

THE MAN OF MYSTERY!

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



BAGGY AND THE BUMPS!

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

THE MAN OF MYSTERY!

By
**Martin
Clifford.**

CHAPTER 1. A Big Future.

"THERE is no question whatever which I cannot answer." The Man of Mystery delivered these words with a very confident air.

He was standing in a little side street off the High Street in Wayland, and he waved his long-cloaked arm as he spoke. A good crowd had collected to see the Man of Mystery. His fame had reached Wayland before him. Several St. Jim's fellows were there, and Trimble of the Fourth was in the front row.

"Ask me any question you like!" said the Man of Mystery.

Trimble giggled. The grey-bearded old man seemed an easy butt for humour.

"When is the war going to end?" he asked.

"You ask me a big question," said the Man of Mystery. "But I can answer you. In three hundred and forty-five days peace will be declared."

"What authority have you for that statement?" inquired Skimpole solemnly.

"Merely that I know it," said the Man of Mystery loftily. "Any more questions which you would like to ask?"

He turned and swept the crowd with his eyes. They seemed to glitter particularly brightly behind his smoked glasses. He certainly looked the part he had taken on himself, and which was indicated on the board which stood behind him—the Man of Mystery.

"I should like to know the determining factor which causes an oxidising agent to function when—"

Skimpole had got thus far when Baggy Trimble dug him in the ribs.

"Shurrup!" he growled. "I'm going to ask this merchant a few questions. Skimpole glared through his round glasses.

"Really, Trimble," he protested, "you are most ill-mannered! I—"

Baggy Trimble used his elbow again, and Skimpole subsided.

"Now," said Baggy Trimble, "can you tell me my name?"

The Man of Mystery regarded him quietly.

"Trimble," he said.

"Marvellous!" muttered the crowd.

They had heard Skimpole use the name, but they naturally concluded that the Man of Mystery had not heard it. Which was where they blundered. His hearing was quite acute.

"If the stout young gentleman will come up here," said the Man of Mystery impressively. "I will read his palm before I sell my sealed packets. This reading will be free."

Trimble hesitated.

"It will not hurt you," said the Man of Mystery. "Come on, my little man!"

"Little man!" snorted Trimble indignantly. "I'll come up just to expose your trickery!"

He stepped up, and the old man took hold of his hand, turning it palm upwards. It was a dirty palm, but it did not baffle this remarkable person on that account.

"You come from a school near here,"

he said. "You are very fond of feeding—in fact, you rather overdo it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You have a great future before you—"

"That's his tummy!" said a voice from the crowd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Man of Mystery adjusted his glasses. Trimble scowled.

"Your weight is evidently felt," said the man wisely.

"Ho, ho ho!" guffawed the crowd.

The Man of Mystery ran his fingers over Trimble's head.

Then he started talking like a book.

Trimble heard himself flattered and discoursed on in a most entertaining way.

Having got the crowd into a good humour, the man was proceeding to "read his bumps" in a manner which was calculated to induce the crowd to roll up and have theirs told.

Trimble was described as a kind-hearted, generous youth who was bound to get on in the world. The Man of Mystery said that he would probably become a learned scientist or a doctor or some important sort of personage.

If the prophetic gentleman did not feel Trimble's head swelling beneath his hand as he spoke he must have been slow.

The fat junior resumed his place in the crowd with a satisfied smirk. The St. Jim's fellows were giggling in mirth.

To hear Trimble summed up as everything that was good was the last word in japes.

But the crowd did not know Trimble.

They regarded the fat junior with more favourable eyes, and the Man of Mystery as a great and discerning personage.

"Can you tell what is going to happen in the future?" demanded a voice from the crowd.

"Easily," said the Man of Mystery.

"I do not tell fortunes. But I can answer questions. Nothing is hidden from me. Any member of my audience can come here and ask me questions, and I will write the answers on a piece of paper and seal it. The fee will be one shilling."

The good people of Wayland rolled up with their shillings in their hands.

The first was an elderly woman in black, and she spoke long and earnestly with the Man of Mystery. She paid her coin, and went away with the written answers.

Trimble watched the proceedings interestedly at first, but he soon grew fed-up.

"Going to answer some questions?" he asked suddenly.

The Man of Mystery shook his head.

"You haven't really given a proper answer to anything yet," said Trimble.

Confident now that he was a wise man in view of the reading he had had. "It's easy enough for you to say I'm clever. Anyone can see that!"

"Don't interrupt! I'm busy!"

Trimble eyed the Man of Mystery aggressively.

"Who won the Derby in 1872?" he asked.

Silence.

"Who won the Derby in 1875?" de-

manded Trimble, evidently thirsting for information on the subject, but not particular about the year.

"I cannot attend to you now," said the Man of Mystery acidly. "Go away!"

"You don't know who won the Derby in 1896!" howled Trimble, in triumph. "You're a fraud!"

"What?"

"Tell me who won the Derby in 1907!" persisted Trimble, coming rapidly from the ancient to the modern.

The Man of Mystery eyed the fat junior balefully.

"I went light with you, young man, just then!" he said spitefully. "I only read off your good points. I might have told these people others. I'll tell them now, if you are not careful!"

"Who won the Derby in—1912?" demanded Trimble desperately.

He had a bad head for figures, but a firm belief that he could stump the Man of Mystery if he kept on long enough.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the grey-bearded man. "I wish to warn you about that boy. I noticed just now, when I was feeling his head, that he had criminal instincts. He is a danger anywhere!"

"D-d-danger!" stammered Trimble, going pale.

"Look at him, gentlemen!" said the Man of Mystery. "He has gone white! Watch your pockets, if you are wise!"

There was a murmur from the crowd. Their sympathy was not on the side of Trimble.

"Hoof him out!" roared a voice.

"I—I—" commenced Trimble.

A couple of heavy hands were laid on him.

"Don't want no pickpockets 'ere!" growled a rough-looking man. "Chuck 'im aft!"

"Yaroooooh!" roared Trimble.

He was quickly propelled through the crowd, amid angry threats on all sides.

"Shurrup!" roared Trimble. "I tell you he's a fraud! He's jolly well—Oooooo-er!"

A hearty kick caught the fat junior as the hands relinquished their hold on his collar, and he went flying forward. His hump of knowledge came into violent collision with a tree in a manner which did not threaten to reduce it in size.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Trimble.

"Biff 'im agin, Bill!" spoke a voice encouragingly.

But Trimble was already retreating down the street at his best speed. Baggy had had enough!

CHAPTER 2.

The Widow's Trouble.

"SOMETHING'S up!" Tom Merry made this remark. The Terrible Three were coming along the High Street in Wayland when Tom Merry caught sight of something which drew the exclamation from him.

A woman, dressed in black, came slowly towards them. She held a handkerchief to her eyes, and the chums saw that she was sobbing bitterly.

Tom Merry stopped as she passed. "Is there anything the matter, ma'am?" he asked kindly.

The woman looked up at the boys, and paused. They noted that she was red-eyed and looking very miserable.

"I do not think you can help me," she said. "But I am in great trouble."

"Not too serious, I hope?" asked Tom gently.

"It is my son—my poor son!"

"At the Front?"

"No, no. He is not killed," said the woman. "He could not be any use there. It is the dreadful discovery I have made about him. And me a widow—a lonely widow!"

The Terrible Three looked on sympathetically.

"My son—although he is only a poor cripple—is all that I have left me. My husband was killed in the war months ago. And now to hear this about my dear George is terribly distressing!"

"Has something happened?"

"I have made a discovery," said the woman bitterly. "I have found out something which has explained a mystery which has troubled me for a long while. It explains what George has been doing with his time."

