistake without putting himself to the trouble of an investigation, and if he moved to investigate, they might dodge him. Anyway, it was no good giving themselves away.

He did not call again. They saw him come out into the moonlight, walk up to the gates, and let himself in with his key.

"That was a beastly narrow squeak!" said Kent, breathing hard.

"We ain't out of it yet," quavered Watson.

"He didn't see us," said Piggett.

"We've only to wait a few minutes, and the coast will be clear."

But there Piggett made a mistake.

Mr. Latham had gone in, telling himself that he had only imagined he saw something. But when he reached his own study he felt much more sure. Three figures—yes, there had been three, he was sure! And the very fact that no answer had been made to his question merely made more likely the possibility that the three had been boys from the school!

The Fourth Form-master hurried out of his room. He had sat down and changed his boots for slippers before the spirit moved him to look more closely into this doubtful affair, and his slipped feet made no noise in the corridors.

The three adventurers did not see him. But he saw them!

By the moonlight streaming full in through a landing window he saw them, himself invisible in the darkness below. And he recognised all three.

"Piggett—Kent—Watson! Third Form boys! What is the school coming to? The audacity of it! Nevertheless, I am sincerely glad that they were not members of the Fourth. I will go to Hamilton at once. No, I cannot, for he is away to-night! Perhaps I had better go to Selby. But I do not think I will; he is so very crusty if disturbed late, and he may even have gone to bed. It will keep till to-morrow," said Mr. Latham to himself.

If the three adventurers had been of the Fourth, the Fifth, and the Sixth, and had been seen by Mr. Selby, that gentleman would certainly have followed them up to their dormitory. He could not have foregone the pleasure of letting them know at once that they were caught out—and by his smartness.

But Mr. Latham had no such feelings. He recognised that, as a matter of duty, the escapade must be reported. There his concern with it ended. The boys were not in his Form, and he only knew them by sight and by name. There was none of the meddlesome spirit that made Messrs. Ratcliff and Selby so unpopular with their colleagues about Mr. Latham.

But somehow Mr. Latham did not in the very least relish the prospect of reporting the delinquencies of the three to Mr. Selby, whose ideas regarding discipline were not at all his.

CHAPTER 7.

Frank Hears Something.

"THERE you are, Frank!" said Ernest Levison.

His minor looked down at the paper which had been handed over—papers, rather, for there were more sheets than one.

"I couldn't tell them from my own, Ernie," he said. "It's—it's jolly good of you!"

"Rats, kid!" replied the elder brother. "If I mayn't do you a good turn, who may I do a good turn to?"

Certainly Ernest Levison was the only person at St. Jim's who could have done that particular good turn to his brother, for Mr. Selby had an unpleasant way of examining lines very closely, for fear the boy to whom they had been given had got help in doing them. But Levison major could reel off impositions in the hand of another fellow almost as quickly as he could in his own natural fist.

"It will be all right unless Selby asks me whether I have done them all myself," said Frank.

"Well, you needn't—"

The elder brother stopped short. Both of them flushed slightly as Frank said:

"Of course, that's putting a chap on his honour."

"That's right, Frank. But I hope the beast won't come you for getting help!"

"I guess he will if he tumbles. But it's jolly well worth the risk. And I'm no end obliged, Ernie!"

He went, Cardew, who had been present, but had not spoken a word, gave a long, low whistle as soon as the door closed behind him.

Levison major turned on him almost fiercely.

"Pax, old man!" said Cardew. "I wasn't going to say a word that was anything but complimentary to the kid!"

"He doesn't need compliments!" growled Levison major.

"On the whole, you're right. I've no use for little angels; but our Franky is a little white man—white clean through. St. Jim's don't hold his giddy equal."

"There are plenty just as straight," Levison major answered. "And I tell you plainly, Cardew, I'd have my right hand cut off before I'd see the young'un playing the rotter as I've played it!" Or as I have, Levison," Cardew said quietly.

His chum looked at him with an odd mixture of affection and doubt on his face.

"You're a queer beggar, Cardew," he said. "And you've done some rummy things in your time; but you were never worse than grey—not black, like I was!"

"It was a dingy shade of grey, though, Levison. An', as we are on a subject that very likely we shall never touch again, I don't mind tellin' you that Franky has done me good as well as you. An' I couldn't think more of the kid if he was my own brother—very likely I shouldn't think half as much."

Clive came in just then.

"You chaps are looking no end serious," he said.

"We're feelin' so," said Cardew.

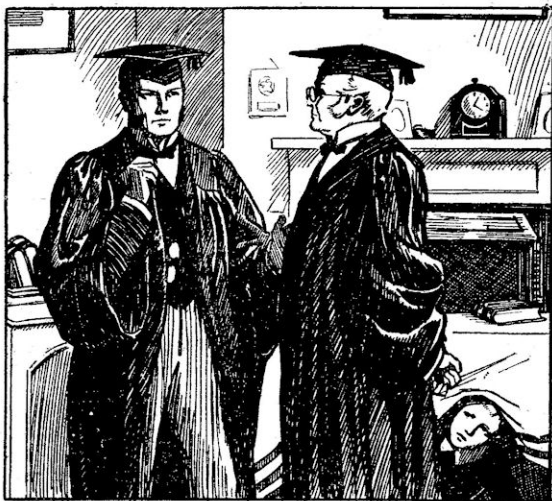
Clive glanced at Levison, and said no more.

Meanwhile, Frank had trotted along to Mr. Selby's study.

Frank Levison assuredly was not a little angel. He had his full share of mischief.

Temptation smote him strongly now. Mr. Selby was not in his study. Frank looked round, and his eyes gleamed as he saw the inkpots—red and black—and a pot of gum on the master's writing-table.

It would serve old Selby jolly well right if—



Frank Hears Things.

(See Chapter 7.)

His right hand was on the pot of gum, and the next moment he would have committed himself to a deed that he might have had cause to regret later.

But in time he heard a step in the corridor, and saw the knob of the door turn.

There was nothing of the funk about little Frank Levison; but he lost his presence of mind then, and did the wrong thing.

He dodged under the table.

It was not Mr. Selby who entered, however. It was Mr. Latham.

"Dear me, not here!" said the Fourth Form-master.

Another step sounded. Again it was not the owner of the study, though.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, entered.

"Ah, I thought I saw you, Latham!" he said. "I followed you in, as I knew that you would not find Selby, and there is a matter I want to discuss with you. Oh, nothing in the least unpleasant, I assure you! Merely a small discovery I have made in connection with a subject which I am aware also interests you."

"I am relieved to hear that. I am sorry to say that my errand here is scarcely a congenial one," said Mr. Latham gravely.

"Then it is unlucky that you cannot relieve yourself of it at once. But I happen to know that Selby has gone to Weyland."

"Linton, there is a doubt in my mind—a grave doubt! Neither you nor I can be said to approve of Selby's methods of discipline."

Frank was sorry now he had got under the table, and felt much inclined to emerge at once. But, after all, he thought, neither of the masters could say anything about Mr. Selby's methods of discipline that would be news to him.

He stayed—only to wish later that he had come out!

"Selby and discipline, as I understand the word, have nothing in common," said

Mr. Linton drily. "The man is an unmitigated tyrant, who should never have had authority anywhere!"

"He suffers greatly from dyspepsia," replied Mr. Latham mildly.

"And he passes on the suffering to others!"

"That is true, Linton, may I ask your advice—as a friend, and in the strictest confidence?"

"My dear fellow, you may command me!"

Again Frank didn't like it. But he could not come out now.

"Last night I saw three boys of Selby's Form out of bounds—Piggott, Watson, and Kent. I did not confront them. Forgetting for the moment that Raitton was absent, I thought of reporting at once to him. But I cannot let the matter stay for his return; and I had therefore come here to inform Selby of the occurrence."

"I should do nothing of the sort!" rapped out Mr. Linton. "I would not hand over a case to Selby's judgment, tainted as it would inevitably be by his internal discomfords and his notorious inability to regard mercy as weakness."

"What would you do, Linton?"

"I should go to Holmes! No man is faultless; but I would be willing to leave the fate of my own boy—had I one—to the Head of this school, sure that he would deal wisely and well."

"You are right—a thousand times right!" said Mr. Latham warmly.

