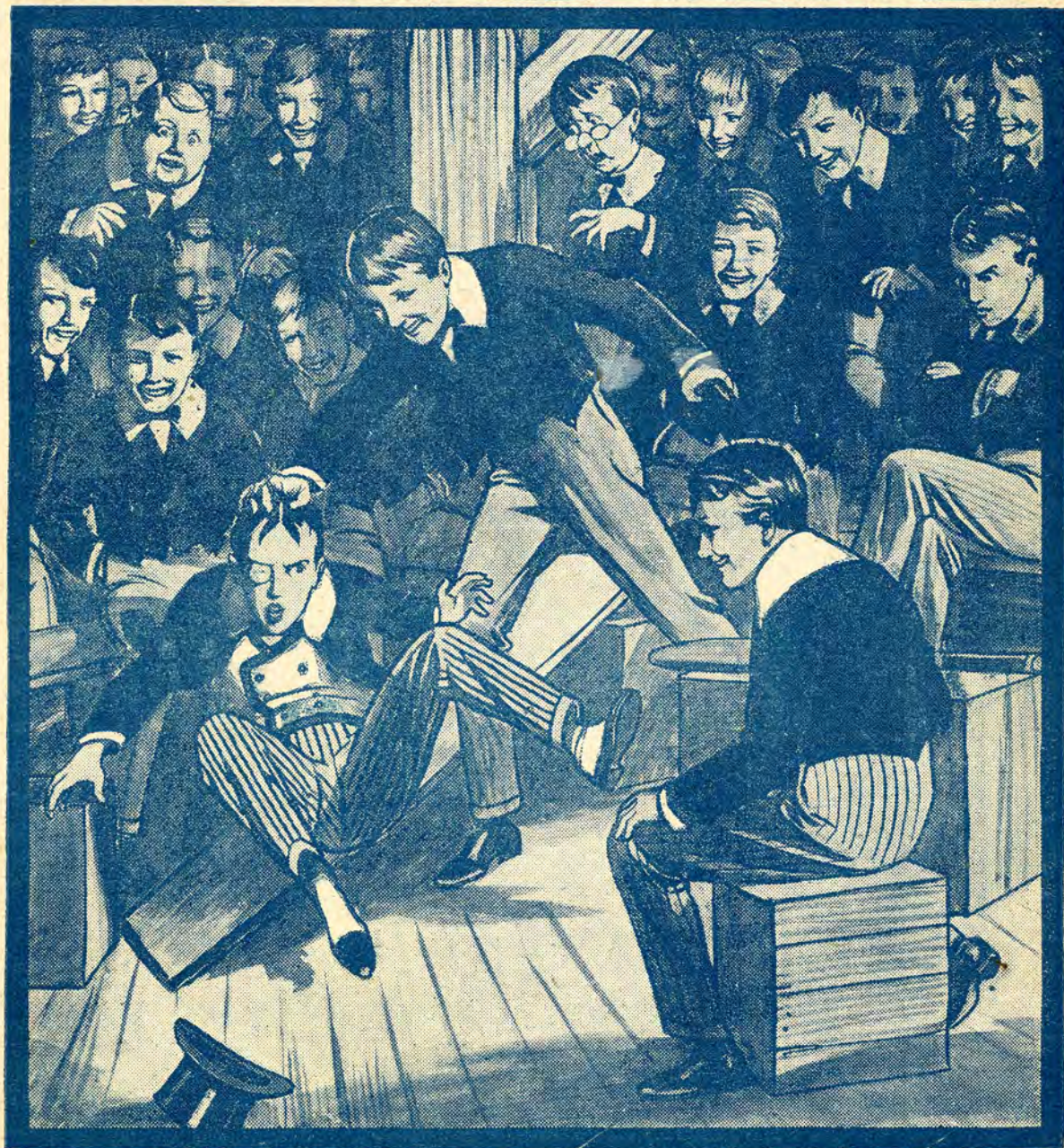
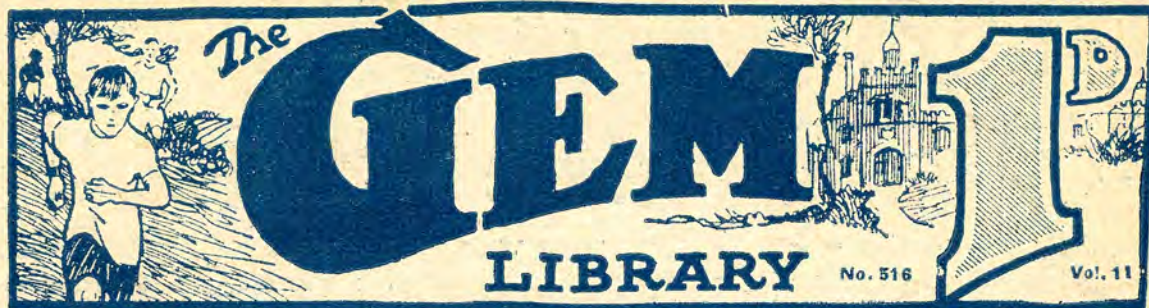


Number Nine on the Warpath!

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



THE END OF GUSSY'S SPEECH!

Copyright in the United States of America.

Number Nine

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

BY
Martin Clifford.

on the Warpath!

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry : Prime Minister.

"**M**ACAULAY says—"
"Bother Macaulay!"
"Macaulay says—"
shouted Tom Merry.

"Bless Macaulay!"
"Who was Macaulay, anyway?" inquired Jack Blake.

"He, he, he!" cackled Baggy Trimble. "Blake don't know who Macaulay was! He was the chap who wrote the 'Lays of the Last Minstrel,' of course."

"The Lays of Ancient Rome," fat-head!" said Manners.

"Rot!" replied Trimble. Then there was a shout from George Alfred Grundy of the Shell.

"What's that fat rotter Trimble doing in here? He's not a member of the St. Jim's Parliament!"

"I spy strangers!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Turn Trimble out!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Look here, you know, I can be in the Common-room if I like!" bellowed Baggy Trimble indignantly.

"That's your mistake! You can't!"

"Yaroo! Leggo, Grundy, you cad!" Grundy of the Shell did not let go till he had deposited Trimble outside the door and slammed it after him.

"Now—" began Grundy, returning to the scene of action.

"Order!"

"Macaulay says—" resumed Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! You have repeated that remark several times, Tom Merry. Pshaw! you would be good enough to put on a new record," suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth.

"Macaulay says—" roared Tom Merry, without waiting for Arthur Augustus to finish his lengthy observation.

But there were fresh interruptions. It was quite a numerous meeting in the junior Common-room in the School House of St. Jim's.

The matter in hand was most important.

The St. Jim's Parliament having been duly elected, the arrangement of the various political parties was the next important step.

Monty Lowther pointed out that it was strictly necessary for a House of Commons to be divided into different parties. Upon that system the politicians were able to take regular turns at the loot. Without party divisions, there would be a general scramble for the loot. Which could only lead to confusion.

True, in the case of the St. Jim's Parliament, there wasn't any loot. But it was better to follow the time-honoured custom.

This meeting was for the purpose of organising the party. Over in the New House Figgins & Co. were organising themselves. In the Third Form-room the fags were also going in for organisation.

But it was settled that Tom Merry & Co. were to form the Government, and make up a Cabinet—a regular War Cabinet. For the St. Jim's juniors were at war with the Grammar School at Rylcombe, and they were prepared not to sheathe the sword till Grammarian militarism was quite knocked on the head. There was, in deed, a great majority in favour of the policy of the knock-out blow.

The Terrible Three had settled that Tom Merry was to be Prime Minister. Grundy had settled that Grundy was to be Prime Minister. He had one backer—his chum Gunn. Gunn was quite prepared to help him become Prime Minister. He said he had always felt that Grundy would come to a bad end.

"Macaulay says—" said Tom Merry for about the tenth time.

Owing to unparliamentary interruptions he had not been able to get as far as what Macaulay actually did say.

"Shut up a bit, Merry!" said Grundy. "I'm going to address the members—"

"Weally, Gwunday, I was about to address the honourable membahs!" protested Arthur Augustus.

"I've got a few remarks to make," observed Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Same here!" grinned Blake.

"My dear friends and fellow-members," said Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, "pray, give me your attention. I trust you will select me as Prime Minister. I assure you that I should immediately make peace with the Grammar School, being a convinced Pacifist—"

Skimpole was interrupted

"Yah!"

"Order!"

"Traitor!"

"Pro-Grammarian!"

A cushion smote Skimpy, and he rolled under the table. The voice of gentle Pacifism was no longer heard, only a series of anguished squeaks.

"Now—" commenced Grundy.

"Macaulay says—"

"My only hat! He's got Macaulay on the brain!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"For goodness' sake, let him tell us what Macaulay said, and give us a rest!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" bawled Manners. "Silence for the chair!"

"I'm the chair!" roared Grundy.

"Shut up!"

"Gentlemen—"

"Hands!" yelled Lowther. "Hands up for Tom Merry to jaw!"

"Ha, ha!"

There was quite a show of hands for Tom Merry.

"Grundy, you're out! Shut up!"

"I'm not the man to give way to a weak and craven majority!" said Grundy.

"The majority is always wrong. Gibson says so—I mean—Hsen. I don't believe in majorities. I believe in a War Cabinet sitting on everybody."

"I believe in sitting on Grundy!" remarked Gore.

"Hear, hear!"

Half a dozen honourable members proceeded to sit on George Alfred Grundy. The great George Alfred despised majorities; but he found that majority difficult to deal with. He was reduced to gasping, and Tom Merry triumphantly proceeded with his speech.

"Gentlemen and honourable members—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Macaulay says—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Give Mac a rest!"

"Macaulay says," proceeded Tom firmly—"he says:

"Then none were for a party,
Then all were for the State,
Then the rich man helped the poor,
And the poor man loved the great!"

"I rise to a point of order!" said Monty Lowther. "I beg to point out that it is no use, in these times, for the poor man to love the grate, when he can't get any coal to burn in it."

"Shut up, Lowther! None of your rotten puns!"

"Order!"

"Silence!"

"Yaas, wathah! I pwotest against Lowthah makin' idiotic puns—"

"Oh, go home!" said Lowther. "You oughtn't to be here, Gussy. Your proper place is the House of Lords or an idiot asylum, or something of the sort."

"Bai Jove! You uttah ass!"

"Order!"

"Macaulay—" resumed Tom Merry.

"Oh, dear! Give him a rest, and us, too!"

"Macaulay was describing the proper state of affairs in war-time," said Tom Merry severely. "Then none were for a party, then all were for the State. Now the State in this case is St. Jim's. Every true man is called upon to rally round the State—by backing me up!"

"Bai Jove!"

"The School House party," continued Tom Merry, "is the pillar of—of everything. United we stand, divided we come a mucker!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Unity in war-time is essential. We are at war with the Grammar School, and no truly patriotic chap can possibly want an end of the war—"

"Never!"

"The war, in fact, is an institution which we must hand on, unimpaired, to our children and our children's children—"

"Bravo!"

"Gerroooooough! Get off my neck!"

That was a remark from Grundy.

"Unity is the word," proceeded Tom Merry. "Unity means backing me up—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Any person not backing me up is guilty of fomenting dissension and discontent in war-time, which is the act of a traitor!"

"Oh!"

"I trust there are no traitors present."

I regret to see in this House that one member proclaims himself a pro-Grammarian. I may safely leave him to the contempt of his fellow-members and the scorn of his constituents."

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, I rely upon you to select me as Prime Minister. We form the majority in the St. Jim's House of Commons. Our leader will take the Premiership. I am your leader. Therefore—"

"Ergo!" said Lowther.

"Ergo, I am going to be Prime Minister, Q.E.D.," wound up Tom Merry triumphantly.

"I protest!" Arthur Augustus made his voice heard. "Gentlemen, we are at war with the wotten Gwammarians. What is wanted for the Pwemiership is a fellow of tact and judgment. I beg to state—"

"Rats!"

"Ring off!"

"Look here!" roared Grundy. "If you don't get off my neck I'll simply spifficate you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vote! Vote!" howled Lowther. "Party leader has to be selected at this meeting. The window is our division lobby, and behind the screen is the lobby for the malcontents and pro-Grammarians. Gentlemen, remember that the country is in danger, and follow me to the window!"

"Hurrah!"

There was quite a swarm to follow Lowther. By a two to one majority Tom Merry, captain of the Shell, was selected as party-leader, and therefore Prime Minister of St. Jim's House of Commons.

"Vewy well, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus gracefully, "I withdwaw my claim. Tom Mewwy is leadah, and I offah fwecely to back him up whenever he wequahs the aid of a little tact and judgment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lot of silly asses!" growled Grundy, getting on his feet at last. "I protest! I don't believe in Parliamentary institutions at all. What we want is a military dictatorship. I'm prepared to be dictator—"

"So is every other silly idiot with a swelled head!" remarked Kangaroo.

"Look here—"

"Shut up, Grundy!"

"Speech!" roared the honourable members.

The Prime Minister mounted on the table.

"Gentlemen, you have conferred on me the high honour of being your leader, and therefore Premier. You may rely upon me. I know the duties of Premiership. I shall back up Conservative principles, while rendering every support to Liberal ideas. While approving of Free Trade, I shall give Tariff Reform my hearty support. I shall duly recognise the blessings of peace, and carry on war relentlessly and permanently. I shall remember that our Constitution is a democratic one, without losing sight of the advantages of an autocratic administration. I shall bear in mind that there are two sides to every question, one just as good as the other, and act accordingly. Gentlemen, can I say fairer than that?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bravo!"

And as it was tea-time the meeting terminated. Grundy mounted on a chair to address the members, but found himself with an audience of only one. And that one, William Gunn, was grinning.

Wilkins looked in.

"You fellows done jawing?" he asked. "Tea's ready in the study."

"I'm left out, Wilkins!"

"Haven't they made you Prime Minister, Grundy?"

"No! Would you believe it?"

"Extraordinary!" said Wilkins, closing one eye at Gunn. "Never mind, come and have tea."

"I shall join the Opposition!" said Grundy. "I feel that that's my duty. As leader of the Opposition I shall make the Prime Minister wriggle a bit."

"What about patriotism?" asked Gunn. "We're at war, you know."

"I'm beginning to agree with Dr. Johnson," said Grundy darkly. "He said that patriotism was the last refuge of a scoundrel."

"Dr. Johnson! Was he a politician?" yawned Wilkins.

"Oh, no! Quite a respectable man."

"Well, come and have tea, and after tea you can become leader of the Opposition—perhaps."

"Perhaps!" murmured Gunn.

And Grundy went to tea, which was really the best thing he could do under the circumstances.

CHAPTER 2.

Grundy's Petition.

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW lounged into Study No. 9 in the Fourth.

Levison and Clive were there. They were talking footer, and discussing Clive's chances of playing in the next Grammarian match. Ernest Levison was booked for a place, anyway.

"Hallo, you slackers!" yawned Cardew. "Don't you know there's been great doin's in the Common-room?"

"I thought I heard a row going on," remarked Clive.

"Meetin' of the School House party in the St. Jim's Parliament," said Cardew. "Tom Merry's selected as Premier."

"Couldn't do better!" said Levison. "Were you present?"

"No fear! Only Members of the House admitted. Trimble was chucked out on his neck, so I didn't venture to put my unparliamentary nose inside the door. Grundy seems displeased at the result."

"Poor old Grundy!"

"And we're left out in the cold," said Cardew. "Not one of us succeeded in gettin' into the House on the elections. Study No. 9 takes a back seat."

Levison laughed.

"Perhaps we shall survive it," he remarked.