The Terrible Three waited. They had recognised the woman now. She lived just outside Wayland in a pretty little cottage, and they knew her crippled son very well indeed. He was a cheery little man, although terribly deformed. The three felt interested.

"For some time," said the widow, who felt that she must unburden her trouble to someone, "George has gone out every day quite early in the morning and disappeared. He would tell me nothing of what he was doing, but I have kept him supplied with money whenever he asked for it. You see, my poor husband left me enough to live on."

"I see, ma'am," said Tom Merry.

"George," pursued the widow, "has been coming in of an evening in a very—well, very funny condition. I often wondered what was the matter with him. He walked unsteadily, and he had a peculiar look which I did not like."

"We know your son by sight, ma'am," said Manners. "He always struck us as a decent sort. You surely don't mean that he comes home—er—intoxicated?"

"That is what I have just discovered," said the woman.

"I should never have thought that!" said Tom Merry.

"Have you seen him drinking, ma'am?" asked Monty Lowther.

"No," said the woman. "He is too cunning for that. But I have just had a question answered in a way which left no doubt. The Man of Mystery has just told me!"

"The Man of Mystery?" gasped Tom Merry. "Who is he?"

The widow explained.

"But you surely don't believe him, do you?" asked Monty Lowther. "Why, he's a travelling humbug! He'd tell you anything! He's only out to get money."

"I wish I could believe it," said the woman. "But he proved that he knows more about my son than I do. He told me that he goes gambling and drinking all day!"

"Don't believe him!" said Tom Merry briskly. "How should he know?"

"That I cannot say," answered the woman. "But I find that he was right. He told me so many things that I cannot doubt him."

"Guess-work!" said Monty Lowther. "No; it wasn't that," said the woman.

"You have to ask him questions."

"Ask who?"

"The Man of Mystery," said the woman. "I just told him that I had a son named George Folland, and asked

him what he was like. This is the answer he gave me at once."

She drew a piece of paper out of a handbag, and showed it to the boys. Tom Merry read it out.

"He is a cripple, deformed in the shoulders, about five feet in height, and rather thin. He has a high forehead, and wears his long hair brushed back."

Monty Lowther whistled.

"That is certainly a description of your son," he said. "And do you mean, ma'am, that he wrote this when you merely told him the name?"

"Yes," said the widow.

"Whew!" ejaculated Manners.

"You will see the answer to my next question there," said the widow.

"I asked about his father, and how long George had been a cripple. See the answer!"

Tom Merry read from the paper again.

"His father died in Flanders, fighting against the Germans," he said. "George has been a cripple since he was five years old, when he had a bad fall from a window."

"And is this true?" asked Manners.

"Absolutely," said the woman. "So, believing then that he was more than an ordinary man, I asked him what George did of a daytime, and how he spent his money. You will see the answer there: 'Drinking and gambling!'"

The Terrible Three exchanged perplexed looks.

"That is my trouble," said the widow. "Can you wonder that I am upset?"

"N-no!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Don't you think this—this Man of Mystery might have made a mistake?" asked Manners.

The woman shook her head.

"I am certain now that he did not," she said. "This explains everything. I am sorry that I have troubled you, young gentlemen, with all this, but I felt that I must tell someone. It is a terrible sorrow for a poor widow!"

"I wish we could do something for you!" said Tom Merry. "You know, I feel sure that George is right."

"Then, what is he doing every day?" Tom Merry was silent.

"He will get no more money from me!" said the widow bitterly. "It is good of you to be interested, but I am afraid you cannot help. Good-bye!"

She applied her handkerchief to her eyes, and went on. The Terrible Three looked at each other glumly.

CHAPTER 3.

A Real Mystery.

"WELL I'm jiggered!" muttered Tom Merry at length.

Monty Lowther scowled at the pavement. For once he forgot to be funny. The Terrible Three had just heard a moving story of real life, and they felt genuinely sorry for George—more so still for his mother.

"Just the sort of thing these fortune-telling quacks do!" growled Manners. "Fancy anyone believing in a Man of Mystery!"

"Jolly well ought to be run in by the police!" growled Lowther. "Spinning a rotten yarn like that!"

"I expect he's keeping on the safe side of the law," said Tom Merry. "You see, he doesn't profess to tell fortunes. He answers questions. That's all the difference."

"Eat lot of difference!" growled Manners. "He's a humbug from start to finish!"

"How do you think he was able to write out that description, then?"

"These merchants have all sorts of wheezes they work," said Manners. "She might have been wearing a locket

with his photo in. Or he heard someone in the crowd talking about him."

"It doesn't explain everything," said Tom Merry, with a puzzled face. "But I'm sure there's some trickery in it. And of course, as soon as he gets the chance, he makes a guess at the rest, and she goes and believes it all."

"That's about it," said Lowther.

The three walked on with moody brows. But they looked up suddenly as they heard a scuffling on the pavement, and then grinned broadly.

Trimble was bolting along in their direction as though the Huns were at his heels.

"Just stand still!" said Monty Lowther. "Let him run into us!"

Trimble came on like an express train, and did not see the obstruction until too late. The Terrible Three were ready for the impact and he was not. Trimble staggered back, and sat on the pavement with a resounding thud.

"Yarooogh!" roared Baggy Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clumsy beasts!" snarled Trimble, as he scrambled to his feet.

Monty Lowther took the fat junior firmly by the ear.

"What's that?" he asked.

Trimble blinked.

"I—I said that I was sorry!" mumbled Trimble.

"That's better! Now tell us what the rush is about."

Trimble glanced furtively behind him. But apparently none of the irate crowd had thought it worth while to follow him.

"It's that beastly Man of Mystery!" growled Trimble savagely.

Tom Merry whistled.

"What's the matter with him?"

Trimble explained his experiences at the corner.

"I asked him about the Dorby," he finished, "and the rotter wouldn't answer me."

"I expect he was too busy coining the cash at the fortune-telling business," said Monty Lowther.

"No, he didn't know the answer," said Trimble. "That's where I caught him out. He had to admit, of course, that I was jolly clever, as soon as he felt my head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then, of course, when he saw that I had caught him," proceeded Trimble, "he trumped up that other yarn about me being a pickpocket!"

Monty Lowther grinned.

"How do you know that the yarn about your cleverness wasn't the one which he trumped up, just to encourage the people?" he asked. "The rest might have been the truth, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble scowled.

"Really, Lowther," he growled, "you ought to know me too well for that!"

"We do know you too well, Baggy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble glared, and strode on. He was not likely to receive much sympathy from the Terrible Three.

"The Man of Mystery seems to have been going it some!" said Tom Merry. "Let's cut along and have a look at him!"

The grey-bearded prophet was still standing at the corner when the chums arrived. He was evidently doing a roaring business answering questions.

The Terrible Three watched for a few minutes.

They had arrived, however, at the tail end of the show. After answering a few more questions, the Man of Mystery consulted his watch, and announced that his meeting was finished.

The chums of the Shell watched him interestedly. Monty Lowther might have

tried to work off a few jokes if he had had the opportunity. But they had arrived too late for that.

"Let's follow him," said Tom Merry, as the man, having packed his belongings into a large brown bag, moved off.

"Good idea!" said Manners. "I want to see where he goes to."

They followed down the side street at a leisurely pace. The man in front turned a corner several yards in front of them. When, however, the Terrible Three came to the spot, they found that he had disappeared.

They ran down the side street, and peered about. There were several alleys, but it was not certain which one the grey-bearded man had taken.

Monty Lowther inquired of a woman who was standing at a doorway whether she had seen an old gentleman with a brown bag.