"I will proceed to the Head at once. I shall not tell Selby anything whatever. Holmes will, of course, do what he sees fit in the matter. I need not say that, in the circumstances, I do not wish Selby to know of my visit to him; and, on the whole I would very much prefer that none but yourself and the Head should know that I have had a hand in the affair."

"I think you are doing well to avoid controversy with Selby," Mr. Linton answered. "And practically everything

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is matter for controversy with Selby in those days. I avoid the man as far as possible. You can depend on my keeping silence, Lathom, as you know; and I think that Holmes will see the force of your objection if you state it to him."

"I hope so—I hope so. For I am sure that Selby would be very unpleasant indeed if he were made aware of the fact that I had elected to go to the Head without consulting him, when the matter concerned his Form exclusively."

The two masters went out together. Frank left his hiding-place, and made a bolt. He took the lines with him, for he did not want his visit to the student in Mr. Selby's absence to be suspected.

But, though he regretted having heard so confidential a talk, he was not worrying about it greatly.

Frank Levison could keep a secret as well as most people. He felt that he was on his honour to keep this one.

If he had come out of hiding he must have given his assurance to Messrs. Linton and Lathom, that he would say nothing. But that would have created a very awkward situation for all three.

It was not likely that two masters would be keen on sharing a secret with a fag in the Third—especially as that secret had to do with their inmost feelings in regard to the fag's Form—nor that he had no right to share a secret with them—to their knowledge.

As it was, it did not seem to him to matter much, except that he felt mean about having heard. He could keep a shut mouth, and his knowledge would make no difference.

He did not guess how difficult it was going to be for him to keep silence!

CHAPTER 8. Before the Head!

"YOU sent for me, sir," said D'Arcy minor, entering the Head's sanctum in response to Dr. Holmes' "Come in!"

"Yes, my boy," answered the Head gravely.

There was hardly enough, but he flinched before the Head's steady look, which seemed as if it could read his inmost thoughts.

There was silence for a moment. Then the Head said:

"I regret to tell you, D'Arcy, that your Form-master has laid a very serious charge against you. He says that you are insubordinate, and the cause of insubordination in others."

Wally raged inwardly. He felt that it was grossly unfair. No other master—except, of course, the unpopular Mr. Ratcliff—would have punished a fellow three times and have reported him to the Head afterwards.

But there was no denying the charge, and it was of little use pleading that he had been provoked and goaded into something like rebellion. To argue a matter with the Head required an older brain than Wally's. The less said the better.

"I need not ask you whether this is true, D'Arcy," went on the measured tones. "I am not going to punish you. That I gather, has already been done."

"I'll bet he had to ask Selby whether I'd got it in the neck before the old beast told him that," thought Wally. "And he didn't tell him all he'd done to me, either."

You are not a boy of a bad disposition, D'Arcy, of that I am sure. You are faithful and straightforward. I look to you to be a credit to a higher Form in the future. But discipline must be maintained. Mr. Selby is here to be obeyed; and behind his authority, when necessary, is mine. But it is bad for a

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boy when my authority has to be invoked by his Form-master. It is a circumstance which I do not easily forget, which cannot help but weigh with me if that boy is brought before me again. I think you understand that?"

"Yes, sir," replied Wally. How he wished that the Third could be ruled by such a man as the Head! Not even then would they have been models to the school; but—well, things would be very different, and a fellow would have a fair chance.

"You may go, D'Arcy. And don't forget!"

"I won't forget, sir," replied Wally. And he went, full of respect, almost of affection for the Head, but hating Mr. Selby worse than ever.

As he passed out of the Head's quarters he met Piggott, Kent, and Watson going in.

Kent and Watson were like two puppies with their tails between their legs. They had not the spirit to say a word to Wally.

But Piggott's face was full of angry spite.

"So you've been to the Head, you rotter!" he snarled.

"Yes, I've been to the Head," replied Wally, looking him straight and full in the face.

"I never thought you'd dare! But you've just about done for yourself now, D'Arcy minor!"

"We'll see about that!" said Wally calmly.

Piggott could do him no real harm with the Form. Let Piggott do his worst!

Wally had only to say why he had been to the Head. He had not wanted to miss his chance of competing public property. He had meant to tell no one but Frank Levison and, perhaps, Joe Frayne. But there was no disgrace in it, and the story could be told if necessary. Even now, however, he had not made up his mind to tell it.

Piggott & Co. caught it far hotter than Wally. Piggott's record was not a good one, and if the Head had not believed that the object of the night escapade was nothing worse than a visit to the Wayland cinema—serious enough, but a far less grave offence than going to the Green Man or any such disreputable haunt—Piggott would hardly have escaped expulsion.

As it was, Taggles was called in, and he was biched. Watson and Kent were only caned. They were warned that a second offence would entail severer punishment.

But it would be a long time before either offended again in this way. Watson's knuckles were in his eyes before the Head had done talking to him, but he bore the caning better than Kent, who yelped dismally. Piggott howled and begged for mercy, but got only justice—which was really better for Piggott, though he could not see it.

"I don't think D'Arcy need have gone and told," said Kent dolefully.

"It was rotten. But I ain't sure I'm sorry he did," Watson replied. "It's done it for me! Don't you ever speak to me again, Piggott! I've had enough of you, that's over!"

"Little white-livered finks!" sneered Piggott. "I'm going to make D'Arcy minor wish that he'd never been born!"

"I don't mind that," said Watson. "But I think if it was only one of you it would have been better it should be you than Wally!"

"Fear, hear!" said Kent.

There was absolutely no doubt in Piggott's mind as to who had given him and Watson and Kent away to the Head. Wally had been true to his word, and had told Dr. Holmes. Then Wally should suffer!

CHAPTER 9.

Up Against It.

"DO you say that you blame me if I did it, Reggie?" demanded Wally, looking hard at Manners minor, who was rather inclined to avoid his gaze.

"Look here, Wally, don't be an ass! I don't want to quarrel with you for the sake of a cad like Piggott, who deserves sackin' anyway."

"That ain't the thing. If I did it, do you blame me? That's what I asked you."

"If!" sneered Piggott, who had wasted no time before exploding his mine.

"I'm not talking to you, Piggott! I'm not going to talk to you—except with my fist, or my foot!"

"What do you keep on saying 'if' for?" asked Reggie, with irritation that was quite natural. "We ain't talking about 'ifs.' If you tell me straight out now that you didn't, I believe you, and that's all there is to it. Piggott lies like a Hun, and he will have to prove what he says before the Form believes it." "That's good enough without my saying anything," answered Wally. "For Piggott can't begin to prove it!"

But a considerable section of the Form did not agree with Reggie, who himself was wavering.

"If it ain't so, it's up to Wally to say it ain't so," said Harvey.

"Hear, hear!" chimed in a chorus. Wally looked round him defiantly, and, like Pharaoh of old, he hardened his heart. The Form generally had thought a lot of the manner in which he had stood up to Selby. He valued his office as skipper, and did not regard it as any means an empty honour.

And he had threatened to report Piggott if necessary.

To admit that he had gone before the Head and asked for a disgrace to the blessed Form—against me, when I only want to keep the Form decent—that would be very galling to his pride.

He would not admit it! He would tell no one—not even Frankie!

But at heart he was by no means sure that anything would have taken him to the Head on such an errand as Piggott averred had been his.

And that made his position weak, and through the knowledge that it was weak his temper suffered.

"Well, I'm not going to!" he said hotly. "If you chaps care to side with a cad like Piggott—a disgrace to the blessed Form—against me, when I only want to keep the Form decent—"

"He's admitting he sneaked!" howled Piggott.

"I'm not!" roared Wally.

"Do you deny it, then?" asked Reggie. "Have a little sense, old scout! Either you did or you didn't. You can't have it both ways!"

It was Wally's last chance, and if he had stopped to think he might have taken it, even at the cost of his pride.

But he did not stop to think.

"I don't admit it, and I don't deny it," he said stubbornly. "I say that if I did it there's no reason why anyone—but those three should mind it—they would, of course. But who cares for what a rotter like Piggott and two silly kids like Watson and Kent think?"

"That ain't it!" snapped Reggie. "It's what we think. I told you when you threatened Piggott that I reckoned going to the Head was dead off, and you know that the other chaps thought the same. You can't expect that the Form's going to stand it!"

"The Form's got to stand it!" shouted Wally. "As for you, Reggie Manners, I've no use for a chum of your sort."

"Don't speak to me again till I speak to you!"

