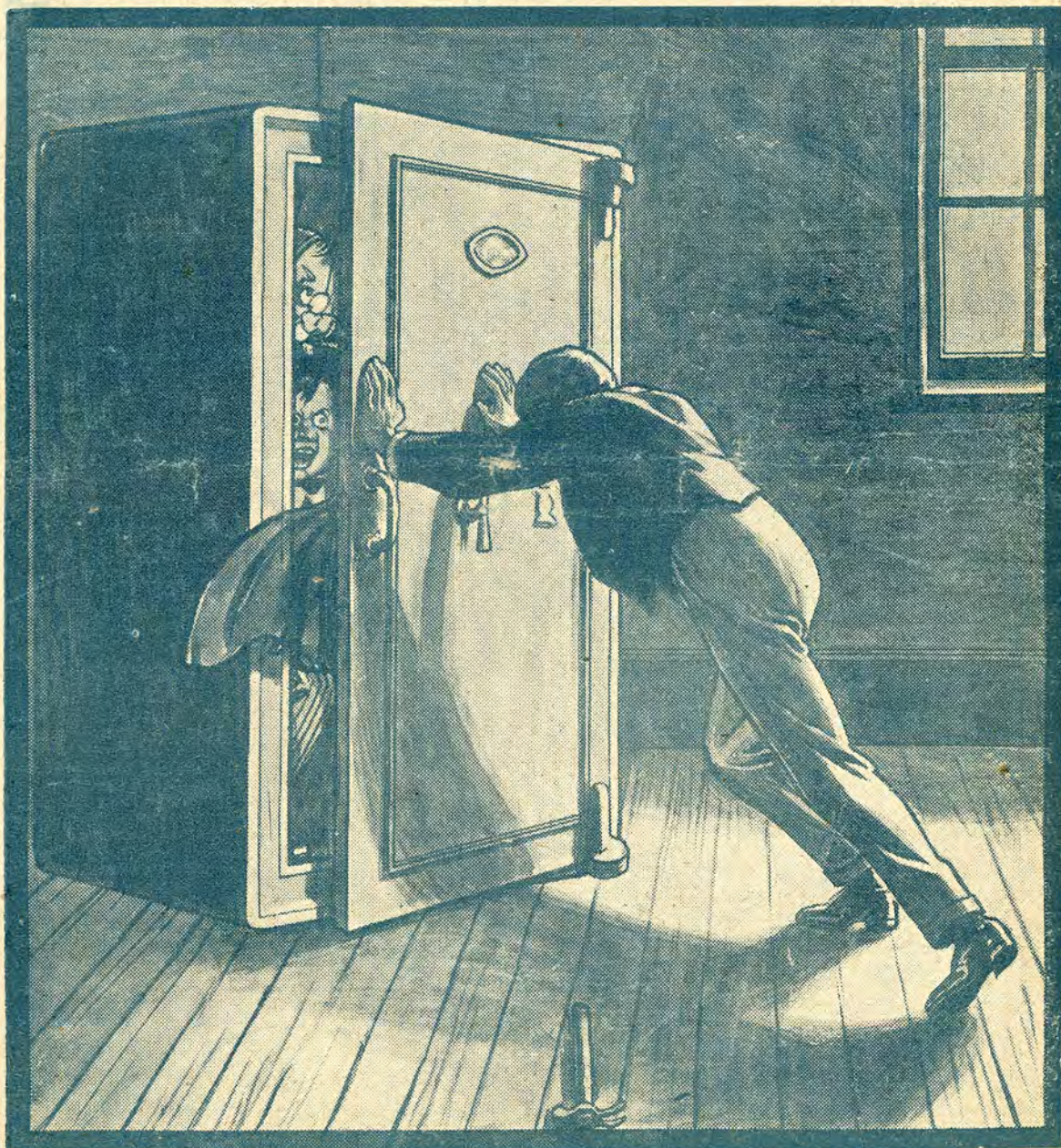


RATTY'S LEGACY!

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



GRUNDY BAGGING "BURGLARS!"

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RATTY'S LEGACY!

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

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Ratty on the Warpath!

"HURT yourself?" It was Redfern of the New House who spoke.

Frank Levison of the Third was already scrambling to his feet.

"Not much," he answered, panting.

Redfern looked at him keenly.

"I believe you have," he said.

"What's the matter?"

Frank grinned, and then pulled a wry face as he felt a pang from his twisted knee.

"Grundy was after me," he explained. "I caught him a beauty on the nose with my peashooter. But I think I've given him the slip all right."

"Well, put it away," said Redfern quickly. "Here comes Ratty!"

Frank Levison glanced across the quadrangle. It was under the elms that he had fallen, and now he saw Mr. Ratcliff, the sour-tempered Housemaster of the New House, coming out of the doorway.

Frank dropped the peashooter to the ground.

Mr. Ratcliff came half-way across the quad, and stopped. Frank stooped to rub his injured leg, but Redfern did not move. He was watching Mr. Ratcliff, and suddenly, to his surprise, he saw something hit the master's cheek.

"Who did that?" roared the Housemaster, swinging round.

His eyes settled on the pair standing together, and Frank Levison started up rather guiltily at the sound of his voice. Redfern suddenly realised that what had struck Mr. Ratcliff was a pea from a peashooter, and that it had come from somewhere in their direction. He looked quickly behind him, but there was no one in sight now.

Mr. Ratcliff strode forward angrily.

"Redfern," he barked, "did you fire that—er—missile?"

"The which, sir?"

The sour-tempered Housemaster scowled. Then he suddenly stooped and picked up Frank Levison's peashooter from the ground.

"Whose is this?" he demanded.

"It—it is mine, sir," faltered Frank.

"Then come with me!" thundered the master.

Redfern stepped quickly forward.

"It was not Levison, sir!" he said.

Mr. Ratcliff swung round.

"It was either Levison or you!"

he snapped. "It is perfectly scandalous that I should be assaulted in the precincts of the school! You will accompany me at once!"

Redfern did not move.

"It was neither of us, sir!" he said.

"You will not escape punishment in that way," returned the Housemaster.

"Who did it, if you did not?"

Redfern glanced round. There was no one else within sight, and the fellow who had fired the pea had evidently cleared off and left them to face the music.

The New House junior realised in a flash how things stood. Either he or the

fag would have to endure Mr. Ratcliff's wrath. And Redfern did not intend to stand back and leave Frank to take the gruel alone.

He said nothing.

Mr. Ratcliff frowned more heavily.

"Levison admits that this—this article belongs to him!" he barked. "I shall therefore cane him!"

"Levison did not do it, sir!" said Redfern.

"Then you will come with me instead," returned the Housemaster.

He turned and strode off. Redfern started to follow.

"I say," burst out Frank, "he's—he's not going to cane you, is he?"

Dick Redfern laughed grimly.

"I don't suppose he's going to stand me a feed!" he said.

"But you didn't do it!"

"How do you know?"

"Well, of course you didn't," said Frank earnestly. "It was someone else."

You know that, too, Redfern!"

"I can't prove it," said the junior.

"Well, you're not going to suffer for me!" said Frank, with a determined thrust of his young jaw. "I'm going to explain things to him!"

Redfern laughed harshly.

"You'll never do that," he said.

"Leave well alone, kid. I'm bound to get a licking sooner or later. He's got his knife into me."

"Redfern!" sounded Mr. Ratcliff's voice.

"Coming, sir!" answered Redfern.

He started forward, but Frank followed.

"Don't be a little duffer!" said Redfern crossly. "Keep out of it! He'll only cane us both!"

"I ought to take the licking," said Frank, as he crossed the New House doorway. "It was my peashooter!"

"Rot!"

But Frank Levison kept on. There was plenty of pluck in the fag, and he did not intend to see Redfern punished for nothing.

Mr. Ratcliff strode grimly to his study. He looked up in surprise as the two boys entered.

"What do you want, Levison?" he rasped.

"To say that Redfern did not shoot that pea, sir!" said Frank Levison, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"Do you mean that you did?"

"No, sir!"

The Housemaster frowned.

"I have had enough of this nonsense!"

he snapped. "I was assaulted by one of you two boys. You will not escape punishment by trying to shield each other. I expect that you were both concerned in it, so I shall cane you both!"

"Oh, crumbs!" muttered Redfern.

Frank Levison did not say anything. His face went a shade paler, but he prepared to take his gruel.

The two boys came out from the study two minutes later rubbing their hands. Mr. Ratcliff had not spared the cane. For that matter he never did. But to

day he was feeling particularly disagreeable.

Levison major was standing in the quadrangle when they came out of the door. He crossed over to meet them.

"What's the matter, Frank?" he asked.

The junior pulled a wry face.

"Ratty's just caned us both."

Levison's face darkened.

"Ratty?" he said. "Why?"

Frank told him the story in a few words. The frown on his major's face deepened.

"And what did he cane Reddy for?" he asked.

"Reddy tried to save me," said Frank.

"He wanted to take the licking himself. And when I tried to explain it to Ratty we both got licked."

Levison major turned to Redfern.

"It was jolly decent of you, Reddy!"

he said. "I'm sorry you've caught it as well as Frank. Ratty's a beast!"

"He is," said Redfern. "You'd know that if you were in his House, like me!"

"Thank goodness I'm not!" said Levison.

"It's a good thing for him, too. But I'll make him sorry for this! If Ratty doesn't get the ragging of his life before he's much older, you can call me a Dutchman!"

CHAPTER 2.

A Present for Ratty!

REDFERN grinned.

He was not feeling in a very charitable frame of mind with the sour-tempered Housemaster.

"You're welcome to do anything you like to Ratty," he said. "And—Hullo! What's that?"

He pointed towards the gates. A cart had just drawn up outside the school, and a small, loudly-dressed man was dragging a weighty packing-case off it.

"I expect that's for me," said Baggy Trimble, drifting up to the group.

"The family jewels from the Trimble Arms!" grinned Levison.

"Trimble! Hall!" corrected the fat junior. "No, it can't be them. I expect it's a parcel of tuck. I've told my people that I'm being starved on account of the food restrictions."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" growled Trimble.

Tom Merry & Co. joined the party.

"What's the trouble, Levison?" asked Manners.

"Ratty's just been on the war-path again," said Levison grimly. "He's licked my minor, and Reddy, too. Accused them of shooting at him with a peashooter, and caned them both because he couldn't find out which one it was."

"Who was it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Neither, worse luck!" growled Redfern. "I wish I'd had a shot at him now. I'd have given him something to remember!"

"I've sworn to take my revenge on Ratty," said Levison. "So I'm hoping that this cart which you will see outside

the gates is bringing a spare crate of bombs. They would come in useful."

"Did someone say that that is a civate of bombs?" demanded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, joining the group. "If that is the case, I considah that it would be a decidedly unwise pwoceeding to bwing them in here."

"Go hon!"

"Bombs in inexperienced hands are vewy dangewous things," said D'Arcy innocently. "I should not be likely to blow myself up with one."

"No?" said Lowther solemnly.

"But othah obaps might not be so caahful," continued Gussy. "I therefoah think—"

"Have you chaps heard—" commenced Manners, breaking in. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and bestowed a withering glare on Manners.

"I think you must have ovahlooked the fact that I was speakin' then!" he said indignantly. "It is fwightfully bad taste to intahwupt!"

"Ring off, Gussy!" said Manners, with a grin. "You've got the wrong record on. No one wants to hear your views."

"But the bombs?" protested D'Arcy.

"Fathead! There ain't any bombs!"

"In that case you could have weas-suahed me befoah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with dignity.

Before Gussy could be answered, a fresh sound interrupted the juniors, and all eyes were turned on the gates.

"Hi! Wot you doin' there?" demanded Taggles, who had just come out of his lodge.

The stranger with the packing-case waved him aside.

"This is St. James' College, ain't it?" he asked.

"Yus. Wot do you take it for? A bloomin' battleship?"

"Name o' Ratcliff 'ere?" demanded the man, ignoring the sarcasm.

Levison whistled.

"My aunt!" he muttered. "I'm fore-stalled! Someone's sent him an infernal machine already!"

"Yus!" said Taggles.

"Then this 'ere's fer 'im," said the man with the crate. "Git outer the way! I've horders to give it into 'is 'ands personally."

"Keep hout till I tells 'im!" roared Taggles.

The man outside merely grunted, and heaved the crate on end, quite ignoring the gesticulating figure of the porter, who tried to bar his way.

"Mind yer backs!" he roared.

Taggles stood his ground, but only for a few seconds. The packing-case swayed, and then toppled towards him. Taggles tried to stop it, and failed. He staggered back, and the box fell on him with a thud.

"Yaroooooh!" he roared.

"Come and lend a hand!" said Tom Merry quickly. "That burlber will kill him before he's done!"

"Git out o' me way!" roared the man outside. "I'll teach you ter defy Silas Simpkins! Silas allus 'as 'is own way, 'e does!"

"Elp!" roared Taggles in a gasping voice. "Police! Fire!"

"Heave-ho!" shouted Tom Merry as the juniors dashed up.

Taggles felt the load lifted off him as the juniors raised the box to its former position. He gave a furious grunt, and laboured to his feet.

"I'll teach 'im wot I think of Silas Slimskins!" he roared.

"Steady on!" said Tom Merry, laying a hand on the porter's arm. "If the box is for Mr. Ratcliff, you'd better let it in."

"I suppose you don't 'appen ter be

named Ratcliff, do you?" demanded Silas, surveying Taggles from the back of the crate.

"No, I ain't!" returned the porter, with some heat. "You'll see my name on the summons for hassault!"

"Then I ain't got no time ter waste on you!" said Silas. "When the will was read it said that I was ter give this 'ere contraption into the 'ands of his nephew personally. That's why I'm 'ere!"

"It's a giddy heirloom from Ratty's uncle!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Yus, that's right, mister!" said Silas. "Old Ratcliff—that was this bloke's uncle—told me afore 'e died that 'e was leaving this to his nephew fer 'im to patent it. 'E's a mean cove, 'e told

CHAPTER 3.

The Invention.

SILAS surveyed the Housemaster. He did not hurry to speak. "What does this mean?" repeated Mr. Ratcliff in a shriller tone.

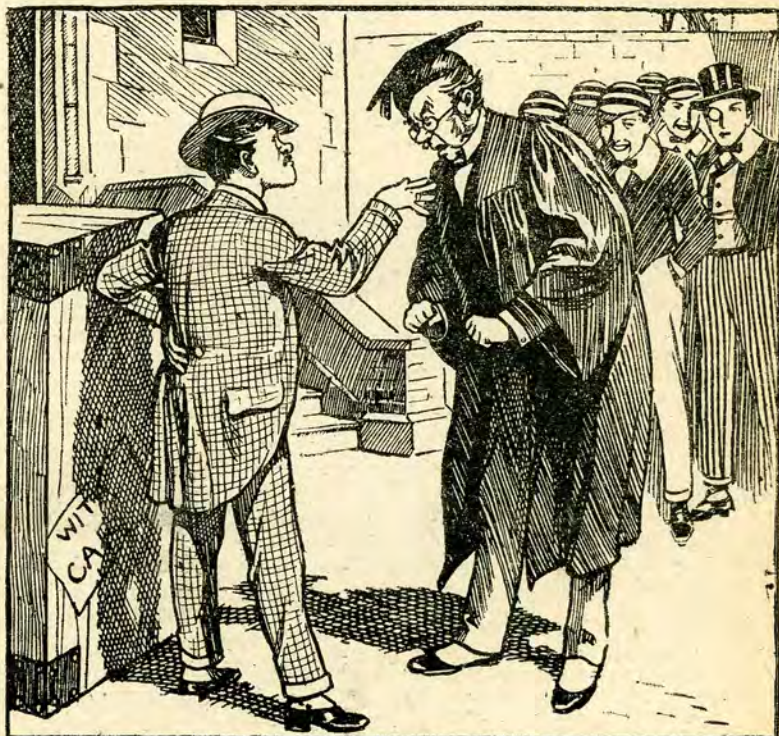
Silas drew a grubby slip of paper from his pocket and studied it.

"Name of Ratcliff?" he asked.

"That is my name!" returned the other. "Mr. Ratcliff, please!"

"H'm! I don't see no 'Mister' 'ere," Silas consulted the paper, and then looked up, as though comparing details with what was written on the paper.

"Tall," he muttered. "Ugly! Not much 'air on top. Got a few whiskers



Mr. Ratcliff and Silas Simpkins!