"Yes," she said. "He went down there."

"Thanks!" said Lowther.

The chums hastened on the track of the Man of Mystery. They found that the alley led into a field, and on the far side they caught a glimpse of the man they sought.

But even at that distance they could see something which startled them. He was taking off his grey beard.

"Come on!" shouted Tom Merry, breaking into a run.

But the chums were too late. The Man of Mystery had already jumped on to a cycle, and was pedalling away at a surprising speed for one so old!

CHAPTER 4.

Trimble Gets Busy.

TOM MERRY & CO. looked at each other blankly.

"He's an impostor," said Monty Lowther. "An old man could not scorch like that!"

"And besides," said Manners, "he pulled his beard off. From what I could see from here, he looked quite a young fellow!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I wonder what he's going about in disguise for?" he muttered. "Perhaps he's dodging the Army!"

"Just about what it is, I'll bet!" said Monty Lowther. "I wish we hadn't lost him just now. We might have had a few words with the old merchant!"

The chums crossed the field, and came out on to the road along which the Man of Mystery had cycled. But that worthy had already disappeared. Evidently he believed in making himself scarce before questions were asked.

The chums made their way thoughtfully back to St. Jim's.

They knew that they had tumbled across something which was not all that it seemed. Tom Merry voiced the general feeling.

"I'm wondering," he said, "why that fellow said that George Folland spent the day boozing?"

"Give it up!" said Lowther. "Just for something to say!"

"Well, I doubt that!" said Tom Merry. "The woman would have been much more pleased if he had said something nice about him, and she would probably have shelled out another bob!"

"Well, what do you think, then?" demanded Manners.

"Don't get excited, old son!" said Tom Merry.

"Rate! I think we were a set of jugglers to go and lose the fellow as we did! We could have found out everything then."

"Of course we could!" said Tom Merry. "But the fact remains that we

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didn't! Now, I reckon that he had some motive for saying that."

"Oh, I don't know! He might have seen him in a pub somewhere."

"Don't believe that," said Lowther. "I had a yarn with the chap once, and he's a total abstainer."

"Then how do you account for it?" said Manners crossly. "Think he's gifted with second sight!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Course I don't!" he said. "We've found out that he's an impostor, to start with. And if he comes anywhere round here again, I'm going to have a talk with him."

They walked on towards St. Jim's in silence, and arrived just at tea-time. There were a good number of fellows in Big Hall for the meal. The sky had filled with dark clouds, and there was every prospect of a big storm.

The Terrible Three went up into the study after tea, and got on with their prep. Then they made their way down to the junior Common-room.

The voice of Baggy Trimble floated out of the door as they approached.

Tom Merry grinned. He caught some of the words.

"Come and listen to Baggy!" he said. "He's going to be amusing!"

The Terrible Three entered the door way. Baggy Trimble was standing in front of the fire, addressing a large crowd of amused juniors. Not that Baggy intended to be amusing. He was looking very serious. But the juniors evidently were not taking him as seriously as he took himself.

"I can tell by the bumps on a chap's head exactly what he's going to be!" said Baggy.

Monty Lowther laughed.

"That's nothing!" he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I can tell by the bumps on a chap's head what he's been doing!" said Lowther.

"It's impossible!" howled Baggy.

"I've got a book about it, and I know just where all the bumps are. You can't tell the past."

"Oh, yes, I can!" said Lowther quietly.

"Just let me show you! Now, you see that big bump on Baggy's head, you fellows? Well, I can tell from that that he biffed himself on to a lamp-post or something like that, this afternoon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy glared.

"I wish you wouldn't try to be funny, Lowther," he said peevishly. "I don't mean that sort of bump!"

"No?"

"I mean the other sort. They're kind of bulges, and it wants a jolly clever chap to read them!"

Monty Lowther grinned.

"Then it wants a clever chap to read that bump on your waistcoat!" he said.

"Eh?"

"I think I could do it," said Lowther, with mock seriousness. "Now, I should say that you've scoffed about three times your allowance of grub to get that bulge!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors laughed heartily. Baggy Trimble's face was a study. He could not make himself understood.

"I wish you'd stop rotting, Lowther!" he howled. "I'm trying to give a proper demonstration. I'm offering to read any chap's bumps, and tell him what he's fit for!"

"And if he's fit for nothing you'll give him a few—eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes—I mean no; certainly not!" howled Baggy. "I'm a jolly clever chap at this job!"

"Go on!"

"A chap read my head this afternoon

in Wayland," explained Baggy to the crowd. "The fellow called himself the Man of Mystery, and he was a jolly cute chap. He said that I'd make a good schoolmaster."

"Eh?"

"Or that I should study to be an analyst."

Monty Lowther held up his hands in assumed horror.

"Said that you ought to study to be an Ananias, Baggy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors thought that the process was frightfully unnecessary.

"My dear Baggy," said Monty Lowther, "you wouldn't have to study to do that. You could teach Ananias!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble went crimson.

"I said an analyst!" he howled. "He's a chap who finds out what things are made of."

"Such as tinned fruit, and that sort of stuff!" said Lowther. "You could do that fine, Baggy! You've analysed some of the grub out of our study when you got the chance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you wouldn't rot!" roared Baggy, quite losing his temper. "I'm offering to read any fellow's bumps! A chap told me this afternoon that I was jolly clever, so you know you'll be in safe hands. I only charge sixpence a time."

"So that's the wheeze, is it?" said Tom Merry. "Well, you'll soon be in safe hands yourself, Baggy. Let's give the swindling rotter a few more bumps—on the floor!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble was yanked up, and deposited on the floor with a crash.

"Yarooogh!" he roared.

"That's the bump of truthfulness, which you hadn't got before!" explained Tom Merry blandly.

Bump!

"Groooogh!" roared Baggy.

"That's the bump of honesty!" said Tom. "I don't think that you had that one!"

"Ooo-er! Yooop! Leggo, you beasts!" howled the fat junior.

But Tom Merry & Co. were enjoying the good work on Baggy's behalf, and they did not stop until they had added all the talents which he lacked.

CHAPTER 5.

A Loan.

"WHO says a stroll through the woods?"

It was on the half-holiday following that on which the

St. Jim's juniors had met the Man of Mystery.

That personage, however, had been almost forgotten. He had raised doubts in the juniors' minds at the time; but, having heard nothing further about him, the Terrible Three had ceased to speculate about the mystery.

"I'm game!" said Manners. "There's no footer on, and it's not worth while mooching about the school."

"Same here," said Lowther. "When we get fed-up with the woods we can go on into Wayland for tea."

"Right!" said Tom.

A quarter of an hour later the trio set out, and made in the direction of the woods. It was always a pleasant walk. And they were sheltered there from the wind, which was cold and penetrating.

"Seen anything of the crippled fellow lately?" asked Tom suddenly.

The earnest to Wayland had suddenly reminded him of the Man of Mystery and the widow's story.

"N," said Manners. "He—

Halk! Why, there he is!"

Tom looked ahead, and he saw a little crippled man making his way towards them.

The Terrible Three paused as George Folland came up. He was very round-shouldered, and walked with a pronounced limp. But, for all that, his face was cheery now as he looked at the boys.

"Good-afternoon, George!" said Tom. "Good-afternoon, young gentlemen!" returned the cripple. "Hope you're all right!"

"Fit as fiddles, thanks! How are you?"

A shade crossed the cripple's face.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I'm in trouble," he said. "To be quite candid with you, I've come to beg money!"

"Beg money!" ejaculated Tom.

"Yes. I know it sounds like impertinence on my part, but you young gentlemen have known me for a long time. I don't get up to anything that's wrong. But things have gone badly with me lately."