"I won't—and not then!" retorted Reggie hotly. "But don't you run your head against the silly notion that it's only me, Curly and Jimmy and Hobbs all think the same. So do Joe and Levison, only I suppose they won't own up."

"I'm stickin' by Master Wally," said Joe resolutely.

"So am I, whether he's right or wrong," Frank said.

"Come off it, Wally! We know you didn't sneak," put in Hobbs uneasily.

"I certainly didn't sneak," replied Wally, with an emphasis on the last word.

"It ain't sneaking when it's D'Arcy minor!" snarled Piggott. "Can't he do things that would be all wrong for the rest of us?"

"Piggott's a rotten outsider!" said Jameson candidly. "I think it was off if Wally did split about him; but it seems to me it would be quite enough if old Wally said he saw his mistake now, and wouldn't do it again."

"Good for you, Jimmy!" said Gibson. "Now then, Wally, old chap! You ain't really so swanky that you mind owing up you were wrong for once!"

But Wally could not do that. And he was sure that if he backed down now, and told the whole truth, some there would refuse belief—perhaps most of them.

"I've said all I'm going to say," he replied doggedly.

"But I've something more to say," Frank Levison put in, to the surprise of everyone. "I know Wally didn't do it—I know, I tell you!"

Levison minor alone of all there knew exactly what Mr. Latham. He did not know why Wally had been to the Head; but he felt so certain it was not to lay a report that he spoke as confidently as he could have done if he had heard Wally's story.

"Of course!" Piggott sneered. "Any tale D'Arcy minor likes to tell Levison minor will swallow!"

"If he could tell Frank that your yarn was a lie, he might have told us," said Gibson. "But as he did tell Frank, that's good enough for me. Wally ain't a liar."

"I told on!" said Wally sharply. "I've told Levison nothing, and if he knows anything, it can't be through me."

Every eye was turned upon Frank, who flushed under the gaze of the Form, and looked far more guilty than Wally.

"Out with it, Frank!" said Jameson encouragingly.

"Wally won't mind," said Hobbs.

"No, I don't mind," Wally said.

He had dived upon Wally that he was hard up against up. He had bluffed twice. The first bluff had resulted in putting him into a very suspicious position, for without it no one would have paid heed to Piggott's charge—indeed, the charge might never have been made. And the second bluff had made his case worse still. He had played for a vote of confidence, and had most obviously failed to get it.

Frank must know something, as he said he did. There was no doubt about that in Wally's mind. Let Frank speak out, then, and all would be right, without injury to the D'Arcy pride! Wally would have laughed at the idea that he was as proud as Arthur Augustus; but, in his different way, he was.

"I can't say any more," said Frank haltingly.

He wished now he had not spoken. It had been done on impulse. He might have known that his bare assurance would not clear his chum.

But, as he saw things, it was as impossible to tell of that conversation between Mr. Latham and Mr. Linton as it would

have been if he had given his word of honour not to tell. He felt that his honour was pledged. He had had no right to hear; having heard, he could not possibly tell!

"Rais!" yelled Piggott. "Is Levison such an ass as to think we'll swallow a yarn like that?"

"It certainly ain't good enough for me, as it stands," said Manners minor. "I'm not saying a word against Franky—he wouldn't lie about it, I know."

"But he might be mistaken," said Hobbs.

"I think I know Wally didn't. I reckon it's only old Wally's pigheadedness," remarked Gibson shrewdly. "But that don't prove anything, does it?"

"Thank you for nothing, Curly!" snapped Wally.

"What Levison minor thinks ain't proof," said Reggie.

"What you think ain't sense, Reggie!" retorted Joe Frayne.

"Better speak out, Franky," urged Jameson.

"I can't! I know it, but I can't tell you fellows how I know it. You understand, don't you, Wally?"

"Blessed if I do!" returned Wally.

"It sounds middling silly to me. But I'm not asking you to tell, Frank."

He did not ask; but he wanted it, nevertheless, as Frank could see. A gulf was opening between them, and with every moment Frank kept his secret it would grow wider.

And Frank must keep his secret. He was as hard up against it as Wally. He had more at stake than Wally. It was honour in his case, only pride in his chum's.

"I can't tell," he said; and, with heart throbbing fast, and a queer feeling in his throat, almost as if he were stifling, he walked out of the Form-room.

"I've had enough of this," said Wally. "You chaps had better see about getting Piggott made Form captain, as you're so jolly keen on him! Come along, Frayne!"

And he and Joe went out together. Curly Gibson made a step or two as if to follow, but Manners minor dragged him back. Hobbs and Jameson looked hard at one another.

The brotherhood was breaking up!

CHAPTER 10.

Friends Fall Out!

"SNEAK!"

"Swanker!"

"Who went and sneaked to the Head?"

"Turned so pious that he had to go and let on about chaps cutting out to go to the cinema!"

"Yes! 'Tain't as if the asses were really blagging. And even if they had been—"

"Sneak!"

Wally's head was in a whirl as he faced the dormitory.

He saw that Reggie Manners, Gibson, and Hobbs were keeping apart from the rest. They did not join in the outcry. Neither did a few more, for that matter. But it seemed to Wally as gross treason to friendship that they should hold aloof from him at such a time, as if they had joined his enemies.

Only two stood by him—Frank Levison and Joe Frayne.

And Wally did not feel as grateful for Frank's loyal support as he might have done. During the hours that had passed since the scene in the Form-room there had been growing in him resentment against Frank for not speaking out. If the silly young beggar could clear him, why didn't he?

But if Wally's head felt rocky, his courage did not fail. What he did then

needed courage, looked at rightly. For he told the plain truth, though he was late in telling it.

"I don't care a scrap what you rotters think!" he shouted.

But that was not quite the truth, though he meant it—or fancied he did. If he had not cared he would not have told.

"But it will be a bit of a take-in for you when I tell you that I never said a word to the Head about the measly three—and never meant to!"

Silence fell. All there knew that Wally had a habit of telling the truth. Most were inclined to believe that he was telling it now—but not by any means all.

Reggie Manners and Curly Gibson and Hobbs looked hard at their chum and leader. They believed, but were not pleased or satisfied. He had spoken too late for anyone to feel satisfied.

Piggott's sneering voice broke the silence.

"Tell that to the marines!" said Piggott. "You were coming from the Head when we went to him. Kent and Watson know that."

"I've never denied it," replied Wally.

"Then perhaps you'll tell us what you went to him for?" asked Piggott triumphantly.

"I don't know why I should. It's my bizness, and no one else's!"

"I should tell them, if I were you, Wally," murmured Frank.

"Who asked for your advice? You ain't so jolly keen on telling things!" snapped Wally.

Frank shrank back as if he had been struck. To his sensitive nature that speech was like a blow in the face.

"You'll have to tell, old chap," said Reggie, in a conciliatory tone. "It's no good making half a ruddy tale of it now that things have gone so far."

"I told you not to speak to me again till I spoke to you, Manners!" rapped out Wally.

"And who the merry dickens are you that I should do what you tell me?" barked back Reggie.

"Steady on, Reggie!" spoke Curly Gibson.

But Wally paid no heed to Curly. He turned to Joe Frayne.

"What do you say, Joe?" he asked.

"You're the only chap I have left."

Frank Levison turned away to his bed, and began to undress.

This was the end, then! Wally had cast him off!

"That ain't right, Wally," said Joe uneasily. "There's Franky, anyway; an' those chaps—"

Levison won't speak, and the rest can't, make my word!" said Wally bitterly.

"I think as I'd tell it all, if I was you," said Joe.

"Then I will. I went to the Head because Selby had reported me for insubordination, and I had a wiggling. There!"

Wally's face flamed. He had hated telling that. Not as captain of the Third, wielding authority, had he gone to headquarters, but a mere rebellious fag!

Now they knew it. Let them make the most of it!

But his face went redder yet, and he sprang forward with clenched fists, as a murmur of unbelief arose.

"Rais!" said Piggott. "It's taken you a long time to make up that yarn!"

"And it's a bit too thin now it's made up," said Kent. "I should have thought a jolly right more of you if you'd owned up to the truth, D'Arcy! I don't mind owning I'm sorry I went."

"Same here," said Watson.

"It is the truth, you shrieking idiots!" roared Wally.

"Let Levison prove it, then," said Piggott. "He says he can."

It would suit Piggott's bookwery well to intensify the breach between Wally and his loyal chum. He did not believe Frank would speak out, and he did not want him to.