(See Chapter 3.)

me, confidential like, one day, 'but 'e'll do it when 'e knows there's money in it,' meanin', of course, that there was money in the idea. I've 'ad a look to see that there wasn't none in the safe, you bet?"

"A safe?" queried Tom Merry. "Do you mean to say that there is a safe in that box?"

"In the three of them," said Silas, indicating two more boxes on the cart. "Yus, that's the invention. Old Ratcliff's bin workin' on this idea for years. 'E was a bit potty ever since 'e 'ad 'is 'ouse burgled—and there wasn't much love lost, neither, between 'im and the bloke I'm bringin' this to. But it was in 'is will right enough, when they come to read it. And it said as 'ow I was to bring it to 'im and fix it up."

"Then bring it in," said Levison, with a grin. "It's addressed to old Ratty all right. We'll give you a hand."

Nothing loth, the juniors turned to. The three cases were conveyed across the quadrangle and stacked outside the New House. Then an acid voice suddenly fell on the boys' ears, and Mr. Ratcliff appeared.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he demanded.

under 'is ears, and looks fit to eat you. Got a 'abit of screwing up 'is nose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with irrepressible laughter as Silas reeled off the description. Mr. Ratcliff's face went dull-red with anger.

"Who has brought this disgraceful creature in here?" he hooted.

Silas bristled.

"Disgraceful creature!" he returned warmly. "'Oo's a disgraceful creature, I'd like to know! I've come 'ere to see you. No one brought me in, and no one wouldn't stop me, neither!"

"Go away!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "Clear off at once, or I will have you thrown out!"

"Like to see you!" chuckled Silas. "Wot 'ave I done, anyway?"

"I am not here to be insulted, my man!" returned the master furiously.

"No one 'asn't insulted you," said Silas calmly. "I ain't never seen you before. And I've gotter make sure before I deliver a valuable thing to you. You can't 'elp it if you're ugly. Why, I'd never 'ave known you if 'e 'adn't said you looked like sin."

"Fellow!"

"You didn't make your face," pursued Silas calmly. "At least, I shouldn't think you did. Them things ain't made. They're gifts of Nature, that's wot they are. And Nature 'ad ought to be ashamed of 'erself, in my opinion!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with laughter again. The Housemaster's face was a study.

"Taggles!" he shouted furiously. "Remove this fellow at once!"

Silas smiled.

"You won't get rid of me as easy as that," he said. "I got that there description from your uncle, old Hezekiah Ratcliff. 'E gave it me 'isself, so as I should know you!"

Mr. Ratcliff started.

"You have come from my Uncle Hezekiah?" he demanded, in a different tone.

Silas winked.

"Yus, that's right," he said. "I've brought you an invention—a portable safe. It's been left you in the will, and I've got instructions to bring it to you and see as 'ow you patents it!"

Mr. Ratcliff mopped his brow with his handkerchief. He was in a dilemma. He had been insulted before a crowd of boys. Everyone in the quad had witnessed the incident, and he would have had the greatest satisfaction in seeing Silas and his boxes cast out. But at the mention of Uncle Hezekiah, whom he had always understood to be rich, and the news of the invention which had been left to him, his mood underwent a change.

He had certainly not been friendly with his uncle, and for years they had not even written to each other. So it was not surprising. Mr. Ratcliff reasoned, that the gentleman in question should have provided his emissary with such a description of him.

But, now that Uncle Hezekiah was dead, there certainly might be money in the invention, and at the thought the New House master's eyes glistened with greed.

"I shall not require you after all, Taggles," he said to the porter, who had just come up, and was eyeing Silas with a very business-like look.

Taggles touched his cap and moved off reluctantly. Mr. Ratcliff turned to Silas with a frown.

"You may leave the—the safe here," he said shortly.

"Not so fast, guv'nor," said Silas. "My job ain't done yet. I 'elped your uncle to make that 'ere safe, and it's in the will that I've got to explain it all to you, and see you patents it. I'm goin' ter be paid fer doin' that."

"I can do without your assistance," said the master acidly.

"Very likely you can, and very likely you can't," retorted Silas. "But I can't afford to do without the money."

"That is no concern of mine. You've brought the safe. Now clear off!"

Silas bristled.

"Look 'ere," he said, "you ain't goin' to order me about, and don't you believe it. I ain't one of your schoolboys, and they wouldn't think so much of you if they knew all I've 'eard about you! 'Oo come 'ome drunk, and tried to 'ang 'isself on the 'all-stand?"

"Silence!" roared the master.

"'Oo pushed the washerwoman down the front steps?"

"Be quiet!"

"'Oo got run in for obstructing the police?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff went nearly white with passion as he heard the laughter of the juniors. The stories might be invented, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 511.

but they were certainly not the kind of thing to please him!

"Disperse, you boys!" he shouted at length. "I do not want you standing about—about here!"

The juniors scattered amid further chuckles. The Housemaster turned to Silas.

"You must remember," he said in a low tone, "that anything my uncle said about me was slander. I do not wish any of these stories spread about here. Do you understand?"

Silas grinned. He noted the earnestness in Mr. Ratcliff's tones, and it only made him more certain of his ground.

"You—you won't forget an honest workin' man, will you?" he murmured.

"No," said the Housemaster, producing a silver coin reluctantly. "And now about these boxes."

He paused and scratched his chin. He did not know what to do with the invention now. But his eyes brightened as he spotted Mr. Raitlon, who was just coming out of the School House door.

He crossed the quad quickly.

"I wonder if you could oblige me, Raitlon?" he said, far more politely than usual. "A will has just been proved apparently, and an invention—a portable safe—sent me. You will see it there," he added, indicating the three boxes with a wave of his hand.

The School House master nodded.

"Well, I don't know what to do with it," Mr. Ratcliff pursued. "My own House is in the hands of the decorators, and I have not a spare room. I wonder if you could lend me a room for a few days? The thing is much too big for my study."

"Study No. 6 in the Shell passage is empty. You can have that, if you like."

"Thank you very much. I shall not need it for more than a few days."

His doubts resolved, Mr. Ratcliff turned to Silas.

"Bring the boxes this way," he said.

CHAPTER 4. Compensation.

SILAS toppled the first box over on to its side.

"'Ere, lend a 'and!" he called appealingly to the juniors.

"Yas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry & Co. joined him.

"I suppose Raitlon's going to let him shove his rubbish in the School House!" grunted Manners, as he heaved.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes," he said. "His own show is being painted. It's unfortunate, though. We shall have the merry old bouncer bobbing in at all hours of the day to see that no one has pinched it."

Several more fellows made a raid on the remaining boxes. Amongst them was Trimble. Trimble did not join in because he liked work. It was curiosity that had attracted him, and also a vain hope that he might again have the pleasure of hitting the unpopular New House master with his peashooter.

He had done it once that afternoon from the cover of the elms, and Redfern and Levison minor had borne the consequences. But details like that did not bother the fat junior. He had managed to slip away behind the elms before he was discovered, and, to his mind, that was all that mattered.

"By Jove! There's something in here!" Levison panted, as he got the second crate on the move. "Here, Baggy, get out of the way if you're not going to lend a hand! You're a nuisance!"

"I'll direct," said Trimble magnanimously. "All big jobs have an overseer. I'll tell you if you're going straight."

Levison laughed.

"You don't know very much about going straight yourself," he said.

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Baggy Trimble. "I'm not a Good Little Georgie like you."

"No, You're a Big Bad Baggy," returned Levison.

Trimble pretended not to hear the remark.

"This way, you chaps!" he said. "Now roll it over. That's the—Yaroooogh!"

Levison stopped.

"What's the matter?"

"Grooogh!"

"Anything wrong?"

"Yooop! Yarooogh! Oo-er! It's on my foot!" howled Trimble. "Yah! It's hurting! Grooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not funny!" roared the fat junior.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's hurting! Take it off my foot! Help! Yarooogh!"

"You're a nuisance, Baggy," said Levison reprovingly, as he strained back on the box. "You're always getting in the way!"

Trimble extracted his foot, and limped away. He was not injured seriously, but the pain was quite enough to convince him that he hadn't a sound bone left in his foot.

All thought of further damage to Mr. Ratcliff's features with the peashooter had vanished from his mind. The fate which avenges petty meanness had not forgotten Baggy Trimble for long. It had overtaken him swiftly and suddenly, and avenged Reddy and Frank Levison!

Mr. Ratcliff superintended operations from the doorway of the School House. He was a little more gracious than usual. For one thing he was not in his own House, and he felt that the juniors were doing him a favour. For another, he was afraid of Silas.

There was no doubt about that. Mr. Ratcliff would not be easy in his mind until that objectionable person had been seen safely out of the gates. It was a fact that, in his younger days, Mr. Ratcliff had had some differences with his uncle, and had behaved in a manner which certainly left room for reproach. He did not wish this injudicious messenger to make any further insinuations about what might, or might not, have happened in the forgotten past.

By dint of much labour the boxes were transported up the stairs to Study No. 6, and piled in there. Then, as Silas got to work with a hammer and cold chisel, Mr. Ratcliff felt easier.

"That will do," he said to the boys who had helped, as he went into the study and closed the door.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusting his monocle. "Nevah even said 'Thank you!'"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Good thing he didn't," he returned. "My heart won't stand shocks like that."

The sound of hammering came from within the study, succeeded suddenly by a wild yell from Mr. Ratcliff.

"That was my hand, you idiot!" he screamed.

"Then keep your 'ands orf the box!" returned Silas surlily.

D'Arcy grinned.

"Serves him wight!" he muttered.

There was a general grin amongst the juniors, but no one wished to do any eavesdropping, and they started to make their way back to the quad. The passage was left deserted.

A minute later the limping form of Baggy Trimble appeared from the head of the stairs.

It was not possible for Trimble to stifle his curiosity for long. As soon as the pain of his foot got easier he resolved to

find out what he could of the mystery of Study No. 6.

Reaching the doorway, he looked cautiously round him to see that he was not observed. Then he stooped and applied his ear to the keyhole.

Baggy's luck was dead out that afternoon.

Mr. Ratcliff had got fed-up with watching the wrathful assaults of Silas Simpkins on the wooden boxes. He crossed to the door, and took hold of the knob. As he opened it, Trimble rose guiltily to his feet.

"H'm!" muttered Mr. Ratcliff with relish. "Come in, Trimble."

Trimble came in.

"So you were listening at the key-hole?"

"No, sir!" said Baggy, in well-assumed horror. "Certainly not, sir! I never do such things, sir!"

"Then what were you doing?"

"My—my bootlace came undone, sir," said Baggy. "I was just tying it up."

"I don't believe you!" snapped the master. "What are you doing in this corridor at all?"

"I—that is—I just came along to see you, sir," said Trimble desperately. "The fact is, sir, I was hurt while helping to bring your boxes in."

"Oh?"

"There is such a thing as Workmen's Compensation, sir. A special Act was passed in Parliament about it. I wish to claim damages, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff started.

"And you have the impudence to come to me with a story like that?" he said harshly.

"I—I will not press the claim, sir, if—you don't wish!"

"You had better not!" said Mr. Ratcliff acidly. "And don't let me find you hanging round here again!"

"Yes, sir!"

And Baggy Trimble fled, glad that he had escaped so lightly.

CHAPTER 5.

Silas Gets Angry.

"THE thing," said Levison of the Fourth, "is to know what to do."

Cardew grinned.

"You might rig him up a booby trap," he suggested.

Levison shook his head.

He had finished prep in Study No. 9, and Frank, who had been in for the usual help, had taken his departure. Levison major was casting round in his mind now for some means of taking the revenge which he had promised himself upon the unpopular master of the New House.

"Too dangerous," he said. "He'd report it to the Head, and it would be bound to come out."

"Why do you want to do anything at all?" asked Sidney Clive.

Levison told him the story of the peashooter.

"Reddy and my minor both suffered from that rotten outsider," he said.

"I'm going to revenge Frank, anyway. And Reddy was a proper brick over it. He tried to save the youngster."

"Gum his slippers!"

"That's got whiskers on it!"

"Well, I give it up."

"So do I—for the time being," said Levison.

He rose and left the study, making his way to the Common-room. A good many fellows were gathered there, reading or chatting in small groups. Tom Merry nodded cheerily.

"How's the safe getting on?" Levison asked.

"I think they're putting it together," returned Tom. "Old Ratty's had the time of his life. Silas has been slanging

him unmercifully, and he's caught him one with the hammer several times. I don't know what the safe is like, but I know old Ratty will be jolly glad when it's done."

"What's he going to do with it then?"

"Goodness only knows. Hope he locks himself up in it!"

Levison gazed thoughtfully across the room.

"I suppose you can't suggest a jape I can work on Ratty?" he asked.

Tom shook his head.

"You'd better be careful," he warned.

"Ratty is a visitor here. Railton would be down on any ragging."

"Yes; that is what I was thinking. But I've sworn to revenge Reddy. It's got to be did!"

"Well, be careful about it. Reddy tried to do it once with a sack of soot, and if Cardew hadn't taken the licking he'd have got the boot. Luckily, Cardew took the swishing before Reddy even knew there was a row over it."

"I'll be careful," said Levison with a wink. "I expect something will turn up."

Baggy Trimble drifted in at the door.

"I say, you fellows," he said, "Ratty's nearly finished!"

"Oh?"

"I happened to be passing the door just now, and my bootlace came undone. As I was tying it up I distinctly heard that fellow Silas say that they'd get it done to-night."

"I say, Baggy," said Monty Lowther with mock seriousness, "have you ever heard of Wenham & Co. in Leicester?"

"No. Why?" asked Baggy, in surprise.

"Well, take my tip, and don't have anything to do with them! They make those beastly button-boots! They'd be rotten for you, wouldn't they?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I think I'll have to get a pair," said Trimble. "My boot-laces are often a nuisance. But I couldn't help hearing what they were saying!"

"Of course not!"

"Ratty wanted to know where the door was!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And what did Silas say?"

Trimble shivered.

"I'm jolly glad I ain't Ratty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners came into the room.

"Any news of the wheeze upstairs?" asked Tom Merry.

Manners laughed.

"Dear old Silas is the best chap we've had in the place for a dog's age!" he said.

"He's just offered to knock old Ratty into Germany if he won't hold his tongue an' leave a nonest man alone!"

"Good!"

"I think Ratty is pretty tired of the thing already," said the Shell fellow.

"But Silas talks loud enough for anyone to hear within a hundred yards. He says he's going to finish the job. There! Listen! Hear him?"

The sound of Silas' voice reached the Common-room distinctly. But suddenly it was broken by the noise of a scrimmage, and then the banging of a door.

Mr. Ratcliff's voice sounded shrilly.

"Help! The man's mad!"

"Something doing!" grinned Levison.

"Three cheers for the winner!"

"You let me catch you!" roared Silas from somewhere in the distance. "Why can't you let the dratted thing alone?"

The juniors crowded through the doorway in time to see Mr. Ratcliff come streaking down the stairs like one possessed. He evidently did not intend to let Silas catch him, as requested.

Silas followed him closely, with a length of stout wood in his hand.

The New House master dashed out into the quad, and made a bolt for his own house, Silas bringing up an energetic rear.

"I'll give you what-ho!" he roared.

"I'll teach you to 'it me on the 'ead with that 'ammer agin'!"

Mr. Ratcliff did not stop. He evidently considered that he had learned the correct method first time.

"Help!" he roared.

"I'll knock you back into the monkey-house!" yelled Silas, brandishing the length of timber.

He made a flying lunge the next moment, and got home with the blow. It did not have exactly the effect that Silas had predicted, but it caught the unfortunate master a tremendous thrack on the back.

"Yaroooogh!" he roared.

The next moment he was in his own house, and, bolting to his study. He did not pause until he had slammed the door behind him and turned the key.

"The abominable fellow!" he muttered. "I'll summons him for that!"

He took off his coat, and endeavoured to rub his injured back, when a sudden thudding at the door warned him that Silas had sought him out, and wished to continue the conversation at closer quarters.

But Mr. Simpkins was not long master of the situation. Taggles, who had a score himself to pay, appeared on the scene, and with his help Silas, still very furious, was rendered a prisoner.

Mr. Ratcliff breathed more freely as he heard him taken away.

"A dreadful experience!" he muttered, as he sank into a chair.

As he calmed down, however, he began to think things out, and presently he saw that, all things considered, it might not be wise to give Silas into the hands of the police. He might say too much!

He turned to his desk and wrote a note, stating briefly that S. Simpkins had delivered the safe and explained its mechanism to him, and then made his way across the quad to Taggles' lodge.

CHAPTER 6.

Door-hanging!