"We're simply common or garden members of the public," said Cardew. "Of course, it's a kid's game, but that only makes it all the more like the real thing—that's a kid's game, too. Study No. 9 ought not to be left out in the cold. It's up against the high standin' of this study."

"We may get in on a bye-election!" suggested Clive, with a laugh.

Cardew shook his head.

"There won't be any bye-elections yet awhile. Bye-elections are caused by members dyin' of old age, which isn't likely to happen here—"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Or else bein' shoved into big-salaried jobs to keep 'em from worryin' the Government. But that can't happen here, either, as there are no salaries goin'. The members will all stick to their seats, and we can whistle for bye-elections. Now, with this study left out, I don't see how the thing can be a success."

"Impossible!" smiled Levison.

"It's bound to end in a muck-up without our backin'. My idea is that we ought to help it on the way it's bound to go, an' put it out of its misery."

Levison chuckled.

"If you've got any wheeze for pulling the Parliamentary leg I'm your man," he said. "A little fun will keep

them from boring one another to death as real members do."

"It's a half-holiday to-morrow afternoon," remarked Cardew. "There's to be a full-dress meetin' of the whole House in Pepper's Barn. I beg its pardon, I mean in the House of Commons. I understand that Tom Merry's selectin' his Cabinet now, as he's head of the majority. Figgins & Co. will oppose, but they will be outvoted. Wally and the fags will rage, but they don't count. Everybody will be there, the whole merry family."

"Well?" asked Clive.

"Well, I was thinkin' that while they're deep in Parliamentary eloquence we might happen along, with a screw-driver an' gimlet an' some screws—ahem!"

Cardew broke off suddenly as there was a knock at the door.

Grundy of the Shell looked in, with a gloomy brow.

"I want you fellows to sign a petition," he said.

"What about?"

"I'm getting up a public petition," explained Grundy. "The public are not satisfied, and the public have a right to petition the House if they want to—that's in the British Constitution. The public will demand that Tom Merry plays second fiddle, and a chap with real ability goes in as Premier. Me, for example!"

"Oh!" said the three together.

"Here's the petition!" said Grundy, laying a sheet of manuscript on the table. "I'm going round for signatures. I haven't any yet. Gunn says he can't sign, as he's a Member of the House; and Wilkins seems to have sprained his wrist, or something, and can't hold a pen just now."

"Ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at, Cardew! Sign here, please!"

Cardew dipped a pen in the ink.

"You're going to sign it?" exclaimed Sidney Clive.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not, if Grundy wants me to? Besides, I dare say Grundy is goin' to lick a chap who refuses to sign!"

"Exactly!" said Grundy. "I'm doing this from patriotic motives, and I should consider it a duty to give a chap a thick ear if he refused."

"You see, there's no choice in the matter," said Cardew.

"Buck up!" said Grundy. "I've no time to waste! I've got to take this round and get it filled, to present to the House to-morrow."

"Right-ho!"

Cardew scrawled on the paper.

"Now, you, Levison!"

Levison glanced over Cardew's shoulder, and grinned, and signed his name. Clive chuckled, and did the same.

"Good!" said Grundy, as Cardew handed the paper to him across the table. "That's a beginning. Why—what—"

Grundy stared at the paper, and his face became purple as he saw what Ralph Cardew had written there. It ran:

"This is to certify that G. A. Grundy is in a proper mental condition for admission to Colney Hatch.

"Signed,

"R. R. CARDEW.

"E. LEVISON.

"S. CLIVE."

"You cheeky rotters!" roared Grundy. "You've mucked up my paper, now! You—you—"

Grundy hurled the paper at Cardew, and rushed round the table to come to closer quarters with him.

"Line up!" grinned Levison.

Three pairs of hands were laid upon the Shell fellow at the same moment.

Grundy, instead of carrying all before him, was suddenly whirled off his feet, and his head swam as he found himself spinning in the air.

"Leggo!" he gasped. "Put me down! I'll lick you—I'll smash you! I'll—"

"Take him home!" said Cardew.

Grundy was rushed out into the passage.

"Hallo!" The Terrible Three were in the Shell passage as Grundy came along with his arms and legs flying wildly.

"What the dickens—"

"Only taking Grundy home!" smiled Cardew. "He is trying to intimidate the public. This is how the public deals with dictators! We're the public!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Open Grundy's door, dear boy!"

Tom Merry ejaculated as Grundy's study door. The great George Alfred was whirled into the study.

"My hat!" ejaculated Wilkins.

"What—"

"Look out!" shrieked Gunn.

Crash!

Grundy landed on the study table. The tea-things were still there. The result was terrific.

Crash! Smash! Clatter!

"Yaroooh!" roared Grundy.

"Ta-ta!" smiled Cardew, and Study No. 9 retired.

"Yoop! Oh, dear! Oh, yah! Yaroooh!" howled Grundy, struggling among smashed tea-things. "I'll—I'll—I'll—Yooooop!"

He rolled off the table in a shower of crockery.

"You silly ass!" shouted Wilkins.

"Look what you've done!"

"Did I do it, fathead?" raved Grundy.

"Come with me, and we'll mop up those cheeky fags! Yow-ow! Handling me, you know, because I was going to lick them—yow!—for not signing the petition properly! Groogh! Come on!"

"You frabjous chump!" howled Wilkins. "We won't lick them—we'll jolly well lick you!"

"Why—what—you cheeky ass!"

Wilkins and Gunn seized the unfortunate Grundy. The smashing of the crocks was too exasperating. Crocks had been broken before in the study, but the loss of the whole set was too much.

Bump! Bump!

"Oh! Ah! Yah! Ow! Ow!"

Wilkins and Gunn walked out of the study and slammed the door, leaving Grundy sitting on the carpet, trying to get his second wind.

He was hurt, but he was more astonished than hurt. Even his own faithful followers had risen against him. It never did occur to Grundy that his study-mates were not blessed with the patience of Job. He had found it out now.

Perhaps it did Grundy good. At all events, nothing more was heard of the public petition, and Tom Merry was left undisturbed in the high and honourable post of Prime Minister of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

The Sporting Club!

ERASMUS ZACHARIAH PEPPER was masticating a crust of war-bread and a hunk of ancient cheese in his cottage, and grousing over that frugal fare. Mr. Pepper's fare was always frugal, in peace-time as well as war-time. He did not believe in spending money. But it worried Mr. Pepper dreadfully to have to pay the war-price for war-bread. The village miser had plenty of pounds, but his thoughts generally ran upon pence. He ceased munching, and looked up with a grunt

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 516.

as the cottage door opened and a well-dressed junior of St. Jim's looked in.

It was Racke of the Shell.

Mr. Pepper rose to his feet—an unusual act of politeness on his part. He had a great respect for Racke. For Aubrey Racke was heir to the immense war-profits of Messrs. Racke and Hacke, the famous—or infamous—contractors. And Mr. Pepper was a believer in the Oriental proverb that the smell of all money is sweet.

"Afternoon, sir!" he said, quite civilly.

"Good-afternoon!" said Racke, coming into the cottage and casting a contemptuous glance round him as he did so. "I've called to see you, Mr. Pepper."

"Take a chair, Master Racke."

Racke glanced at the grubby chair, with its uncertain legs, and decided to stand.

"Never mind that. You've let your barn, or bungalow, or shed, or whatever you call it, to Tom Merry, to play a fool game in, Mr. Pepper."

"Master Merry and Master Grundy rent that barn, sir—an arrangement between them," said Mr. Pepper.

"Yes; I hear that you squeezed rents out of both of them."

"Ahem!"

"Well, there's a storehouse under that barn, with a door at the back," said Racke. "You didn't let that with the barn, did you?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Pepper.

As a matter of fact, it was supposed that the whole building was let, but Mr. Pepper divined at once that Racke wanted the subterranean storehouse for some reason of his own. He was quite prepared to let it, if he could, and leave Racke to settle the matter with Tom Merry and Grundy. All was grist that came to the mill of Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, of Rylcombe.

"There's a yarn among the fellows that you had a lot of gold buried there, and had to hand it over," said Racke.

"I'm a poor man, Master Racke. I haven't seen a sovereign for years," said Mr. Pepper. "Don't you believe all you hear."

"Well, you're not using that cellar at present?"

"No. But it ain't a cellar, Master Racke; it's a very handsome, well-found storehouse, got up in first-class style. Only partly underground, owing to the slope of the field. A very fine—"

"Cut it out!" said Racke rudely.

"Will you let that den, whatever you call it, to me?"

Mr. Pepper looked reflective.

"You see, I'm not using that splendid storehouse at the present moment," he remarked. "But I might. But to oblige you, sir—"

"I'll stand you a bob a week for it!"

"What a humorous young gentleman you are, Master Racke!" said Mr. Pepper good-humouredly.

"I'm not joking!"

"You must be. The rent of that storehouse is five shillings a week, and cheap at that."

"It's not worth that to me."

"A rich young gentleman like you, Master Racke."

"Look here, Pepper, I'll make it two bob—"

"Good-afternoon, Master Racke!"

Mr. Pepper turned to his war-bread again.

Racke gave him an angry look. Racke wanted that cellar for reasons of his own. But he was not prepared to be swindled. He had heaps of money, but he had also a great gift for taking care of it.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" he growled, and he turned to the door.

"Ahem! Wait a minute, Master

Racke!" said Mr. Pepper, in alarm.

"Perhaps, to oblige a young gentleman I respect very highly, I could let that fine storehouse for half a crown a week."

"Done!" said Racke.

"I'm losing money on it," sighed Mr. Pepper. "I was always too careless in money matters! That's why I'm still poor!"

"Oh, rats!" said Racke. "Look here, I'll pay a month in advance, and you can give me a receipt and the key. There's a padlock, I think."

"You'll take care of the key, Master Racke? Keys are expensive, now."

"Br-r-r-r!"

Racke threw a ten-shilling note on the rickety table.

Mr. Pepper made out a receipt, with a cross-nibbed pen, watery ink, and the paper that had been wrapped round the cheese.

Racke sniffed with disgust as it was handed to him, but he put it in his pocket-book.

"Got more than one key to the cellar?" he asked, as Mr. Pepper fumbled with a bunch on a ring. "I'd like another one for Crooke."

"There would be an extra charge for an extra key, Master Racke—"

"Oh, rats! Give me one, then!"

Racke took the key, and dropped it into his pocket.

"Mind, none of your dodges of letting the cellar twice over, same as you did the barn with Grundy and Merry!" he said warningly.

"Oh really, Master Racke!"

With that non-committal reply, Mr. Pepper turned again to his frugal meal, and Racke left the cottage.

Crooke and Scrope, of the Shell, and Mellish, of the Fourth, were waiting for him in the lane.

The black sheep of St. Jim's looked at their leader inquiringly.

"All serene?" asked Crooke.

"Right as rain! I've rented the dashed cellar, and I've got the key. It was a rippin' idea!" said Racke, with great satisfaction. "Nobody's likely to disturb us there. It was getting rather risky in the School House, since Kildare found our study smelling of smoke. And those New House cads raided us last time we had a little party in the old tower. Pepper's cellar will be as safe as houses!"

"Good egg!" said Mellish heartily.

"What about the merry Parliament meetin' overhead?" said Scrope, with a grin. "If they know—"

"They can't interfere with us. We can lock the door, for one thing. But they won't even know we're there, I expect; we shall keep it to ourselves. Let's go and have a look at the place."

The four young rascals crossed the field to Pepper's barn.

It was deserted at present, though later that afternoon there were to be great Parliamentary doings there.

At the back of the barn, owing to the backward slope of the ground, the floor was some height above ground-level. There lay Mr. Pepper's storehouse, as he called it—cellar, as Racke called it. The door was secured by a rusty and padlock.

Racke inserted the rusty key into the equally rusty padlock, and it squeaked and turned. He threw open the door.

Crooke sniffed.

"A bit musty!" he remarked.

"We can air it by leaving the door open a bit. We can warm it with an oil-stove," remarked Racke. "We can get one in the village. Those old boxes will make chairs and a table. This is where that chap Outram was hidden, and he stayed here for days on end. We can bring a few things here to make it more comfy. We can lay in a lamp, too."

"Toppin'!"

"We'll go whacks in the exes," added Racke.

His comrades looked rather less enthusiastic.

"Stony!" remarked Mellish.

"You always are stony!" sneered Racke.

"Can't all have fathers in the war-profit line," observed Mellish. "My pater's never had a chance to start as an extortioner."

"Look here, you cad—" roared Racke. War-profits were rather a sore subject with the noble Aubrey.

"Order!" grinned Crooke. "But really, Racke it was your idea, you know, and you're tenant, too, and it was understood you were seeing the thing through. You've got tons of money—I don't say it's yours, but you've got it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't let's begin raggin'," said Scrope pacifically, as Racke clenched his hands. "I'll stand my whack, and you can do the same, Crooke. This will make a rippin' club-house. Let's get along to the village an' lay in supplies."

"All right!"

The store-house was locked up again, and the precious quartette walked into Rylcombe.

The supplies were many and various.

There was a small oil-stove, a lamp, and a can of kerosene. There were cigarettes—purchased by a friend of Racke's and handed to him in a quiet corner; the said friend being potman at the Green Man. There were other articles, and the four juniors had plenty to carry when they started for the barn again.

In a short time the purchases were conveyed into the cellar, and deposited there.

"Who's going to superintend the oil bizney?" asked Crooke, who had no mind to soil his hands with kerosene.

"Mellish!" said Racke.

"I like that!" said Mellish warmly.

"You're not payin'," said Racke coolly. "That's your whack. You pile in and look after the lamp and the stove, Percy."

"That's fair," chimed in Crooke. "You're bound to do somethin', Mellish. If you can't pay, you'll have to work."

"Or you won't be a member of the Sporting Club!" said Racke.

Mellish hesitated.

But the poor hanger-on of three well-to-do fellows had little choice in the matter.

"Well, I don't mind," he said grudgingly, at last.

"Get it into order, ready for the first meetin' of the club," said Racke coolly. And he strolled away with his friends, leaving Mellish scowling—with work to do.

Mellish stared after them.

It was not all lavender to be a member of a shady circle in which he could not pay his footing. But he set to work—in a slovenly way. There was a good deal of kerosene spilled about the place, by the time he had finished. When the sporting club turned up for the first session they were likely to find their quarters highly-scented.

Racke looked in again presently, as Mellish was wiping his oily hands on the old sacks. He sniffed angrily.

"You silly chump!" What have you been doin' with the oil?" he exclaimed.

"Spilling it," said Mellish flippantly.

"Oh, you chump! We can't meet here to-day!"

"Go hon!"

Mellish walked away, grinning now. Racke angrily locked up the cellar, and followed, scowling.

It was Racke's turn to scowl, and Mellish's to grin.

CHAPTER 4.

Cardew's Little Game!

"GOOD-AFTERNOON, Mr. Pepper!"

Mr. Pepper had finished his lunch, and was sucking at an empty pipe. His pipe generally was empty, as an empty pipe costs less than a full one. The pipe itself had seen service, and had probably been thrown away by a previous owner before it came into Mr. Pepper's possession.

Three juniors looked in on him—Ralph Reckness Cardew, Ernest Levison, and Sidney Clive, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

"Afternoon!" said Mr. Pepper gruffly. "We've called to see you on business," remarked Cardew. "There's a sort of cellar or somethin' under your barn yonder, I think."

Mr. Pepper fairly jumped.

What on earth Racke could want his cellar for was a mystery to him. He was not aware of the shady proceedings of the sports of St. Jim's.

"Not at all!" said Mr. Pepper, in a great hurry.

"Oh, all right!"