"Now, then, young Levison!" said Reggie, in his lordliest way.

"I've nothing to say except what I said before," said Frank quietly.

"Then you've said either a dashed sight too much or a dashed sight too little!" snapped Wally, turning upon him in anger.

"It can't help it. That's how it is. If I could explain you would say I was right. But it's impossible," said Frank hopelessly.

"You're no friend of mine, Levison!" "You can't make me your enemy, Wally!"

"Oh, hang your beastly meekness! Take that!"

Wally stepped up to Frank, and slapped his face.

Half the dormitory gasped.

"Oh, cheese that, Wally!" cried Curly Gibson.

"You know what that means, Levison?"

"He won't fight!" jeered Piggott.

"He fought you all serene!" said Hobbs.

"Me? I ain't Wally D'Arcy, you know."

"Not by long odds!" said Reggie Manners. "Wally's an old ass; but he couldn't be a putrid Piggy if he tried!"

"I'm talking to Levison," said Wally doggedly.

He was sorry already for what he had done. But Frank's attitude annoyed him. Frank ought to have punched hard at his nose, Wally considered.

Instead he stood there with the marks of Piggott's fists still upon his face, and looked sorry. Not in the least funky; but sorry—and for Wally, rather than for himself.

"How could he expect a fellow to stand that?"

"I know," said Frank. His voice trembled a little, but that was all. "I shall have to fight you, and of course you'll lick me. That's all right. I can take a licking."

"He'll fall flat as soon as Wally the Great touches him, and then they'll make it up. Honour satisfied, you know!" Piggott sneered.

"I don't think you understand what honour means, Piggott," said Frank.

"Now, then, you kids! You ought to be in bed!" spoke the voice of Eric Kildare, captain of St. Jim's. And at once there was haste to undress.

Kildare scented something unusual in the atmosphere. But he saw nothing to justify suspicion.

"I'll give you two minutes more," he said.

When he came back everybody was in bed. Frank Levison did not speak another word that night, though Piggott giped, and his chums tried to draw him.

He might have answered Wally; but he had no word for Manners' minor or Hobbs or Gibson. And neither Wally nor Joe Frayne spoke.

CHAPTER 11. Asking Advice.

WALLY FELT by no means gay next morning.

It was soon evident that the majority of the Form refused to believe his explanation. Coventry was in the air!

And he kept up his resentment against THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 501.

Manners' minor and those who had stood by Reggie, till he made them almost ripe for voting the punishment Piggott was scheming to bring about.

But the worst of it all was that he had to fight his best chum; and he knew Frank too well to imagine he would give in until he was licked to the wide.

As for Frank, he worried less about the fight than because of the strong feeling in the Form against Wally.

What could he do—not to avert the fight, but to put Wally straight in the eyes of the Third?

He could see no way out.

And he would not go to his brother. Ernie would want to know too much.

There was Cardew, though. Cardew was as clever as Ernie, and Frank thought no end of him. He had never minded Cardew's patronising way; that did not mean anything, he was sure.

He got his chance during the period between classes and dinner.

Clive and Levison major went off somewhere on their bikes. Frank watched them go, and then trotted up to No. 9.

"Hallo, Franky!" said Cardew.

"Your innocent young mug looks rather like the latest in Futurist paintin's. I should never have thought Piggott could hit so hard—dashed if I should!"

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Frank.

"What is anything? Why, nothin' in

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particular," drawled Cardew. "An' what's the nothin' in particular that you've come up here to yarn about in the absence of the mentor, kid?"

"It's like this, Cardew—"

Frank paused.

"Then it seems to be chiefly silence," returned Cardew. "Break it, Frank! You'll never get much forrarder with your speech if you don't, 'know'."

"I want to ask you what you'd do if you were in my place?"

"I think I should adopt a mask till my face got normal," grinned Cardew.

"Oh, blow my face!"

"Don't go lookin' for any more blows. The merry Piggott seems to have done enough damage."

"I'm serious, Cardew!"

"You usually are, kid. But never mind—tell your kind uncle! He warns you, however, that what he would do probably ain't the right line for you, because he's got a merry little habit of doin' the thing which shouldn't be did."

"That's rot, Cardew! If I didn't know you were straight I should not have come to you."

"Thanks, kid!"

"Suppose you heard something in confidence, and they didn't know you'd heard—"

"Who were they?"

"Oh, never mind that! It doesn't matter. And then it happened—that that you had something to prove, and couldn't prove it without telling what—"

"Hold on! I've got to know more about how you heard before I can answer that."

"Well, suppose you were under a table—"

"It ain't a habit of mine, young 'ungettin' under tables. Too stuffy. Still, I've a bit of imagination, an' I'll let it carry me as far as under the table. What then?"

"Well, you hear. And it was two masters. And they told each other things in confidence. And you didn't come out—"

"On the whole, I think I shouldn't," Cardew said lazily, as Frank paused. "Not that I'm keen on the location indicated. But I don't go around askin' for trouble. An', takin' one consideration with another, as Gilbert says, I think it up to the two grave an' reverend seigneurs to look under the table before they began talkin' secrets, by gad!"

"You didn't come out," went on Frank, far too much in earnest to answer chaff in the same spirit, yet feeling that Cardew was making it easy for him to tell. "You didn't come out because you were so well, ashamed, and p'raps a bit finked."

"Just what my feelin's would be, Franky. You an' I have lots in common—lots!"

"And then it came so that—so that your best chum was in a hole, and the only way to get him out of it was to tell what you had heard. But you felt that wouldn't be the straight thing; you'd made up your mind that you wouldn't ever tell a word, because, oh, because it was up to you not to, as you oughtn't to have heard—see?"

"But I ain't sure that I should have made up my mind, Franky. I admit that eavesdroppin' ain't one of my bad habits. But this was a perfect accident, an' you haven't made it clear that the pair of heels would be hurt by your tellin'. I might tell, holdin' it no more than a bit of idle gossip, by gad!"

"You wouldn't, Cardew. You couldn't, because it wouldn't be honour bright. There, that's how I feel!"

"An' the tellin' of the story seems to you a vital necessity, kid?"

"Yes."

"Then, as you can't tell it, why not ask one of the other parties concerned to do so?"

"Crums! I never thought of that! Of course, I should have to own up. 'Tain't all jam to do that; but I can do it all serene. I shall go to Lathom—it's more his biznez than Linton's."

"Glad, for your sake, it ain't Selby, or Ratty. It certainly wouldn't be a jammy job then. But Lathom is quite a decent beast, as masters go. What's happened to the sprightly Wally?"

"I didn't say anything about Wally, Cardew!"

"You weren't referrin' to the delightful Piggott when you mentioned your best chum, I suppose?"

"You're jolly keen, Cardew!"

"Not at all, dear boy! I'm keen about nothin'. I'm merely a mildly-amused spectator at the show of life. Some things happen to bore me less than others; that's all."

"Anyway, you've given me jolly good advice."

"Don't be too sure even of that. Lathom has his ups an' downs. But he won't quite massacre you at worst."

"I shall do it! I don't really mind very much if he is waxy, but I hope he won't think me a worm."

"My respected Form-master is not an absolute fool, Franky. An' anyone who could believe that ingenious face of yours the—er—illuminated frontpiece of a worm—I'm getting mixed, by gad!"

"I—I—oh, thanks ever so much, Cardew!" said Frank. And he bolted.

CHAPTER 12. Facing the Music.

"OH, here you are, young Levison!" said Reggie Manners.

"D'Arcy minor has been sending Frayne all over the place looking for—"

"Then Frayne may do a bit more

looking," replied Frank. "I haven't time to attend to him just now."

"It ain't my affair," Reggie said. "Wally and I are out, and it will be a jolly long time before we're chums again. I can't stand it."

"Shut up!" snapped Frank. "I'm not going to listen to you backbiting Wally! If you've anything to say about him, say it to his face!"

"Well, I ain't sure I believe what most of the chaps are saying, come to that," admitted Reggie. "If Wally told the Head, he didn't mean it as sneaking. But it was all the same. And just going to a cinema—there's nothing in that."

"Wally says he didn't, and Wally isn't a liar. So he didn't. And I know it!"

"Why doesn't you prove it, then? Wally will lick you into a cocked hat, you know. He ain't all he fancies himself, but he's a giddy long way above your weight."