SILAS SIMPKINS, an indignant and vindictive prisoner, was still detained at Taggles' lodge when Mr. Ratcliff arrived.

"Allo, whiskers!" he greeted the New House master.

Mr. Ratcliff scowled.

"I have not come here to be insulted!" he said shortly. "I wish to have a word with you, Simpkins, and give you a chance."

"Charnst!" howled Silas. "Why, I—"

"You may retire for a minute, Taggles," Mr. Ratcliff said, interrupting. "I wish to speak privately to this man."

Taggles moved off slowly towards the gate, so that any attempt by Silas at a dash for freedom would be frustrated.

Mr. Ratcliff turned to Silas.

"Now, attend!" he said solemnly.

"You have assaulted me, and unless you agree to one condition I intend to give you in charge for assault and libel."

"But it ain't libel!" returned Silas indignantly. "All I said about you is perfectly true!"

"Tush!" said the master quickly. "It was a slander. But I do not want slanders spread about here, any more than you want to go to prison. Do you understand?"

Silas nodded.

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Now that his temper had subsided he saw that he had said too much.

"I am willing to make you an offer," the master continued. "If you will promise to get right away from here, I will give you a letter that will satisfy the solicitors, saying that you have delivered the safe and explained its mechanism to me. Will that meet the case?"

"Seeing as 'ow you 'it me several times with the 'ammer, it ain't much, is it?"

"Those were accidents. You assaulted me deliberately."

"Only sorter remindin' you, you know."

Mr. Ratcliff frowned.

"I have not the time to argue," he said. "I am making you a generous offer. Take it, or leave it!"

Silas demurred.

"Taggles—" began Mr. Ratcliff, when the other interrupted him.

"Orl right," he said sullenly. "It's a bargain!"

Five minutes later, to the intense indignation of Taggles, Silas was on the other side of the gate, driving away in the cart which had brought the boxes, and Mr. Ratcliff was returning to Study No. 6 with the satisfied feeling that there was no further danger of any knowledge of those little episodes of his past reaching the curious ears of the St. Jim's juniors.

The safe was nearly completed. Mr. S. Simpkins had certainly worked hard on it that afternoon. It was a rather curious-looking article—tall, deep, and narrow. Mr. Ratcliff judged that it was built of lightly-tempered steel, thin, but strong, and that the only patent parts about it were its ability to be packed into a small space, and the number of dodges inside to give warning of the ill-timed attempts of prospective burglars.

On its walls were three gongs and fourteen bells, all connected with wires, so that the efforts of anyone trying to open it without the use of the key would set one or more in motion, and bring the eager—or reluctant—householder on the scene, with the pleasurable—or alarming—feeling that he had caught a desperate fellow red-handed.

Mr. Ratcliff admitted candidly to himself that he did not, and could not, understand the working of these contrivances. But Silas had assured him that they would all work, and that all that remained for him to do was to fix the door on, and then sell it to a delighted purchaser.

The New House master started on the door, confident that he would soon have the invention in working order.

But the piece of metal that he had to fix was heavy, and Mr. Ratcliff was no mechanical genius. After ten minutes' furious struggling he contrived to overturn the main portion of the safe with a crash that set every bell jangling, stamp the door on his foot, and fall backwards over a piece of board, bringing the door on top of him.

He emerged from the wreckage two minutes later with a face like a beetroot and a temper like a Hun.

"Hang the safe!" he growled.

He rested the door against the wall and panted. He had made up his mind by this time that the safe ought to be worth a very large sum of money. But at length he recovered his courage, and made a second desperate assault.

This would have been successful if he had not, at the critical moment, caught his finger between the door and the jamb, and dropped it on his injured foot, with a roar of pain.

With something like dogged courage Mr. Ratcliff seized the door for what he resolved should be the last time.

As a matter of fact it was. And it was THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 511.

Trimble who helped him to keep the resolution.

Trimble's detailed account in the Common-room of what he had overheard had excited considerable interest from the less scrupulous section of the juniors. And the limelight always appealed to the fat junior.

So, when the buzz of interest over Mr. Ratcliff's hurried flight across the quad had died down, and the master had been seen to return alone to the scene of his interrupted labours, Trimble hid himself back to the Shell passage to try and find out something further.

He arrived just at the moment when Mr. Ratcliff was picking himself up from the floor, and reeling off a string of bitter remarks about safes in general, and his own in particular. Baggy applied his ear to the keyhole and listened for more.

For some minutes, however, there was silence. Trimble could only hear the master's faint panting as he strained for the last time to fix the door in position. He leaned closer against the study door to hear better.

But Study No. 6 had been disused for some time, and the lock was not in good order. Baggy's weight proved too much. Just at the crucial instant the lock slipped, and the door flew open.

It caught Mr. Ratcliff's bending figure at the moment when triumph was within his grasp, and upset his balance. He pitched forward violently against the iron door, dropped it, and disappeared into the interior of the safe as the whole thudded to the floor.

Trimble, quite unbalanced, followed into the room in time to receive a thwack from a piece of wood which was jerked from the floor by the fall of the safe.

"Yaroooogh!" he roared.

And from the interior of the invention came an echo:

"Grooogh!"

Trimble staggered clumsily to his feet. He turned, in a vain endeavour to escape, but he was too late. Mr. Ratcliff, with a black eye, and a tremendous bump on his ample forehead, was peering over the side of the safe, looking like a jack-in-the-box.

"Stay where you are!" he roared.

And Trimble stayed, while Mr. Ratcliff, in a more Hunnish mood than he had ever been before, climbed out of the wreckage.

CHAPTER 7.

Explaining it Away.

THERE was a snigger from the juniors outside the doorway. Most of the Shell and Fourth had heard the final crash, and come to see what was the matter.

Trimble's teeth chattered, and his knees fairly knocked together. He saw visions of a tremendous licking in the very near future, unless he could invent some excuse which would explain his sudden and uncalled-for entrance.

The New House master's face was livid with fury. He paused for a second to rub his shin, and then turned on Trimble.

"How dare you enter in that manner?" he barked.

Trimble's heart fluttered a little. He was not accused of eavesdropping, at any rate.

"I—I knocked first, sir," he said humbly. "Of course, sir, I—I did not know that you were so—so close to the door, and I—I slipped as I came in, sir."

"Why did you come here at all?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff.

"I came to—that is, sir—I came to see you!"

"Why?"

Trimble shifted uneasily. His brain was working faster than it had worked for some time.

"I came to—to put you on your guard, sir!"

"What?"

"I have just had a very unpleasant experience, sir," said Trimble, gaining courage as he continued.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I have just been out, sir," Trimble lied glibly. "I started off to walk into Rylcombe. But I had not got more than half a mile when a masked man stopped me."

"Masked man?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Yes, sir. He asked me whether I came from St. James' College. I told him that I did. Then he asked me whether I knew if a—safe had come for Mr. Ratcliff, sir."

"Good gracious!" muttered the master, turning rather pale. "And what did you tell him, boy?"

"I—I defied him, sir. Wild horses would not get a secret out of me, you know. I—I knocked him down!"

"You knocked him down? He could not have been very big, then."

"Well, sir—that is, I tried to knock him down, sir. He was a very big man, sir—a horrible, low-looking fellow. I am sure he meant no good!"

Mr. Ratcliff nodded slowly. He felt equally positive.

"And did you say anything about the safe?"

"No, sir. Not a word, sir!"

"Why didn't you tell him that it had not come?"

"I couldn't tell a lie, sir!" said Trimble virtuously.

Mr. Ratcliff suddenly became aware that a crowd of juniors were watching the scene from the passage. He stepped hastily across to the door.

"Go away from here!" he said harshly.

"I do not want anyone spying on me!"

The door closed with a bang as he returned to the study. Tom Merry gave a slow whistle of amazement.

"I like that!" he muttered, turning to Lowther. "Fancy old Ratty talking about spies!"

"He licks Baggy Ananias!" said Lowther. "By the way, Trimble hasn't been out this evening at all, has he?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Of course he hasn't," he said. "But he pitched that yarn about the masked man pretty well."

Manners laughed.

"And Ratty took it in!" he chuckled.

"It saved Baggy a first-class licking. Ratty hasn't got the pluck of a mouse."

"He certainly did seem a bit scared," agreed Tom Merry. "He's got that safe on the brain."

"He had his brain on the safe just now!" corrected Lowther.

"Well, you know what I mean, fat-head!"

"All right! Had his fat head on the safe."

"Ring off, Monty!" growled Tom. "I'm delivering a few deep thoughts now. The fact of the matter is, Ratty thinks he's on a fortune, and he's ready to believe any yarn about hooligans wanting to pinch his secret. Any duffer could have spotted that Baggy was romancing."

The trio made their way to the Common-room. The chief subject of conversation there was the safe and its proud owner, Mr. Ratcliff.

Several fellows had gone straight down from the passage and recounted Trimble's story, and the manner in which it had been received. Levison of the Fourth heard it and grinned, and as the Terrible Three of the Shell came in, he went up to them.

"Were you there when Ratty jumped on Baggy?" he asked.

Tom Merry laughed.

"We were, we was!"
 "And you heard the confession from Baggy's own lips?"
 Tom nodded.
 "Do you believe Ratty took it in?"
 "Sure he did. What are you driving at?"

Levison laughed.
 "I suppose you know that Baggy hasn't been out?"

"Of course. He's been down here all the time. I think he's missed his vocation. He ought to be on the staff of the Hun Wireless News Agency. He's got enough imagination!"

Levison's eyes gleamed.
 "Daylight at last!" he murmured.

"What are you burbling about?"
 "Well, I suppose I ought to tell someone," said Levison. "Ratty believes that there is a horrible scoundrel after his safe, and he's just getting a full police description from Trimble."

Tom Merry nodded.
 "That will make Ratty value the safe all the more, won't it?"

"I suppose it will."
 "Well, then, taking all things into consideration," said Levison, "it would be a pity to disappoint him of a real good shock now that he has made up his mind that someone really thinks enough of the safe to try and pinch it."

"How do you mean?"
 "Why, find a scoundrel for him, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 The chums laughed.

"But I don't see how you're going to do it," objected Manners. "Uncle Silas has gone."

"That's all right," said Levison. "Ratty's going to have a nice little scare all on his own. We'll prove to him that Trimble has spoken the truth for once."

"But he hasn't!"
 "No matter," said Levison darkly. "We can prove it. I have an idea!"

"Dress someone up?" asked Tom Merry.

"Marvellous, my dear Jotson!" grinned Levison. "You have a brain like a rocking-horse!"

CHAPTER 8.

Levison's Revenge!

TRIMBLE of the Fourth came into the Common-room with a smiling face. There was a general laugh at the sight of him.

"Good old Baggy!"
 "Georgie Washington for ever!"
 "Speak the truth, and shame the Kaiser!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Trimble stopped short, and surveyed the grinning faces.

"I say, you fellows!" he said. "Ratty ain't half in a stew!"

"Go on!"
 "I told him all about the fellow I met, and he believed every word of it. He wanted to shake hands with me when I came out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "It's a fact!" growled the fat junior.

"Then Ratty's got 'em!" declared Lowther. "Didn't he tell you to wash your paws first?"

Trimble ignored the remark, and proceeded to give a glowing account of what he had told the New House master. Levison listened quietly, noting all the details of the description of the rufian which Trimble had given. He knew that he would need them.

He went to bed in a happy frame of mind, feeling that the revenge which he had sworn to take on behalf of his junior and Redfern would soon be his.

The next day passed quietly enough. Mr. Ratcliff was only seen in the School House when he came to lock the study

door in the morning, and in the evening when he came to ascertain that no one had carried the priceless invention off. He was not feeling at all fit. The previous day's adventures had left him bruised and sore.

He was unusually severe with the Fifth Form that day, but the Fifth had the joy of seeing that he was suffering as much as they were, and there was a certain satisfaction in that.

The bump on the New House master's head had swollen to such a degree that it formed quite a side wing to his lofty brow, and his eye had taken on variegated shades. In addition, he was scratched all over.

On the following day he had a word with Mr. Railton, and through him obtained the aid of Bernard Glyn, the St. Jim's inventor, with whose help he speedily got the door on the safe, and put the contrivance in working order.

All this time Levison had kept very quiet, but Cardew and Clive knew that he had some scheme in his mind; and that evening they taxed him with it.

"Look here, Levison," said Cardew, as he came into the study and closed the door, "as one pal to another, you might enlighten me as to the meanin' of those chuckles you keep indulgin' in."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you've got some scheme on," Cardew explained. "You walk about in a brown study half your time, make remarks to yourself, and then laugh at 'em! What's the trouble?"

"I hope it's nothing serious!" added Clive.

Levison laughed.
 "I suppose you'll have to know sooner or later," he said, "and, anyway, I'd like someone to see the giddy pantomime. To-morrow's a half-holiday, isn't it?"

"Hasn't quite lost his powers of deduction yet, has he?" laughed Cardew, looking across at Clive.

"Don't burble!" said Levison. "I'm explaining myself. I think I had got as far as the half-holiday!"

"You had!"
 "Well, I expect old Ratty will go out for a stroll. If he doesn't, he will have to be lured out. That can be done all serene. And he'll not be very easy in his mind, because he knows that there is a nasty man who wants to pinch his safe."

"But there isn't any such man!" protested Clive. "That was all a yarn of Baggy's!"

"Ratty doesn't know that."
 "Well, there's no need for him to be afraid. No one would want to pinch an outsider like him if they were in their right senses."

"Ratty ain't likely to reason like that," said Levison. "He'll go out full of fear, trembling like a jelly, and see a horrible man. Then perhaps the horrible man will knock him into a ditch!"

Cardew looked despairingly across the room at Clive.

"Clean potty!" he said sadly.
 Levison glared.

"What on earth is the matter now?"
 "You're talking out of the back of your neck!"

"How do you mean?"
 Cardew groaned.

"My dear chap," he said, "we've told you once that there ain't any horrible man!"

Levison glared again.
 "Can't you chaps put two and two together?" he howled. "The horrible man will really be a fake. Don't you see? I'm going to be the horrible man!"

"Whew!" whistled Cardew.
 "And that's to be your revenge on Ratty?" asked Clive.

Levison laughed.

"Of course it is!" he said. "He gave Reddy and my minor a swishing for nothing. Now I'm going to give him the time of his life! He'll never go out again without a revolver or a trench-mortar!"

"There are distinct possibilities," said Cardew interestedly. "I'll do the horrible-man business, if you like!"

"You won't!" returned Levison. "This is my stunt! But you can help."

"The man might have a pal," suggested Cardew. "It wants a couple to bump him properly!"

"The ditch will be good enough for him," said Levison. "And Ratty would smell a rat if there were two of us. Besides, footpads don't go in for bumping!"

Cardew nodded.
 "You're too late, anyway," Levison said. "I've fixed it all up with old Wiggs. He's going to make me up as a proper hooligan, and say nothing about it. But I shall probably want someone to lure Ratty out."

"How?"
 "Well, if someone sent him a wire from Wayland, saying that they had come to buy the safe, and would meet him in Rylcombe, he'd be out like a shot!"

"And then you could disguise yourself, meet him on the way, and tell him you were the fellow he was going to meet!" said Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I'll send the wire," said Cardew. "I'll just borrow a hat and moustache from the property-box of the Dramatic Society. Then I'll send a wire from Wayland, and leave the rest to you, Levison."

Levison laughed.
 "Trust your uncle to see it through!" he returned.

CHAPTER 9.

The Man with the Mask!

MR. RATCLIFF dropped into a chair in his study.

It was the half-holiday following the one on which he had received the invention from his deceased uncle, but he was not yet feeling his usual self.

The excitement and knockabout business had proved too much for his nerves. He was quite jaded. He started violently as a knock came at the door.

"Come in," he snapped irritably.

Toby, the page, entered, with a telegram in his hand.

"For you, sir," he said.
 Mr. Ratcliff took the envelope, and slit it open. A slight flush of excitement mounted into his pale cheeks as he read it.

"No answer," he said. And Toby vanished.

Mr. Ratcliff read the wire again. It ran as follows:

"Arriving Rylcombe 2.30. Interview you reference patent safe. Wish make offer Wait outside post-office.—WILSON, agent, Safenuff Safe Company."

The master looked at the top of the telegram. It had been despatched from Wayland.

"Evidently coming down by train," he muttered. "I suppose he's got this from the will. These business people are so decidedly sharp. I will go and see him. This certainly looks like business!"

He rose in a happier frame of mind, and reached for his hat.