"But what the merry dickens do you want the cellar for, Cardew?" asked Clive, puzzled.

Cardew had brought his chums along to Mr. Pepper's cottage for a walk, without explaining his object. What he could want with the cellar was as great a mystery to them as to Mr. Pepper.

"My dear chap," drawled Cardew. "It's a commodious residence, with many advantages. Safe refuge in case of air-raids, for example. There'll be no end of air-raids shortly."

"You ass!" said Clive.

"Thanks! Sixpence a week for the cellar, Mr. Pepper?"

"Five shillings!" said Mr. Pepper firmly. He was aware that Cardew was the grandson of a peer, and had plenty of cash.

"Oh, all serene!" said Cardew carelessly.

"Fathead!" shouted Levison. "You're



A Surprise for Racke & Co.
(See Chapter 2.)

And here was another St. Jim's fellow after that same cellar!

Mr. Pepper jumped—and grinned.

Having let the barn-cellar included—to both Tom Merry and George Alfred Grundy, he was quite prepared to let the cellar separately to both Aubrey Racke, and Ralph Cardew—if he could. If somebody else had come along and offered to rent the roof separately, Mr. Pepper would certainly have let it to him. It really looked as if that barn was going to be a horn of plenty to its business-like proprietor.

"I suppose you're open to let that cellar?" went on Cardew.

"Certainly, sir!" said Mr. Pepper civilly. He did not think it worth while to mention that the cellar had been let half an hour before.

"Good!" remarked Clive.

"But didn't the cellar go with the barn?" asked Levison,

not going to give him five bob a week for a cellar you don't want!"

"But I do want it."

"What for?"

"Suppose there's air-raids? You know how nervous I am!"

"You're not nervous, but you're a silly ass!" growled Levison.

"Very likely," said Cardew, unmoved.

"There's a quid-note, Mr. Pepper. Give me a receipt for a month's rent in advance."

"Certainly, Master Cardew."

The cross-nibbed pen and the watery ink came into use again. Mr. Pepper looked round for paper. But the wrapping of the cheese had already been used for a receipt for Aubrey Racke.

Cardew laughed, and tore a leaf from his pocket-book. Upon that Mr. Pepper scrawled a very nearly undecipherable receipt.

"Key!" said Cardew laconically.

The bunch clinked, and Mr. Pepper handed over the second key of the padlock.

"Any other keys to that lock?" asked Cardew.

"Only one I've got, sir."

"I don't want any other fellows to get hold of any key by chance," the dandy of the Fourth explained.

"There was only one other, sir, and that I handed to a former tenant, who hasn't returned it," said Mr. Pepper stolidly.

"Well, that won't hurt us," said Cardew, little dreaming who the former tenant was, and how recently he had become Mr. Pepper's tenant.

The three juniors left the cottage, Mr. Pepper blinking after them very curiously. He wondered whether any more St. Jim's fellows would take a fancy for renting his property. He was quite ready to let it to them if they did.

"Come and look at our new quarters," said Cardew.

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at!" said Clive, in perplexity. "We're missing footer practice for this."

"That doesn't matter."

"Oh, bow-wow!"

Cardew smiled, and in a few minutes they arrived at the barn. Mellish and Racke had been gone ten minutes when Cardew unlocked the door.

The smell of kerosene smote them forcibly.

"By gad! What a merry niff!" said Cardew.

"Groooh!"

"My hat! Pepper seems to have his cellar pretty well furnished!" exclaimed Clive. "Oil-can, lamp, stove! My hat! Is the old boulder hoarding oil, as he used to hoard gold before Grundy bowed him out?"

"Shouldn't wonder!" grinned Cardew. "But he's let us the cellar, and we're entitled to use what we find in it. I suppose it's let furnished."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we're not going to stay here!" exclaimed Levison, in amazement.

"We are!" smiled Cardew. "This oil-stove is a real find. It would be jolly cold and damp. Could you light it, Clive?"

"Of course I could!" said the South African junior, with a stare. "Couldn't you?"

"Well, I'd rather not try."

"Oh, you ass! You're afraid of soiling your fingers!"

"Yaas!"

"Then you can light it," said Clive coolly, putting his hands into his pockets. "You know how to handle a stove, Levison?"

"Yes. I'll tell you, if you like," said Levison, following Clive's example with his hands.

"Oh, bother the stove!" said Cardew. "We can stand the cold, anyway. Let's get the door shut!"

"But what are we staying here for?" shouted Levison.

"Have you ever heard of a celebrated philanthropist named Guy Fawkes?" asked Cardew.

His chums stared at him.

"I've heard of Guy Fawkes, but I never heard he was a philanthropist," said Clive. "He tried to blow up the House of Commons on the Fifth of November."

"That's it!" assented Cardew. "They don't call him a philanthropist in the history books; but I'm convinced that the poor chap was very much misunderstood. He felt that it was necessary to stop the politicians babbling; and, though his method was rather drastic, there's much to be said for it. In fact, I've often thought that old Fawkes could help us

win the war if he was alive now, and if he was given his head."

"You ass!"

"Well, in us you behold three disciples of merry old Fawkes!" exclaimed Cardew. "The House of Commons is to meet overhead—the St. Jim's House of Commons, I mean. We're not going to blow them up, of course. They don't quite deserve that—they're not real politicians. But I really think that three fellows under the floor could add considerably to the interest and liveliness of the proceedin's. Don't you think so?"

"Oh!"

"I've brought a bike-bell of the largest size," said Cardew, taking it from his pocket. "Here's a police-whistle, and here's a hammer, likewise the lid of a saucepan. When the band begins to play it's bound to cause some excitement in the merry House of Commons. They won't be able to hear each other jaw, or themselves, and you know that that means anguish to a politician, even an amateur one! We're left out of the cheery old Parliament, and so we're going to inflict that torture on them—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better lock the door first!" grinned Levison. "They'll come down to scalp us if they can."

"You bet!"

Cardew closed the door. The padlock being outside, it could not be locked. But pegs of wood were wedged under the door, securing it against any possible assault. Clive lighted the lamp. Cardew cast an expressive look at the stove.

"Jolly cold here," he remarked.

"Try the stove, then," suggested Clive.

"Oh, never mind."

"But it's cold!" said Levison, taking up the oil-can. "You can light the stove, Cardew—"

"I won't trouble, thanks!"

"Or else you can have about a quart of this kerosene over your clobber," added Levison. "Take your choice!"

"Look here—"

"I give you one minute!"

Cardew lighted the stove. He wiped his fingers carefully on his handkerchief, frowning, while his comrades grinned.

"Quite warm and comfy!" chuckled Clive. "Hallo! I hear footsteps!"

There was a sound of many footsteps on the plank floor of the barn above. And Cardew & Co. chuckled softly, and prepared for business.

CHAPTER 5.

Parliament Opens!

TOM MERRY & CO. crowded into the barn.

The opening of the St. Jim's Parliament was a very important function, and nearly all the members had turned up.

The Terrible Three and Study No. 6 and Grundy were prominent. Talbot of the Shell was there as Speaker. Wally & Co. of the Third naturally came in force. Figgins & Co. of the New House were all there.

Figgins & Co. were in a minority. That was only natural, as the School House was by far the larger House at St. Jim's. The New House contingent had to form the Opposition, and there was no doubt that they would do plenty of opposing. The School House members formed the Government, and a School House fellow was Prime Minister.

But in spite of his majority Tom Merry was not likely to have it all his own way. The fags were a very uncertain quantity. D'Arcy minor gave very dark hints of a Third Party. And even fagdom was not quite united. Neither were the other parties, as a matter of fact. Redfern and Owen and Lawrence of the New House were scholarship fellows, and they had thoughts of starting a Labour

party; while Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, was the sole member of a Peace party, and the champion of Conscientious Objectors.

Certainly, the first meeting of the Parliament had been disorderly, and had been interrupted by a German air-raid. But it had been urged that no business could be proceeded with unless order was kept. Lowther, indeed, opined that in that respect the resemblance to the parent institution at Westminster would be all the better maintained. But Lowther was frowned down; and it was agreed that there should be order, and that the ruling of the Speaker should be final.

The barn had been well arranged for the sitting.

Innumerable benches had been erected for the members. True, they were mostly made of planks laid on boxes or trestles. But they answered the purpose, and what more could be desired?

And there was, of course, a mace. Parliamentary proceedings were impossible without that magic symbol. There could not be a parliamentary chin-wagging contest without a mace, so a mace was provided. It happened to be in the form of an old, somewhat battered, disused cricket-bat. But, after all, what did that matter? It was quite as useful as a real mace in a real House of Commons.

D'Arcy minor advised having a closure. He had heard of the closure in real parliamentary debates, and understood that it was frequently applied. It was gently explained to Wally that a closure was not a magic symbol like a mace, but was simply a forcible finish applied to chin-wagging when it became intolerable even to professional chin-waggers.

The Cabinet took their seats on the Front Bench with much dignity. All members of the Cabinet were present, the St. Jim's Parliament being rather old-fashioned in that respect. Later on, no doubt, the Cabinet Ministers would not find time to attend the debates.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was given a good deal of scope in making the arrangements, as he had first-hand information. He had had the high honour and privilege of witnessing a real debate by real members in the real House of Commons once upon a time. He declared that it was as good as a cinema, till you got tired of it.

D'Arcy was in the St. Jim's Cabinet. There had been a good deal of competition for places in the Cabinet. There was some grumbling at both Manners and Lowther having seats, but Tom Merry had warmly demanded whether he wasn't to look after his own pals first, like a real Premier.

But it was agreed that Arthur Augustus should be Minister for Foreign Affairs. Lowther advocated it. He pointed out that Gussy had all the qualifications. He was well-connected, had nice, polished manners, and not a single idea in his head. In fact, he was the very man for the Foreign Office. Moreover, the way he dropped his final g's marked him out as suited for a diplomatic career.

Manners minor, Piggott, Baggy Trimble, and several other members of the public followed the honourable members in, and were promptly turned out, with some scuffling. Honourable members acted as their own Sergeant-at-arms.

"Sit down!"

"Keep your feet to yourself, Grundy!"

"Make room for a chap!"

"Bai Jove! If you tip my hat again, you uthah ass—"

"Order!"

"Shut up!"

"Honourable members and gentlemen—" began Grundy.

Then there was a roar.

"Dry up, Grundy!"

"Look here, you fatheads—"

Monty Lowther jumped up.

"I beg to draw Mr. Speaker's attention to an unparliamentary expression used by the hon. member. I submit that 'fathead' is not an expression to be used within the walls of this House."

"Hear, hear!"

"In another place," added Lowther, severely, "it may be appropriate. I admit it. But within these walls—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ring off!"

Mr. Speaker, otherwise Talbot of the Shell, glared at the obstreperous Grundy.

"Fathead is an unparliamentary expression. That expression must be withdrawn," he said sternly. "I feel that I can leave it to the good sense and taste of the honourable member concerned."

"I said fathead, and I mean fathead!" said Grundy doggedly. "Mustn't the truth be told in this show?"

"Certainly not! This House is to be run exactly on the lines of the real House!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I regret to see that some honourable members are moved to laughter," said the Speaker. "I can only repeat that I insist upon the withdrawal of the expression used by the honourable member!"

"Hit him with the mace!" yelled Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!"

"Withdraw!"

Grundy glared round at the House. Gann tugged at his sleeve.

"Withdraw, you ass!" he muttered. "Play the game! Mr. Speaker's the referee in a House of Commons jawing-match, and you have to give the referee his head!"

"I withdraw the word fathead," said Grundy. "I will only remark that, outside these walls, I should regard certain honourable members as silly fatheads. Within these walls I regard them as—as members of the House of Commons!"

"Same thing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen will kindly keep order, or the debate must be adjourned!" said Mr. Speaker.

"Oh, my hat! Look here, Talbot—"

"Order!"

There was something like order at last. Several members were on their legs, and attempting to catch the Speaker's eye. Grundy, of course, was one. But Grundy did not succeed in catching the Speaker's eye. Grundy's orations were not desired.

The Prime Minister rose to make his statement. There were cries of "Silence!" and "Cut it short, Tommy!" These were unparliamentary expressions, but the Speaker allowed them to pass.

The Prime Minister coughed, and referred to his notes.

"Go it!" said Wally encouragingly.

Tom fixed his eyes upon Mr. Speaker, and started.

"In the present unprecedented crisis in the history of our beloved country, the nation and the Empire stand, metaphorically speaking, on tiptoe, their anxious glance fixed upon US. We are engaged in a life-and-death struggle such as the world has never before witnessed, and we shall never sheathe the sword, which we have not lightly drawn, till Grammar-school militarism is crushed into the dust, from which it ought never to have arisen."

"Hear, hear!"

"Looking around us," went on the Prime Minister eloquently, "what do we see? A Lower School united as one man in the great, the tremendous—I may say the terrific—task of crushing the

common enemy of civilisation. I need not elaborate the point that civilisation is represented by us, and that all other civilisations are spurious imitations."

"Hear, hear!"

"Where did he dig up those words?"

"Ha, ha!"

"Order!"

"Words fail me in attempting to describe the atrocious atrocities of the common enemy," resumed the statesman of the Shell. "These atrocities are not merely hearsay. Honourable members have witnessed them. I need only refer to the occasion upon which Skimpole was adorned with soot and treacle by Gordon Gay, of the Grammar School—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And to the outrage perpetrated upon George Alfred Grundy, when he was painted like a Red Indian and sent home to St. Jim's in that state—"

"Ha, ha!"

"Atrocities of like nature have stained the history of the Grammar School since the commencement of the war. Pacifists and pro-Grammarians, the friends of every school but their own, have hinted that we, also, have sooted Grammarians—that we have painted Gordon Gay like a Hottentot, if not like a Red Indian. Be it so! Honourable members do not need to be told that, in the battle for civilisation, regrettable incidents are bound to occur."

"Hear, hear!"

"I have been called an optimist!" resumed Tom Merry.

"A whatter?"

"I have been called an optimist. If by optimism it is meant that I am ready to attend a spread while other fellows are going on short commons, I admit it—I am an optimist!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause for discouragement. The war rages on land and sea, but I have not been hurt!"

"Hear, hear!"

"In spite of the utmost efforts of our deadly foes, my skin is as whole as at the commencement of the war. Peace! Never, till the Grammarians have been utterly foiled, diddled, dished, and done! Never, till Gordon Gay shall abandon for ever his mad dream of giving St. Jim's the kybosh! Never, while there is a St. Jim's fellow left to punch a Grammarian nose, or to black a Grammarian eye! We fight for peace, and perpetual war is a small price to pay for peace!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let me make one more appeal to this House, and to the whole Lower School—for unity! Beware of Bolos! Back me up! Stand by me! I am IT! I am the real goods; all others spurious imitations. Keep your eyes on me! Do as I direct! Don't grumble! Don't grouse! Don't jaw! Listen to me! Leave the jawing to your accredited Cabinet—they are quite equal to all demands in that line. Victory will be ours! The Grammar School will be kyboshed! Gordon Gay will be driven to take a back seat. Already there are murmurs of discontent in the ranks of the enemy. At any moment it may break out, and Gordon Gay may be deposed by the Grammarians themselves. Our duty is to fight on, while there is a hand that can wield a cricket-stump, or a boot that can be planted forcibly on the person of a Grammarian."

The Prime Minister sat down, amid a roll of cheering.

The Foreign Minister jumped up.

"I beg to point out that Tom Mewwy has talked like an ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's because you're a howling ass!" exclaimed the Prime Minister heatedly.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Mr. Speaker," howled Wally of the Third, "is howling ass a parliamentary expression?"