"Sorry to hear that," said Lowther sympathetically, though he could guess what was coming.

"My mother has been supplying me with cash, you see," said the cripple. "But the other day some fellow told her a rotten story about me, and what do you think that she believes?"

"What?"

"That I spend it in drinking and gambling," said the cripple miserably. "She ought to know well enough that I do nothing of the sort! But I could not explain things to her."

"Why not?" said Lowther. "You could soon have shown her it was wrong, couldn't you?"

"That's just where the hard part of it comes in," said George. "With all due respect to my mother, who is one of the best, she can't help talking. All Wayland would know what I'm doing if I told her, and that would never do!"

There was a short pause.

"I suppose you're working on something secretly, then," said Tom Merry, "and you must have money to carry it on?"

"That's just it!" said George eagerly. "I've reached a critical stage in the ex—in the work, and now I haven't got any money to go on with. I hate cagging, and all that sort of thing, but I must have money somehow!"

"Won't you tell us what it is?" asked Manners.

George hesitated.

"It was nearly given away by a partner of mine," he said slowly, "and I swore then that I would tell no one until my work was complete. I knew it's asking a lot; but if you young gentlemen could trust me for—for a fortnight at the most—I could prove to you that the money was being well invested."

Tom Merry thrust his hand into his pocket.

"I had a remittance from Miss Fawcett this morning," he said. "Rather lucky I did. Will ten bob be any good, George?"

"It will buy exactly what I want!" said the cripple, with shining eyes.

"Take it, then!" said Tom. "I hope you're successful!"

"I'm more than obliged, Master Merry!" said the cripple gratefully. "And I'm glad to know that you trust me. You'll keep mum about this, won't you? Not a word to a soul!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom cheerily. "Let's know if anything comes of it!"

"Something is bound to come of it," said the cripple. "I am only completing things now ready for trial. Thank you very much for the help, Master Merry. You'll excuse me leaving you now, won't you? I want to get on with the work."



The Hunchback's Secret!
(See Chapter 6.)

"Certainly!" said Tom. "Good-bye!"

The Terrible Three watched the cripple make his way swiftly among the trees and disappear from sight.

"I'm glad you had the oof to help George, Tom!" said Manners. "I'd have done the same if I'd been able to."

"Yes; I think he's dead straight!" said Tom. "And what he says about his mother is quite true. She is very fond of talking. The way she told us all about him the other day was rather funny."

"Just what I thought at the time," said Lowther. "Well, come on, you fellows. I'm freezing!"

The juniors resumed their walk at a brisker pace. They reached Wayland, and went to a quiet little tea-shop, where a satisfying meal could be obtained without evading the orders of the Food Controller.

"Shall we get back through the woods?" asked Tom Merry, as they came out of the shop.

"May as well," said Manners.

CHAPTER 6. The Secret of the Cave.

MANNERS led the way back through the woods. He had a notion of exploring.

He branched off to the left after they had followed the main path for about a hundred yards, and, scrambling over some broken ground, reached a little overgrown path which wound darkly away amongst the trees.

"This is jolly pretty!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I'm rather glad we came this way!"

The three pressed on quickly. The path was gloomy, but wildly beautiful. It was evidently very little used.

Suddenly Manners, who was on in front, stopped. As Tom Merry and Lowther came up, he pointed to the bushes at the side.

"See how they're smashed down?" he asked. "That means that someone

breaks through there pretty often. I wonder if there's a path?"

"But it won't lead us anywhere, you duffer!" Tom Merry protested.

"We've got plenty of time to explore, haven't we?" demanded Manners.

"Yes; but what do we want to explore for? Think we're going to find a gold-mine?"

"Oh, give the duffer his head!" said Lowther. "Perhaps he'll find a sugar-tree, and get a price from the Food Controller for it!"

Manners grinned, and broke through the bushes. His two chums, following him, found that he was on a little winding path, which ran down the side of a small hill and suddenly disappeared.

"No go!" said Tom. "You've drawn blank here, Henry!"

But Manners went on for a few feet, and suddenly he turned on excited face to his chums.

"There's a little cave down here!" he said, in excitement. "Come and see what it is!"

The chums followed him down the slope. At the bottom, concealed by overhanging bushes, was the mouth of a little limestone cave, lit by the flickering rays of a light.

Manners advanced towards the entrance, but as he did so there was a rustle from within, and the uncouth form of the cripple came out into the open.

The deformed man sprang to his feet with a shout of rage.

"Spies!" he roared. "So I've caught you—eh?"

The Terrible Three paused, dumb-founded.

"You have tracked me to find out what my secret is—eh?" snarled the cripple. "That's a fine thing to do! By Harry, I'll make you pay for this! I'll—"

He broke off suddenly, and his face underwent a change. The Terrible Three had been so taken off their guard that they had not yet found their tongues.

"I'm sorry for that!" said George. "I'm forgetting myself! Work, work, work all the day long drives a fellow near to craziness!"

"It must do," said Tom Merry quietly. "As a matter of fact, I'm sorry we've found you here. We didn't track you here at all!"

"No, I know that," said George quickly. "I'm a cad to think of you!" "We've been into Wayland for tea," said Tom, "and coming back through the woods, we did a bit of exploring. This is where we found ourselves."

"Of course, of course!" said George. "I quite understand!"

"If we're in the way we'll buzz off!" said Manners. "We don't want to be a nuisance, if you're busy!"

"Oh, you're not a nuisance!" said George. "Don't think of going now. I've tried to keep this place a secret, and I've done so till now. No one has suspected that I worked in this cave all day."

"No?" "There are very few people ever come about here, and hardly any get down in this hollow. Even then, they do not trouble about the cave. There are any number of limestone caves about here—many a good deal larger than this."

He paused. The chums realised that the cripple was trying to pass the situation off as lightly as possible. But they knew, all the same, that it was costing George a tremendous effort.

"Look here, George!" said Tom Merry suddenly. "We quite see what we've done. We didn't intend to spy, and we're sorry that we came here at all and interrupted you. We'll give you our word not to say anything to anyone about this."

"You will?" asked the cripple eagerly. "Yes!" said the three together. "That's good of you!" said George. "And now, as you have discovered so much and trusted me with your money, I may as well tell you the rest."

"I am engaged on chemical experiments in this cave. I have been working for months past on a new explosive which I thought out while I was employed in a munition factory. That explosive is practically ready for trial now, and all that I am doing is manufacturing a sufficient amount to prove all that I claim for it. It was to buy the ingredients that I borrowed the money from you."

"Yes?" The Terrible Three were very interested now.

"When I started," George pursued at length, "I took a partner, to whom I partly told my plans, but not enough, fortunately, to give the whole secret away. He tried to play me false, and about that time I began to suspect that he had German interests."

"You'd be bored, young gentlemen, if I told you the whole story. In the end, it came to my refusal to work any more with him. At first he was angry. Then he made me an offer for the secret, but I was quite determined, though poor, to carry it through myself."

"Soon after that," the cripple proceeded, "he made an attack on the little laboratory that I worked in in an old cottage which we had rented between us for the experiment. This happened at night, but I was well barred in, and I drove him off by threatening to throw some acid at him. You see, I can't defend myself very well otherwise."

"Of course not," said Tom Merry, as the cripple looked up with a wry little smile.

"The next day my partner came to see me again, and when I taxed him with trying to break into the laboratory, he—

swore that he knew nothing about it. He offered me a more handsome price than ever for the invention; but, feeling that I should be touching German gold if I accepted it, I refused. Of course, I had no real proof that he was a Hun—it was only what I suspected."