"Plenty of time," he assured himself. "And it ought to be safe enough in daylight. I shall be glad to get the thing off my hands—with criminals lurking about after it!"

Ten minutes later he was on the road to Rylcombe. It seemed particularly

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lonely just then. Mr. Ratcliff, who was no hero, looked rather apprehensively about him as he set off along the path.

He had just made up his mind, however, that his fears were groundless when the hedge suddenly parted, and a black-guardly-looking man, wearing a crepe mask over his eyes, leapt out on to the road.

"Stand!" he roared gruffly.

Mr. Ratcliff stood.

"Is your name Ratcliff?" demanded the ruffian.

"N-n-no!" stammered the master.

"It's—J-Johnson!"

The ruffian chuckled. He produced a dangerous-looking "life-preserver" from his pocket, and fondled it lovingly. The New House master shivered like a man with ague.

"Johnson, the millionaire, eh?" he asked. "That's lucky! I'll just trouble you for a 'undred thou'. 'And over!"

"I'm n-not that J-Johnson," gasped Mr. Ratcliff, who had no idea that anyone so rich lived in the neighbourhood.

"Then you must be Ratcliff," said the ruffian. "As a matter of fact, I know yer. So yer better stop them lies!"

"I tell you I'm n-not R-Ratcliff!" stammered the master, glancing despairingly up and down the deserted road.

"I don't believe yer," said the man. "And I don't like yer behaviour. You gotter treat me as a gentleman—see? You'll ave ter call me 'sir'!"

"Yes, sir," said the unhappy master, his bulging eyes on the "life-preserver."

"Good!" said the ruffian in a satisfied tone. "Now I'll interduce meself. I'm Wilson, agent for the Safenuff Safe Company."

"You're Wilson?" gasped the master. "The same—in the flesh!" grinned the other. "I thought you'd know me all right. So you got the tellegram?"

"Yes. Yes, sir," gasped the master, licking his dry lips.

"Well, I want the plans of the safe!"

"I-I haven't got them."

"That don't matter," said the safe agent. "Sit down and write them out."

"I d-d-d-don't know anything about it," gasped the New House master.

"Bunkum!"

"I-I don't, sir!"

The ruffian paused. But he proceeded again as his ears caught the sound of a faint chuckle from the hedge.

"You ain't goin' from 'ere until you tells me orl abaht it!" he said fiercely.

Mr. Ratcliff shivered violently.

"And I'm agoin' to use persuasion if yer don't speak quick!" added the ruffian.

"I-I don't know anything—sir!" groaned the master in his humblest tones, hoping against hope that someone would come along and get him out of his predicament.

"Well, I'll show yer that I'm a desprit character," the "ruffian" said. "I'll start with this 'ere little stick."

He turned suddenly on his heel, and crossed the road to pick up the stick indicated. Mr. Ratcliff saw his chance, and in another moment he set off at a furious pace for St. Jim's.

The supposed ruffian allowed the terrified master to gain a good start, and then set off in pursuit. Clive and Cardew, laughing hysterically, came out from concealment in the hedge to watch events better.

"Levison did that a treat!" muttered Cardew. "Old Ratty's nearly scared to death. Hallo! The play goes well!"

Mr. Ratcliff was rapidly losing the race. His wind was short, and his form bad. But he ran on desperately. He was quite convinced that he had met a very dangerous fellow.

Levison, safe in his disguise, followed him swiftly, first edging the master in towards the footpath, and then gaining on him till he was nearly level. Then he selected his opportunity, and, leaping forward, charged his quarry.

Mr. Ratcliff gave a single despairing shriek, and disappeared into the ditch.

"Grooogh!" he roared, a moment later.

The ditch was wet, and very muddy. Mr. Ratcliff found it soft to fall on. But as he slowly picked himself up, and wiped a lump of mud off his face with an equally muddy hand, he did not consider the softness an unmixed advantage.

To his relief, however, the tramp had disappeared. Without pausing to ask himself any questions on the subject, Mr. Ratcliff set off at the brisk pace he could muster in the direction of St. Jim's. He completed that journey squelching mud at every step, and leaving a trail behind him which the greenest tenderfoot could have followed with perfect ease.

He arrived at the school almost hysterical with rage and shame. But Taggles barred the gates.

"No tramps in 'ere!" he growled.

"You wants the 'orsepond!"

"I am Mr. Ratcliff, fellow!" howled the New House master.

Taggles stared, and then burst into a loud guffaw.

"Sorry, sir! Haw, haw, haw!" he muttered. "I didn't—haw, haw, haw!—know you, sir! Haw, haw, haw! 'Ave you met with a naccident, sir? Haw, haw, haw!"

The master of the New House scowled, and said nothing. With the eyes of quite fifty fellows on him, he made his dripping way across the quad, and reached his study.

CHAPTER 10.

Grundy Takes it Up!

WAS THAT Ratty?"

Tom Merry asked the question as the door of the New House slammed behind the dishevelled master.

"Must have been," grinned Lowther.

"What on earth has he been up to?"

"Nature will triumph," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Every animal returns to its natural conditions sooner or later!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a general buzz of excitement in the quadrangle. Everyone was asking questions about what had happened.

And it was not long before they were enlightened. Clive and Cardew arrived at the school shortly after Mr. Ratcliff's hurried dash across the quad.

Tom Merry noted their grinning faces, and crossed to meet them.

"Seen Ratty?" he asked.

Clive and Cardew burst into a roar of laughter.

"Seen him?" gasped Clive. "I should think we have! You ought to have seen his face when Le—that is, the ruffian stopped him. He nearly died of fright. And the way he toppled into the ditch was it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Cardew, as he recalled the incident.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Was it Levison?"

Clive nodded, and described the incident of the road.

"Ratty was done brown from start to finish," he said. "He's had the fright of his life."

"Serves him right!" chuckled Tom.

The news soon spread round the quad, but Levison's name was kept out of it, except amongst those whom the juniors knew they could trust.

The New House quortled hugely. The sound of their laughter penetrated even into Mr. Ratcliff's room as he tremblingly changed his muddy clothes, and thanked his lucky stars that he had not been done to death by the villainous fellow on the road.

George Alfred Grundy took the matter seriously, however.

He laughed at first, but his two chums, Wilkins and Gunn, saw at once that he had been impressed by what he heard.

"Serves Ratty right, don't you think?" asked Wilkins.

Grundy hesitated.

"I suppose it does," he said. "But this is a thing which wants seeing into."

"That's what Ratty said just before he fell into the ditch!" chuckled Gunn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy frowned. The great George Alfred was thinking deeply.

"Shut up!" he snapped. "There is more in this matter than you fellows see."

"Oh?"

"I am used to looking into things," pursued Grundy. "Things strike me which a fellow with less brain would never think of."

"Yes," said Wilkins. "I've seen a good many things strike you!"

"He, he, he!" giggled Gunn.

"If you're looking for a hiding," Grundy said warmly, "I'll give it to you!"

I'm not a quarrelsome fellow, but I'm always willing to do my duty when necessary."

Wilkins looked at Gunn. Gunn looked at Wilkins. They did not want to start their study mate scrapping.

"Quite so," murmured Wilkins hastily.

"If there's a vicious criminal at large," Grundy proceeded, "it is up to us to capture him."

"If!"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't believe there is!"

"Rot!" said Grundy. "Of course there is! Trimble saw him. And now Ratty has been assaulted by him."

"Good thing, too!" said Gunn.

"I don't pity him," admitted Grundy.

"But that is not the point. He's a St. Jim's master."

"Worse luck!"

"That doesn't alter the case," said Grundy. "It's an insult to the school."

We've got to capture the rascal!"

"Rats!"

Grundy frowned.

"Wilkins," he said severely, "you are asking for a licking! Don't interrupt again. You are well aware that I know best in these matters."

"But how are we going to capture him?"

"That," said Grundy, "will require some thinking out. I am inclined to the view that the man is after the safe more than Ratty!"

"Go hou!"

"Then the most obvious thing for him to do is to break into St. Jim's to get it. I don't suppose that Ratty will go out again until we have captured the ruffian."

"Then he'll be confined to the school for life," said Gunn sympathetically.

"What do you mean?" snapped Grundy.

"Well, the man's not going to walk in here and ask us to arrest him, is he, you chump?"

"Of course he isn't!" said Grundy tartly. "You haven't got any brains. Now, I rather fancy myself as a detective—"

"Ahem!"

"And I'm going to follow up the clues properly. He should be in prison by to-morrow night."

"Or to-morrow morning," said Wilkins sarcastically.

"Yes," said Grundy seriously, "perhaps

by to-morrow morning. My idea is that he will endeavour to break into the school at night, and pinch the safe. So to-night, and onwards, we are going to do sentry-go outside the study where the safe is."

"You can," said Gunn. "You won't find me there!"

"You'll do what I tell you, Gunn, unless you want a licking!" said Grundy. "You're too big an ass to realise the importance of what is happening!"

"I am, too!" said Wilkins meekly. "I'll stand you a feed for every hour that you find me doing sentry-go to-night!"

"I don't want bribery in the execution of my duty!" said Grundy loftily. "I am perfectly convinced that the masked man will attempt to steal the safe to-night."

"But he couldn't carry it away single-handed!"

"He might try! That is where we come in!"

"Oh, I see," said Gunn innocently. "We're there to help him! That's a good idea. The safe is a wretched nuisance in the Shell passage. I shall be glad to see the last of it."

George Alfred Grundy gasped.

"Of all the howling duffers," he roared, "you're the limit! We're going to be there to stop him! Now, those are your orders!"

"Rats!"

"I'll lick you— Here, where are you going?"

Grundy shouted the question after the retreating figures of his two chums. Wilkins and Gunn, having washed their hands of the detective business, were escaping before things became too hot!

CHAPTER 11.

Three Men in a Study!

BAGGY TRIMBLE was curious.

That was not unusual. The fat junior was always poking his nose into business which did not concern him.

And now Baggy's curiosity concerned the safe.

Trimble had heard, with bated breath, the story of the ruffian who had assaulted Mr. Ratcliff that afternoon, and it never dawned on him that it might have been a masquerade by some junior, inspired by his own story of the ruffian with the mask.

Trimble really believed that he had struck a winner, and that his invention about the man on the road was sheer prophetic genius.

The decision caused the fat junior to wonder whether there really was something clever about Mr. Ratcliff's legacy. And he decided that, at all costs, he must obtain a closer view of the safe.

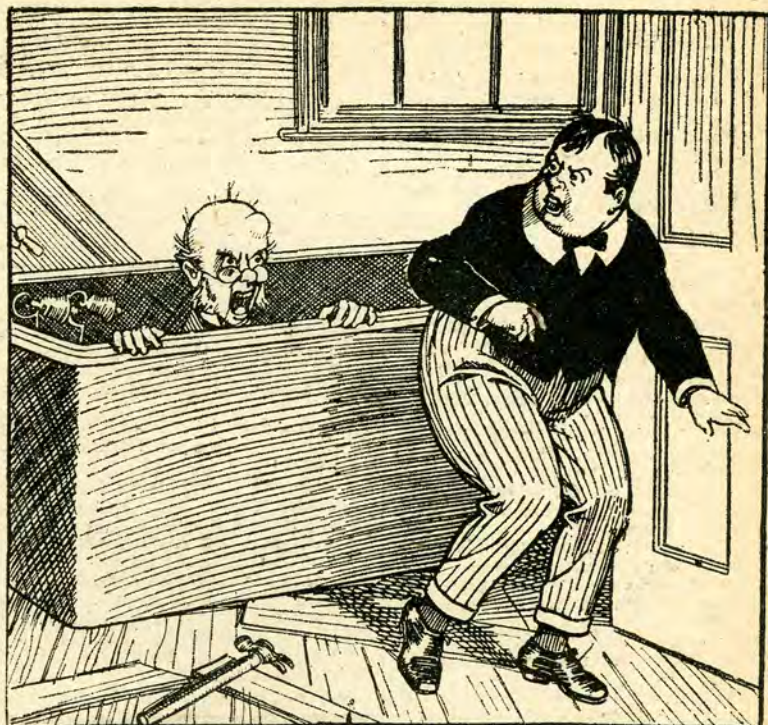
Three times he tried to reach the Shell passage, and failed. Either Mr. Ratcliff was there, or Grundy was standing about in a manner which seemed to suggest that any attempt to gain admittance would be frustrated.

But as night drew on, a simple and safe plan came to his mind. He would be able to wait until the fellows were asleep, then slip from the dormitory, and in five minutes find out all he wanted to know.

He went to bed with an easier mind, feeling that his doubts would soon be set at rest.

But Trimble was not the only one thinking of the safe. Mr. Ratcliff was giving it his undivided attention. He came over to the School House early in the evening, and sat in Mr. Raitlon's study—to that gentleman's great discomfort—until a very late hour, describing what had happened to him in the lane, and how the ruffian had seemed to know all about the invention.

The School House master was at first genuinely alarmed on his colleague's be-



Mr. Ratcliff as Jack-in-the-Box.

(See Chapter 6.)

half, and, being supplied with a description of the "wanted" man, telephoned to the police-station at Rylcombe, giving a full account of Mr. Ratcliff's unhappy adventures.

That done, he found himself bombarded with questions by the nervous New House master as to what had better be done to keep him safe from further attacks.

"Hit the rascal next time!" Mr. Raitlon said testily, at length.

"My dear fellow," said the other tremulously, "I couldn't—er—lower my dignity to do that!"

"He'll be likely to lower your dignity if you don't!"

"Yes, yes!" muttered Mr. Ratcliff. "I know—I know! But I want to be free from further assaults!"

Mr. Raitlon yawned, and glanced at the clock. It was past eleven.

"Well, I'm going to turn in now, if you don't mind, Ratcliff," he said. "You need have no fear that the man will try here. No doubt the police will have him by to-morrow."

Mr. Ratcliff rose.

"I hope they will!" he said fervently.

As he passed out of the study a thought struck him. He ought to have a look at the safe.

He felt in his pocket for the key. It was not there. The dreadful recollection came to Mr. Ratcliff then that he had left it in the door of Study No. 6!

He bounded up the stairs.

It was just at that moment that Trimble, having left the comfort of his bed, with the intention of satisfying his curiosity, was fumbling with the door of the study. The journey through the darkened passages had not been without its terrors, but now that he had got so far the fat junior resolved to see the thing through.

He tried the handle, and found that the door yielded at his pressure. He stepped cautiously into the room.

And just then Mr. Ratcliff came round

the corner, and, to his horror, he caught a glimpse of the disappearing figure.

With his heart palpitating wildly he started forward. Should he call for help? He opened his lips to shout, and then shut them. The man would be alarmed before help had time to arrive, and the first person that he would attack would be the master himself.

In the bluest of blue funks Mr. Ratcliff pressed on. He reached the door in six or seven trembling strides. He was so excited that it never occurred to him to turn his head and look back.

Had he done so, he would have seen in the uncertain light that a third figure had come round the angle at the top of the stairs.

But Mr. Ratcliff was peering intently into the study. He saw that the figure of the intruder was right inside the safe, the door of which stood open. A plan occurred to his mind. He would slip quietly in, and slam the door, and the burglar would be a prisoner.

With noiseless steps he crossed the threshold, and glided into the study.

"What luck!" muttered George Alfred Grundy, as he followed quickly along the passage. "It's the burglar all right! You can see from the suspicious way in which he moves!"

Deprived of the support of his chums, Wilkins and Gunn, Grundy had resolved that he would at least keep a look-out on his own. So, as soon as everything was quiet, he had slipped into his outer clothes, and crept along the Shell passage.

And then, to his delight, he spotted the lurking figure of Mr. Ratcliff ahead of him.

It was very dark, and Grundy was very cocksure. It did not even occur to him that the figure was that of anyone but a burglar. He tiptoed along the passage, flushed with excitement and pride.

Grundy was not lacking in courage, whatever his other faults might be. He

gained the doorway almost behind Mr. Ratcliff, and, peering into the study, saw the master standing just in front of the open safe.

Then Grundy's brain worked quickly. He saw the obvious way of capturing the man. The open door of the safe gave him the same idea which had occurred to Mr. Ratcliff.

Grundy leapt forward. With a heavy push he bumped the New House master into the safe right on to Trimble, and seized the door.

"Stop! Help!" came a voice. But it was too late.

Grundy had acted quickly. The door clanged to and the bolts shot fast. At the same moment there came a furious ringing of bells from the interior.

A faint voice rose above the sound.

"Help! Let me out!"

The smile on Grundy's face suddenly disappeared.