"Howling ass is not a parliamentary expression," said the Speaker. "The Prime Minister, I am sure, will withdraw that expression."

"Withdraw!" yelled Blake.

"I withdraw the expression howling ass, and substitute that of 'Foreign Secretary,'" said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Speaker—" howled Grundy. But again the great Grundy failed to catch the Speaker's eye.

Figgins of the New House rose to move a vote of no confidence in the Government. There were cheers from the Opposition.

But Figgins' telling speech—prepared in advance—was fated never to be bestowed upon an expectant House of Commons, for just as Figgins got fairly going there came a terrific uproar from beneath the barn.

Crash, smash, bang! Crash, shriek, scream! Bang, bang, buzz!

CHAPTER 6.

Adjourned!

"GREAT Scott!"

"What the dickens—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, my ears!"

"What the merry thunder—"

Crash, bang, crash, shriek! Bang, crash!

The House were all on their legs at once now. Figgins' voice was drowned. The terrific uproar came from beneath the barn, and it was like unto half a dozen pandemoniums—or pandemonia—rolled into one.

"There's some villains in the cellar kicking up that row!" gasped Blake.

"They're trying to muck up the game!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Oh, my ceahs!" wailed Arthur Augustus. "I shall weally be deafened! My ceahs!"

Bang, bang, crash!

"My hat! We can't go on like this!" exclaimed Figgins. "Let's go and snatch them bald-headed!"

"Come on!"

"Order!" bawled Wally. "Move the adjournment of the House!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! Stick to the wules!"

The adjournment was hastily moved, and carried nem. con. Then there was a rush out of the House of Commons.

Bang, bang, bang!

How anyone could have got into the locked cellar to kick up that terrific row was a puzzle to the honourable members. But it was evident that it had been done. The din was terrific and incessant, and was evidently designed to "muck up" the proceedings of St. Jim's Parliament.

Tom Merry & Co. gathered in great force outside the cellar door. That door was unlocked, but it was securely fastened. They bumped it in vain.

"Who's in there?" roared Tom Merry.

"You uttah wottahs, open the door! We're goin' to scawg you!"

"Come out, you rotters!"

There was a sudden silence. The din ceased as suddenly as it had started. Tom Merry rattled the door.

"Who's there?" he roared.

No reply.

"Some Grammarian cads, I expect!" remarked Levison minor.

There was a chuckle from within, but no word.

"Somebody's got a key," growled Grundy. "You see the lock's open. I'll scalp 'em! Let's smash in the door!"

"How?" snapped Lowther.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 516.

"My dear fellows"—Skimpole pushed forward—"it would be quite easy to smash in the door."

"How?" yelled Manners.

The genius of the Shell smiled superior. "It is quite simple, my dear Manners. By means of violent impact of a solid body of sufficient weight to overcome the resisting powers of the door—"

"Try Skimpy's head," suggested Blake.

"Really, my dear Blake—"

"That's not solid; that's empty," said Lowther.

"In short, by the use of a battering-ram," said Skimpole, beaming on the juniors through his big glasses. "You see, it is quite simple."

"Have you got a battering-ram in your trousers-pocket?" asked Digby, with deep sarcasm.

Skimpole shook his learned head.

"I have not, my dear Digby. The size of a battering-ram would preclude the possibility of carrying it with me in my peregrinations, confined to so limited a space as the interior of a pocket."

"Oh, my hat!"

"However, there are other means. By means of the ignition of a sufficient quantity of an explosive powder—"

"Got it about you?" shrieked Gunn.

"No, my dear Gunn. However—"

"Sit on him, somebody!"

The sublime Skimpy was hurled away, and the honourable members crowded round the door, kicking and thumping it.

But no sound came from within.

Levison & Co., like Brer Rabbit, lay low and said "nuffin'."

"Let's get back!" said Figgins, who was anxious to get on with his speech. "If they begin again, we'll come and boil them in oil!"

The juniors looked wrathfully at the door. But there was no getting through it; and they were a little doubtful, too, about smashing Mr. Pepper's property. They returned to the House of Commons at last.

Honourable members having taken their seats, Figgins rose to resume his speech.

"I beg to direct the attention of members to the fact—"

Crash!

Bang!

Crash, crash!

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry in great exasperation. "They're beginning again!"

"Bai Jove! The feahful wottahs!"

"Keep on, Figgins!" shouted Redfern.

"You can't hear me if I do!" howled Figgins.

"That doesn't matter a bit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass, Reddy—"

"Let's go and rout out those villains!" roared Grundy.

There was a rush to the storehouse door again. Angry fists hammered, and boots clattered on it.

The din inside ceased.

Apparently, the practical jokers hidden in the cellar did not intend to take the trouble of keeping up the concert, excepting when honourable members were on their legs speechifying.

"Oh, the wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "We must get at them somehow and give them a feahful thwashin'."

"Come on, you boobies! Come out, you Grammarian rotters!"

Again there was a chuckle from within, but there was no answer. The exasperated juniors hammered and kicked in vain.

"We could get at 'em through the floor!" gasped Lowther. "There was a loose plank once, you remember."

"It's been screwed down."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 516.

"Got a screwdriver, anybody?"

"Bai Jove! I névah cawwy a sewew-dwivah about with me, deah boy."

"Ha, ha!"

"I fancy we'd better adjourn the sitting," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Let's move the adjournment of the House till after tea, and we'll bring a screwdriver when we come."

"Yaas, wathah!"

It appeared the only thing to be done. The House was accordingly adjourned, and the barn was deserted.

A quarter of an hour later the cellar door was cautiously opened, and Cardew's grinning face looked out.

"Coast's clear!" he announced.

Levison and Clive followed him, chuckling. Cardew closed the storehouse door and locked the padlock.

"Quite an entertainin' afternoon," he remarked as they strolled away from the barn. "This notion might be introduced at the real House of Commons with advantage. See what a lot of gas it cuts off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Study No. 9 strolled home cheerfully to St. Jim's, feeling that they deserved well of their country. In the School House they found some of the honourable members in excited discussion.



"Hallo, you chaps!" said Cardew blandly. "Had a jolly good session this afternoon?"

"It was mucked up!" growled Tom Merry.

"Not really?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Some feahful wottahs got into the cellar undah the barn, and kicked up a feahful wow so that we couldn't pwoceed!"

"My hat! Who was it?"

"Some of the Gwammah cads, I think."

"Too bad!" said Cardew sympathetically.

And the three chums did not chuckle till they were within the walls of Study No. 9.

CHAPTER 7.

The Sportsmen at Home!

"THOSE silly asses have cleared off, thank goodness!" remarked Racke.

Racke & Co. stopped at the barn. All was silent there.

The session of the St. Jim's Parliament had been over some time. Honourable members were having their tea at the school.

Racke & Co. were glad of it. The black sheep of St. Jim's had arrived in force for the meeting of the precious "Sporting Club." Racke and Crooke, Scrope and Clampe, of the Shell, Mellish and Trimble of the Fourth, and Piggott of the Third. Racke's new quarters were much safer for the precious seven than

the precincts of St. Jim's. The most inquisitive prefect was not likely to suspect that smoking and the game of draw poker were going on in the storehouse under Mr. Pepper's barn.

Racke unlocked the padlock, and threw open the door.

"That blessed niff's cleared off a bit," he remarked.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Mellish. "Somebody's been here!"

"What rot! The door was locked!"

"Somebody's been here, all the same! The lamp's been lighted."

"My hat!"

The sportsmen looked round the room in astonishment.

There were many signs that it had been visited during their absence.

The lampglass was a little smoky; the stove had evidently been alight. There were traces of muddy footprints. The room was quite warm, too.

"I say, this isn't so jolly safe, if anybody can get into the place," remarked Leslie Clampe.

"Blessed if I understand it!" growled Racke. "I've got the key, and I found it locked just as I left it."

"Somebody else has a key, too, then." "Only old Pepper, I suppose! He wouldn't come here. He must have, though; and he's burning our oil, the old miser!" snarled Racke. "I'll jolly well talk to him about this! I wonder if he's found the smokes?"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Crooke, dismayed at the thought.

There was a rush to the box where the cigarettes had been concealed. Fortunately, from the sportsmen's point of view, they were found intact.

"Well, no harm's done!" grunted Racke. "Light the lamp and the stove, Mellish. We'd better have the door shut, in case anybody comes along."

"And fasten it," said Scrope. "If those silly idiots come back, they'd think nothing of routin' us out, if they knew what was goin' on."

"You bet!"

Racke wedged pegs under the door to keep it fast.

The lamp brightly illuminated the semi-subterranean apartment, and the stove shed a warmth that was grateful and comforting.

It was really quite a comfortable room, and it was very secluded and secure, which was more important still.

Cigarettes were lighted, and the atmosphere of the storehouse was soon hazy. But the sportsmen did not mind that. They were used to it.

An old packing-case made an excellent table, and the cards were not wanting.

Racke & Co. were soon going strong. Mellish and Piggott, who were hard up, had to be content with smoking and watching the game, Racke & Co. not being in the least inclined to play for waste paper.

But they had the consolation of feeling awfully doggish.

"Your deal, Crooke!"

"Cut!"

"My hat! This is a bit better than what goes on upstairs!" grinned Clampe. "Those silly chumps could have a sportin' club there, if they liked, instead of a fat-headed imitation of a fat-headed Parliament!"

"Silly duffers!" grunted Racke.

"I raise you a tanner, Scrope!"

"And I go one better!"

Racke tossed a half-crown into the pool.

"Raise that!" he said.

"I'll raise you!" said Crooke boastfully. "There's five bob for you to cover!"

The game went on merrily, Mellish and Piggott watching with envious eyes. Aubrey Racke was the winner, and he

raked in more than thirty shillings, with a grin. The others did not grin. Like most gamblers, they did not like losing.

"Your deal, Scrope!"

"Hallo, there's somebody upstairs!" exclaimed Mellish.

There was a sound of footsteps above. Then voices were heard in the upper room.

"Bai Jove! We're heah first, deah boys!"

"That silly ass D'Arcy!" growled Racke. "Hang him! Just like that cad to chip in if he knew we were here!"

"Don't make too much row, then!" advised Crooke.

"Oh, they can go and eat coke! The place is ours, isn't it? I'm paying old Pepper rent for it!"

"Lend a chap a few bob to begin, Racke!" said Mellish, whose eyes were fixed hungrily on the silver and currency notes.

"Rot!"

"Dash it all, you've got lots of dibs!"

Racke shrugged his shoulders.

"Pretty dull sittin' here watchin'!" grumbled Piggott.

"You can clear off, if you like!"

"Here's a half-crown for you, Piggy," said Scrope, tossing the coin to the young rascal of the Third.

Piggott clutched it.

"Count me in!" he said.

Cards were dealt to the Third-Former in the next round. Percy Mellish looked on sullenly. Nobody offered to lend him even half a crown. Mellish would not have been displeased just then if Tom Merry & Co. had come upon the "sporting club" and routed them out. He was not feeling amiable towards his wealthier comrades.

Piggott's loan did not last him long. The stakes rose above what he could cover, and he had to pass out. He resumed smoking and watching, with a discontented face.

More and yet more footsteps sounded above. Evidently the St. Jim's Parliament was turning up again, to resume the interrupted session. Of that interruption Racke & Co. knew nothing. They were quite unaware that Cardew and his chums had been in the storehouse at all. But that fact was destined to have consequences for them.

"Oh, rotten! You have all the luck, Racke!" growled Crooke, as the heir of war-profits scooped in the pool again.

Racke laughed boastfully.

"I've got the nerve," he said. "Look at my cards! You passed on a full hand, and let me win on a small pair. If you'd covered my stake, you'd have done me brown!"

Crooke grunted.

"What a thumpin' row they're makin' up there!" growled Scrope. "I can hear Figgins' boots—the biggest in Sussex!"

"They'll be speechifyin' soon, the silly idiots!" said Racke. "Whose deal? Don't waste time, Clampe!"

Clampe dealt out the cards.

"Anybody going to lend me half a quid?" asked Mellish.

"Ask me another!"

"Go an' eat coke!"

"You're gettin' the smokes for nothin'!" sneered Racke. Racke's manners were not exactly Vere de Vere; in fact, they were, as Monty Lowther had remarked, War-profit de War-profit.

"Can't you be satisfied with that?"

"Bother your smokes!" grunted Mellish. "I've had enough of them. I'll get out—fed up with this!"

However, he decided to have another smoke before he went, though, as a matter of fact, he was feeling a little queer inside already. The game went on, the players taking no notice of Mellish. They had no sympathy to waste upon "lame ducks." Their greedy eyes were fixed



The Tables Turned on No. 9.

(See Chapter 11.)

upon the game, and upon one another's money. Meanwhile, the St. Jim's House of Commons was gathering in great force overhead, and honourable members were taking their seats.

CHAPTER 8.

Gussy Goes It!

TOM MERRY & CO. came cheerfully into the barn.

"Here we are again!" announced Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! That is not a parliamentary expression, Lowthah!"

"Not a bit!" grinned Figgins. "You ought to say, once more this House meets under circumstances of unprecedented stress."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where's Mr. Speaker?"

"I saw him talking to Miss Marie," chirped Levison minor, of the Third, and there was a laugh.

"Bai Jove! Mr. Speakah has no wight to wemain in conversation with Miss Mawie when the House is about to open!"

"Here he is!"

Talbot of the Shell came in, last of the meeting.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon him severely.

"Mr. Speakah, you are late!"

"Sorry!" said Mr. Speaker. "I was delayed by circumstances—"

"Very pretty circumstances, too," remarked Monty Lowther. "I noticed that circumstances was wearing a very nice hat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Talbot coloured, as there was loud laughter.

Mr. Speaker went to his place without replying.

Grundy was on his legs at once.

George Alfred Grundy had had no opportunity of speechifying so far; and the muttered epoch-making speeches that

were bottled up, so to speak, within Grundy, were simply tremendous.

"Mr. Speaker—" he began.

"Dwy up, Gwunday!"

"Order!"

"The Foreign Secretary is to make a statement," remarked Mr. Speaker. "A debate will follow. At present the honourable member who is on his legs is not in order."

Grundy sat down with a grunt.

"Go it, Gussy!" sang out Blake, and Herries, and Dig encouragingly.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus was on his honourable legs, referring to a sheaf of notes. The swell of St. Jim's had prepared a very important speech.

"Mr. Speakah, and gentleman—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Once more we meet undah this histowie woof. I have only a few words to say, and shall not detain you more than two houahs—"

"That you jolly well won't!"

"Not quite so long, either!"

"Ha, ha!"

"I wquest honourable membahs to lend me their ceahs, and not to intewupt me with wibald wemahs. Members of this honourable House are awaah that there is a similah institution—a lessah institution—on the banks of the Thames. 'Speakin' as a membah of the St. Jim's Cabinet, I desiah to express the opinion that this House is called upon to set an example to the othah House. I have ewery hope that the fame of the St. Jim's Parliament will spread, and that the othah House of Commons will learn, by our example, to cut the cackle and come down to weal business."

"Oh, my hat!"

"For that weason, I wogard it as necessary for speeches in this House to wefer to weal mattahs of national importance. In that mattah, I appeal to diffah from the Pwime Ministah, my wespected colleague Tom Mewwy. But that

is a mattah of vewy small importance, for it is no longah the custom in this country for the vawious membahs of the Cabinet to agree with one another."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am about to make an important statement on the Wah. Honourable membahs are awaah that we are at wah with a set of disgustin' wottahs called Pwussians."

"Hear, hear!"

"We are blockadin' those scoundwels, an' starvin' them out; and the tweachewous wottahs are submawinin' our foodships, and twyin' to starve us out, too, which is just like the mean, disgustin' weptles."

"Ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' to occasion laughtah in that remark. However, to pwocceed. The country is at pwesent divided into two portions—the chaps who have gone to the Wah, and the chaps who haven't. The cost of the Wah is wunnin' into thousands of millions of pounds—a vewy large sum of money—"

"Go hon!"

"We are all feelin' the stwain. My patah no longah sends me a fivah now and then—even cuwwency notes are growin' few and fah between—"

"Ha, ha!"

"However, I have a plan for weducin' the cost of the Wah to a mere nothin' and placin' ewevybody on an equal footin'. My ideal is this—"

"The honourable member has an ideal!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Extraordinary!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats! My ideal is this—at pwesent, for some reason I do not pwetend to undahstand, a man is paid more for stayin' at home than for goin' to the Fwont. Of course, it is a gweat pwivilege to go to the Fwont, and worth no end of money, so fah as that goes."

"Oh!"

"However, it appears to me, as a fellow of tact and judgment, that things ought to be placed on an equal footin'. I therefore suggest that ewevy man in the country should be put upon a soldiah's pay—"

"Eh?"

"And ewevy woman upon a sepawation allowance. Nobody should have any moah, or any less, than that. All the west of the money could be put into the Wah."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Honourable membahs can see how wippingly this would work out in pwactice. Ewvay man would work his vewy hardest to pile up money, knowin' that it was goin' to be used for purposes of national importance—"

"Oh!"

"The whole howwid wace of wah-pwofiteers would disappear at once. Nobody could afford to buy more food than anybody else, so the food-hogs would disappear. All the twouble of waisin' wah-loans would be saved, as wah-loans would not be wanted. Nobody would object—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you fellows laughin' at?"

The honourable members did not explain what they were laughing at. They roared. The Cabinet Minister eyed them wrathfully through his eyeglass.

"Ordah!" he shouted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"Good old potty lunatic!"

"I wefuse to be called a pottay lunatic! I am suggestin' a vewy simple plan, which could easily be cawried out. No pawtiotic person would object. Any man in the country who draws more than a Tommy's pay, is pwactically claimin' that he man ought to be paid more for stayin' at home than for goin' to the Fwont. I wégard that as unweasonable. I am suah that the moment this suggestion is made in public, there will be a twemendous wush to back it up."

"Ha, ha!"

"Ministahs will hand ovah their salawies—"

"Great Scott!"

"Contwactahs will supply the army and navy at cost pwice—"

"I don't think!"

"Only keepin' as much for contwactin' as a Tommy gets for fightin' the Germans. I wégard this as just. Pwewapps a contwactah might be allowed a little extwah, as compensation for takin' up a less honourable job. Say fifteen pence a day instead of a shillin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I can see them doing it!" sobbed Blake.

"Pway do not intewwupt me with fivivolous remarks. I wépeat, that this ideal has only to be announced in public for the whole nation to wally wound. It simply has not occurred to people's minds yet. I wéquiah this House to vote upon the question, and I twust that I shall have a thumping majowity. A copy of the wésolution will be forwarded to the othah House of Commons, with a wéquest that they will immediately go and do likewise—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If any membah has anythin' to say against my plan, I shall be vewy glad to heah it," said Arthur Augustus, with lofty disdain. "I may wemark that I shall wégard any such membah as a Pwo-German and a Bolo."

"Vide, vide!" chortled Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus sat down again with lofty dignity.

It unfortunately happened that the Home Secretary—otherwise, Monty Lowther—had pushed his bench away, and the Secretary for Foreign Affairs sat down further than he had intended.

Lowther caught him just in time—by the hair, and there was a terrific yell from Arthur Augustus.

"Yawwooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" rapped out Mr. Speaker.

"I am goin' to thwash that uttah ass Lowthah—"

"Order! I call the honourable member to order!"

"Yaas, but—"

"The vote will now be taken," said Mr. Speaker, with a chuckle. "The 'Ayes' to the right of the gangway, the 'Noes' to the left."

But Grundy was up once more.

"Mr. Speaker—"

"Ring off!"

"I insist upon addressing the House!"

"Silence!"

"Oh, give him his head, and let him get it off his chest!" said the Prime Minister resignedly.

Silence was obtained at last. Grundy gave a little cough, and was about to begin, when a voice broke the silence, proceeding from below:

"Your deal, Racke! Buck up!"

CHAPTER 9.

Caught!

THE House of Commons were all on their legs at once.

"Those rotters again!" exclaimed Kangooroo.

"They're in the cellar!" shouted Figgins.

"Mr. Speaker!" bawled Grundy.

"Shut up, Grundy!"

"I move the adjournment of the House while the bouncers down below are dealt with!" came from the Prime Minister.

"Hear, hear!"

"The 'Ayes' have it!" said Mr. Speaker.

And the sitting was adjourned.

There was evidently somebody below, and the honourable members had not the slightest doubt that it was the same disturbers as before. Tom Merry had thoughtfully provided himself with a screwdriver this time.

The honourable members fully expected the discordant concert to begin below. As a matter of fact, Racke & Co. had no intention of the kind. But the honourable members, of course, were not aware of that.

"Get that blessed plank up!" growled Gunn. "No good trying the door; they'll have it fastened, same as before."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go it, Tommy!"

"I'm going it!" said Tom Merry. "Some of you go round and see that they don't bolt when they hear me getting the plank up."

"Good egg!"

Figgins & Co. and a dozen more fellows rushed out of the House of Commons, and hammered at the door of the storehouse behind.

"We know you're there, you rotters!" roared Figgins.

"Hallo!" came Racke's voice from within.

"Oh, you can speak this time, can you?"

"What are you driving at, ass!"

"You know well enough, you worm! Open this door and let's get at you!" shouted Figgins.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Well, we'll get at you jolly soon, anyway!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Let us in, you rotters!"

"Rats!"

Racke & Co. went on with their game, disregarding the hammering at the door. The door was quite safe, and they did not even think of an attack from overhead.

Meanwhile Tom Merry was busy in the barn with the screwdriver.

The loose plank in the floor, which had once given admittance to the cellar, was screwed safely down; but the captain of the Shell extracted the screws in record time.

"That does it!" said Tom at last. "Up with it!"

He prised up the end of the plank with the screwdriver, and it was seized by a dozen hands and jerked out of its place.

There was an exclamation from below.

"Hallo! Look there!"

"Great Scott!"

Tom Merry dropped through the opening into the storehouse underneath.

Racke & Co. were all on their feet now in alarm and dismay. They had not even dreamed of an attack from that quarter.

Racke gave the captain of the Shell a furious look.

"What do you want here?" he shouted. "Get out!"

"Come on, you fellows!" called out Tom Merry, unheeding.

Lowther and Manners, Blake and Herries, and Digby dropped down after him, and more followed.

If Racke & Co. had thought of putting up a fight, they thought better of it then. The honourable members crowded into the cellar, and Blake kicked the wedges away and threw the door open, and Figgins & Co. blocked the doorway. The sportsmen of St. Jim's were surrounded.

Tom Merry's eyes swept over the scene, flashing with contempt. There were cards and money and cigarettes on the packing-case, and the atmosphere was thick with smoke.

"You measly rotters!" growled Tom. "You uttah, disgustin' wapsallions!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

Racke gritted his teeth.

"You've no right here!" he snarled. "This is my place!"

"How do you make that out, you cheeky cad?" demanded Figgins. "Don't we rent the barn from old Pepper?"

"I rent the cellar," said Racke. "I've taken it from old Pepper for a month."

"The cellar goes with the building!" said Grundy hotly.

"Pepper says it doesn't!"

"Pepper's a welsher, and you're another!"

"You can make what arrangements you like with Pepper," said Tom Merry, "but you can't turn our House of Commons into a taproom. And you can't interrupt Parliament by kicking up a row!"

"We haven't made half so much row as you silly asses with your silly jaw!" snapped Crooke.

"No; you hadn't started yet. But you did at the previous sitting, and we had to adjourn—"

"Eh? We haven't been here before!"

"Dwaw it mild, Wacke!"

"What's the good of lying?" asked Jack Blake. "You were here this afternoon kicking up a fearful row to interrupt the House."

"We weren't!" howled Racke.

"Why, you silly ass, we know you were!" shouted Grundy. "You had a hammer and a whistle and things, kicking up a thumping row like a Wagner concert."

"We didn't! We haven't been here—"

"Oh, rats!"

"And you were just going to begin again!" said Tom Merry sternly. "But I brought a screwdriver this time, you rotter!"

"I tell you—"

"Bai Jove! There's the hammah and the saucepan-lid!"

Racke stared at the articles, which he had not noticed before.

"They don't belong to me," he said.

"I tell you I haven't been here before!"

"Wats!"

"Spoof!"

"Anyway, you're here now, and you're gambling like a set of rotten cads!" said Blake, with a snort. "You're going out on your necks, and you're not coming in again!"

"I tell you this is my cellar!" shouted Racke furiously. "I've paid rent for it!"

"That's your business. You can pay rent for our cellar if you like, but you can't use it to gamble in."

"Oh, don't give me any sermons!"

"Gentlemen and deah boys—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gussy!"

"You are a diswepctful young wottah, Wally. Gentlemen and deah boys, I suggest that we go into a committee of the whole House to deal with these diswepctable persons found on our pwemises. Wacke & Co. are wequiahed to appear at the bah of the Commons to answah for their beinous conduct."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good egg!"

"This way, Racke!"

"Don't think I'm goin' to take a hand in your kiddish rot!" roared Racke.

"Clear out, and let's get on with the game!"

"That game isn't going on here," said Tom Merry grimly. "Gather up the cards and smokes, you fellows. Now bring them along."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Piggott made a dive for the door, but Grundy caught him by the ear in time. The rascal of the Third gave an anguished squeal and surrendered.

"I—I say, I wasn't in this!" stammered Mellish. "I—I was only looking on, you know! Honour bright!"

"Your honour isn't bright enough," remarked Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head. "It needs some polishing. Kim on!"

"Look here—"

"This way, dear boy!"

Lowther had Mellish's collar, and he led him out, followed by Grundy with Piggott.

Racke put up his hands savagely. But Kangaroo of the Shell collared him promptly. The stalwart Cornstalk tucked Racke under his arm, and carried him away wriggling and struggling.

Clampe and Scrope and Crooke and Trimble decided to go quietly. And the honourable members returned into the House, with their seven prisoners marching unwillingly in their midst. Racke & Co. were to be dealt with by a committee of the whole House, and from their apprehensive looks it was evident that they expected to be dealt with severely.

CHAPTER 10.

No Exit!

"TOE the line, you rotters."

"Hang you!"

"You've got to stand at the bar of the House!"

"Oh, rats!"

"That chalk line," continued Tom Merry calmly, "is the bar of the House. Will you toe it?"

"No, I won't!" roared Racke.

"Then you'll be toed! Active or passive, just as you like."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you cheeky rotters—"

"Figgins, toe them, please! You've got the biggest feet!"

"Why, you silly ass—"

"Silly ass is not a parliamentary expression! Toe them till they toe the line!"

"Well, I'll do that!" said Figgins.

George Figgins of the Fourth may not have had the biggest feet at St. Jim's, but they were a good size. They seemed quite big enough, and heavy enough, to Aubrey Racke when Figgy commenced operations.

"Yaroooh!" roared Racke. "You rotter—"

"Toe the line!"

"I'll smash you! I'll—"

"Go ahead, then!" said Figgins cheerfully.

But Racke decided to postpone the smashing, and walked to the bar of the House. His companions hurriedly followed his example. Baggy Trimble, who was fat and slow, received some help from Figgins, and yelled.

"Yow-ow! I'm toeing the line, ain't I, you beast?"

"Buck up, then!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Which of the honourable members undertakes the job of accuser?" inquired Mr. Speaker.

"You can leave that to me, deah boy! Look me in the face, Wacke, you wascal!"

"Not unless you put a mask on!" snorted Racke.

"Why, you cheeky wottah! There is no occasion whatevah for laughin', you fellows! I wegard Wacke as a wude beast!"

"Get on with the washing, Gussy!"

"Wats! Mr. Speaker and gentlemen, these membahs of the public stand at the bar of this House, accused of intewwuptin' the solemn proceedin's of Parliament with a diswepctful wow."

"Hear, hear!"

"By beatin' with a hammah on a saucepan-lid, or somethin' of the sort, and blowin' a whistle, they have intewwupted the important debates of this House, and committed a sewious offence against the pwivileges of Parliament. The most seweah punishment is called for. It is a vewy sewious thing to intewwupt the talkin' in Parliament, as Parliament exists for nothin' but talkin'."

"Bravo!"

"I demand the exemplawy punishment of these iwwewvent membahs of the mere public!"

"Any defence?" inquired Mr. Speaker. "Yow-ow! We didn't do it!" howled Trimble. "It was somebody else! Most likely the Grammar School chaps!"

"Wats!"

"I say, we weren't in the cellar this afternoon, really!" protested Scrope.

"Who was then?" demanded Blake.

"How should I know, ass?"

"Racke's got a key to the cellar, and nobody else has," said Tom Merry. "Put it to the vote. Guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" roared the whole House.

"I tell you—" yelled Crooke.

"Dry up!"

"Accused, you are found guilty of interrupting the chin-waggings of the House of Commons with irreverent noises," said Tom Merry. "An example must be made. The proper punishment is beheading. But perhaps a good bumping will fill the bill!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You are handed over to the Serjeant-at-Arms," said Blake sternly. "By the way, who's Serjeant-at-Arms?"

"Bai Jove! Is that somebody at the door?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass on the door of the barn.

"All serene—it's locked!" said Manners.

"Vewy good! There is somebody outside—I can heah him! Pewwaps some confedewate of these misewable wascals! Howevah, to pwocceed, Wacke, you are sentenced to be sewiously bumped, and I twust the lesson will do you good! Collah the wottah!"

Racke was seized at once.

He struggled savagely in the grasp of the honourable members, but his resistance was of no avail. He was bumped thrice on the floor of the barn, to an accompaniment of loud yells.

"Crooke next!"

"Look here!" yelled Crooke. "Oh, my hat! Oh, crumbs!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Now, Scrope!"

"Oh, you rotters!" gasped Scrope. "I tell you it wasn't us! We haven't—we hadn't—we didn't—we— Yoooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mellish's turn!"

"I say—I— Yaroooh! Help! Yah!"

Oh, oh, oh!

"Your turn, Piggott!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Clampe's getting anxious for his turn!" grinned Blake. "Shan't keep you a minute, Clampey!"

"We never—" yelled Clampe.

"Hands off, you rotters! Oh, dear! Oh! Oh!"

While Leslie Clampe was going through it Baggy Trimble dodged, and made a desperate rush for the door.

It was locked, but Baggy turned the key like lightning, and dragged at the door frantically.

"After him!" yelled Blake.

"Stop him!"

To Trimble's astonishment and horror, the door did not come open. It was no longer locked, but something, evidently, was holding it, for it remained fast. Baggy dragged at it in vain, and the next minute he was in the clutch of many hands, and whirled away from the door again.

"Look here, you know— Oh, crumbs! Yaroooh! Help! Fire!" yelled Baggy.

Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Oh! Yah! Yaroooop!"

"Justice has been done, you wottahs," said Arthur Augustus sternly. "Pewwaps on another occasion you will—"

wefwain frowm intewwuptin' the pwoceed-
in's of Parliament!"

"Yow-ow!" groaned Trimble. "I didn't—I wasn't— Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now, kick 'em out!" said Kerr.
"All together!" said Blake. "Open the door, somebody!"