"I think you were wise if there was any doubt about it," said Manners.

"I think I was," said the cripple. "Well, anyway, after that I took due precautions, and moved all the stuff down to this cave one night, and continued work here. I left the cottage locked up, climbing out of a small window, which I shut after me. It was broken into by someone, and ransacked the next night."

"Great Scott!"

"So you see the need for secrecy," said George, in conclusion.

"Rather!" echoed the three. "Rely on us to keep as mum as oysters!"

They departed a little later, for it was getting dark. As they went, they discussed the business amongst themselves.

CHAPTER 7.

Setting Up in Business.

THE Terrible Three entered the junior Common-room a little later. D'Arcy met them at the door.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Tom Merry genially. "What's the rag now?"

"Heard about Trimble, deah boy?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"No."

"Bai Jove! Haven't you heard about his foathune-tellin' stunt?"

"Course I haven't, you dummy!" retorted Tom Merry. "How should I? I've been out all the afternoon."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you are vewwy wude!" said Gussy. "I shall wewuse to say anything more if you continue to talk like that."

"What on earth is the ass gassing about?" groaned Tom. "What's Trimble done now?"

"Has he told your fortune, Gussy?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Well, yaas. I did have sixpenny-worth, just to see what the ass was doin'," explained D'Arcy.

"Didn't you look in the glass to see what the ass was doing?" inquired Lowther sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Gussy flushed.

"Weally, Lowthah," he protested, "if you fellows continue to make these wotten jokes I shall have to administah a feaful thwashin' to somebody!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Well, tell us about Trimble!" said Tom.

"Trimble's tellin' foathunes," said Gussy.

"You've said that once!" growled Tom.

Monty Lowther interposed blandly. "Does he tell fortunes?" he asked.

"He pwofesses to."

"Did he tell yours?"

"Yaas, he twied to," said Gussy unspectingly.

"And did he say that you were suddenly going to be dropped on the floor?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove, no!"

"Then Trimble is an impostor!" said Monty Lowther, shaking his head sadly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors in the Common-room laughed. It suddenly dawned on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that his aristocratic leg had been pulled.

"Weally, Lowthah," protested the swell of the Fourth. "I don't see how even a pwopah fortune-tellah could have forescen that I was goin' to be dropped on the flooah!"

"Shall we show him?" asked Monty Lowther, in a low voice.

Tom Merry nodded, and suddenly stooped. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt himself whirled into the air in the grip of three strong pairs of hands, and bumped solemnly.

"Yawwooooh!" he roared.

The Terrible Three drew back as Gussy scrambled to his feet.

"Now go and tell Trimble that he's a fraud," said Monty Lowther.

Gussy's face was crimson.

"I shall weally have to administah—"

But Herries and Digby seized him by the arms.

"Come away, you chump!" growled Herries. "Can't you see that they're pulling your leg?"

Gussy was led away under protest.

"What's all this gas about Trimble?" asked Tom Merry, turning to Kangaroo.

Kangaroo grinned.

"It's quite true," he said. "Trimble's been thinking things out, and he doesn't see why he shouldn't be a second Man of Mystery!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So, he's started a fortune-telling bureau in Study No. 2," said Kangaroo. "He's been at it all the evening. He charges sixpence a time for a reading, and he tells you what all the bumps on your head mean."

"My only aunt!" gasped Tom Merry. "Spoofig bouncer! I thought we'd knocked that idea out of his head the other day!"

"Don't seem to have done," said Kangaroo. "He's stuck a notice on the door, and is trying to look like a wise old owl. I think he's pretty hungry. He'll give you a fine reading for a tanner."

Monty Lowther grinned.

"I suppose he'll tell you that you were going to be Prime Minister for about two bob," he suggested.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Has he done much business?" asked Tom Merry.

"Only Gussy," grinned Kangaroo.

"Gussy went in to have the future told, and he got good value for his money. Trimble told him all sorts of rot. But Gussy wasn't satisfied."

"No?"

"Trimble told him that Gussy was going to lend a good-looking, stout fellow half a dollar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And did he?"

Kangaroo laughed.

"Gussy wasn't quite green enough. But he'd paid his sixpence before the reading started. As soon as Gussy came out, Trimble closed the shop while he went and spent the tanner."

The Terrible Three exchanged grins.

"Let's go and see this merchant," said Tom Merry. "We'll give him a bit of encouragement!"

"Rather!" said Manners.

Monty Lowther said nothing. But he thought quite a lot.

Trimble's door was open, and there were several fellows standing outside, watching the amateur fortune-teller, who waited the arrival of his clients with an anxious and hungry look.

"Like a great fat spider asking 'em to roll in to his web!" grinned Levison, as the Terrible Three came along the passage.

Monty Lowther wore a very serious air. He stooped at the door, and drew out a pencil. Then he surveyed the notice which Trimble had pasted on to the woodwork.

It ran:

"The Man of Mystery!

The Man who can Tell Anything!

Roll in! 6d. a Reading!"

Monty Lowther made a few alterations

with his pencil, and Tom Merry, craning forward, read the altered notice to the crowd.

"The Man of Misery!

The Man who can Scoff at Anything!

Rolls it in! 6d. a Feeding!"

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

Trimble scowled through the doorway. "If you fellows don't wish to avail yourselves of my talented services," he said peevishly, "you might get out of the way, and not stop customers from coming in!"

"Where are the customers, Baggy?" asked Lowther.

"They—they'll be coming presently," said Baggy lamely. "I—Someone's coming now!"

A heavy step sounded down the passage, and George Alfred Grundy strode into the study. He sat down easily in a chair.

"Are you a fortune-teller, Baggy?" he asked.

"Y-y-es, Grundy," assented the fat junior.

"Then tell my fortune," said Grundy calmly.

CHAPTER 8.

Grundy's Cure.

BAGGY TRIMBLE hesitated. "Do you want your bumps told or your future read?" he asked nervously.

Grundy glared at him.

"Both!" he snapped.

"And not too short at the back, please!" said Lowther from the doorway.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble hesitated.

"The charge is sixpence each, you know, Grundy," he suggested.

"I know that," said George Alfred Grundy. "I've heard all about you in the Common-room. You'll got your money when you've finished."

"I always take money first!" said Trimble firmly.

"Well, you won't have it first this time."

"Then I refuse to tell your fortune!"

"You've got to!" said Grundy calmly.

"I'm down on quacks, and I'm determined to come down on any that I discover with a heavy hand. Of course, if you can do what you say you can I'll pay you."

Trimble hesitated.

"You said something about mind-reading, didn't you?" asked Grundy, after a pause.

"Yes; I do it a bit," admitted Trimble, turning rapidly to a page in his book of instructions which dealt with that subject.

"Then read mine!" said Grundy abruptly.

"You're thinking," said Trimble artfully, "that you're just going to pay me a bob!"

"Wrong!" said Grundy triumphantly. "I'm thinking that I'm just going to punch your nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble hesitated. He glanced desperately round the room. But there was no escape for him. And it was equally certain that Grundy intended to carry out his threats if he did not get satisfaction.

"I'll read your bumps first!" said Trimble desperately.

"Right!" said Grundy. "Get on with it!"

Trimble turned over the pages of his book of instructions, and looked earnestly at a large chart of the human head, divided into sections like the counties on a map of England. These were all numbered, and underneath was a lot of ex-

planatory matter referring to the numbers.

Trimble placed his hand on Grundy's head and started feeling.

"Washed your paws lately?" snapped Grundy.

"Y-y-es, of course!" returned Trimble, starting violently.