"Eh?" he ejaculated. "Who's that?" There was a pause. It was broken by a wild howl from Trimble.

"Grooogh! Oo-er! Keep still! You're sticking your elbows into my stom— Yarooogh!"

"Who is that?" shouted Grundy again, above the din of the ringing bells.

A faint, acid voice answered him.

"Open the door at once! It is I, Mr. Ratcliff!"

Grundy gasped.

"My hat!" he muttered. "That's done it!"

CHAPTER 12.

Prisoners!

"WHO is that?"

The voice came from outside the door, and Grundy recognised it as that of Mr.

Ratcliff.

"I'm here, sir—Grundy!" he said.

Mr. Ratcliff came into the study, and switched on the lights. Above the din of the bells could be heard the shouts of Mr. Ratcliff, and the agonised roars of Trimble.

"Whatever is the meaning of all this?" demanded the master sharply.

Grundy looked at the floor.

"I—that is, sir—I believe I have made a mistake!"

"Let me out!" roared Mr. Ratcliff faintly.

"Grooogh!" seconded his companion in misfortune.

"I was expecting a burglar to come to-night, sir," said Grundy. "I came to this passage to keep a look-out. Just as I was coming, I saw a dark figure steal into the room and start tampering with the safe. Thinking it must be my duty to capture him, I shut the door. I believe that it was Mr. Ratcliff, sir!"

"Mr. Ratcliff!" gasped the House-master.

At this point in the conversation, the bells, having rung themselves out, came to an abrupt conclusion, and the glee-party in the safe took up the entertainment.

"Let me out! Grooogh! Shurrup! Yarooogh!"

"Surely, that is not Mr. Ratcliff's voice!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I—I believe there is someone else in there, too, sir!" explained Grundy.

There came a tap at the study door.

"Is there anything the matter, sir?"

Mr. Ratcliff turned, to see that Kildare had just come along in a dressing-gown. Behind him hovered several curious juniors, who had been awakened by the noise.

"Yes. Wait a minute." Mr. Ratcliff stepped across to the safe. "Who is that?" he demanded.

A faint roar answered him. Mr. Ratcliff.

cliff and Trimble both tried to speak at the same moment. It sounded like a duet between Ramble and Triceliff.

"What?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff, with a frown.

Mr. Ratcliff was feeling very sick indeed. He took up the conversation with all the wind left to him after Trimble, in one of his frantic struggles, had bumped him.

"Don't stand there asking questions like a crass idiot!" he roared. "Open the door!"

Mr. Ratcliff flushed.

"Is that you, Ratcliff?" he shouted.

Mr. Ratcliff did not catch the question. The alarm bells and Trimble's roaring had made him rather deaf. And he was very uncomfortable. Baggy was making frantic and panic-stricken struggles to elbow a way through him and reach the door.

"If you don't let me out," roared Mr. Ratcliff, "I'll give you the thrashing of your life!"

The School House master gasped.

"That sounds like Mr. Ratcliff's voice," he said grimly.

"Yes, sir," said Kildare, with a grin.

"You had better acquaint the Head with what has happened, and tell Taggles to bring all the tools he has. There is only one key to this safe, and Mr. Ratcliff is sure to have it on him."

"Very good, sir," said the skipper, as he left the study.

Mr. Ratcliff turned to Grundy, and paused. The New House master filled up time with a volley of threats and shouts, in which he was ably accompanied by selected howls from Trimble.

"You had better get back to bed, Grundy!" he said. "The Head will see you in the morning! I think you have been guilty of a piece of unpardonable folly!"

"Yes, sir," said Grundy, quite subdued.

"And you other boys will go back to your dormitories at once!"

The juniors in the passage turned and made off. Mr. Ratcliff paced up and down the study.

The duettists in the safe saw to it that things were not dull for him. Mr. Ratcliff divided his abuse between the unknown person who had slammed the door and Trimble. Trimble concentrated all his vocal powers on a series of roars and howls which were as amazing as they were varied.

The safe was fairly humming with melody by the time the Head arrived, and Mr. Ratcliff explained to him how things stood. Dr. Holmes' forehead wrinkled.

"This is serious, Ratcliff," he said. "An endeavour must be made at least to let a little more air into this—this contrivance. How are you feeling, Ratcliff?" he added, raising his voice.

"Open the door at once!" answered Mr. Ratcliff, not recognising the voice, "Don't ask idiotic questions!"

The Head frowned.

"I am afraid that he cannot hear us, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff hurriedly. "I understand that one of the boys is also locked in there. It appears to be Trimble. He is making a tremendous noise."

"Yarooogh! Yooogh! Oo-er! Grooogh!" echoed the safe.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"This is very serious," he said. "Ah, here is Kildare! Kildare, I wish you to call the prefects, and start a search for the key of this safe! I fear that Mr. Ratcliff has it on his person. But we must not leave a stone unturned to liberate them as soon as possible!"

Kildare left the study, and, as the Head turned, Taggles entered. He was

carrying a large sack, which clanked as he set it on the floor.

"Er—Taggles," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Do you think you can open the safe for us?"

"I'll try, sir!" said Taggles. "I ain't a burglar, sir, but I'll do me best. It don't look very thick. I think this will do it."

And, groping in the sack, Taggles produced a tin-opener.

Mr. Ratcliff frowned.

"That thing is no good!" he snapped.

"What else have you got?"

Taggles dived into the sack again, and brought forth a spade, a garden-fork, a kitchen-shovel, and a sledge-hammer.

"Have you nothing else?" groaned Mr. Ratcliff.

"I've brought everything I could lay me 'ands on, sir," said Taggles dutifully, and produced, in confirmation of his statement, a cycle-repair outfit and a poker.

The Head groaned.

"Useless!" he muttered. "Is that all you have, Taggles?"

Taggles groped furiously for something else. The unfortunate occupants of the safe rendered a melody of their own composition in vociferous tones as he exhibited a pair of pliers and a couple of old water-taps.

But at last the Head's eyes gleamed.

"That is what we want," he said.

Taggles had produced the last articles in his collection—a brace and set of bits!

CHAPTER 13.

Out at Last!

TAGGLES set to work with a will. But he had a big task before him. The Head and Mr. Ratcliff stayed to watch.

With a fine drill he bored a hole in the safe. The steel, however, was hard, and a good hour elapsed before Taggles, perspiring and flushed, felt the drill slip forward into space, and a roar from Mr. Ratcliff indicated that it had punctured him somewhere.

"Careful!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

But the next moment there was perfect pandemonium from inside the safe. Trimble had dozed off, and Mr. Ratcliff's yell woke him in a fright. He let out savagely with his fists, catching the New House master every time that he did not score a direct hit on the steel sides.

Mr. Ratcliff, in an instinct of self-preservation, executed reprisals, and Trimble felt that he was not getting the best of the match. He vented a series of ear-splitting yells.

Taggles stepped back admiringly.

"My heye!" he murmured. "They ain't 'arf goin' it!"

The sounds of combat lasted a couple of minutes or so, and then subsided. Both of the prisoners were suffering from the poisonous air in the safe; for, had that article not been leaky, they would have been suffocated by this time.

Mr. Ratcliff, in spite of his injured left arm—a memento of his service against the Huns in Flanders—relieved Taggles, and put in a strenuous twenty minutes with a larger-size drill. Then the porter took the work on again. But another couple of hours slipped by, and there was only a small hole made as yet.

Kildare had returned to report failure in the search for the key, and it was now ascertained from Mr. Ratcliff that it was at that moment in his trouser-pocket.

The Head wrinkled his brow.

"Kildare," he said, "fetch something hot for Mr. Ratcliff. We must try and supply him with a little nourishment through that hole."

The prefect departed, and Taggles continued with his labours. In ten minutes Kildare returned with a steaming cup of

beef-tea, which he had made in the kitchen, and a small glass funnel from the chemical laboratory.

Mr. Railton took the things and approached the safe.

"I have some beef-tea here, Ratcliff," he said. "Put your mouth to this tube, and I will pour some in."

He inserted the tubular end of the funnel through the hole, and raised the cup of beef-tea.

Mr. Ratcliff, unfortunately, did not catch the words, and thinking that the tube was intended to make conversation easier, applied his ear to it just at the moment that the hot beef-tea came running through.

"Idiots!" he roared ungratefully, as he received a shower of liquid over his head. "Open the door! Never mind about anything else!"

Mr. Railton said nothing, and Taggles proceeded with his work. Kildare and the School House master took spells at it. But it was not until rising-bell was due to sound that the night-workers triumphed, and a hole was made large enough for the imprisoned master to pass the key through.

The Head took it and unlocked the door. Taggles sank back on to a chair, with a sigh of exhaustion. It had been a strenuous night for all concerned.

The door swung open, and Mr. Ratcliff staggered out, followed by Trimble.

Both prisoners looked the picture of misery. Mr. Ratcliff trembled like a leaf, and Trimble was ashen, and nearly as shaky.

"When I catch the fellow who locked me in," were Mr. Ratcliff's first words. "I will—"

The Head interrupted him.

"I will deal with that matter, Ratcliff," he said. "You are not well. You had better go to your room, and I will telephone for the doctor. Trimble, go to the sanatorium. You are looking very poorly."

Kildare took the fat junior's arm, and helped him from the study. Mr. Railton did the same for his fellow-master. The Head turned towards the door, and then paused.

"You have done very well, Taggles," he said. "Very well indeed! Mr. Ratcliff should be grateful to you! Send Grundy to me."

Grundy came from the Head's study very soberly.

He had expected a licking. But, although he had escaped that, the Head had given him a piece of his mind, which he was not likely to forget.

Grundy had been told that he, the great George Alfred, had behaved like a lunatic. The Head's sarcasm had stung him far more than the cane could have done.

Mr. Railton also found an opportunity of giving his opinion of Grundy's conduct; and he told him that, through his folly, Mr. Ratcliff was on the sick-list, and Trimble likely to spend a couple of days in the sanny.

Which Trimble did, though no one minded that much.

Mr. Ratcliff took longer than a couple of days to recover. It was not until the fifth day that he resumed his place in the Form-room, and then he was unusually subdued. For a few brief hours his Form found life quite a pleasure.

Levison's part in the escapade never became known officially, though Grundy and Trimble both heard later that the tramp had been he. Grundy wanted to fight Levison at once, of course. But the rest choked him off that.

Trimble also said he yearned to fight Levison, only he happened to be too busy!

Mr. Ratcliff, however, had had quite enough of the safe. He did not wait for any more offers. He sent it, as it stood, to the local munition works, and received a cheque, in due course, for the value of a few hundredweight of scrap-iron!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"THE SCHEMER OF THE SHELL!" by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"THE SCHEMER OF THE SHELL!"
By Martin Clifford.

Two of our characters of whom comparatively little has been heard of late are prominent in next week's story.

These are Reginald Talbot and George Gore. Between these two there is a strong bond, for Talbot stood by Gore in the hour of his utmost need, and, though Gore may not be good at speaking gratitude, he is capable of feeling it. Time was when Gore figured as one of the villains of the drama; and since he has taken to going straight he has dropped into obscurity. He is no perfect character now; there is still a touch of the bully in him, and he does not look at everything in the right and sportsmanlike way. But all that is best in him answers to Talbot, and next week you will read how loyally he stood by the fellow whom he once counted an enemy, but now regards as his best friend.

Racke is "the Schemer of the Shell," and Crooke aids him in his schemes. Both hate Talbot, but, thanks in part to Gore, they do not triumph over him.

"GEM" HISTORY.

I promised you last week that I would return to my notes about the early history of the GEM. We had got as far as where the dear old paper was enlarged, made a penny instead of a halfpenny, and started afresh with No. 1, New Series.

That second No. 1 was entitled "The Gathering of the Clans." In it Rylcombe Grammar School first came into notice. Gordon Gay and the two Woottons were not upon the scene then, however; the leaders of the Grammarian juniors were Frank Monk, Carboy, and Lane. In No. 2—"Miss Priscilla's Mission"—Hake, a bullying senior at the rival school, played a part. Cousin Ethel was well in the foreground about this time, too. We read of Figgins' devotion to her. There was a sports contest between St. Jim's and Rylcombe in No. 4—"St. Jim's to the Rescue!" In No. 6—"The Invaders!"—the Grammarians came to St. Jim's for a while, owing to an epidemic of some sort at their own school. In No. 7 we had Skimpy as a detective. Skimpy deduced that it was Manners who had broken Mr. Linton's window, and, without any intention of sneaking, told the master so. But it was Gore, not Manners. Ferrers Locke appeared in this yarn—as a foil to the wondrous Skimpy, no doubt! Percy Mellish was "The Tell-Tale" of No. 8. In No. 11 the school story was cut short to allow of the inclusion of "The First

Adventure of Alan Wayward." These were good adventure stories of Eastern lands, written by a man now dead, who in his day did fine work for the "Union Jack." But they did not run long; there were only seven of them in all, with distinctly attractive titles, too—"The Long Arm of the Pasha," "The Swoop of the Hawk," "The Black Vulture of Foliat," "The Taming of the Turk," "The Vengeance of the Bey," and "Alan's Foe." What the readers wanted was Tom Merry. And I have but little doubt as to how they signified their wishes. I fear Alan Wayward, having been guilty of a kind of trespass, did not get justice. "Rotten yarns," "dry as dust," "blood and thunder," "tripe," and such compliments flew, I know—at any rate, they would do in similar circumstances. There are other ways of signifying dislike besides violent abuse; but I regret to say that some of my readers apparently don't know those other ways.

The last Wayward story was in No. 18. No. 21 was "That Fool Skimpole; or, Skimpole's Fancies." In it Skimpy fell in love with Cousin Ethel. "Tom Merry in Camp" came a little later—No. 24. It was followed by "The Rival Camps"—St. Jim's juniors and those of Rylcombe, of course. Then there was "Skimpole's Airship." After that came a series of stories in which St. Jim's became a school on a steamer. The steamer was wrecked, and "Skimpole's Salvage" followed. Wally D'Arcy made his bow in No. 38. Pongo came with him—have you forgotten Pongo—or has Mr. Clifford? In No. 40 Wally ran away, and had to be searched for in London.

No. 41 was the first twopenny double number. It contained "The Ghost of St. Jim's," and the first chapters of Mr. John Tregellis' great war-story, "Britain Invaded." By the way, that story began at Greyfriars School, but not our Greyfriars. In No. 46 Tom Merry, with Arthur Augustus and Wally and the great Skimpy went to America.

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT.

If you are unable to obtain this publication regularly, please tell any news-vendor to get it from

Messageries HACHETTE et Cie.,
111, Rue Reaumur,
PARIS.

I have referred above to one serial. The long, complete story has always been the chief feature of the GEM; but for all that we have had some ripping good serials, "Britain at Bay," and "Britain's Revenge," followed "Britain Invaded," and then came "In the Service of the King." A little later came two very popular stories—Sidney Drew's "Wings of Gold," and Prosper Howard's "School under Canvas"—the latter a Rylcombe yarn. Maxwell Scott, with "Birds of Prey," was responsible for the next; and then came Warren Bell's "Sir Billy of Greyhouse." Brian Kingston's "The Corinthian," "Playing the game," by A. S. Hardy, "A Bid for a Throne," by Clive R. Fenn, "Officer and Trooper," by Beverley Kent, and "The City of Flame," by Alec G. Pearson, were the next five. "Cousin Ethel's School-days" was a little later. For a time I used the later pages for "Extracts from 'Tom Merry's Weekly'"; but many readers wanted a serial, so I gave them "The Twins from Tasmania"—and they seem to like it!

More about the old Tom Merry yarns in another number.

NOTICES.

Leagues, Magazines, etc.

H. Major, 34, Livingstone Street, Great Horton, Bradford, wants readers for "Boys' Own Magazine." Specimen copy, 1d.

H. Birch, 27, Breda Road, Stoke Newington, N.16, wants readers and contributions for amateur magazine which he thinks of starting.

F. Farrow, 71, High Road, Wood Green, N.22, wants members for correspondence club—stamp-collecting, photography, etc.

The "Magnet" and GEM Correspondence Club (South Africa) wants readers interested to act as agents locally.—W. Fry, P.O. Box 224, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

S. Rosen, 62, Wells Street, London, W., wants more members for United Club.

The New Grafton Club wants more members. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.—Ernest T. Acott, 57, White Lion Street, Angel, Islington, N.1.

Your Editor



THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA



Our Great New Serial Story.

THE CHIEF CHARACTERS OF THE STORY.