"I know that," said Frank quietly. "Well, you must be a silly ass to keep up this foolery, then!"

"Perhaps I am. But you can't judge."

"Look here, kid, you've pluck, any road. I'll second you, if you like!"

"No, thanks," Frank replied coolly.

"Why not? I shan't offer again."

"All the same if you did."

"You ain't going to drag your brother into it, are you?" asked Reggie, with just the suspicion of a sneer. "We bar the Fourth meddling in our affairs, you know."

"I haven't told my brother, and I don't mean to. Frank patted on, and Reggie stood staring after him."

Mr. Latham was in, and he did not look too ferocious. He even smiled. He did not know Frank very well, of course; but he liked the youngster.

"You want to see me, Levison minor?"

"Yes, sir. I—I've got something to confess."

"Out with it, then, and I will see whether I can give you absolution. It can hardly be a very black crime, I think."

"It will make you angry, sir," said "Possibly. That I can judge better when I hear."

Frank told his story. He confessed the trick that he had been going to play on Mr. Selby, and he admitted that he had heard every word spoken by the two masters.

Then he paused, for the worst of the explanation was still to come.

"I will not say you are wrong to confess this, Levison; but why do you do so? There must be some reason. I gather that you have not repeated a word—"

"No, indeed, I haven't, sir, and I never mean to. It—well, it wouldn't be decent!"

"Then—"

"It's like this, sir. A chap—a chum of mine—is in a nasty mess. The Form thinks he told the Head. They don't know anything about you, you see!"

"And who is the supposed informer, may I ask?"

"D'Arcy minor, sir."

"He seems to be a very unlikely person for the role."

"But they think he did it—and they're sending him to Coventry because of it. Even—even some of his friends have turned against him."

He has a very loyal friend in you, may I ask?"

"That's nothing, sir. Of course a chap would! So if you could punish me, sir, or ask Mr. Selby to—but I'd rather you—and let the Form know how it was—"

"I shall certainly not punish you,

Levison minor, and I shall not ask Mr. Selby to do so. As you did not carry through the childish and mischievous trick you meditated, I think that may be overlooked. I will see to it that D'Arcy minor does not remain under an unjust suspicion, though I am rather at a loss to imagine how he came under it."

Frank did not explain that. It had been all through Wally's bluff, of course.

Then you'll clear Wa—D'Arcy minor, sir?" he said eagerly.

"Yes. The best way will be, I think, a statement made to the Form—for which I must ask Mr. Selby's permission."

Mr. Latham spoke drily. It was plain to Frank that asking Mr. Selby's permission to make the statement to the Form would not be an enjoyable ordeal for the Fourth master.

"I—I—shall you have to say anything about me, sir?" asked the fag hesitatingly.

"You do not wish that?"

"No, sir. I don't want Wa—I don't want the fellows to know."

Mr. Latham was puzzled. He felt sure that there was more behind this than the youngster had told. But he looked at the ingenuous young face, and he asked no more questions.

Coming away from the master's sanctum, Frank met Joe Frayne.

Joe was intensely loyal to Wally. But, nevertheless, he found it impossible to regard Frank as an enemy. He grinned in friendly wise as he spoke now.

"Who's your second, Franky?" he inquired.

"Oh, I dunno. I haven't one, not yet."

"Well, it ain't no odds, really. May as well settle things up with you. Wally says as 'ow 'e thinks the fight 'ad better be away from the school. Will the field just past the barn suit you?"

"I don't mind. Anywhere, Joe."

"No gloves," he says. Wally's tearing mad—'Tey're bin on to 'im somethink cruel—'issin, an' all that there rot. An' 'e 'pears to think it's all your fault."

"Don't you, Joe?"

"Can't say as I 'do, really, Franky. But—well, you know 'ow 'tis. I gotter stick to Wally. But you an' me ain't mixed to quarrel."

"When's that?"

"Why, I reckon as you've got a say in that, kid."

"No, I haven't," replied Frank, almost wearily. "Let Wally have it as he likes. It will be all the same in a hundred years' time."

But it'll hurt now—at least, this afternoon."

"It does hurt now, Joe," said Frank sadly. And Joe half understood.

There was a very big surprise for the Third that afternoon.

Mr. Latham walked into the Form-room just before the hour of dismissal, and asked leave of Mr. Selby to speak a few words to the Form.

Leave was given him with a very ill grace indeed. But Mr. Selby was never gracious.

"Three of your number were reported to the Head for breaking bounds at night," said Mr. Latham. "I reported them. I tell you this because it has come to my knowledge that a boy in the Form has been accused of playing the informer. Nothing of the kind happened. You can take my word for that, and it should be enough to set at rest any unpleasantness that may have been caused. I thank you, Mr. Selby, for your permission to make this statement."

Mr. Selby, bristling with rage, red-faced, did not look at all in the mood to take thanks nicely. He followed his

colleague out. From the corridor came angry words in his high-pitched voice.

"Should certainly not have acceded if—gross interference with my business—should have been reported to me—me—should a friendly action—cannot take—friendly spirit—astounded—disgusted!"

Frank, seated not far from the door, caught those words, and it occurred to him that he was not the only one who had had to face the music that day. Mr. Latham had also faced it, and manfully, too, for he had accepted the punishment. The hum was like the hum of a hive of bees. His popularity had been regained at a single bound.

But Piggott held aloof, though Watson and Kent did not. And Frank Levison held aloof.

If Wally had only known!

But Frank did not want him to know. He could not have explained why, perhaps. But so it was. If he could prevent it, Wally should never know.

Wally had an impulse of generosity. He said it didn't matter about the fight now.

But the Third would not have that. The greater number of them felt that it would be no better than a swindle if the fight fell through. Frank was the scapegoat, and Piggott fairly licked his lips with malicious relish when he was able to feel sure that Levison minor would not escape.

Before that Mr. Selby had come whisking in, handed out imposts liberally for the tumult he found in progress, and dismissed the Form.

"Franky," whispered Joe Frayne, "if you was only to say 'arf a word of 'ology to Wally now, it would be all right!"

"I've nothing to apologise for," said Frank resolutely.

"Then I'm going to second you! Reggie's butted in, an' got round Wally to take 'im in, Wally said 'e knew. I wouldn't mind. Well, I do—leastways I would if 'twas anyone else but you, kid!"

"Thanks, Joe! I'll be glad to have you!"

So it was that while Wally went to the field of combat escorted by an enthusiastic crowd, keen to show him that everything was all right now, Frank went alone except for little Joe Frayne—Wally's staunchest friend, except Frank, perhaps.

The general opinion was that the fight would be a brief one. Frank was really no match for Wally, and most of the Third took it that he would not be silly enough to stick it out too long, in the circumstances.

But in Frank's ears Wally's own words seemed to ring. Wally had implied plainly that Frank was not the fellow to cave in as long as he could go on.

And Frank did not mean to!

It was a trifle slow at first. Wally did not want to hurt his opponent too much.

Frank, for that matter, did not want to hurt Wally at all. But he had to do it. It was up to him to put in all he knew, to go under, when the time came, fighting hard.

And when Wally began to get hurt, being human and by no means meek of spirit, he waded in.

By the third round they were at it hammer and tongs.

By the fifth the result was plainly foreshadowed. Frank had not been earthly!

But he was still sticking to it when the tenth round came, and now Wally had begun to hate himself, though he was still furious, and curly Gibson whispered to Hobbs that it was a beastly butchery, and Joe begged Frank again and again to let him throw up the sponge.

Frank only shook his head. He was past speaking. He had been down half a

(Continued on page 16.)

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THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA

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PHILIP and PHILIPPA DERWENT—known to their friends as FLIP and FLAP—are bound for school—Flip to Highcliffe, and Flap to Cliff House. They have with them Cocky, a cockatoo of unusual conversational powers, and through the bird they incur the dislike of GADSBY of Highcliffe, in whose company and that of his chums, PONSONBY, VAVASOUR, and MONSON, MINOR, they travel. Gadsby tries to fling Cocky's cage out of the window of the compartment, and in the struggle which follows Flap falls out of the train, and Ponsoby jumps after him. As the train has slowed down, nearing a station, neither is much hurt, but Flap is determined to give Gadsby a thrashing. Some of the Cliff House girls are at the junction which the train has just reached, and the Tasmanian girl joins them. The Famous Five of Greyfriars are also there, with FRANK COURTENAY and RUPERT DE COURCY—called the CATERPILLAR—of Highcliffe.