"The blessed door's jammed, I think!" said Tom Merry, pulling at it. "It doesn't seem to open!"

"Bai Jove! I thought I heard somebody there! Some wottah is holdin' it outside, Tom Mewwy!"

"Lend a hand there, somebody!"
Half-a-dozen fellows dragged at the door.

But it did not open.
Evidently it was not merely being held outside. It was fastened much more securely than that.

The honourable members looked at one another. Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"Somebody's screwed it!" he exclaimed. "Some cheeky rotter has screwed up the door outside!"

"Bai Jove!"
There was the sound of a chuckle outside.

"My hat!" "We'll scalp him!" exclaimed Blake. "It can't be the Grammar cads! Who the dickens—"

"I know that chortle!" growled Monty Lowther. "That's Levison!"

"My major!" exclaimed Frank Levison.
"Bai Jove! The pwactical jokin' wottah!"

There was a rush to the window, and Tom Merry dragged it open. Outside in the falling dusk three figures could be seen.

Study No. 9 were there.
Cardew nodded, and smiled to the exasperated members.

Blake shook a fist through the window at the dandy of the Fourth.

"Have you fastened the door?" he roared.

"Oh, yaas!" said Cardew, with a nod.
"What have you done to it, you worm?"

"Screwed it, old chap."
"You—you—you—"

"Weally, Cardew, you wottah—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Lowther. "Perhaps it was those worms in the cellar this afternoon, after all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the three.
"Was it you?" shouted Blake.

"Certainly, dear boy!"

"And—and we've been ragging Racke & Co. for it!"

"Just the kind of brains one would expect of honourable members of an honourable House of Commons," smiled Cardew.

"Yow-wow-wow!" wailed Trimble. "I told you it wasn't me! Yow-ow!"

"Shut up, Trimble!"

"My hat! We'll scalp them!" howled Blake. "Wait till I get out of the window, you grinning jabberwocks!"

Jack Blake shored head and shoulders through the window.

Blake jerked his head back with great speed. A tarry mop had met it.

"Aren't you comin' out?" grinned Cardew.

"You—you worm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The honourable members, crammed inside the window, shook a forest of fists at Study No. 9 without.

And Study No. 9 chortled.

CHAPTER 11.

Turning the Tables!

TOM MERRY & CO. glared; but there was nothing to do but glare. The tarry mop discouraged them from attempting to get out of the window.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 516.

"Look here, I'm going out of this!" growled Racke.

"Go if you like, fathead!"

Racke looked out of the window. But he jumped back as Cardew thrust forward the mop.

"Ow! The rotter!"

"This way!" grinned Cardew. "Come on, Racke!"

"Bai Jove, you fellows, it appears that we were wathah hastay in waggin' Wacke for kickin' up that wow. It appears that it was those othali wottahs all the time."

"Yow-ow! I told you so!" wailed Baggy Trimble.

"Gentlemen and fellow-members," said Monty Lowther, "we owe Racke & Co. amends. Racke, we withdraw the ragging bestowed upon you for kicking up a row in the cellar. You may consider that the ragging was awarded you for smoking and gambling within the precincts of the House."

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha!"

"Are you satisfied, Racke?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snarled Racke.

"Look here, we've got to get at those rotters!" exclaimed Figgins.

"You go first, dear boy," suggested Monty Lowther. "After all, if your face gets damaged, it won't alter it for the worse."

"You School House chump—"

"You New House ass—"

"Cardew, you silly duffer!" called out Tom Merry.

"Hallo, dear boy!"

"You can't keep us here, you fathead! What's your game?"

"Go it, Levison!" said Cardew.

"Give 'em our terms."

Levison chuckled.

"We're not members of the merry House," he remarked. "But we claim places in the Cabinet. That's the terms of peace. Otherwise, we're going to keep you bottled up."

"You can't, you ass! You—"

"Quite simple!" grinned Clive.

"We're going to tip up the cart yonder in front of the window; you won't be able to move it. You can vote yourselves in permanent session, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I warged that as a wotten twick, you know!"

"Do you agree to the terms?" grinned Levison.

"No, you ass! You can't be members of the Cabinet without being members of the House!" snorted the Prime Minister.

"My dear chap, you're out of date," said Cardew. "That's old-fashioned. We can be appointed Ministers without portfolios. There's lots of them now, and they don't belong to the House of Commons. Well, we'll be Ministers without portfolio—otherwise, I fear, you will have to pass the remainder of your natural lives screwed up in a barn."

"Look here—"

"Those are the terms. Take 'em or leave them!"

There was a buzz of excited voices in the barn.

Figgins drew Tom Merry away from the window, and whispered:

"Keep 'em talking there, Tommy, while I nip round—"

"But you can't, ass—the door's screwed—"

Figgins pointed to the loose plank in the floor, and grinned.

"By Jove!" Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. "I'd forgotten that! You can get down in the cellar, and out through the back door—"

"Shush! Cardew don't know about that plank being up!" Figgins chuckled softly. "Keep 'em talking while I get round!"

"What-ho!"

Tom Merry whispered to his comrades,

and they crowded round the window, to keep Figgins & Co. well concealed from the juniors without.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, dropped through the opening in the floor, and Kangaroo, Manners, and Talbot followed.

Outside, Study No. 9 remained in blissful ignorance of that manoeuvre.

"Now, look here, Cardew," said Tom Merry, mindful of the astute Figgy's injunction. "Unscrew that door, and we'll let you off for this fat-headed jape."

"Bow-wow!"

"Ministers without portfolio," chortled Clive. "That's the terms!"

"Take it or leave it!" grinned Levison.

"My dear chap, we should make rippin' Cabinet Ministers," argued Cardew. "I couldn't undertake to talk such utter rot as Gussy, perhaps—"

"You cheeky ass!"

"But I could undertake to talk for an hour without lettin' anybody get half a chance of guessin' what I was drivin' at. What more do you want in a Cabinet Minister?"

"Last chance!" said Tom Merry. "Let us out, and you can clear. Otherwise, we shall collar you and tar you with your own mop!"

"Come on, dear boy! Oh, my hat!" yelled Cardew suddenly, as Figgins & Co. came racing round the barn.

"Down 'em!" yelled Blake, in great delight. "Give 'em socks!"

"Yaas, wathah—wag the wottahs!"

The sudden charge took Study No. 9 quite by surprise. They were bowled over in the twinkling of an eye. The odds were already against them, and they resisted in vain—Tom Merry & Co. were scrambling through the window now.

Monty Lowther caught up the tarry mop that had fallen from Cardew's hand, as Figgins and Kerr collared him.

"Gentlemen, this is where the tables are turned," grinned Lowther. "Pass Clive this way. Sorry, Clive, but privileges of Parliament must be respected, and irreverent members of the public must be taught a lesson!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Groogh!" spluttered the unfortunate Clive, as the mop operated upon his face, amid yells of laughter.

"That'll do for Clive. Levison, my infant, I'm sorry—but you've asked for it, you know!"

"Gug-gug-gug!" came from Levison of the Fourth, as the mop reached his face. "Ow! Groogh! Gug-gug!"

"Cardew—"

"Keep off, you beast!" howled Cardew. "Don't you touch me with that—gugg! Ow! Groogh! Gug-gug-gug! Groocho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now come and have some more!" yelled Lowther, flourishing the mop.

But Study No. 9 had had enough. They fled.

and they crowded round the window, to keep Figgins & Co. well concealed from the juniors without.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, dropped through the opening in the floor, and Kangaroo, Manners, and Talbot followed.

Outside, Study No. 9 remained in blissful ignorance of that manoeuvre.

"Now, look here, Cardew," said Tom Merry, mindful of the astute Figgy's injunction. "Unscrew that door, and we'll let you off for this fat-headed jape."

"Bow-wow!"

"Ministers without portfolio," chortled Clive. "That's the terms!"

"Take it or leave it!" grinned Levison.

"My dear chap, we should make rippin' Cabinet Ministers," argued Cardew. "I couldn't undertake to talk such utter rot as Gussy, perhaps—"

"You cheeky ass!"

"But I could undertake to talk for an hour without lettin' anybody get half a chance of guessin' what I was drivin' at. What more do you want in a Cabinet Minister?"

"Last chance!" said Tom Merry. "Let us out, and you can clear. Otherwise, we shall collar you and tar you with your own mop!"

"Come on, dear boy! Oh, my hat!" yelled Cardew suddenly, as Figgins & Co. came racing round the barn.

"Down 'em!" yelled Blake, in great delight. "Give 'em socks!"

"Yaas, wathah—wag the wottahs!"

The sudden charge took Study No. 9 quite by surprise. They were bowled over in the twinkling of an eye. The odds were already against them, and they resisted in vain—Tom Merry & Co. were scrambling through the window now.

Monty Lowther caught up the tarry mop that had fallen from Cardew's hand, as Figgins and Kerr collared him.

"Gentlemen, this is where the tables are turned," grinned Lowther. "Pass Clive this way. Sorry, Clive, but privileges of Parliament must be respected, and irreverent members of the public must be taught a lesson!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Groogh!" spluttered the unfortunate Clive, as the mop operated upon his face, amid yells of laughter.

"That'll do for Clive. Levison, my infant, I'm sorry—but you've asked for it, you know!"

"Gug-gug-gug!" came from Levison of the Fourth, as the mop reached his face. "Ow! Groogh! Gug-gug!"

"Cardew—"

"Keep off, you beast!" howled Cardew. "Don't you touch me with that—gugg! Ow! Groogh! Gug-gug-gug! Groocho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now come and have some more!" yelled Lowther, flourishing the mop.

But Study No. 9 had had enough. They fled.

The St. Jim's House of Commons adjourned, and returned to the school in great spirits. Many of the members looked in at the Fourth-Form dormitory in the School House, where there was a terrific noise of splashing, scrubbing, gasping, and growling.

Study No. 9 were cleaning off the tar. It took them a long time; and when they came down, there were still traces of it about their ears and their hair. There was wrath in Study No. 9 that evening; but in most of the other studies there was much merriment.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"THE ST. JIM'S CADETS!"

by Martin Clifford.)



THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA



Our Great New Serial Story.

THE CHIEF CHARACTERS OF THE STORY.

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

Ponsonby insists on being one of a Highcliffe party which is going to tea at Cliff House. Flap lets her brother know that the girls would rather not have Ponsonby as one of their guests, and Gadsby manages that the postscript of her letter, in which she says this, reaches Pon instead of Flip. Pon contrives to persuade Flap that Flip has shown him this, and gets on something like a friendly footing with her. On the way back he and Merton quarrel. Flip does his best to make peace, but Ponsonby is certain that Merton has played a dirty trick on him, the trick being really Gadsby's, and the two fight. Flip refuses to second Pon, and steals away from the combat in the gym. The result is a draw, owing to the appearance on the scene of Mr. Mobbs. One of Merton's eyes is badly damaged, and it is feared he may go blind. He and Tunstall go away without leaving any message for Flip, who is very miserable about the whole affair. The Cliff House girls jump on him, too.

(Now read on.)

The Remorseful Ponsonby.

"I SHOULDN'T worry myself too much, old fellow," said Monson, with more feeling than he usually showed. "Take it the way Derwent puts it—seems sound enough sense to me. It's jolly rough on old Merton, of course—we all know that. But there's a chance it may turn out all serene after all."

"How can a chap dashed well help worryin'?" asked Pon.

He looked worried. His eyes were feverishly bright. Perhaps he really did feel remorseful. It is possible that he did not hate Merton enough to wish him so awful a fate as blindness. If it had been Frank Courtenay, then there would have been no real sorrow in Pon's heart, whatever he might have pretended!

"Bad thing for you to stay here alone," said Flip.

"I shall come out of it to-morrow. The old man was in two minds about expellin' me, I fancy—scandal for the school, an' all that. But Mobby backed up—put it to him that the sack for me would only mean worse scandal, because folks would say it couldn't have been any dashed accident. Willy little worm, Mobby!"

"He did you a good turn there, though," replied Flip.

"Not so sure! I'm pretty sick of Highcliffe, Flip. If it wasn't for you I really think I'd cut it."

Monson did not appear to resent that speech, though it certainly was not flattering to him.

"Derwent was about the only chap who didn't see anything of the fight at all," he remarked.

"What? Weren't you there, Flippy?"

"No. It seemed to me sickenin' rot."

"Well, you can have what credit there is for tryin' to make peace, an' as things turned out, it looks heap big credit to you. I wish I'd done as you said, by gad! Poor old Merton!"

There was silence for a minute or two.

Then Monson said, rather awkwardly, but quite sincerely:

"You'll be writin' to him, Derwent? Tell him old Pon's no end sick about it, an' we're all sorry, an' wish him back y'know. You can put it better than I can, I guess."

"Yes, I shall write, and I'll tell him, of course," answered Flip.

It was strange that he should not have

thought of writing till then. Now the notion came like fresh hope to him. He felt grateful to Monson.

But he knew himself anything but a good hand at saying things on paper. Never mind! Merton and I'm ought to be able to understand.

"Come back after tea, you fellows," said Pon, when they made a move. "It's beastly dull here. The matron's gone out, so she won't interfere; an' you can cut prep. Mon will tell Mobby you're comin' to me, an' it will be all right."

Flip went into tea in Monson's study. It was better than being alone in No. 6, without even Cocky to cheer the gloom.

But he would not leave Monson to put it right with Mr. Mobbs. He did not like asking favours of that gentleman; but he asked this one.

Mr. Mobbs was almost gracious.

"Loyalty to a friend in trouble becomes the meanest of us, Derwent," he said; and Flip wondered which of them was the meanest of us. He rather thought Mobby was. "To a high-souled and chivalrous boy like Ponsonby, with strong feelings, the present situation must be almost intolerable. Convey to him my best wishes, and tell him that he may rely upon my moral support throughout."

"Did you tell him what to do with his moral support, Flippy?" said Pon, on receiving that message.

"No. What would you have told him? After all, he meant well, though he's an old wower."

"You should have told him not to chuck it about so dashed recklessly at the present price of butter. That's about what Mobby's moral support is, by gad! Butter—and rank bad butter at that! What have you got there, Mon?"

Monson had a board under his arm, and now he produced a box from his pocket. The whole thing resolved itself into a game played with leaden horses and jockeys and dice—a child's game, and quite innocent played as such, but capable of being turned into a gambling medium to any extent the players chose.

"Thought it might amuse you for an hour or so, Pon. We could have a trifle on it, just for sport, y'know."

"By gad, yes! It's a ripping idea—you don't often have them, old scout. You on, Flippy?"

"Oh, I don't mind," said Flip.

"Six horses—we'll take two each; that will make it more interestin'. I'll have the two blacks, an' I'll bet you both half-a-dollar even money that the one with the red jock gets home first. I'll give two to one that one of the blacks does!"

Flip laughed.

Ponsonby's eagerness seemed to him rather kiddish.

Pon's eyes were bright, and he fingered the dice as if he loved them.

His battered hands looked strange. But he was not thinking about them. His whole soul seemed absorbed in the game.

"I'll throw first, for my red jock," he said. "Six! Jolly good! Now you throw for one of your two, Mon. You're takin' my odds, I suppose?"

"Oh, yaas. But you're pluggin', Pon. It ain't any two to one on your two. It's two to one against, by gad!"

"Not likely! I feel that my luck is in to-night. You see! You're riskin' half-a-dollar, Flip? Come on! The game's dull without it."

"I don't mind," answered Flip.

It did not seem to him quite like playing cards; and he was not dead set even against that. But he thought of Flap, and he felt just a trifle uneasy.

The plea that it was to keep Pon from brooding might not have seemed as strong to her as he felt it to be.