PHILIP DERWENT	The twins from Tasmania—Phillip (Flip) at Highcliff, Philippa (Flap) at Cliff House.
PHILIPPA DERWENT	
PONSONBY	The leader of the Highcliff nuts.
GADSBY	One of the nuts, and Flip's enemy.
VAVASOUR	Another of them—an empty-headed swell—hand in glove with Gadsby.
MONSON MINOR	Yet another—sulky—disposed to the Gadsby faction.
MERTON	Two more of the nuts—chums of Flip's—they share No. 6 Study with him.
TUNSTALL	
FRANK COURTENAY	Captain of the Fourth at Highcliff—a fine fellow.
RUPERT DE COURCY	His chum, known as the Caterpillar.
THE GREYFRIARS FELLOWS	For further information see the "Magnet."
MARJORIE HAZELDENE	
CLARA TREVLIN	Cliff House girls and friends of Flap.
PHYLLIS HOWELL	
MOLLY GRAY	A little red-headed Cliff House junior—knows Merton at home.

Gadsby and Vavasour, with the aid of Hazeldene, of Greyfriars, have stolen Flip's cockatoo, and the bird has been set loose. Flip and his chums go to look for Cocky, although they are due on the beach for a five v. five conflict between Highcliff and Greyfriars. The girls, up on the cliffs, find the bird, and the searchers find them. They reach the beach late, and the fight ends in a draw, after a fine struggle. Ponsonby induces Flip to take a hand at nap, and smokes a cigarette in No. 6.

(Now read on.)

Mr. Mobbs Is Unpleasant.

TUNSTALL went out, and Merton lounged after him. They did not feel like starting in on lines again. The game of nap had unsettled them.

Flip did not feel quite like lines either. But he had a whack still to do, and there was, at least, a quarter of an hour before the dinner-bell would go. He was just sitting down to the table when someone pushed open the door, which Merton had left ajar.

"Dear me! What a smell of tobacco!" said the querulous voice of Mr. Mobbs.

The Fourth Form-master rarely intruded in this way—at least, as far as the studies of the nuts were concerned. Smithson & Co., being in his eyes inferior persons, received his attentions now and then.

Smithson chanced to be passing at that moment, and he stopped as he heard Mr. Mobbs say harshly:

"Derwent, you have been smoking!"

"Excuse me, sir, but that's not true," replied Flip.

There was nothing of the spy about Smithson; but this did not strike him as a conversation of the kind that must be considered private, and he waited.

"How dare you deny it?" snapped Mr. Mobbs.

"Just because it isn't a fact," said Flip. His voice sounded to Smithson quite self-assured, but not at all cheeky.

"I can distinctly smell tobacco!"

"So can I," said Flip. "Someone's been smoking, that's plain. But I haven't."

"Ah!"

"Old Mobbs fairly chortled for joy," said Smithson, when he told the tale. "He'd pounced on an end. Dare say he took it away and smoked it on the sly, if it was long enough. He's just that sort of rotter!"

"Do you deny this evidence?" shouted Mr. Mobbs.

"I don't deny that it's evidence that someone has been smoking. But I haven't, so it's no evidence against me," Flip answered.

"But you are alone here!"

"No, sir. You're here, too."

"Do you mean to infer that I—"

"I didn't mean to infer anything, sir. But I'm not alone as long as you are here."

("And the chap said it in a way that jolly well ought to have made Mobbs see that he meant he'd rather have been alone!" Smithson told his chums.)

"Do not bandy words with me! When you deny that you have been smoking, you accuse

either one or the other of your study-mates of having been guilty of that offence. Is that your meaning?"

"No, sir. It was neither Tunstall nor Merton."

"Then who was it?"

"That I can't tell you, sir."

"Mobbs ought to have insisted, according to the way he does things," said Smithson.

"Of course, no decent master insists on one chap splitting on another; but Mobbs never knew what decency meant. But he didn't insist—cause why?"

"Cause he knew very well it must have been one of his nutty pets. If it had been you or me, Benson, or Yates, or Courtenay—but he knows we don't! And it suited his book to get at Derwent."

"Very well! I take that as a confession that you are the culprit, Derwent!" snapped Mr. Mobbs.

"That's rot—I mean you really can't do that, sir! It isn't reason or fair play!"

"It is not for you to tell me what I can or cannot do, Derwent; and it is certainly not in your province to instruct me in the matter of either reason or—er—fair play!"

"(Mobbs said 'fair play' as if it didn't taste good in his mouth," was Smithson's comment on this.)

"I shouldn't try, sir," said Flip. He was not usually sarcastic; but there was a touch of sarcasm in that. "It's for me to have my own notions about them, I suppose, though."

"Not at all! It is for you to accept what your elders and superiors tell you, Derwent!"

To that no answer was made, because none seemed possible.

"Have you done the lines I gave you?" snapped the master.

"Most of them, sir."

"What do you mean by most of them?"

"About four hundred, I think."

"Where are they?"

"Here, sir."

Smithson heard the rip of paper being torn across.

"You will start afresh on them now, Derwent!" said the grating voice of Mr. Mobbs.

"Why, sir?"

"Because I tell you to, boy!"

"I think I've a right to know what I am being punished for," said Flip doggedly.

"For impudence!"

"I deny having been impudent."

"And for smoking!"

"I deny that I have smoked."

"And for refusing to answer my questions!"

"I deny your right to ask me to give another fellow away."

("Derwent's a cool hand," Smithson told his chums. "I like him, though I thought I didn't before. He could so easily have said those things in a cheeky way, and got in a bait about it all. But he didn't—he kept his temper. He was as cool as the Caterpillar, and you can't say more than that. Yet all the time a chap could tell that he thought Mobbs a worm, and that Mobbs knew he thought so!")

"Derwent, come to my study!"

"What for, sir?"

"I am going to cane you!"

"Is that instead of the lines, or besides them?"

"It is for your recalcitrant behaviour. You will also do the six hundred lines, and you will be confined within gates for a fortnight from date!"

"Then I shall appeal to the Head, sir."

Mr. Mobbs gasped. That appeal was well within the junior's rights. But an appeal to the Head was an unusual thing at Highcliff. Dr. Voysey hated to be troubled, and the fellows knew it. But Dr. Voysey had a keener sense of justice than Mr. Mobbs, Flip was sure.

Before the master could speak again Cecil Ponsonby lounged in.

"(I knew there would be some fun then," said Smithson. "Pon's a rotter always, and a funk sometimes; but he don't funk Mobbs.")

"Behn' brought to book, Derwent, by gad?" said Pon, with cool insolence.

Flip did not answer. The last thing he cared about was having Pon take up his cause. He had always fought his own battles, and he preferred to go on doing so.

"What's the matter, Mr. Mobbs?" asked the lordly Pon.

The master looked at him curiously. From their first meeting Mr. Mobbs had disliked the new boy; yet until now he had refrained from persecution. And now he had acted under a mistake. He had fancied that the countenance of the great Pon, who was so very highly connected, had been turned away from Derwent. It had. But its beams were now turned back. Mr. Mobbs had not counted upon that.

"Kindly leave me to deal with this junior, Ponsonby, if you please," said the master weakly.

"Oh, of course! I shouldn't dream of interfering. But what's the dashed row?"

Neither Flip nor Mr. Mobbs replied.

"Dumb, Flippy?" asked Pon.

"Oh, chuck it, you idiot!" snapped Flip.

"I've appealed to the Head, and I'm going to him."

"It will be a dashed silly mistake if you let him do that, you know," said Pon to Mr. Mobbs.

Then he saw the cigarette-end, which the master still clutched in nervous fingers.

"If that's the trouble," he said coolly, "put it on to me, by gad! Derwent don't smoke."

"Do you mean that you smoked here, Ponsonby?"

"Yaas, by gad!"

"Really, I wish you would have a little more common-sense and a better notion of behaviour!" said Mr. Mobbs irritably. "Take fifty lines!"

"Don't be too hard on a chap, sir," drawled Pon, grinning.

"As for you, Derwent—"

"I'm quite content that the Head shall settle it, sir," said Flip. "Of course, there's no need to mention the smoking, as you have punished Ponsonby for that."

Mr. Mobbs gave a gulp.

"I—er—on the whole, I do not think that Dr. Voysey, whose health is indifferent, should be troubled," he said. "We will consider the matter of the lines as—er—wiped off, Derwent. As for the gating, that shall extend only to Monday. You owe this lenience to Ponsonby's manly and chivalrous confession, and I trust you recognise the debt."

"I don't quite see it the same way as you do, sir; but I don't want to argue," said Flip. "What about the caning I was to have? If you persist in that I shall appeal, anyway. I can stand a caning all right, but not for what I haven't done."

Mr. Mobbs breathed hard.

"Your tone is insufferable, Derwent!" he said, in accents of concentrated venom. "Unless it changes, I foresee that you and I will fall out seriously! But for this time only I will remit the caning."

He departed, with the cigarette-end still clutched in his fingers. Yates met him, and naturally stared at it. Yates got a box of the ears which staggered without surprising him. Yates knew Mobbs's little way of venting bottled-up wrath on someone.

Playing for the Fourth.

MR. MOBBS went his way in dudgeon. He was not pleased even with Ponsonby, and he was very wroth indeed with Flip.

Smithson and Yates sought the Common-room together, and there Smithson poured forth his story, which aroused a good deal of sympathy with Flip.

"Mobbs's a putrid little boulder!" said the Caterpillar. "I'm delighted to hear that he failed to score off Derwent, an' that Derwent kept up his end so well. But Mobby won't love him after this, unless he can discover a lord or two among his relations, an' let the little sweep know. A baronet might do the trick. But I suppose you can't rake a baronet out of the nearest dustheap, by gad!"

"It's a pity Pon should have chipped in to rescue him, though," remarked Wilkinson major. "Derwent's the right sort; but he's too jolly thick with Pon and all that crew."

"Only Pon," said the Caterpillar, shaking a wise if languid head. "I shouldn't exactly class Merton an' Tunstall as belonging to the inner ring, an' there's no love wasted between the engagin' Vavasour, the festive Gaddy, an' the merry Monson, an' young Australia. Penny for 'em, Franky!"

Courtenay was evidently thinking hard.

"I was wondering whether Derwent would play for us to-morrow, Rupert," he said. "He can't go with the first to Lantham, as he's gated. If he cares for a game— But I can't very well ask anyone to stand down for him now."

"He can have my place, Courtenay," said Smithson readily.

Smithson would not have made that offer an hour earlier. But he had suffered much at the hands of Mr. Mobbs, who was as tyrannical to the liegemen of Courtenay as he was servile to the followers of Pon; and it had done him good to hear a fellow standing up to Mobby. The manner of doing it had impressed him, too. The nuts might call Smithson an outsider; but, in fact, he was a youngster of very decent instincts, and able to appreciate the way in which Flip had stood up for his rights without losing his temper and being impertinent.

"Or mine," said Yates.

"He can have any giddy place in the team except yours, Frank, or the Caterpillar's," said Wilkinson major boldly. And there was a murmur of assent from the rest.

"Jolly good of you all!" said Courtenay heartily. "There aren't many teams that would back up like that, I fancy. I'll ask him after dinner. There goes the bell!"

The captain of the Fourth was as good as his word.

"Pleased to," said Flip at once. "That is, if you'll have me with this face, Courtenay!"

"Never mind your face," replied Frank.

"You should see Cherry's!"

"It's like a dashed picture by one of those Futurist artists, by gad!" said the Caterpillar. "Not so much round the corner as Pon's dear countenance, an' Merton's, an' Tunstall's, but more gaily coloured. But, though the dial must be sore, Cherry is singularly otherwise. 'Pon my word, I believe he loves you for it, Derwent! I shouldn't. I should want vengeance on anyone who'd given me that little lot! It's only human nature, by gad! There's Gaddy now—lots of human nature in Gaddy—not quite the nicest sort, but lots of it!"

Did the Caterpillar mean that as a warning? Flip had thrashed Gaddy before he ever set eyes on Highcliffe; and he had thought more than once since that his antagonist did not feel exactly amiable towards him. Could it have been Gaddy who had played that rotten trick with Cocky?

"You're talking through your hat, Rupert," said Courtenay. "It wouldn't be your style to bar a chap because he had given you a licking in fair fight."

"And I didn't lick Cherry," said Flip. "I'm not sure but that he'd have licked me. But he would have been jolly tired by the time he'd done it, I fancy!"

"Wharton's the fellow who feels sore," said Frank Courtenay. "And I don't wonder. More than half the chaps in the Greyfriars Remove are down on him for sending Hurree Singh out of the fight when Monson gave up. Yet it seems to me the decent and obvious thing to have done."

"They say Greyfriars would have won, by gad, if he hadn't done it, y'know, Franky. An' they say, too, that it wasn't accordin' to the dashed rules, which seem to have been made by someone who hadn't any objection at all to takin' odds. An' that someone wasn't Wharton—if I were ever so wicked as to bet, now that I've reformed for good an' all, I'd lay odds on that!"

"Wharton had nothing to do with making the conditions," admitted Flip. "And Field, who settled them with us, didn't care a heap for that one. Yes, I think Greyfriars must have pulled it off if the Indian chap had stayed in. But—well, I don't know—somehow Wharton was dead right, whatever those fellows may say!"

"That's quite a nice kid, Franky," said the Caterpillar, when Flip had gone. "I like him, by gad, though he makes me feel ever so old an' crafty. He won't be able to stick Pon long. Pon's no end interestin', but he's not at all nice. Bread-an'-butter sort of word, yet somehow it fits both that merchant an' his pretty sister, just as it does you an' Wharton an' Nugent an', in another sort of way, Smithson, an' lots of other fellows, but not me, or Vernon-Smith, or the roarin' Bulstrode, or the growlin' Bull, or—"

"Oh, dry up, old scout! I don't want a metaphysical treatise, and I don't cotton to any sort of classification that puts me in one class and you and such chaps as Bull and Vernon-Smith in another!" said Courtenay.

"But the difference is there, by gad!" persisted the Caterpillar. "It's not a matter of manners or of honour. My manners are all right, I hope, an' Bull's as honourable a chap as I know. But—"

"Oh, dry up, do!"

"To hear is to obey, O King!" said De Courcy solemnly.

Langton, the skipper of Highcliffe, stopped Flip in the Form-room corridor later in the afternoon.

"I say, Derwent, what's this rot about your bein' gated to-morrow?" he asked.

"Did Pon tell you? I was going to. Yes, it's right, Langton."

"But we can't do without you, man! It's one of our toughest matches."

Flip had already proven his value to the School Eleven, and Langton was grateful to Pon for having suggested his inclusion, though he knew that it had not been entirely from unselfish motives. Pon wanted to keep his recruit out of the Fourth Form Eleven, which Courtenay led.

"Fraid you'll have to," said Flip. "I'm sorry. But it wouldn't have looked well to take a chivvy like mine over to Lantham, would it?"

"Hang your chivvy! That's all right. What's the use of takin' any notice of a crawler like Mobby? Half the chaps in your Form defy him to his face when it suits them."

"Do you advise me to do that, Langton?"

"Dash it, no, young 'un! It wouldn't be the thing for me to give you advice of that kind. But, look here, if you care to do it, I'll see you through any trouble after it—what? I'll tell Mobby I insisted on your comin' along."

"No, thanks!"

"Why not, you young idiot?"

"Not my line, that's all. Can't shelter behind another chap. Besides, Mobby knows that it wouldn't be any use your insisting once I'd made up my mind. And I've promised to play for Courtenay. They've a match at home."

"Oh, if you'd rather play for them! An' I suppose it's natural enough, by gad! But—"

"I don't know that I would rather. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't. Look here, Langton, it's bucked me no end getting my first eleven colours like this—the only chap in the Fourth who has them. And I know it's jolly good of you to give me then. I should hate it if you reckoned I was ungrateful, or wanted to stay away when you needed me. Of course, I'd like a game or two with my own Form—I'd like a match every day, come to that—but—"

"All right, kid; I'll say no more," said Langton. "We shall miss you no end; but I'm not sure you're wrong."

He was not angry with Flip. But Pon was when he came to hear of it.

Gadsby told him. Gadsby had heard Smithson and Benson talking, and went off in all haste to Pon.

"You thought you'd got him on a string, Pon, when you made him play nap at last!" sneered Gaddy. "But he'll take some holdin', I fancy. Why don't you chuck the rotten young swanker?"

"Want me to chuck him—what? An' why, Gaddy?"

"I don't want you to chuck him. It's no dashed bizney of mine," growled Gadsby.

"Then keep your ugly nose out of it!" snapped Pon.