"Then don't waste time!" ordered Grundy. "I'm busy. I know all about myself, and I know all my strong points. If you don't tell me correctly I'll jolly well biff you!"

Had Trimble been wise he would have seen that he had the chance of a lifetime. Grundy had a very high opinion of himself, and everyone knew it from experience. Trimble could have told Grundy quite a lot that would have pleased him, and sent him away in a satisfied frame of mind. But Trimble was flustered, and he trusted to the chart, with its vague lettering and indistinct print.

He mauled Grundy's head for a few seconds, and then turned to the book.

"You've got a big bump there," he said. "Let's see! No. 8. That's the bump of dishonesty!"

"What?" roared Grundy.

Trimble looked at the chart again.

"No; that's a mistake!" he said quickly. "That means love of animals."

"But don't take it for granted that he loves you, Baggy!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get on with the reading!" roared Grundy.

Grundy was getting impatient. Trimble became more flustered.

"There's a dent here," he said. "It's a very pronounced one. That means that you lack something very strongly." He consulted the chart. "That one stands for reasoning powers."

"Correct!" cried Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy leapt to his feet angrily.

"Me-me lack reasoning powers?" he howled.

"No; t-that's not right!" said Trimble hastily. "I've made a mistake, Grundy. Let me get on with it!"

Grundy sat down in a very savage frame of mind. The juniors outside the door were grinning in anticipation.

Trimble started fumbling Grundy's head for some more prominent landmarks. He discovered a bump where Grundy had knocked himself on the door that day, and located its exact position.

He turned to the chart and compared it very carefully. As his finger rested on the spot his blood seemed to freeze. Grundy got up quietly and looked over his shoulder. He saw the spot that Trimble was pointing to.

"A brute by nature!" he howled. "So that's what you've discovered—eh?"

"Found it out a long time ago, Grundy!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"I reckon Trimble's a jolly good fortune-teller! Don't you?"

Grundy seized the unfortunate junior by the shoulders and shook him until his teeth chattered.

"You're a confounded impostor!" he howled. "I guessed you were before I came. And you intended to swindle me out of sixpence for telling me that rot!"

"G-g-g-g-g-g-gug!" shivered Baggy.

"I'm down on all quacks!" pursued George Alfred Grundy relentlessly. "So I intend to cure you of fortune-telling for good!"

Baggy Trimble blinked.

"Hold out your hand, Trimble!" he said. "I'm going to tell your fortune now. You'll soon see that I'm a jolly sight better at the game than you are!"

"I won't!" growled Baggy desperately. "I read your bumps all right. It's the book that's wrong!"

"Hold your hand out!" thundered Grundy.

Trimble looked at the Shell fellow, and suddenly decided to carry out orders. He held out his hand.

Grundy took it, and peered at it intently.

"Never saw such a grubby paw in my life!" he growled.

"Perhaps that's because of the state of your head!" explained Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'd come out and lick you if I wasn't too busy!" said Grundy. "But I'm dealing with Trimble now. There's a line that runs right across his hand. It means that a big and able fellow is going to give him the thrashing of his life for telling whoppers, and trying to swindle fellows out of their tanners."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroooooh!" roared Trimble, in anticipation of what was coming.

Grundy picked up a cricket-stump, and, swinging Baggy round, brought the stump across his fat person with considerable force.

"Yooooop!" roared Baggy. "Ooo-er! Stoppit! Yaroooooh!"

But Grundy, having taken Trimble's reformation in hand, meant to see it through.

And he did!

CHAPTER 9.

Tom Merry Thinks.

THE Terrible Three remained to watch the execution.

They did so in order to see that Trimble had fair play, and did not get more than his deserts. But Grundy was not unmerciful. He realised the fat junior's weakness, and Grundy was not a bully, though some fellows did think him one.

Trimble roared as the stump descended.

"Yooooop! Yaroooooh!" he howled.

"I think you've had enough," said Grundy, as he flung the stump into the corner. "But if you start any more fortune-telling, Trimble, I shall come and give you another licking!"

"Wow-wow!" moaned Trimble.

"You're like all the rest of the fortune-tellers," said Grundy. "You're a fraud from start to finish!"

He slammed the door behind him, and strode down the passage. Monty Lowther whistled a few bars of "See the Conquering Hero Comes," but Grundy took no notice. The Terrible Three grinned, and retired to their own study.

"Look here, you fellows," said Tom Merry, as the door shut. "I've been thinking!"

"Never!" ejaculated Lowther.

"Did it hurt much?" asked Manners.

"Nothing to speak of," said Tom, grinning. "Trimble styling himself as the Man of Mystery reminded me of that other merchant we saw in Wayland. Have either of you heard any more about him?"

Manners shook his head.

"Well, several curious things have struck me lately," said Tom Merry.

"Hope they haven't injured you!" said Lowther anxiously.

"B-r-r-r-r!"

"Well, get on with the washing!" said Manners.

"Have you decided yet why the Man of Mystery wanted to tell the widow that her son spent the day boozing and gambling and all that sort of thing?"

"No," said Manners.

"Well, there must be some reason."

"I thought we came to the conclusion that it was beyond us!" said Manners.

"He might have invented it merely for something to say."

"I don't think he did," said Tom.

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wisely. "We said at the time that there might be some doubt about it, and that George might really have been boozing. But the explanation that he gave us today clears all of that up."

"That's right!"

"We also know that, instead of wasting his money, he's been working on an invention of real national importance."

"Right again!"

"Well," said Tom, "don't you chumps begin to see daylight?"

"Hanged if I see what you're driving at!" growled Lowther.

Tom Merry smiled patiently.

"I'll have another shot," he said. "What was the effect of the old lady hearing that her son was wasting her money?"

"Why, she stopped it!" said Lowther.

"And that, in its turn, stopped him going on with his work," said Tom Merry. "See anything now?"

Manners shook his head.

"Dense!" said Tom pityingly. "Look here! Suppose a fellow wanted to stop George Folland getting on with his job, could he hit on an easier way than stopping his money?"

"I suppose he couldn't!"

"Glad you can follow me so far!" said Tom Merry. "I'm going to startle you now. The next part of the mystery is the Man of Mystery himself. In my opinion, he is a proper man of mystery!"

"Well, we saw him taking off his disguise," said Manners. "That looked rather fishy. He was a young-looking fellow, and there isn't any reason, so far as I can see, why he shouldn't be in the Army."

"I don't suppose there is any reason," said Tom Merry. "Otherwise, why should he go about disguised?"

"Give it up!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, I'll go a little bit farther!" said Tom Merry. "Suppose that fellow knew George Folland, and wanted to stop him completing the invention! How would he do it?"

"Same way as the Man of Mystery did!" said Lowther suddenly. "I think I see what you're driving at now, Tom."

"Glad you do! It's about time! This is my notion. The Man of Mystery knew George Folland quite well, and he told the rotten lie about him drinking and gambling to arouse his mother's suspicions and stop his allowance!"

Manners whistled.

"That's a pretty good flight of imagination," he said. "You haven't got much to back it up!"

"I've got a lot!" said Tom slowly. "The Man of Mystery must have known George Folland and his family pretty well to be able to give that description of him which he wrote on the piece of paper!"

"My aunt! So he must!" ejaculated Manners.

The chums looked at each other. Things were becoming clearer.

"Who is this wretched Man of Mystery, do you think?" inquired Manners presently.

Tom Merry shrugged.

"Can't say definitely until we catch him!" he returned. "But I've got a pretty shrewd idea who he is! You remember that story which George told us about his dishonest partner, don't you?"

"Yes!"