Pon did not look much like brooding now. He had forgotten all about Merton. The gambling spirit was very strong in him, and even on so small a scale as this any game of chance absorbed him.

The others got interested, too.

That was not surprising in Monson, who was bitten with the gambling craze, anyway, and had the sort of mind that this feeble imitation of racing appealed to.

But it surprised Flip when he thought of it afterwards that he should have grown so keen. There were complications in the game—times when to throw five gave one a real advantage, while to throw six meant going back, because six forward landed one's horse in a ditch, entailing that penalty. Then, when one neared the finish, perhaps only the ace or the deuce would serve one's turn—anything higher meant too much, and then again you had to go back instead of forward. It was quite thrilling when each had one horse

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 516.



within a single throw of winning, and thrice in turn each threw too high or too low.

Pon won the first game, and drew half-a-crown from each of his opponents with great zest. Then Monson proposed having something on second and third; and the result was a pool, into which each put three half-crowns, No. 1 to draw five of them, No. 2 three, and No. 3 the one left. It did not look much of a gamble to Flip's untutored mind; at worst, it seemed, one could but lose five bob. But it proved possible to lose one's whole stake, playing with two horses each; and he managed it, for Pon got first and third home, and Monson had the second.

Still it seemed of no importance. It amused Pon, and Flip would not miss a few shillings. He found himself really keen on getting home first in the next game, though. It was no use playing unless one really tried.

Monson told him that he did not hold the dice-box right, and explained what he considered the right way, while Pon grinned amiably. When, having finished explaining, Monson for seven successive throws, cast either very low numbers or high ones that landed him in the obstacles, Flip grinned, too. But Monson did not mind their grinning; and, after all, he got a blue jockey on a brown horse home first.

The game was absolutely on the straight; indeed, there could not well have been any tricky play. But both Pon and Monson could enjoy a game on those lines; it was when temptation in the shape of a pigeon fairly asking to be plucked—such as Bunter—came along that they cheated. They did not even want to cheat Flip—not that night, anyway. Monson thought that he had never known half what a nice chap Derwent really was, and Pon was almost grateful; and all three of them were quite chummy.

Afterwards, lying awake in bed, worrying about Merton, Flip wondered how he had got so keen on such a childish amusement. He also wondered what Flip would have said to it. The objection she would have made would not have been to its childishness, he was sure.

Well, it had pleased old Pon, and helped him to get through an hour or two cheerfully. And, for all the Cliff House girls might say, Flip wasn't going to desert Pon!

So thinking, he fell asleep, and dreamed a dream in which he was wandering through waste places, with Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars; and Cocky sat on Bunter's head—he would sit there, though Bunter did not like it a bit; and Bunter said it was all through Ponsonby; and then Peter Hazeldene came along, and he said the same thing; and then it was Clara Trevlyn, and she said so, too; and then little Molly Gray came and took Cocky away, and Bunter was angry, and said something about never loving a dear gazelle but some ginger-haired female kid must come along and bone it; and Clara turned up her nose and said Bunter must be a perfect ignoramus to call Cocky a gazelle; and then Bunter and Hazeldene and Miss Clara had all gone, and it was all dark, and somehow Flip himself had become Merton, and he knew it was always to be like this—always dark—and he cried aloud in his agony that one had far better be dead.

And then he woke up, and was still awake when the rising-bell clanged out its summons over Highlife.

Among the Nuts!

"HEARD anything from Tunstall yet, Flippy?" asked Pon.

"Not yet. There's hardly been time," replied Flip.

"You won't hear. Your call, Pon! Don't keep the dashed game waitin'," said Gadsby.

"Of course he'll hear!" said Monson minor.

"Bet you two to one in quids he don't!" Gadsby returned. "They've done with him, an' with the lot of us, y'know. Derwent's quite one of us now, an' if they ever come back they'll cut the connection, an' chum up with Clara an' De Courcy, by gad!"

Flip did not reply to that. He had no taste for argument with Gadsby.

Anyone seeing him then might have taken him for one of the crew. The only thing that distinguished him from the rest was that he had no cigarette between his lips. But there were five cards in his left hand, and in front of him was a little pile of money.

He still believed that he only played to please Pon, and indeed that was true enough in a sense. But when once he had started, the fascination of the game got hold of him, and he found a pleasure in considering how

to make the most of his cards—yes, and a pleasure in taking the money he won, too, especially if it chanced to be Gadsby's or Vavasour's!

Where he differed from all four of the rest was in the fact that he simply had no idea of playing the game otherwise than on the dead straight, and that losing had no effect on his temper.

"Shut up, Gaddy!" growled Pon. "Flippy will hear all right. I'm feelin' quite hopeful that the news will be good, too. What's the use of puttin' any faith in a dashed country doctor? Specialist's what you want, y'know. Merton's eyes will be all right in about a couple of twinks, as soon as he gets a man to them that knows what's what."

"Hope so," said Flip soberly.

"Sure to be," Monson said.

There was a curious sort of division among the five. Flip split the other four. Pon and Monson made much of him, backed him up, did all they could to make him feel at home. Gadsby and Vavasour, though willing enough to play with him, showed no friendliness, and their sneers sometimes irritated Flip, and often enraged Pon.

"I'll take you, Gaddy!" said Monson.

"What's the good of betting on a thing like that?" Flip said, not half liking it.

"Oh, leave 'em alone, dear boy! Gaddy would bet on anything," said Pon. "He can't help it, by gad!"

"I'd rather he didn't bet on my affairs, though!"

Flip was picking up silver as he spoke. He had called three, and got them.

"No need to be so down on bettin'. You take the chink readily enough when it comes your way, Derwent!" sneered Gadsby.

"As I pay when I lose, that's only reasonable," replied Flip coolly. "I didn't say I was down on bettin', but—"

Pon struck in. He did not want those two to quarrel.

"Paid up your losses yet, Vav?" he asked.

"My-er—I don't follow you, Pon, by gad!"

"Over the fight. Drury says you owe him thirty quid—no, ten, for you wouldn't do it more than once. Want of faith, by gad—want of faith! You might have gone the whole hog while you were backin' me, even if I let you down in the end."

"But it's rot, Pon, absolutely! You didn't lose."

"I didn't win, by gad, I know that!"

"But you don't admit you lost, surely?"

"Langley says I did. That's Drury's argument."

"No, I don't agree, naturally; but I guess it's up to you to pay up, by gad! We can't have you posted as a defaulter, y'know."

"If Vav lost I lost, an' I'm dashed if I'm goin' to pay!" said Gadsby sulkily.

"No one who knows you would expect you to if you could see your way out of it, dear boy," replied Pon lightly.

Gadsby scowled. But he scowled at Flip, not at Pon. It was a curious thing that whenever Pon sneered at Gaddy—and he did it pretty often—Gaddy scowled at Flip.

Curious, and yet perhaps not altogether to be wondered at. For Gadsby was jealous. He had stood next to Pon till this new fellow came along; and he did not like having his place taken by Flip, who had thrashed him so soundly at the very outset.

Flip had put that incident quite into the background. Gadsby seemed to have done the same thing.

But it was only seeming. Vavasour knew that, if no one else did. He knew all about the episode of Cocky's kidnapping, and the scheme—vague as yet—to make use of Chiker, the bashing Courtfield back against Flip in some way; and he had a suspicion about the business of the postscript.

Vavasour was not likely to give Gadsby away, though. Monson, in his new liking for Flip, might have done; but Monson knew nothing.

Flip rose a winner from the game. He thrust the money carelessly into his pocket. Gadsby snorted. He believed that carelessness pretended. But it was not. The time had not yet come when Flip had any need to worry about winning or losing, for he had never ventured more than he could afford to lose.

"Seen anythin' of your sister lately, Flippy?" asked Pon.

"Not the last day or two," Flip replied.

A shadow fell upon his face as he spoke. He did not mean to tell Pon; but he and Flip were at odds.

Flip had not quite taken the same line as

Clara and Phyllis. Her attitude was more like Marjorie's. But what was all right in Marjorie seemed to Flip considerably less than what a fellow had cause to expect from his own sister.

There was no mistake about it that Flip's feelings were quite definitely anti-Ponsonby. She did not say that Flip ought to have backed up Merton heart and soul in the fight; but it was evident she thought so. She could not understand how he could continue to be friendly with Pon after what had happened.

It wasn't Pon's fault, Flip said, and Pon was horribly cut up about it.

Pon, by the way, had not shown many signs of being horribly cut up after that first evening. But Flip did not look for tears and lamentations; he could give Pon credit for feeling what a decent fellow should feel without proof of that kind.

And that was quite all right—except for the initial mistake which spoiled it all—the mistake of taking Pon for a decent fellow!

Flip thought he ought to throw Pon over. She did not say even that in so many words; but it was evident in all she said.

And Flip did not mean to. Pon was his chum; he meant to stick to him through thick and thin.

Pon meant to stick to Flip, too—just so long as it suited him to!

So the twins had parted as they had never parted before—not in anger, but with the feeling that a gulf was widening between them. And, of course, each felt that it was the other's fault, whereas it was not really the fault of either. For each was doing the right thing—so far as he or she could see it.

"See here, old chap," said Pon. "I don't want to come between you two! I can guess how it is, by gad! They all think that I'm pretty nearly as black as I can be. They don't see that the thing that happened to Merton don't make any dashed difference to my character, seein' that no one can suppose for a single dashed minute that I intended it. The charmin' sex is like that. No logic in 'em! An', of course, I was 'Baa, baa, black sheep' before. If you want to keep in with Cliff House, you had better cut me."

"Rats!" was all Flip answered.

And just such an answer as that had the wily Pon expected. Now he had safeguarded himself against the risk of anyone else's suggesting that Flip should throw him over. He could read Flip's open nature like a book. The first thought that would leap into Flip's mind at such a suggestion would be that Pon himself had been first with it; and it would show up Pon as a true and unselfish chum!

The net was closing around Flip. Soon he might be struggling in its meshes.

For it was not with Pon alone he had to reckon.

There was Gadsby, too. And Gadsby's enmity might be almost as dangerous as Ponsonby's friendship.

And there was Vavasour. He might seem too big a fool to be dangerous. But he was vicious as well as empty-headed.

Flip went to No. 6—dull and cheerless in these days. He must make some pretence of doing his prep, though it seemed intolerably dry work after the pleasant liveliness of threepenny nap.

Smithson put his shock head in.

"I say, Derwent, do you care to come and work in our den?" he said. "We've got some chestnuts roasting; it won't be all work."

It was a friendly offer, and Flip's refusal was given in no churlish spirit.

"Thanks, old fellow, but I won't come," he replied. "I don't feel much like company."

"He wouldn't come, then?" said Yates, when his chum returned to No. 7.

Smithson shook his head rather sadly.

"No. Said he didn't feel like it. I only hope he ain't moping about Merton. I like Derwent, and he ought to be one of us. Courtenay likes him, too, and so does the Caterpillar."

"I think everybody likes the beggar," answered Yates. "I know I do. Gadsby and Vavasour and Monson didn't. But they seem to now. A pity, I reckon. We don't want to see him among the nuts."

A couple of hours later they chanced to hear of the card-party in Ponsonby's study, and that Flip had been there.

"It's no go, Yatesy," said Smithson. "Once he starts in at that sort of thing he isn't likely to care about our kind of amusement. Can't be helped, I suppose—anyway, we can't help it. And I don't believe even Courtenay can!"

Which, coming from Smithson, meant that the case was bad indeed!

Rogues in Council!

"GADDSBY," said Vavasour, "you'll lose that bet of yours if you don't watch it!"

"What bet?" asked Gadsby.

The two were alone. Pon had gone off to No. 6.

"With Monson—about that cad Derwent's hearin' from Tunstall, by gad!"

When Pon was absent these two usually referred to Flip as "that cad Derwent." They knew that he was not a cad, though they failed to realise what was equally true—that they were cads. But it gave them a certain measure of satisfaction to abuse him thus.

"Not likely!" said Gadsby meaningly.

Vavasour's rather fishy eyes had a gleam of cunning understanding in them now.

He leaned forward to whisper.

"Don't keep the thing if you get hold of it! It's dangerous, absolutely. Chuck it on the fire! Take a squirt at it first, by gad, if you feel like it, but don't keep it!"

"Think I'm a fool?" growled Gadsby.

"Mon must think you are, or he'd never have made that bet. Dashed silly ass! He might have guessed—"

"Oh, dry up! We don't want Monson guessin' at anythin' like that. You an' I have got to look out, old sport, or we shall have that cad gettin' so much on the right side of those two that we shall be left high an' dry all by ourselves! Drury seems to be chuckin' it, an' Mon's growin' jolly particular. I gave him just a hint that we might skin Derwent a bit next time—without a word to Pon, of course—we three playin' still, y'know."

"What did he say, by gad?" asked Vavasour, with real interest.

"Cursed me! Didn't say he wouldn't do it—there wasn't any need after the way he flared out at me—but acted, by gad, as if he wouldn't ever have thought of such a trick!"

"That's bad, absolutely," said Vavasour.

It was, from his point of view, no doubt. From any other it looked like a distinct sign of grace in sulky, bad-tempered Monson, who had seldom shown any sign of grace before, that he should refuse to join in a swindle.

Possibly it was only a flash in the pan, but quite certainly there had been a change in Monson during the last two or three days. And, for what it was worth, it was at least real. Monson had not Pon's cunning.

"Well, I wouldn't have cared to do a pal down," Gadsby remarked. "But a chap that flies out at me as Monson did is no real pal of mine, an' I don't feel any scuples about it. I wrote to Tunstall to-day."

"Wrote to Tun! What on earth for, by gad?"

"Thought it would ease off suspicion, an' look well. Don't you twig, fathead? Said how sorry we both were about Merton, an' how much we hoped—oh, you know! Dashed if I care one way or the other, really. I don't wish the chap so much harm that I want him to go blind, but it ain't goin' to worry me a heap if he does."

"Oh, absolutely!" returned Vavasour vaguely. "No dashed bizney of ours! Did you say anythin' about the cad?"

"What do you think, my tulip? Told Tun he was comin' on quite nicely with his nap, an' had been a wonderful comfort to Pon in his distress of mind about the giddy accident."

"Dashed if I'd have said that!"

"You don't twig. Pity you're such a dashed chump! If I'd said Pon an' the cad were still no end chummy—well, that would have been a dashed crude way of puttin' it! But Tun an' Merton know Pon well enough to be able to measure up his distress of mind within a pint or so, by gad!"

"You don't think Pon—"

"Think? I know, chump! Pon wouldn't care if he blinded half Highecliffe, unless he had to pay for it. I won't say that he wouldn't rather it was Courtenay an' the Caterpillar than you an' me, 'rinstance; but he'd carry on smilin' if it was us two. That's Pon!"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Vavasour.

He did not ask how Gadsby proposed to get hold of any letter which came from Tunstall to Flip; but he quite understood that that was Gadsby's dodge. He did not offer to help. Taking unnecessary risks was not in Vavasour's line. But if he could help without risk he was ready to do it.

There fell a silence. Gadsby sat gazing into the fire, his eyes sullen and vengeful. Vavasour shifted in his comfortable seat as if it were getting uncomfortable.

"Gaddy," he said at length, "you worked that P.S. bizney—I know you did, by gad!"

"Between you an' me, Vav, I did. An' I ain't sorry, although it didn't pan out the way I'd reckoned on."

"If it hadn't been for that, they wouldn't have fought, y'know."

"Don't be such a dashed idiot! Want to make me responsible for the scrap, do you? Why, you lump of imbecility, if Pon had taken the thing the proper way, he'd never have gone to Cliff House at all, an' there'd have been no row!"