Gadsby went off in a huff, and Pon sat biting his nails in wrath.

But he was too astute to vent his wrath on Flip. He tried another way.

Looking in at No. 6, he found all three at home.

"You chaps care to come for a drive with me to-morrow afternoon—what?" he said.

"Thanks, Pon, but I can't. Gated, and playing footer," replied Flip.

"We're not gated—don't know why—but we're watchin', by Jupiter!" said Merton. "I don't suppose I shall last out the fag of witnessin' the whole match; but Tun may. Tun's developin' no end of vigour."

"Chuck it, an' come with me. We'll have a slap-up tea somewhere ten miles or so out. Just the four of us," said Pon. "We four, y'know. I'm not askin' Gaddy, or even Vav." "Better!" said Tunstall briefly. "We can't come. This, Pon, is not the face I show in public highways."

"I've promised Courtenay," Flip said. "I'd have liked it all serene but for that. Shouldn't bother about my face."

"You can chuck him over," said Pon coolly.

"That's where you're off it. I can't."

"You chucked old Langton over."

"Wrong again! Mobby was the guilty party."

"I don't often ask favours of anyone, Derwent, but I wish you'd come!" said Ponsonby.

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"Sorry, old man, but I really can't!" For a moment an explosion of anger seemed probable.

But it did not happen. The worst was that the door slammed loudly behind Pon as he went out.

"Pity, but it can't be helped," said Flip; and then he settled down to prep, and dismissed the matter from his mind.

Ponsonby gave up the drive. He was on the ground, with Gadsby and Vavasour and Monson minor, when Flip came down with Merton and Tunstall and Drury.

"I almost wish I was playin', by Jupiter!" said Tunstall.

"I don't," said Merton. "I mean, I don't wish I was. I'm indifferent as to what you do, Tun, though I might caution you against developin' vigour at this truly alarmin' rate. Hallo! What does Flippy want with Benson? Didn't know they were on speakin' terms."

"Benson ain't playin'—that's unusual," said Tunstall. "Oh, I twig! He's standin' down to let Flippy in, an' our dear boy's sayin' 'Thank you' in that nice, polite way of his."

"No harm in that," said Merton.

"Quite the decent thing to do," returned Tunstall. "But I'm not sure you or I would have thought of it, Algy."

"I shouldn't want to do it. I shouldn't be thankful to any silly ass who gave up his place to me," Merton said.

Benson and Flip had not exchanged a dozen words till then. But Flip put a hand on Benson's shoulder with the frankness of an old chum.

"Is it your place I'm taking, Benson?" he asked.

"Oh, not particularly, Derwent! I'm the man to stand down, because that lets you in at centre-forward best. But we were all willing. The Caterpillar said he insisted on being the odd man out; but he knows the team can't spare him, of course."

"It's jolly decent of you, old chap," said Flip.

"It's nothing, really. We all know how nailing good you are; and Courtenay's such a fine chap that any of us would do what he asked like a shot."

Flip saw the light in Benson's face when he mentioned Frank Courtenay's name. He did not know yet the full story of how much these fellows of the rank and file of the Fourth owed to him who had been "the boy without a name"; but he could guess at a loyalty deeper than any loyalty the nuts had for Pon.

"You don't mind me saying 'Thank you,' though, do you, Benson?"

"Not a bit," said Benson. He would have said that he liked it, but he felt too shy, and he did not want Derwent to fancy he was sucking up to him.

There was only one opinion among Courtenay's followers. Some of them were more disposed to like Flip than others; but all agreed that he was too good a chap every way to be wasted among the nuts.

The rival team—a Courtfield one, heavier and older than the Fourth—came on the ground at that moment, and Flip, with a wave of the hand to his chums, trotted off to the pavilion to take off his greatcoat.

A Barging Back.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Who says that the days of miracles are past? Here's our nutty friend, Derwent, playing for Courtenay!"

It so chanced that the Greyfriars Remove had had a match for that afternoon scratched at almost the last moment; and it had occurred to some of them that they could do no better than to ride over to Highcliffe and see how Courtenay and his merry men were shaping.

The Famous Five were all there, with the Three Colonials and Peter Todd. Mark Linley had stayed behind to work; Mark was a glutton for Greek, as Bob Cherry said. And Hazledene, not having a further instalment of his debt ready to hand to Ponsonby, had preferred not to come.

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Wharton.

"Thought he was a first eleven man," growled Johnny Bull.

"That's no reason why he shouldn't play for his Form team," said Squiff.

"It doesn't exactly please our dear friend, Pon," remarked Peter Todd. "Either I perceive a scowl on the face of our friend Pon, or it's Wednesday's decorations which

have imparted to it an aspect more than commonly ferocious."

"He is scowling," said Delarey. "But the decorations are all there, too."

Pon was scowling, and at them. He considered it cheek on their part to put in an appearance on the Highcliffe ground. It was, of course, quite a different matter when the lordly Ponsonby condescended to visit Greyfriars.

"Shall I go and speak Pon fairly and gently, asking him whether we may stay, on promise of good behaviour, or whether it is his wish that we shall clear out immediately?" asked Peter Todd.

Wharton laughed.

"As you like, Toddy," he said. "But I should say best not. Anyway, don't pull his nose! If it feels anything like mine pulling will be painful, and he won't love you."

Peter did not go.

Merton and Tunstall came up, and chatted in friendly wise with their opponents of a few days earlier. Pon's scowl grew blacker.

Now the whistle pheeeped, and the match began.

There had been some rearrangement of the Highcliffe side. Like the good, unselfish sportsman he was, Frank Courtenay had given up his own place at centre-forward to the newcomer, and had himself gone outside-right. The Caterpillar was at outside-left; and the Greyfriars fellows guessed that the plan of campaign was long passing and sharp rushes down the wings, ending with middles to Derwent. The role allotted to the two inside forwards was probably that of feeding him when anywhere near goal, and doing what they might to keep up connections between him and his wing men when farther out. Smithson and Yates would do that very well, too. Neither was a showy player, but both were dependable.

The two Wilkinsons were at back together, a sturdy pair.

On the other side there were several strapping fellows from the local munition works, far heavier and bigger than their youthful opponents. But the team was not so well-balanced.

Courtenay had lost the toss. The rival captain chose to kick with the slight wind blowing, and Flip kicked off. The ball sped past Smithson, and straight across to Courtenay beyond him.

He was on it at once, and off down the field like a deer. Then, as he drew near to goal, he sent it across, and Derwent trapped it, made rings round a back, and sent it in, hard and low.

It looked like a certain goal, but there was a man of no small skill between the posts, and he saved in mastery style. He was so active that the game had been in progress some time before any but the most observant noted the fact that he was club-footed. It seemed no handicap to him. He seldom kicked; but kicking is usually a risky move for a goalie, and this fellow was marvellous with his big hands.

A back cleared, and the game swept into the other half. But the attack of the Courtfield men was ragged compared with that of Highcliffe. Three of the forwards were fast and fairly clever; the other two were rather impediments than otherwise.

Back again swept the tide, and the Caterpillar had the ball, and woke up on a sudden. Along the line he sped, with his long, raking stride, and again the leather was beautifully middled. Yates got it, and touched to Flip, and Flip shot—high this time.

It looked a goal once more. But it was tipped neatly over the bar, and the resultant corner-kick proved of no effect.

Tom Brown was watching intently.

"Wharton," he said, "if Derwent plays against us we shall have to look out! You might think Derwent and those two wing sprinters had been playing together a whole season, and Smithson and Yates are doing their little bits like parts of a machine. It's difficult to meet that sort of attack unless the backs have absolute faith in their goalie; and I must say that on Hazel's form lately, with exceptions, of course, he don't inspire me with absolute faith."

"Just what I was thinking, Browney. They would have been two up with Hazel there on his fast week's form. But that Courtfield goalie's a tip-topper."

"Twig his tootsies?" said Peter Todd, and then they saw that the man was club-footed, and marvelled at his agility.

"Flippy's goin' it some," remarked Merton to Squiff.

"He is that! I rather wondered at Langley givin' him his colours straight away, but I don't now!"

"Highcliffe colours—hm!" said Merton. "I don't believe in cryin' 'stinkin' fish'; but they don't amount to much. This team here to-day would be all over Langley's little lot. They're n.g. without Derwent. They'll come a cropper to-day, I'll bet."

"I say, that chap with the red face is rather a dashed bargee!" said Tunstall indignantly. "See how he slammed at Flip?"

"Flippy don't mind bein' charged over. Nothin' hurts Flippy, by, Jupiter!" replied Merton.

"Didn't Cherry hurt him a bit?" asked Piet Delary, with his slow, rather cynical smile.

"The hurtfulness must have been of a considerablefulness, if one may judgetically estimate by the esteemed dial of the absurd and honourable Derwent," said Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh, smiling and showing his white, even teeth.

"No more than he gave me, Inky," said Bob.

"Your facefulness, my revered and ludicrous chum, has a brotherly semblancefulness to that of the party indicated which brings recollectfully to my mind the English proverb of the blackfulness of the honourable pot and the blackfulness of the esteemed kettle."

"Was that the kettle Polly put on?" inquired Peter Todd gravely.

"I do not know the august and undoubtedly charming Polly, but—oh, hang it!"

It needed something quite out of the ordinary to draw from the Nabob of Bhanipour such an exclamation as that.

Flip had gone over again, crashing down heavily. It was a brutal charge, though not technically unfair, for the red-faced back was half as heavy again as he. Unluckily, the man had activity as well as weight. Flip could make rings round his colleague; but this fellow was a bigger stumbling-block. And it seemed that he did not like having rings made round the other back, and had made up his mind that the best interests of his side would be served by knocking out the too agile centre-forward.

"The rotter!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Why don't the referee give him a bit of his mind?" asked Wharton.

"Reedman hasn't a scrap to spare—not a dashed scrap!" said Merton. "Tun, old chap, I take back what I said. Flippy's hurt this time, an' I don't love that bargee a little bit, by Jupiter!"

The referee, a member of the Highcliffe Fifth Form, looked unhappy. He was trying to make up his mind to say something severe to the offending player; but the mind that Merton declared so scanty was evidently not made up in time, for the game was in full swing down the field before he opened his mouth, and Flip, limping, was twenty yards away.

"You're too rough, my man," said Reedman weakly.

"How long 'ave I been your man?" asked Redface unpleasantly.

"Never mind about that. Don't charge so hard, mind all!"

"Were it a foul or weren't it? If it were, there's a penalty owin'. If it weren't, you bloomin' well keep your silly mouth shut! I allus did charge 'ard, an' I allus shall!"

"You're playin' with mere kids, remember!"

"Kids! They'd make rings round twenty-two of your kidney, old margarine-face!"

"Oh, dry up, Chiker!" said the man in goal.

"Dry up, yourself, Clubby! I'm talkin' to this young fashion-plate, not to the likes of you!"

"You are really a dashed impertinent person!" snapped Reedman.

"An' you're a monkey-faced fool!" retorted the agreeable Mr. Chiker.

Then the conversation ceased, for the Caterpillar was rushing the ball down on his wing, and Flip made good pace, in spite of his lameness, in the centre.

"Git out of the way, Margarine!" howled Chiker.

Right across, high, but hard and straight, went the ball, clean from one wing to the other, the breadth of the field. It was a wonderful pass.

Courtenay was ready for it. It dropped close to his feet, and he took a screw shot at goal without waiting to trap it. The ball came in at a very difficult angle, and Flip, eluding the attentions of Chiker, dashed at Clubby as he got to it. They rolled into the net together, and Highcliffe roared applause for the first goal of the match.

"Wot about bargin' now?" snarled Chiker. "Ere, Margarine, ain't you goin' to give a foul agin this mere kid wot puts a bloomin' oss's weight behind 'is childish shoulder, an' knocks over a pore beggar which ain't got proper feet to keep of 'im up?"

"You leave my feet alone, Chiker," said Clubby good-temperedly. "And leave the young 'un alone. I ain't got any grudge against him."

Flip had helped him up, with a word of regret for the necessity of that charge. They understood each other well enough, being sportsmen both.

"If you are impertinent to me again, you dashed fellow, I'll send you off the field!" panted Reedman, his face pink with rage.

"You can't! I wouldn't go for you! An' twenty like you couldn't put me off, Margarine!"

"Do you think I charge hard?" asked Flip of Chiker.

"Think, kid? Don't I blooming well know it?"

"I hope so, I'm sure. For you began it; and you're a heap heavier than I am. I think myself that the game's just as well without so much barging. But I'm glad to know that you can feel me when I come up against you."

For one brief moment Chiker looked almost repentant. Somewhere deep down in him there may have been better things.

But he made no promise of amendment.

"Fast goal Clubby's lost this season!" he growled. "An' all through you, Hop-o-my-Thumb. You'll have to pay for that! But I'd give Margarine there a bloomin' sight 'otter time if 'e'd the pluck to play the game instead of pompin' around with a bloomin' whistle!"

The Winning Goal.

IT was difficult to see how Mr. Chiker could have made it much hotter for Reedman than he had made it for Flip.

The fellow was a player of class. He had cleverness and activity, and he was doing most of two men's work in this game. But his play was spoiled by his savage tactics, and a stronger referee would have sent him off without waiting for a foul. He was a positive danger.

"Serves Derwent jolly well right!" said Gadsby spitefully. "If 'e'd gone to Lantham with the team he wouldn't have come in for this!"

"Oh, chuck that, you rotter!" growled Pon, who had no such zest as Gadsby had for seeing Flip knocked about. "All the same, I wish 'e'd gone, for then Clare would have been in for that little dose, an' it might have done the boulder good—what?"

"Have another quid on, Gaddy?" chuckled Monson. For once Monson was backing his own school.

"Gaddy been bettin' against Highcliff?" asked Pon.

"Why shouldn't I? You've often done it, by gad!" snarled Gadsby.

"Because it's a mug's game, old top! Highcliff's goin' to win. But they wouldn't have had an earthly without our man Derwent. He won't play for them again—I'll see to that! Not if I have to raise a team of my own an' get 'im in that!"

"Do you mean that, Pon? It wouldn't be a bad move," said Monson, who was not quite so confirmed a slacker as some of the nuts.

"It would be silly rot!" snapped Gadsby.

"Oh, absolutely!" chimed in Vavasour. Ponsonby hardly knew whether he meant it or not. But he knew that he hated seeing Flip Derwent play for Courtenay's team.

His certainty that Highcliff would win became less when the home goalkeeper failed at a shot that Clubby would have dealt with easily, and the score at half-time stood one all.

Three-quarters of an hour of hard work was nothing to Flip, but the fact that the period had included at least a score of Mr. Chiker's heavy charges, few of which he had been able to elude, and some half-dozen of which had sent him flying, to land with a hump, had told upon him. He limped, and he was sore all over, but he smiled still.

"That's a brute, Flippy, by gad!" said Pon, coming up to him during the interval.

"He does rather go it," answered Flip, with a wry grin. "But I've floored him twice, and I'm living in hopes of more."

"Does Courtenay funk it—what?" sneered Pon.

Flip frowned.

"I don't think Courtenay funks anybody or anything," he answered.

"I know him a dashed sight better than you do, an' I ain't so sure of that," Pon replied. "Centre-forward's his regular place."

"Yes; he gave it up to me. Jolly decent of him, I thought."

"By gad, 'e'd played against this side before, an' knew what to expect! That was the size of it," Pon replied.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

Flip moved away without another word.

"You can't hold him, Pon. He'll go over to Courtenay yet, by gad!"

"If you don't hold your clackin' tongue, Gaddy, I'll tap you one under the jaw that will make you bite it through!" snapped Pon.

It was to the group which included the Greyfriars contingent, with Merton and Tunstall, that Flip made his way, sucking a section of lemon as he went.

"You're having a warm time, Derwent," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes; reminds me of Wednesday," said Flip, with a cheerful grin.

"You're lame, Flippy!" said Merton.

"Oh, nothing to hurt, Algy! It will go off!"

Frank Courtenay came up.

"Derwent," he said, "you've had enough of that for one afternoon. The chap's a brute, but he don't foul, and Reedman can't control him. If he were told to clear off there would only be a scene. We must make the best of it, and I think that can be done by another chap taking a turn in the centre."

Everyone knew who the other chap would be. Even the Caterpillar expected the answer he got when he said:

"Throw me to the lions, Franky! The gentle Chiker may make mince-meat of me, but that won't matter a heap. Derwent's done his bit, anyway."