"Well, it might be that merchant," said Tom. "In fact, I can't think of a more likely person. He would know George, and as he has made offers for the invention, it would just suit him to get the allowance stopped, and so hinder the work."

"Yes," said Manners eagerly. "And if the money was stopped, George might

get fed up, and decide to sell the invention, after all."

"Course he might!" agreed Tom Merry. "I think we're getting on well! What do you think about it, Monty?"

"Well, nothing's proved, of course," said Monty Lowther slowly. "But I believe there's something in what you say, Tom. It explains everything pretty well, and it's about the only way that you can explain it. But why is the chap going round on this wangle?"

There was a short pause. Manners suddenly smacked his hand on his leg.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed. "You remember that George said that he suspected his partner of having German interests?"

"Yes?"

"Well, that probably means that he's a German spy. If he's the same person as the Man of Mystery, it means that Johnny is a German spy!"

"Go on!"

"A fortune-teller gets heaps of opportunities of extracting information from weak-minded people. So fortune-telling is just the sort of thing that the partner might be expected to go in for."

"And he merely took the opportunity, when he was in Wayland, of putting a spoke in George's wheel!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "By Jove, I believe that we've got it all now!"

The Terrible Three exchanged meaningful looks.

It certainly seemed as though they had got to the bottom of the mystery.

CHAPTER 10.

The Advertisement.

"MY hat!" ejaculated Manners. Monty Lowther whistled.

"It seems as plain as a pike-staff!" he said. "Do you think it's the truth?"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't think of anything that fits the case better!" he said. "If the Man of Mystery ain't George Folland's late rotten partner, who on earth is he?"

"Goodness knows!"

The chums were silent for a few minutes.

"Look here," said Tom Merry at length. "We've got to do something. All this is only supposition, but we can't afford to forget the fact that it might be true. We want to get hold of that Man of Mystery again."

"Haven't heard any more about him since he was in Wayland," said Manners.

"I expect he'll give this place a wide berth now!"

"Don't see any reason why he should," said Tom Merry. "We could soon get him here again, if we tried."

"How?"

"Work some scheme out to rouse his curiosity!"

"No savvy!"

"Well, chumps," said Tom Merry, "we know that if he's the man we think, he's interested in George Folland. How about putting an advertisement in the paper saying that Mrs. Folland wants to see him particularly? He'd think it was something to do with the invention, and he'd be down here like a shot!"

Monty Lowther grinned.

"That's a good wheeze," he said. "He'll be waiting to see if his scheme to ruin George has come to anything."

"But suppose he wasn't the man we think?" said Manners. "We'd look fat-heads!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No young man has got any right going about in disguise as an old fellow like that," he said. "I reckon he's a shirker, if nothing worse!"

"By Jove, you're right there, Tom!" exclaimed Manners. "Shall we nip over

to Wayland on our bikes to-morrow night and see Mrs. Folland?"

"Rather!" said Tom.

And they did so.

They came to the cottage where the widow lived in a few minutes, and, dismounting, knocked at the door. Mrs. Folland answered it.

"Good-evening, ma'am!" said Tom Merry politely, as he raised his cap. "We've come over to see you on something rather important. Could we have a word with you?"

"Certainly!" said the widow. "I'm fearfully lonely here, and George still goes out every day. Come into the parlour!"

The Terrible Three followed the widow into the house.

"We wanted to ask you, ma'am," said Tom Merry, as the door shut, "whether you've seen any more of that fellow who called himself the Man of Mystery?"

The widow shook her head.

"No," she said. "I wish I had. He was such a clever fellow, and what he said was so true!"

"Do you still believe what he said about George?"

The woman sighed.

"To tell you the truth, I don't know what to think," she said. "I have stopped George's money, and yet he goes on just the same. And I cannot really bring myself to think it of George."

"It's not true, ma'am!" said Tom Merry quietly. "We've seen George since then, and he told us as a great secret what he was doing. Of course, we told him that we wouldn't say a word about it to anyone. But it's nothing like drinking or gambling."

"Then what is it?" asked Mrs. Folland.

"We can't explain now, ma'am," said Tom Merry. "You see, it would be breaking a confidence. But you'd be willing to trust our word, wouldn't you?"

"Certainly," said the widow. "That was why I spoke to you the other day, Master Merry. I have heard about you, and nothing that was not good!"

"I see," said Tom hastily. "Well, ma'am, we've come to ask you to do us a favour. It's really only a small thing, but, you see, we've discovered certain things lately, and if you'll do what we're going to ask, you'll probably understand all about George very soon!"

The woman laughed.

"You've very mysterious, Master Merry!" she said. "What is it you want me to do?"

"We want you to advertise to see the Man of Mystery again!"

"But he wouldn't come here specially to see me, surely?" asked Mrs. Folland. "He would charge a lot."

"To come here, he might," said Tom Merry. "But he hasn't been to Rylcombe yet. This is the advertisement which I want you to give us your permission to publish."

He drew a piece of paper from his pocket. Mrs. Folland read it through.

"To the M. of M.," it ran. "When do you visit Rylcombe? Must see you urgently.—Mrs. F."

"That," said Tom, "would go in the agony column of the 'Daily Messenger,' and he would be sure to read it. Then he could publish his reply the next day."

"But he doesn't know my name," said the woman. "He would never understand that!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"We believe that he does," he said quietly. "If he answers this, it will show that he is the man we think he is."

The widow looked at the Terrible Three in perplexity.

"The fact is, ma'am," said Monty

Lowther, "we discovered that he is a young man in disguise."

"Never!"

"It's a fact," said Tom Merry. "So you see, ma'am, that we've got something to work on. Are you willing that the advertisement should appear?"

The widow paused.

"But if the man is an impostor I don't want to see him again!" she said, with a frown.

"No need to," laughed Tom Merry. "You see, all we want is for him to come to Rylcombe, so that we can see him again."

"Then put the advertisement in by all means!" said Mrs. Folland quickly. "I have been terribly worried by what that man said, and I still feel that I half believe it. He was so convincing. But I trust you boys—I believe you are straight!"

"Thank you, ma'am!"

"And if you can do anything to clear up the mystery, and relieve my mind about George, I shall always be grateful to you!"

"Rely on us!" said Tom Merry, as he took up his cap. "We'll find out something!"

And the Terrible Three took their departure in high spirits. There were further plans now to be planned.

CHAPTER 11.

Prophecies.

"**H**ERE'S a reply!" Tom Merry spoke the words quickly. He was just looking through a copy of the "Daily Messenger."

"Really?" asked Manners.

It was two days since the widow had given permission for the advertisement to appear, and the Terrible Three had had the satisfaction of seeing their advertisement duly appear in the agony column.

But they had certainly not expected a reply—if any—as quickly as this.

Manners glanced down the agony column, and then grinned.

"Mrs. F., ran the reply. 'Visiting Rylcombe at 4 p.m. next Wednesday.—M. of M.'"

Tom Merry grinned.

"The merry spoofer comes like a lamb to the slaughter!" he said. "All we have to do now is to unmask him."

Manners rubbed his chin.

"Well, how are you going to do it?" he asked.

Tom Merry grinned.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I never expected that the fellow would reply. But I thought out a rattling good wheeze the other day to work on him."

"Got on with the washing, then!"

"Well, what we want to do," said Tom, "is to pull his disguise off!"

"Correct, old son!"

"And you fellows are quite convinced that we shall be acting properly in unmasking him?"

"Course we are!" growled Lowther.

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"Suppose, then," said Tom Merry, "that we got the rascal a very bad name with the good people of Rylcombe, and left it to them to mob him!"

"That would be all right," said Manners. "But if he started prophesying, and impressed the yokels, they'd rag us as soon as we started anything."