(Now read on.)

The Fighting Breed.

"Oh! Your brother is going to fight Gadsby!" said Marjorie Hazeldene. Philippa nodded.

"Couldn't you stop him?"

"I didn't try. It wouldn't have been a scrap of good. You don't know Flap. Besides, I'm not sure he's wrong."

"I think he's right!" flashed Phyllis Howell. "Gadsby needs a thrashing, and he isn't the only one of them that needs it, either!"

Marjorie looked distressed. She might agree with Phyllis and this new girl, whose eyes gleamed with the battle light, that Gadsby would be no worse for a licking.

But gentle Marjorie hated fighting. She had more courage than most; but it was rather moral than physical courage—rather of the enduring than the combative type.

With a sudden impulse to comfort, Flap threw an arm round her.

"Don't you worry," she said. "If Flap were knocked half to pieces—well! I don't expect him to be—we should both feel quite sure, all the same, that it was right, because it was what he told Flap to do. He wasn't to back down for anyone when he knew he was in the right, dad said. Of course, it's a rather dangerous doctrine, for Flap's a bit cocky, and he might not be in the right when he thought he was. But I'm sure he is in this!"

Flap seemed to think that settled it. "But—it's rude, perhaps—not to mention he's too—too cocky," said Marjorie.

And Phyllis Howell knew by that speech that Philippa had been taken straight to Gadsby's heart. Only to one whom she liked very much would Marjorie Hazeldene have been so frank on such a brief acquaintance.

"Of course, I might! I am—often. We're rather a cocky family," replied Flap, with a ringing laugh. "But we're ready to fight for what we believe in. Dad's over there, though he's forty-five, and so are two of the boys, Roger and Chris. They went through the Gallipoli campaign, and now they are in France. Helen and Barbara are left at home, with Uncle Ted, who is older than dad, and same. Mother is dead, you know; and Philip

I can only just remember her. We two are twins, and so are Roger and Helen, and Chris and Barbara. It's queer, isn't it? Three pairs like that, and each a boy and a girl! And it's queerer than you guess. Roger was badly wounded in the Dardanelles, and Helen dreamed of it the very hour it happened, and woke up and told us. And when anything has happened to Flap I've kind of felt it—even though I've been awake."

"Well, I don't think you'll feel anything that will hurt you much now, my dear," said Phyllis Howell, with a smile, though her eyes were misty. "I am sure that your brother will hurt Gadsby a great deal more than Gadsby will hurt him!"

"I think so, too," said Flap gravely. "But I wish they wouldn't fight, all the same," said Marjorie.

She was shocked, though not surprised.

When Phyllis said:

"I should like to see it!"

"So should I," Flap replied.

"But we can't, of course," Phyllis said.

"I suppose not."

"Of course we can't! It would worry Marjorie no end!"

Marjorie gave Phyllis' arm a squeeze.

"That settles it," Flap said. "And, after all, I dare say we should not like it as much as we think we should. We might even feel sorry for Gadsby!"

"Well, my dear, we ought to feel sorry for him," Marjorie answered softly.

"But, I don't want to," said Flap. "And I'm not going to. I don't feel in the least danger of it," added Phyllis.

Gadsby was already feeling rather sorry for himself.

He had not made up his mind that he was to be licked. But he had no doubt whatever that he was going to be hurt. And none of the nuts liked being hurt.

Ponsoby, who really had more pluck than any of the rest, did not like it a bit. Monson, minor and Merton and Drury and Tunstall, any one of whom possessed more courage than Gadsby, intensely disliked hard knocks. Of all the crowd, Vavasour was the only one who looked even more than Gadsby.

Vavasour would do anything rather than fight. If by any untoward chance he found himself with his fists up, he was always so amazed that he dropped them at the earliest possible moment.

But Gadsby had a little more resolution than that; and all he possessed was in use to scrow his courage to the sticking-point now.

He believed that Derwent knew all about his defeat at the hands of Johnny Goggs, and that mistaken belief rankled in him.

The station at which they had to wait, although a junction, was in quite a rural neighbourhood. On one side of it was a small village; but on the other the white road wound along through open fields, with scarcely a house in sight.

To one of these fields, screened by a line of elms from the station, and by a high hedge from the road, the seven Highcliffians and the five Greyfriars juniors repaired.

They split up a bit en route. In front went Courtney and Wharton and Frank Nugent. Behind them came Pon and the new boy. The Caterpillar, Bob Cherry, Hurree Singh, and Johnny Bubb walked

together. Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour brought up the rear.

"Pon seems fairly gone on that new cad!" growled Gadsby.

"It isn't the new chap—it's the sister Pon's gone on," replied Monson, with some acumen.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"She's worse than the male cub," Gadsby remarked sulkily.

"Why, what have you got against her, Gadsby?" asked Monson.

But Gadsby lapsed into a sulkily silence.

It lasted till the scene of battle was reached. Then Gadsby said:

"You'd better second me, Mon. I suppose Pon will back up that Colonial rotter."

"Right—ho!" said Monson.

But Pon was not seconding Derwent. Pon was slim, and he valued his leadership of the nuts.

"See here, Derwent," he said. "I'd like to second you, by gad! But Gadsby's a chum of mine, an' he might be hurt. An' any of the Greyfriars crowd will take on the job ready enough. I shouldn't ask, Courtney, if I were you or the Caterpillar."

Flap was a trifle disappointed. He would naturally have preferred to be given a knee by a fellow from his own school. But Ponsoby's leap from the train had made him think far more highly of the leader of the nuts than Pon deserved; and Flap did not guess the selfish craft at work to prevent his getting friendly with Frank Courtney and Rupert De Courcy.

Not if Cecil Ponsoby could help it would this very hefty-looking new chap be allowed to join the Courtney brigade. The nuts needed recruits, and more particularly recruits with the fighting spirit in them.

"Right!" said Flap. "I don't mind. I think I'll ask that Cherry chap. But I reckon your friend Gadsby is going to get hurt, anyway."

"Oh, let him down as lightly as you can, dear boy!" replied Pon, smiling. "Gadsby's no great pugilist; but you'll find him the right sort when you come to know him better."

Flap pondered.

The Greyfriars juniors were a little bit surprised when the new Highcliffian came up to them and asked the genial Bob to stand for him.

But Bob consented readily. It was not for him to say that either Courtney or De Courcy would have been a more fitting choice, as Pon quite naturally would not wish to act.

Perhaps Courtney was surprised, too. But he said nothing about it. And the Caterpillar was not in the very least surprised. Already he saw that Ponsoby had backed Derwent for his own. Pon might have made a mistake; but whether he had or not depended a great deal more upon Derwent than upon anyone else.

A fellow must stand on his own feet, and his own level!

And yet—had Rupert De Courcy found his proper place, he would have learned to stand on his own feet, until "the boy without a name," who was now Frank Courtney, had come along and helped him?

"Well, if there's anything to be done for the chap I must leave it to Franky," the Caterpillar told himself. "Franky knows the right time to do an, the right time to do

it, by gad! I can be a bit useful keepin' an eye on Pon—which is amusin' as well as useful—but that's about my limit."

"Flip Derwent's jacket, waistcoat, and shirt came off with a celerity that spoke of many a fight in the past. Gadsby was much slower in peeling."

"Why do you bring the cockatoo along, Derwent?" asked Bob. "For luck?"

"No. Didn't think much about it. Might have left him with my sister, of course. But we haven't really settled yet whether she or I'll have him, and you know what girls are! If she fairly got hold of him she might bang on."

"Suppose they won't let you keep him at Highbury? I don't at all sure you would have a very hearty welcome at Cliff House, for that matter."

"Oh, I'll manage it somehow," answered Flip indifferently. "You fellows mustn't be surprised if Cocky shouts." He gets excited when there's a fight on."

"I don't fancy he'll be shouting long," returned Bob. "I've seen Gadsby at it before, and he ain't what I should call a sticker."

Derwent peeled well; they all noticed that. As he rolled up the sleeves of his vest he revealed arms rippling with muscle—such arms as few boys of fifteen possess. And he looked a fighter all over. Under the brown, wavy hair the face was frank and open, the violet eyes gleamed, and the well-defined nostrils quivered.