"That's one way of lookin' at it," answered Vavasour, letting the flowers of compliment strewn upon him by Gadsby fall unheeded to the ground. "But Pon wouldn't look at it that way. Nor the cad. Nor Merton, by gad, nor Tun!"

Gadsby stared at him. Adolphus Theodore Vavasour looked as vacant as ever. But Gadsby suspected a veiled threat in his words. If he fell out with Vav, Vav might peach!

But it was not prudent to say anything. And Gadsby had something up his sleeve that would serve to prevent his confederate from splitting upon him. He intended to get Vavasour so deeply into the plot that he would be in no position to give it away.

"That ain't half a bad-lookin' girl, that new post-girl, Vav," he remarked, a little later.

"Eh? I haven't seen her. What's she like?"

"Golden hair, blue eyes, dimple in her chin—gives you the glad eye," replied Gadsby.

"Oh, by gad! I must have a squint at her," said Vavasour, leering.

In a few years' time Vavasour would probably spend a considerable portion of the leisure available from gambling and following the races in leaning on bars and trying to make an impression upon the hearts of barmaids. Already he had a tendency that way. Gadsby was playing upon it cunningly.

"She comes along with the mid-day post about half-past twelve," said Gadsby.

"You'd better watch out for her to-morrow."

"Oh, absolutely! Thanks for the tip, old sport."

"You can ask her for any letters she's got for any of our crowd, y'know. That will give you a chance to get into chatty conversation with her."

Vavasour darted at Gadsby a look that was almost keen. He was on to Gadsby's kindly motive.

But it was likely enough that his vanity would prove too strong for his caution.

Anyway, as he reflected, talking to the post-girl need not mean collaring Derwent's letters for Gadsby!

Bunter Talks.

"EVER find your way to Cliff House for hockey now, dear boy?" asked Pon, after classes the next morning.

"Never did," growled Flip. "It was Tun and Merton who were so keen on that. I only played once."

"You're not goin' over there now, by any chance?"

"Well, as it happens, I am. But I'm not going to play hockey."

"Do you mind if I trot along with you, Flippy?"

Flip reddened. He minded very much. In fact, there was nothing in a small way he would have objected to much more than going along to Cliff House with Pon in tow. One experience of that had been more than enough.

While he hesitated, hardly knowing how to put his refusal politely, Pon struck in.

"I can see you think I shan't be welcome, by gad! Well, I don't expect to be. But the girls can hardly be so dashed rude as to turn their backs on me straight away, can they?"

Flip was not at all sure about that. On the whole, he thought they could. He was sure Clara and Phyllis could; and he fancied their example would decide Flap and Marjorie.

Pon did not appear to understand that they looked upon him as a kind of fiend in human form. It was absurd, of course; but so it was.

"An' anythin' short of that will give me a chance to set myself right with them," Pon went on. "I don't care about makin' a parade of the regret I feel, an' all that sort of thing, for what was only an unfortunate accident, at worst—not as a rule. But I would like your sister to understand that I'm

as sorry as a chap can be. That might help to put things right for you. It's dashed rough on you, dear boy, to be out of favour with them all because you won't chuck me over, I must say."

"It's only Flap's opinion I care about," said Flip, with something less than his usual candour, for he was still sore with the other girls, and little Molly Gray's outspoken declaration of hostility had hurt him a good deal. "The rest of them are nothing to me. Well, perhaps Marjorie Hazeldene—she's so uncommonly decent to a chap when he's down. I'm not complaining of the others; but—"

"Your sister's worth the whole dashed crowd of them," Pon put in. "I quite agree with you there, Flippy. Now, see here, don't you think I could put myself right with her an' Miss Hazeldene?"

"Jolly sure you couldn't, by Jupiter!" blurted out Flip. "It's no giddy good, Pon, old man! Until we know Merton is going on all serene, anyway. That would make more difference than anything else could—except you and old Algy going along there together, good pals."

"You would rather I didn't come, by gad!" "I think I've said so pretty plainly, Pon! No good rubbing it in. And no good getting on your ear about it, either."

Pon was a good deal inclined to get on his ear about it. But he curbed his wrath, and Flip started alone.

It was a bitterly cold day, with a cutting wind and a storm-blown, cloudy sky; but he took little notice of the weather. He was wondering why Tunstall had not written yet; and one of his reasons for going over to Cliff House was a vague hope that Clara or Phyllis might have heard news. He felt sure they would have written to Tunstall.

There had been plenty of time for Tun to write. It was queer that he should not have done.

If he did not mean to—if these two, who had been his chums, meant to cut him out of their lives henceforth—well, let them! Flip tossed his head as he thought of that possibility.

He was too proud to beg to be taken back.

Gadsby had counted on that. Gadsby's notion was that to intercept one letter would do the trick. And it did not seem a difficult thing to him; he was getting used to meddling with other people's correspondence by this time.

"Hallo, Derwent!"

Flip turned and contemplated the fellow who had thus addressed him without any friendliness.

It was Billy Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove, in new trousers of a loud chess-board pattern which appeared to have been built from an old measurement. They were far too tight for grace; and, though Bunter declared very often that the food regulations were making him waste away, no one else had been able to perceive that there had been any diminution in the steady rate of increase in measurement under the waistcoat which each successive pair of breeks made for Bunter needed in order to fit.

"Goin' to Cliff House, by gad?" asked Bunter, in what he imagined to be a truly nutty tone.

"I am. So, of course, our way isn't the same, as you can't have any business there," said Flip.

"Oh, really, Derwent! Who says I can't have any business at Cliff House?"

"Doesn't seem likely," replied Flip off-handedly.

Bunter didn't at all like the way this Colonial fellow looked at him. It was almost contemptuous.

The worst of these raw Colonials was that they had no manners—and no taste.

It was bad manners to look contemptuously at Bunter. It was worse than that—it was bad taste—to feel contemptuous. Bunter was sure of that.

He had fancied that now Derwent was one of the nuts—and the fellows said he was, Bunter knew that—there would be some increase of cordiality between them. Bunter was quite a nut himself—in Bunter's estimation.

To-day he was got up to kill. He wore a most elegant silk tie, the property of Mauly, who was unaware that Bunter had borrowed it; a silk hat that the prefect to whom it belonged could hardly miss, as he would not be wanting it before Sunday; a pair of patent leather boots whose real owner was Bland of the Fifth; and his Eton jacket was new.

He trotted alongside Flip, who was too depressed and worried to shake him off, as

he might have done in other circumstances. But not easily, for Bunter had extensive experience in the art of sticking to people who did not want his company.

"Solomon in all his glory would have looked a wash-out beside you, Bunter," remarked Flip, tickled in spite of himself by the absurd fat junior.

"He, he, he! I flatter myself I do look rather well," replied Bunter, with a self-approving smirk.

"Going to mash Miss Clara?" asked Flip. He knew exactly how Clara Trevlyn felt about Bunter, and he fancied Bunter knew.

"No—er—that is, I don't much care for Miss Trevlyn. She is too ready to make eyes at the first fellow that comes along."

"Can't say I ever noticed it," growled Flip. "And I'd advise you to go easy on that sort of talk. I wouldn't have said what I did, but that I know that there isn't a girl among the crowd of them who hasn't sized you up all right."

"He, he, he! If you mean they don't like me, you were never more mistaken in your life, Derwent—never! Marjorie Hazeldene worships the very ground I walk—"

"What?" roared Flip, his hands clenching. "I don't want to go for you, you fat junk; but if you say another word about Marjorie"

"I—I—my mistake, Derwent! I meant Violet Taylor."

"I don't know her, so I can't see any particular reason for getting my hands greasy by touching you on her account. Queer taste she must have!"

"It's no good your getting spoony on Marjorie, you know, Derwent! Take my tip, and keep off it. You'll only land yourself in trouble with Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry."

"You silly fat fraud, I'm not spoony on her or anyone else! I'm not likely to quarrel with either Wharton or Cherry about her. They think a heap of her, and so do I. But—"

"Well, of course, some fellows are cold-blooded," chipped in the Owl. "They can't help it—it's the way they're made, I suppose. I shouldn't care to be like that myself. I've always been—er—suspectible—"

"Suspectible, you mean, don't you?" asked Flip, grinning.

"I said susceptible, didn't I? Don't imagine that any Australian has a command of the English language superior to mine, Derwent! You fellows say 'bonza' and 'wowsie' and 'dinkum' and things like that—not English at all, you know."

"Getting rather mixed, aren't you?" said Flip. Bunter was amusing him.

"Your fault, Derwent. You do interrupt so! As I was saying, I am—er—quite a ladies' man—always have been—and always shall be—ahem!"

"When they're courting you they don't put

their arms round you, do they?" inquired Flip.

"That's asking me to tell secrets," returned Bunter, smirking more than ever.

"Oh, not a bit of it! I was only wondering how many you had courting you at once. One wouldn't be a scrap of good to get her arms right round. Three might do it—say four, to be on the safe side. And of course there's safety in numbers. Their mothers might not feel so alarmed if there were four of them."

"I can see you don't take me seriously, Derwent. But that is your mistake. You haven't any idea how many girls are gone on me, naturally."

"I naturally haven't. And, if they were, I should think it jolly unnatural," Flip replied. "Now if you really were a bladder of lard—lard's dear now, and of course it's quite useful stuff. But you're only a cheap imitation."

"There's a new post-girl who's been coming from Courtfield lately," went on Bunter, unheeding these gibes. "A Miss Gittins—now where have I heard that name before? I've met her two or three times, and she's fathoms deep, you know, Derwent; simply fathoms deep!"

"I've noticed her," said Flip. "She struck me as looking fly enough—and fast enough, if you come to that."

"Really, Derwent, you seem very dull—and a very poor judge of girls, too. I mean fathoms deep in love with me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't see what there is to cackle at, really! I asked her for a kiss yesterday, and what do you think she said?"

"I should think she chuckled down the post-bag and ran for her giddy life," answered Flip.

"Rats! She said—just you listen to this—Bunter spoke in a thrilling whisper—"she said she'd give me such a smack!"

"She's got more sense than she looks to have, then, Bunter!"

"Eh? Sense? I don't—"

"A smack of the face was just what you were asking for."

"Oh, really—that a silly ass you are, Derwent! She didn't mean—"

"Bet you she did! The girl that would want to kiss you, Bunter, is in a lunatic asylum, poor thing! And, what's worse, she'll never be let out. She's too far gone for any chance of that. Hallo, they're not at hockey this morning!"

Bunter Lets Out Something.

THE field was deserted. No short skirt fluttered in the breeze—which was rather more like half a gale than a breeze, by the way—no hair, brown, black, golden, or red, flew loose behind a flying, graceful figure. There were the goal-posts, and there was the trampled turf; but

for all that the two could see there might not have been a girl within miles.

"Did you come over to play hockey?" asked Bunter.

"No—yes, if you like—what's it to do with you, you fat chump? As a matter of fact, I wanted to see my sister."

All Flip's cheeriness had deserted him. He had felt quite cheery while chaffing Bunter. Somehow the mention of the post-girl had given him comfort; he felt so sure that he would find a letter from Tun awaiting him when he got back to Highlife. It was illogical, of course; the coming of the letter only depended upon Miss Gittins in the one small detail that she would probably bring it. She could not influence its coming. But he had felt so sure!

And now he felt sure it would not come. He stared at the empty field, and he felt lonely and miserable. He could see Flip by going to Cliff House, of course. Probably he would see them all; and he had rather wanted to see them—Marjorie, anyway.

But he did not feel like paying a formal visit.

"I—I was thinking of a game, too," said Bunter.

"Yes, you look like it—I don't think!" snorted Flip. "A topper and patents are just about the right things for hockey! Besides, you'd bust those new breaks!"

"Oh, really, Derwent—"

"Dry up! I'm sick of your 'Oh, really!'"

"I'm sick of you! Clear off!"

Just then little Molly Gray came out of the gate with her chum, Alice Sherwell.

Flip forgot that Molly had sworn enmity against him. His hand fell on her shoulder.

"I say, Molly, you might tell Flip I want her—there's a decent kid!"

The youngster shook his hand off, with a toss of her red-maned head.

"I thaid I never wanted to theepak to you again, Philip Derwent, and more I never don't want to," she said, her grammar suffering through her excitement. "Pleathe remember that! My frienndth are my frienndth; but I like frienndth that mean it!"

Flip stood gasping as the small girls passed on, flaxen-pollled Miss Sherwell giggling nervously, Molly on the verge of tears.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "I hope I'm more popular with the girls than that!"

Molly turned, her face redder than her Titian locks.

"You're not, then!" she cried, stamping a small foot. "For we did all like Flip once, anyway, an' no one in their theintences could potbly like you, William George Bunter!"

In spite of his dismay, Flip could not help laughing. Bunter's fat cheeks turned as red as an angry turkey-cock's comb, and then faded to a dull mottled tint which looked very unwholesome.

(To be continued next week.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"THE ST. JIM'S CADETS!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's fine story tells of the establishment of a Cadet Corps at St. Jim's—who joined up, and who didn't; how the high-handedness of certain enthusiasts caused some trouble, and how the spite of fellows who were anything but enthusiasts caused more; what happened when the Corps went on duty with the local Volunteers—and all the rest of it. I do not mean to give away the story in advance. It is one that I feel confident you will all like, whether you are interested in the Cadet movement or not. And, by the way, it is rather a pity if you are not. For it is a fine thing to be a member of a Cadet Corps. If I were fifteen to-day—instead of being—well, it is on the right side of fifty, but above the age at which the Army has any use for me—if I were fifteen to-day, I say, nothing would keep me out short of being chuckled out. And those in control don't chuck out the fellow who wants to do his bit, you know!

A NEW VOLUME!

With next week's issue Vol 12 (New Series) of the GEM starts.

I am not going to announce any startling novelties. There is no need for them. Except for the few grumblers—whose motive for buying the paper is obscure to me; they don't

think it worth the money, and we should never miss them!—everyone seems satisfied about the long, complete stories and the serial alike. It is true that a lot of pressure has been put upon me to start

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

It is not from any want of goodwill that this anxiously anticipated feature has been so long delayed. But I am now able to give a definite announcement of its appearance. If it can possibly be crowded in the first article of the series will appear next week. Who will be its subject? Why,

TOM MERRY.

of course! Who else should be?

About space. So many of you want these articles that it seems something like an obligation upon me to give you them, though they will entail hard work, and extra work, which will not be easily done. But our pages have no elastic property. If you are to have the Gallery—I should say, as you are to have the Gallery—you must make up your minds that something else must be slightly shorter to make room for it. Either the long story or the serial or the Chat—there is nothing else at present to cut at. Probably the Chat and the serial will both lose a bit. Can't be helped!

I do not guarantee, either, that the Gallery will appear every week. That may not be possible. But I will try to let you have it without a break. If there is a break, don't write and grumble!

I am having a new title-heading for the paper next week. Nothing strikingly different about it; some of you may not spot the difference, but it's new, and you may be interested to know it.

Now is the time to get your chums to read the GEM. What better story could you ask for as an introduction than the bright and cheery yarn which appears this week? Hand that to any boy or girl with a taste for reading; and I will wager that he or she will be no end keen to read more about the Terrible Three and the chums of No. 6, the No. 9 trio and Racke & Co., Wally and Grundy, the New House brigade, and the miserly Mr. Pepper, with his little hobby of collecting two or more rents for the same premises whenever possible.

Try them, anyway! The GEM—and the "Magnet" too—are as popular as they have ever been. I don't think, indeed, that they have ever in the past been quite so widely read and appreciated as they are to-day. But

NEW READERS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!

Your Editor