"No; I'm taking it on myself, Rupert. You don't mind outside-right, I hope, Derwent, or inside, if it suits you better? But Smithy's not exactly a flyer, are you, Smithy?"

Even without the friendly hand on his shoulder and the friendly smile on Courtenay's face, loyal Smithson would not have resented that speech. As it was, he took it almost as a compliment.

"I'll do my best on the outside, though, if Derwent would like my place better," he said. "He's a bit lame, you know."

It had been on the tip of Flip's tongue to say that he wanted to stay in the centre. He did want to greatly. He had no fear of Chiker, and resented the notion that the fellow might think he had.

But he remembered Pon's sneer at Courtenay, and he saw Smithson's utter willingness and prompt obedience, and he choked down his own self-will.

"You're skipper, Courtenay," he said.

"What you say goes. I don't really mind Chiker much, but I might be more use inside. 'Traid I'm no Deerfoot to-day, so if Smithson don't object, I'll line up next to you."

"Which, incidentally, won't take you so far from the agreeable Chiker but that he and you may pass the compliments of the season to one another now an' then, Derwent," remarked the Caterpillar, with a shrewd glance under his long, fair eyelashes at Flip—a glance in strong contrast to the lazy tone in which he spoke.

"Well, I'm not denying that," Flip answered. "I suppose I ought not to care what the rotter thinks, but I don't want him to fancy I'm funking him!"

"Bless you, Flippy, you haven't got it in you to funk anybody, by Jupiter!" said Merton, almost affectionately.

And the Greyfriars fellows were sure he was right. Indeed, he was not far wrong. Physical courage Flip had in abundance. But his moral courage had never been tried high yet. There were coming times that would try it!

Now the teams were whistled back to the middle, and Chiker frowned as he saw the change that had been made.

It did not appear, however, that Flip had experienced his tender mercies merely because Flip's peculiar style of beauty failed to suit his taste. He was every bit as rough on Frank Courtenay. And Frank, though he had a slight advantage over the boy from Tasmania both in height and weight, lacked a trifle of the forbearance of his charging. Perhaps Flip had been used to slightly more strenuous games at home than were usual at Highcliff. Anyway, Chiker found Courtenay's charges less vigorous.

He did not find Courtenay less clever, however.

The Highcliff skipper was first-rate. Good

Flip might be and was; but he would have been the first to acknowledge that Courtenay was, at least, his equal. The game still went largely in Highcliff's favour, save for the important fact that goals failed to materialise.

Smithson shaped quite well, and showed more speed than had been hoped for from him. The Caterpillar was in fine form. Yates played an unselfish and useful game at inside-left, and now there was a good deal of short passing, for Courtenay found the advantage of having a man equal to himself in skill on his right hand and close in.

Between them they made matters warm for Chiker. But the brute never shirked his work, and Clubby was a tower of strength to his side.

Half an hour had passed, and still neither side had scored again.

In the next five minutes Ponsonby enjoyed himself hugely. For Frank Courtenay was catching it hot!

Three times he staggered back and went down before the massive shoulder of Chiker. And then again the red-faced back got at him, lifted him off his feet, and sent him down in a huddled heap.

"I'm done!" murmured Frank faintly, as Flip helped him up.

He could hardly stand. The game had to be stopped while he walked off, with Flip on one side and De Courcy on the other.

Reedman was in great trouble. He knew it was no use ordering Chiker off. The fellow would refuse to go, and that meant a row. But the match was nearly over, and Reedman hoped the end would come without more casualties.

The Caterpillar took command when the game was resumed. Without a word, he assumed the centre-forward position, and his eyes flashed fire, though his bearing was as languorous as ever.

Reedman threw up the ball. As it fell, Chiker dashed at those in front of him, seeking to get at it and clear well down the field. Then Chiker got the surprise of his life. The Caterpillar's charge seemed to him like nothing human. It was as though something out of a giant catapult had been hurled full at him. He went down as if shot.

And the Caterpillar fell, too. He had put all the strength and energy he possessed into thatvengeful charge, and he lay gasping by the side of the rough champion, whose crest he had lowered.

Chiker was the first up. The ball had been cleared, and the Courtfield forwards were taking it down the field.

"Well, I'm gormed! Who'd 'ave thought it?" gasped Chiker, gazing at the slim form of his opponent. "I'm—I'm gormed—gormed if I ain't!"

Flip helped the Caterpillar up.

"Not fit for much more, I'm afraid?" he said. "My word, you did get 'im!"

"My bolt's shot, by gad!" breathed the Caterpillar. "But never say die, Derwent! There's time yet! Have a smash at the beggar yourself—you seemed to like it—missed me, that—thought I should, too—but dashed if I do! Have another go, an' leave Yates to shoot. They won't expect it, an' Yates is no duffer!"

The ball was coming back. Wilkinson minor had cleared when danger threatened.

The Caterpillar lounged off. He confessed afterwards that he was not at all sure that he hadn't some injury to "his dashed vital parts." But he went without help.

"Look out, Derwent!" shrieked Smithson.

The ball came to Flip. Out of the corner of his eye he noted Yates' exact position; and Yates lifted one finger in token that he understood and was ready.

Chiker bore down on Flip, bull-like. The ball was deftly slipped to Yates, and Flip hurled himself at the burly back.

"Goal!" roared Highcliff, as they went down together.

Clubby had made a mistake that proved fatal. He had forgotten Yates, and he did not remember him until too late. Yates did not shoot; he ran with the ball at his toes the few yards between him and the goal, and he hooked it past Clubby as coolly as Flip or Courtenay or De Courcy could have done.

So Highcliff won by two to one, and Gadsby had to pay up a sovereign to Monson minor.

After the Match.

PON stood right in the way as Flip came out of the pavilion with De Courcy and Frank Courtenay.

In his dealings with the latter two Pon had an advantage. They were always

civil to him if he was to them. The Caterpillar had never cherished hopes of the reformation of Cecil Ponsbury, and consequently was not disappointed when, as so often happened, signs of apparent amendment on the part of the nuts' leader turned out in the long run to be the cloak for some baser treachery than common. And Courtenay never forgot that this young blackguard was his kinsman, and would never quite give up hope for him. Thus 15th had an interest in Pon. In fact, De Courcy was wont to say that Pon was quite the most interesting person he knew.

But Pon, when it suited him, would reject with disdainful insolence any civil word spoken to him by Courtenay. Thus Frank seldom addressed him unless obliged.

Now, Pon spoke to all three, and no one hearing him could have guessed on what different terms he stood with each of them—close friendship with Flip, a kind of armed neutrality at most times as concerned the Caterpillar, and rankling hatred against Courtenay.

"That chap was a brutal bargee!" he said. "You've all three had a taste of him. How d'ye like it, by gad?"

"I had quite enough, for one!" replied Courtenay.

"We all had!" said Flip, grinning. He still limped.

"Speak for yourselves, dear boys! I had a dashed sight too much!" was the Caterpillar's answer.

"Well, I must say that on the whole I'm not so dashed sorry I chucked footer," remarked Pon. He was walking beside the three now, and the Caterpillar wondered what was in the wind, and Flip felt rather pleased, and other fellows stared. "It's a dangerous game, by gad! An' beastly painful, which is worse."

"Not much more painful than Wednesday's game, I think," said Courtenay, with a smile that showed he had no intention of saying anything to offend Pon.

"Well, perhaps not; I should say not! Wish we'd had you two there! We'd have licked Greyfriars then, sure as eggs!"

"I don't share your charitable wish, Pon, dear boy," the Caterpillar replied. "An' I don't think Franky does. He hasn't the same timid, shirkin' feelin' that comes over me whenever there's a scrap about, but he—"

"Oh, rats! Catch you shirking, Rupert!" said Frank.

"This chap, when he gets goin', Flip, is a dashed terror," said Pon.

And certainly Pon should have known something about it. There had been two or three combats in his career that he was never likely to forget. One of them had been fought with Temple of Greyfriars, and Pon, as a reward for treachery, had been forced to carry on long after he wanted to throw up the sponge. But even that was not quite so vivid in his recollection as a certain fight with Rupert De Courcy, who had been his companion, if hardly his chum, in the days before "the boy without a name" came to Highgate.

The Caterpillar knew that he had neither forgotten nor forgiven that licking; and the Caterpillar smelt a rat in connection with this new-found civility of Pon's. But Courtenay and Flip were both unsuspicious, though Flip was a little taken aback when he remembered how lately he had heard Pon sneering at the skipper of the Fourth.

"Yaas, Derwent, but it takes a dashed lot to get me goin', y'know," said the Caterpillar. "I don't fairly begin to see red till I've been prodded past bearin'."

The Greyfriars fellows were just going off the field when the watchful eyes of Peter Todd saw that which caused him to exclaim:

"My hat! Talk about the giddy lion and the giddy lamb! What do you chaps think of that?"

"I can see it, but I don't believe it," replied Squiff promptly.

The eyes of all were turned towards where those four paced together in all seeming friendliness.

"It's Derwent's doing," said Harry Wharton. "If he can steer Pon straight it's a jolly good thing he came, that's all I've got to say."

Johnny Bull snorted, and said less.

"He can't. Nobody can," said Johnny.

"Well, it's hardly our bizney," remarked Tom Brown. "And if Courtenay is the same sort of open-hearted, believing chap that you are, Wharton, the Caterpillar's pretty wide. Whatever Pon's game is, De Courcy's the fellow to twig it."

They passed on. As Tom Brown said, it

was not their business. But they could not help wondering.

Others wondered besides them. Gadsby and Vavasour fairly glared as they saw.

"What rot! Chummin' up with those cads!" growled Gadsby fiercely.

"Oh, absolutely! Though—well, you know, you can't call the Caterpillar a cad, y'know, Gaddy. He's got an uncle who's an earl."

"I don't care if he's got a dashed grandmother who's a bishop! I bar him every bit as much as I do Courtenay. He looks on you an' me as the dashed dirt under his dashed feet, by gad!"

"Oh, I don't know about that!" replied Vavasour weakly. "He's generally civil to me."

"Sneerin' at you all the time! He thinks you're an empty-headed swab—an' so does everybody who knows you, by gad!"

But Vavasour's faithful chum muttered the last few words under his breath.

"Eh? I didn't catch what you said, Gaddy."

"Oh, nothin'—nothin' much, anyway. Look here, I'd like to have a yarn with that chap Chiker. They're just clearin' out. Come on!"

"What, that bargin' brute? Dashed if I want to talk to him, Gaddy! He's dangerous."

"He won't hurt you, you idiot! Why should he?"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Vavasour vaguely. "But I don't like people of that rough type."

"I do—sometimes. I liked Chiker this afternoon when he was knockin' Derwent an' Courtenay over like skittles!"

"But—"

"Come along, an' don't do so dashed much chin-waggin'!"

Vavasour went. He did not want to go. He had rather the feeling that a weak swimmer urged to venture into deeper waters by one more skilled and powerful might have. And, moreover, Vavasour had no faith in Gadsby's will to rescue him if the waters proved too deep for him.

He did not know what Gadsby was after; but he knew that it was no good. As vicious and as spiteful as Gadsby—even readier to hate for little cause—his cowardice made him less dangerous. Gadsby was no hero; but by the side of Vavasour he seemed almost intrepid.

A Chat with Chiker.

CHIKER was walking alone. Chiker's methods did not greatly appeal to most of his comrades, and they had been saying things to him. His red face was sulky and lowering, and he kicked loose stones with his heavy boots as he walked.

He was a fellow of twenty-six or so, whom military discipline might have made into a decent man. But he was of the skilled class, and at present the comb had passed him.

"I say!" said Gadsby, as they drew up to him.

"Well, an' what do you say?" rumbled Chiker.

Gadsby had very nearly said "my man." He had only just checked himself in time. Chiker, in his present mood, was in no temper to be patronised by anyone; and if "my man" had left Gadsby's lips the talk that followed would never have taken place. And that would have been better in the long run both for Gadsby and Chiker.

"I wanted to congratulate you on the rippin' good game you played, that's all," said Gadsby. "You're the hottest back I've seen for a dashed long time."

"Oo're yer gettin' at?" growled Chiker. But, though he growled, he looked less sullen.

"I mean it! I've no patience with these ladylike notions about chargin', you know."

"Ah! It's almost a pity as you weren't playin' forward along back there," answered Chiker, with a distinct touch of sarcasm.

Gadsby was not at all of that opinion. But he did not mind lying.

"I shouldn't have squealed, anyway," he said.

"I dunno as there was much squealin', neither," Chiker replied, looking at him with growing curiosity. "But I ought to know your mug, seems to me. Ain't I seen you somewhere before?"

"Likely enough if you live in Courtfield, by gad!"

"Oh, I don't mean on the road or in meetin'! Was you ever at Flash Bill's?"

"Yes, I've been there," said Gadsby readily.

Vavasour almost groaned. How could he be such a fool as to make that admission? Flash Bill's was not only a gambling den, but a particularly low one. The nuts were not too choice in their methods when gambling was afoot; but one visit to Flash Bill's had been enough for Pon and Gaddy and Vav.

"Ah, now I know as you're a sport! Come again, an' we'll try each other at a different kind of game from footer. Footer ain't your game, for all you may say; there's more behind you wantin' to make up to me nor that!"

Vavasour was pulling at Gadsby's sleeve, for he did not like this a bit. Gadsby shook off his hand impatiently.

"I'll come, by gad!" he said. "You can book me for an early appearance, Mr. Chiker. Do you do much in that way?"

"I dunno whether you young nobbs would call it much," said Chiker gloomily. "I do a bit. Eight to ten quid a week, I make, an' that's where the most of it goes. But what's the odds as long as you're appy? An' I ain't got no wife nor kids to worry about. What's your name?"

The question came abruptly. Gadsby hesitated.

But he could not well refuse, and to give a false name was risky. So he afforded Chiker the information asked for.

"Ah! Now I ain't surprised. Do you appen to know a young imp of the old 'un by the name of Gittins—chrised Gehazi—though whaffor I dunno. I wouldn't call no 'armless kid by a name like that. An' I s'pose he must 'ave bin 'armless enough time they give 'im it, for all what he is now."

"Yaas, I know him," drawled Gadsby.

Vavasour wondered at his coolness. Gehazi Gittins was the boy from Courtfield whom Gadsby had tried to help in kidnapping Flip Derwent's cockatoo. And Vavasour was horribly afraid lest that little enterprise should become known.

"E's my nevvie. Did they find the gormed bird?"

"Yaas, they found him, dash it all!"

"Ah! You 'ad oughter let young Gehazi wring its neck. He'd 'ave bin outer the job like a shot—he's a crool young 'ound!"

"What did he tell you about it, may I ask?" inquired Gadsby, still keeping cool.

"The ole yarn, I reckon. Oh, he wouldn't 'ave gone for givin' you away! There wasn't nothink in tellin' me. 'Is notion was to tickle me a bit, an' worm a packet o' cigarettes outer me. Reg'lar young cadger, Gehazi is."

"The bird belonged to the chap you came up against so many times in the first half," said Gadsby.

"Ho, that was the game, was it? Well, it looks to me as if you'd bin comin' up agin' 'im, too—an' not gettin' no change out of it, neither."

"I don't love him, I admit," said Gadsby, with a wry grin.

"An' this dumb young swell—is 'e another what don't love 'im?"

Vavasour had to say something. He said what came most readily to his lips at any time, hardly realising what it meant in this connection.

"Oh, absolutely!"

"Got a voice, as 'e? An' a very pretty voice, too. Well, young gents, I dunno what you want outer me. I ain't got my knife so nation 'ard inter this young Derwent—that's the name, I count—as you seem to 'ave. But 'e was above a bit saucy to me this afternoon, an' I ain't sayin' I love him."

"By gad, Derwent don't really come into it, except that we were jolly glad to see you bash him about a bit, y'know," said Gadsby.

And Vavasour breathed a sigh of relief. This possible new ally struck Vav as rather a dangerous customer.

"Ah, I can understand that there!" said Chiker. "I ain't one of them soft chaps who believes in lovin' your enemies, an' all that. Old women's tork, I call it! When I got an enemy I give 'im a punch on the jor—see? An' if 'e don't like that, I give 'im another!"

It seemed to Gadsby a very desirable way of dealing with enemies; but he realised that it was not one he could always use.

"You ain't goin' to use that chap, are you, Gaddy?" asked Vavasour weakly, after they had parted with the engaging Chiker.

"What d'ye think of course I'm jolly well goin' to use him! What do you think I buttered up the cad for? But I'm not such a fool as to tell him everythin' at once!"

(To be continued next week.)