Gadsby was no weakling, however. He had far better physical possibilities than Vavasour, for instance, and there was more muscle about him than about the slim, graceful Frank Vavasour, but Frank's capacious head had been made the most of. Gadsby had never made the most of his; and now, at the end of the holidays, he was even more unfit than he would have been in term-time.

"Will you keep time, Wharton?" asked Bob only.

"Aren't you going to?" Harry Wharton inquired, in surprise.

"Rather not. An' I'd prefer that someone else should referee."

But Pon's brow darkened when he saw that Wharton was doing so, and he soon indicated, after a brief consultation among the rest, that he would referee.

"Pon would second you if you asked him, I believe, Gadsby," said Vavasour.

"I'm not going to ask him," growled the disgruntled one, "but I'll be a damned quick with that new rotter for my bin!" Jumpin' out after him! I gh! Think he'd have done as much for you or me, Vav!"

"He'd do it, absolutely!" replied Vavasour vaguely.

He did not mean that he thought Pon would have done. He did not know what to think about Pon, but he did know enough to have a dim notion that Gadsby ought not to resent it.

The Fight.

"G O it, ye cripples!" screamed Cocky, fluttering his wings, as the combatants closed.

Gadsby's wrath was still hot, and it lent him a gettious courage. He made in to the attack as if he really meant it—his hands closed.

But Gadsby was no more than a mediocre boxer, and something less normally than even a mediocre fighting-man.

His face was contorted with fury. The fact that most of the time he smiled was rather grim, but it was there. And those whose experience is worth anything say that the smiling fighter is usually a lighter fighter than the one who does not smile.

The impression the watchers took from the first round was that, while Derwent's guard was far too good for Gadsby, the new fellow was not a hard hitter. They imagined that he would have stood little chance against Bob Cherry or Frank Courtenay, who were emphatically hard hitters.

But the second round rather opened their eyes.

Derwent only hit out once in that round. He gave Gadsby a good many taps that were not exactly gentle, but they were such taps as one might give in boxing with a friend—displaced, but not with a lot of force behind them.

But the blow that took Gadsby between the eyes and sent him to grass was of another sort. Not Bob Cherry—not Frank Courtenay—not even Jimbo—but the Solly Sazzy of Courtfield; and Solly had rare force, as Bob-very major had learned in the days gone by—not Tom Merry or Jimmy Silver—could have put more power behind his punch than that punch had.

It was a surprise to everyone—and not least to the nuts—that Gadsby had any appetite for more left after it.

No one expected him to get up. Wharton did not expect him to continue, but he counted crisply, with a note in his voice that seemed to tell what he thought:

"One—two—three—"

"Four—five—"

Gadsby was up on his elbow.

"Six—seven—eight—"

"Nine—ten—eleven—"

As Gadsby made an effort to rise,

"He ain't beaten yet!" shrieked Cocky.

"Flip, Cocky wants—"

"Nine—"

"Dash that blessed bird!" growled Gadsby, staggering to his feet.

Flip Derwent might have administered a knock-out blow then quite easily. Perhaps he did not know why he refrained from doing so.

But he did refrain. He merely stopped a feeble punch at his head; and then Wharton snatched the end of the round, and Gadsby was breathless upon his second knee.

Monson fanned him with real solicitude. Bob Cherry had nothing to do for his man; his man needed nothing done for him.

So his mind slipped in the heart of Monson. The nuts were not given to feeling overmuch for a fellow-nut who was getting hurt. But Monson felt really sorry for Gadsby as he dabbed a clean, scented handkerchief on the bruise swelling between his eyes. Gadsby was a sulky beast, and he had not behaved well; but, after all, Gadsby was their own man, and, in a sense, it was their credit he was maintaining before the watching foomen.

"Stick to it, old boy!" said Monson.

"I am stickin' to it, ain't I, you idiot?" was the friendly reply of Gadsby.

Pon—seconding Gadsby—Gadsby walked from his corner for the third round Pon's hand slapped him lightly on the back. Gadsby was going down to defeat: Pon was sure of that. And he did not want Gadsby to win, either. But he did want Gadsby to put up a decent fight.

That, as Pon thought, was the best chance for Gadsby's relations between the combatants in the future.

There was no thought of friendliness—now or ever—in the mind of Gadsby as he faced Flip Derwent again, however.

Gadsby was minded to consider that knock-down blow as being in the nature of a fluke. Nothing else Derwent had done as yet had hurt him much.

It was true that he had not yet hurt Derwent at all. But he meant to!

He did not realise in the very least what he was up against.

He was up against one of the true fighting breed.

There is no race but has its "quitters"—those who will not fight to the finish because they have not the heart for it.

There are few, if indeed there be any, races which have not their heroes, men—and boys—to whom anything less than the uttermost in them is not a touch.

And of all the races the world has known through all its ages none have proven themselves able to send out a bigger proportion of men game right up to the last ounce than the white, the black, the yellow, the red, the far lands whose "havage" goes back to British or Irish stock!

English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Australian, New Zealand, South African, Canadian, West Indian, and American, though in the blood of the great Republic there be many strains other than ours—it matters not which—not to their few cards shall they be judged, but by the many brave; and most of all, by those of them who can stay to the finish, whatever that finish be.

Flip Derwent had plenty of faults, but to put a fight place all his faults. He wanted was to see Flip at his best. Not his gallant father, not either of those two dashing, reckless brothers of his "over there," had made him feel like this. He had not been cut in upon too heavily in this fight. But it was there.

Gadsby did not realise that. Perhaps no one else did. They were to learn later.

Flip met Gadsby's renewed attack with scientific coolness.

He was still resolved to give Gadsby a good hiding, but he was not so angry with him as he had been. Some of the anger had passed when his enemy had staggered uncertainly to his feet after that knock-down blow.

If Gadsby had dropped his fists now, and had offered an apology, Flip would have

shaken hands, though he would have preferred to go on.

But to do anything at all like that was very far from the mind of Gadsby.

It was luck rather than cleverness, that enabled Gadsby to get home on Flip's left cheek. But it was Gadsby's carelessness—to put it in the mildest way—which made that blow much sadder than it should have been.

Gadsby had omitted to take off his ring, and the stones in it fetched a spurt of blood from Flip's face.

Flip did not notice, but the glint in his eyes was ominous. He caught Gadsby with his guard too low next moment, and Gadsby went to grass again before a blow that might have felt as awful as that it should have been.

The call of time saved him from being counted out.

Most fellows would have said something about the ring. Flip knew what it was that had cut him, but he said nothing.

But, while Bob Cherry, wiped the blood from his cheek, Frank Courtenay said sharply:

"Tad, that ring off, Gadsby! It's little better than a knuckleduster!"

"I forgot it!" replied Gadsby, panting.

"I dare say the people you used to pal with for your knuckledusters sometimes. They didn't wear rings, of course."

"I don't know that they were any the worse for that," replied Courtenay coldly.

"You wouldn't think so, Clarc?" snarled Gadsby.

It was all Greek to Flip. He could not understand why Gadsby called Courtenay "Clarc," and used the name as if there was a sting in it. He could not understand what the precise relations between these fellows were, or why Courtenay and the Caterpillar seemed so much more friendly with the five in the dandy triars caps than with their own schoolfellows.

He was to understand later, and was to have reason to feel sorry for the chance that had done him this mischief. Courtenay, the nuts, and had made Ponsonby his friend—a dangerous friend at best. Cecil Ponsonby! Better to have him as an enemy, though that was dangerous.

"Don't you perceive, Franky, that there is all the difference in the world between the plebeian knuckle-duster—though I'm not sayin' that the honest and horny-handed ones of our kind are any the less of the highest morality ever used it—as the patrician ring? Until it gets to makin' marks—aren't they, Juvie, there's precious little to choose between them."

And the Caterpillar looked critically at Derwent's face.

"It's nothing," said Flip curtly.

Gadsby took off the ring, and Monson slipped it on one of his fingers.

"Time!" called Wharton sharply.

Wharton wanted the fight done with. The nuts were still the nuts, he held. No use hoping that they would play fair or fight fair!

But Flip was in no such hurry. He was angrier now; but he had not lost his head, and he still smiled.

Gadsby began to understand in that round. He knew that this fellow was hitting him when and where he bled; and he knew, too, that he was not hitting him as hard as he might be done. But he did not believe that that was out of any kindness towards him—and he was right!

Flip had three separate offences to avenge upon Gadsby now.

The first was that he tried to kill Cocky. That was from temper. He had frightened Flip. That was more or less an accident, though not to be overlooked entirely on that account. And now he had been guilty of foul fighting. That was neither from temper nor through accident, as Flip saw it. It was because the fellow was a wrong 'un out and out. And that sort needed punishment.

Gadsby was not a hard hitter, but he was close on the end of the round he went down again—so close that time came to his aid once more. That might have been chance. But that was neither from temper nor through accident, as Flip saw it. It was because the fellow was a wrong 'un out and out. And that sort needed punishment.

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The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:
"LEIVISON'S SISTER!"
By Martin Clifford.

Next week's story is a particularly fine one. The last of the Third set on the stage again, but not this time in such prominent parts, the chief role falling to Tom Merry, who is quite in the background in this week's yarn. Ruckie is the villain of the piece, and he goes even further than usual in his shady devices. But he is paid—good measure! I am not going to give away the plot of the story, but I am sure you will all be thrilled as you read of the wild chase of the Terrible Three!

AN OMISSION.

There was no Chat last week—no room for it! Doesn't matter much. I know lots of you never read it. But I know that a good many do, and value it, too; and to those I offer my apology.

OUR NEW SERIAL.

Have you made up your minds yet how you like it?

I don't think there is much doubt; but I am asking you because I want you to recommend it to your friends; and, of course, you cannot be expected to do that if it does not suit you.

New readers are always welcome, and I am trusting to this story to make new readers alike for the GEM and the "Magnet"—for I feel sure that those who read it, and who do not know our companion paper yet, will want to hear more about the Highlife fellows and the Cliff House girls and Harry Wharton & Co. of dryfrank.

I have told you many times before that the very best service you can do an Editor is to tell your friends how much you like the stories in his paper. Like other writers, an Editor is judged by results. And results mean circulation, and that means we want new readers every week to add to the number already secured, and to make good the gaps left by those who, for one reason or another, fall out. And over there, on the Western Front, fellow-readers of yours die every day. I don't think I am exaggerating when I claim for this paper and the "Magnet" that they are perhaps the most popular of all weeklies among the men at the Front. Not a day passes but I have some testimony of how they are appreciated there.

EACH A GEM!

"They are not 'Gems,' and yet each is a gem."

Why, the four numbers of the "Boys' Friend" Library, the two of the "Sexton Blake Library" just lately out, and liable to be sold out if you don't look sharp!

Eightpence will buy them all, and money could not be spent to better advantage by anyone who wants a fine, varied supply of good and healthy reading matter.

There are the two detective yarns—"A Legacy of Shame," and "The Secret of the Park," of which the ever-popular Sexton Blake, King of Detectives, figures. There are two fine adventure yarns, by two such famous hands as S. Clarke Hook and Henry St. John. "Tracker" Through the Jungle and "King of the Road" are their titles, and each suggests much, doesn't it? And there are two great school stories—"The Bridges of Scruby Hall," and "The Fourth Form at Frankingham," both of which were great successes when they ran serially. In the old cant phrase, "You pays your money, you takes your choice"—your finding choice too hard, you bang eightpence, get the lot, and—well, I won't guarantee your living happily ever after; but I am sure that if you don't it will not be the fault of those little volumes, packed from cover to cover with interest!

Your Editor

Trouble in the Third.

(Continued from page 13.)

dozen times at least. He could no longer put any real force into his punches—there had never been too much!

But he held on.

The end came with the twelfth round. It was a fair knock-out blow, right on the mark; and Frank went down before it and lay there, looking as one dead, while Jameson, with a voice that trembled, counted him out.

Then with a rush came Ernest Levison, his face white as a sheet, and flung himself on his knees by his brother's side.

"Oh, you utter young cad, D'Arcy!" he cried. "You bullying hooligan! And after Franky had gone to Latham to clear you, too! Oh, it's wicked—wicked! Speak, Franky!"

"What?"

One moment Wally stood in utter amazement and dismay. Then he, too, was on his knees, and his chums saw on his face what they had never dreamed to see. Wally—the bold Wally—who could take punishment like a stoic when he chose—Wally was sobbing as if his heart would break!

"Oh, Franky, Franky!" he moaned. "I wouldn't have done it for all the world if—"

"That's too late!" said Levison savagely. "Get up! It's no use blubbering over him!"

"He, he, he!" chortled Piggett.

Hobbs smote Piggett a backhander that made his teeth rattle.

"But it can't be true! How do you know, Levison?" demanded Wally.

"Latham told me himself. He said—I said I ought to be proud of my young brother. And I am—I am I am, Franky!"

Frank's eyes opened, and his battered face took on a wan smile.

"It's—all—erene, Ernie," he said faintly. "I did my best. How did you know?"

"Saw you through Cardew's field-glasses."

"He didn't!"

"Cardew? Never said a word. What did he know about it?"

"Nothing—not to matter! It's all right, Wally, old chap—don't don't! I can't bear to see you!"

Wally would have said a lot—if Frank would have let him.

But that was afterwards. It was Ernest Levison who took his minor in charge at first, and Levison major did not seem inclined to trust him again in a hurry to the tender mercies of the Third.

Frank was kept to tea in No. 9 Study, though he fidgeted to get away, and was in no condition to do justice to the meal.

"I wouldn't have anything more to do with D'Arcy minor, if I were you, Frank," said his brother before he went.

"Oh, rats, Ernie! Wally's all right. It was just a mistake," replied the loyal fag.

And all that Frank ever asked of his chum was that the affair should never be spoken of again.

"Let's go on just as we were before, Wally," he said. "Just the same, you know—that's best!"

But Wally did not forget, and will not.

THE END.

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

But Frank Nagent did not like it, and Courtney did not like it. As for Bob, he did not even think about it.

Wharton moved nearer Bob while the next round was in progress.

"Can't you give your man a hint to hurry things up a bit, Bob?" he said. "He's got Gadsby set, you know."

"Eh? What's the hurry?" returned Bob. "Plenty of time, you know, Harry."

"There's something a bit cruel about it," snapped Harry.

"Can't see it myself, old chap."

"That's because you don't choose to."

"Eh? I don't think so, really, answered Bob. "You may be right, Wharton. You generally see more than I do. I'll speak to him at the end of this round."

Perhaps Bob did not choose his time too well. Gadsby, in the course of that round, attempted some fighting of the kind that a referee is apt to frown upon, and was promptly brought back by Courtney.

"Break away there! Break away!" cried the captain of the Highlife Fourth. "This isn't a wrestling match, you know!"

The necessity for Gadsby's breaking away was suddenly removed. Somehow, Derwent got his head into chancery—and then Gadsby had been more than willing to get at arm's-length, but had not the chance.

Derwent, though he still smiled, answered Bob's well-meant suggestion rather buflly.

"When I choose!" he said. "I don't see why you fellows should be tender about that stuff. He's no particular friend of yours, is he?"

The end came in the next round. Gadsby was so furious that he scarcely knew what he was doing, but he still smiled, and smiled enough for what he did.

He reeled back from a blow on the nose that made the blood spurt, and then he knelt, with all his failing strength, at Derwent's slins.

"You can!"

"By gad, it was enough to break the chap's leg."

But Gadsby's leg was not broken, though the sound, when Gadsby's foot struck it, had been sickening. Flip's left shot out, and took Gadsby full on the mark; and Gadsby went down as if shot, and lay there, dead to the world, while Wharton counted him out.

(To be continued.)

NOTICES.

Correspondence Wanted by

S. Morrison, 75, Ashen Grove, Wimbledon Park, N.W. 19, with French, Italian, Russian, and Roumanian readers, in all other languages, or, in the last-named case, in French—in their own countries or in England.

David Bennett, 118, Hillman Street, Belfast, with boy readers of 15 or so in other countries.

Joseph F. Donlan, 24, Plane Street, Blackburn, with boy readers anywhere, with view to forming correspondence club; R.G.'s especially welcome.

Miss Phyllis Barwell, c/o Miss Steel, 154, Durham Road, Grimsby, with girl readers, aged 18 to 25.

Arthur L. Bagnall, 25, Alexandra Road, Burton-on-Trent, will send specimen copy of hitherto monthly magazine for 12d. in stamps.

Jessop, 272, Buxton Road, Macclesfield, wants agents (energetic youths over 15) for his correspondence and exchange club, in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Nottingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Belfast, Cardiff, and Swansea. Real workers, genuinely keen, only required. Please apply at once.

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