"Quite so! Then, how," said Tom Merry, in a very deep voice, "do you think I should look as the Man of Mystery?"

"What?"

"Suppose I told you that the Man of Mystery will pay a preliminary visit to Rylcombe early on Wednesday, just to make himself unpopular?"



The Man of Mystery at Rylcombe!

(See Chapter 12.)

Manners looked at Monty Lowther and tapped his head significantly.

"Does take 'em sudden," agreed Lowther, with a grin.

Tom Merry frowned.

"Asses!" he growled. "Can't you put two and two together?"

Manners looked at him hopelessly.

"If you think the fellow's going to be such a mug as that," he said, "you're right off the track."

Tom Merry snorted.

"Spose I'll have to tell you everything in detail," he said. "In the first place, we've got a jolly good stock of theatrical costumes belonging to the Amateurs, haven't we?"

"Yes?"

"Then, what's to prevent me dressing up as the Man of Mystery, and going into Rylcombe about two o'clock on Wednesday?"

Manners grinned.

"Only one thing," said Manners. "You couldn't do it! It's above your weight! Monty might, though."

"I don't care who does it," said Tom Merry. "Don't you see that if one of us impersonated the Man of Mystery before he got there on Wednesday, and pulled all their legs, we could be sure that he'll get a jolly good reception when he does turn up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three grinned broadly at the idea got hold of them.

"Of course, you'll have to leave it to me," said Lowther. "I can do it all right!"

"Perhaps!" said Tom Merry. "Still, I don't mind your having a shot at it."

"Then, I'll turn up as the Man of Mystery about two o'clock on Wednesday, and we'll give 'em a nice little surprise. I'll tell 'em some dreadful fortunes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here," said Manners suddenly.

"I've got a better wheeze than that. Why not only tell one or two fortunes,

and then sell 'em some sealed packages at a tanner a time?"

"And when they get 'em home," finished Lowther, "they'll find that they're blanks, or something jolly insulting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three chortled.

The idea seemed to promise excellent results, and, as Wednesday was drawing near, they did not lose any time in getting on with the scheme.

The costumes of the Junior Amateur Dramatic Society were sorted out, and Monty Lowther discovered a complete rig-out, which would enable him to impersonate the Man of Mystery.

After that the Terrible Three set to work writing out some of the prophecies which they intended to sell to the gullible folk of Rylcombe. Monty Lowther excelled at it. Lowther was a humorist, and he had proper scope for his talent now.

"How's this?" he asked suddenly, while the three were busy writing.

He read out what he had written:

"My advice, if you want to rise in the world, is to go up in an airship. If you are tired of walking about, about, and get a little hoarse. If you meet a tall, fair man, pay your money, and go into the fair. If you are too fat, and don't like it, report to the Food Bureau. This is a good sixpennyworth, isn't it—eh? Tell me if you don't like it, though I don't suppose you'll see me again in Rylcombe.—The Man of Mystery."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Merry and Manners.

"I think it will raise the ire of some of the good people of Rylcombe!" said Lowther, with a grin. "But we'll have to wrap these things up in several sheets of paper, so that they can't open them before I have time to escape."

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "Look here; we'll wrap them up well, and then when you sell them you can give them strict instructions not to open them until

they get home. Give them plenty of jaw to start with."

"Rely on me!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Then, after you've done the jaw you can read my bumps, and do a few marvellous stunts which we'll prepare beforehand," proceeded Tom. "And, after you've got 'em up to a proper pitch of excitement, you can sell 'em the sealed packets. Got it?"

"You bet!" chuckled Lowther.

"But don't delay things at all. Sell as much as you can in about five minutes, and then pack up. You can pop into a field and pull the disguise off. Then we'll come back into the village and watch the fun."

"Good idea!" said Manners. "There's only one thing, though. We don't want to pinch their tanners. That's the sort of thing that Trimble would do, but it's not in our line!"

"No," agreed Lowther. "The jace is all we want. Look here, we'll send them to the Red Cross Society or the Soldiers' and Sailors' Buffet, at Victoria. There's plenty of deserving objects that want cash."

"That will do it," said Tom Merry. "Well, we've got to get these prophecies ready. Let's pile in!"

And the Terrible Three piled in, working until quite late on the documents which they intended to sell to the gullible folk of Rylcombe!

CHAPTER 12.

Tom Merry's Future.

"I AM the man who knows everything!"

Monty Lowther rolled out the words in a deep, hollow-sounding voice.

Tom Merry and Manners grinned. Everything so far had worked beautifully. The Terrible Three had slipped away from St. Jim's as soon as possible, taking the theatrical costume with them. Monty Lowther had changed in a barn, and he had now taken up his stand in Rylcombe.

There was a goodly crowd gathered round him. The inhabitants of Rylcombe had come in their dozens to hear the Man of Mystery speak.

Monty Lowther surveyed the wondering faces.

"Would anyone like to ask me a question?" he purred.

Trimble, who was standing in the front row, pushed his way forward.

"Yes, you speeding bounder!" he said. "Who won the Derby in 1893?"

"The name of the horse," said Monty Lowther glibly, "was Flint Rye. The famous jockey, Price, rode him!"

Trimble subsided. He was satisfied. He was quite under the impression that he was dealing with the same man that he had seen in Wayland. And the answer, although invented, was beyond dispute as far as he was concerned.

Which showed that the mind of Trimble, in spite of what the real Man of Mystery had said, was small in comparison to the size of his head.

Tom Merry turned to the man who was standing beside him. It was Mr. Tiper, the printer, whom Tom Merry knew quite well.

"I'll ask him what I'm thinking about," he said. "Now, I'm going to think about a place in Africa—Lake Tanganyika. See if he can read my thoughts."

"That's the way to catch these people out," smiled Mr. Tiper, and at once leant over and told some of his friends what Tom Merry was going to do.

Then Tom asked his question.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 529.

"What am I thinking of, Man of Mystery?" he asked.

Monty Lowther eyed him steadily through his smoked glasses.

"A place in Africa," he said. "Yes, it is a lake. I can see it now. Lake Tanganyika!"

"Marvellous!" ejaculated Mr. Tiper. The Man of Mystery smiled on the crowd.

"The reading of thoughts is quite a simple matter to me," he said glibly. "Now, that schoolboy who just asked the question looks quite a simple and innocent little boy. His mind is not like the mind of the grown-up person—full of deceit!"

Tom Merry flushed. The eyes of all the crowd were on him.

"I find it easiest to work with the minds of the young and simple," proceeded the "thought-reader." "If that nice little boy will think of something else I will read his mind again."

Tom Merry turned a rather red face to Mr. Tiper. This was more or less according to the programme, but he had not expected Lowther to be quite so sarcastic at his expense.

"I'm going to think of a song—say, 'A Long Way to Tipperary.' now," he said confidentially.

"Good!" said Mr. Tiper enthusiastically.

Eat less Bread

He told his friends standing about, and then Tom turned and allowed the Man of Mystery to look into the depths of his mind.

"You are thinking," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "of a song. It is a well-known song. Ah! I know it now!"

And, with a more serious face than ever, he chanted a few lines in a cracked, high-pitched voice.

"Right!" roared Mr. Tiper.

The Man of Mystery swept his eyes over the crowd. He spotted several well-known faces there.

"I am a complete stranger here," he said calmly, "but I can tell you a bit about yourselves. Over there I see Mr. Sorewer, of Rose Dale. I believe he is a financier. Am I right?"

"Yes," said a dozen voices.

"And this forbidding-looking person here is a schoolmaster," continued Lowther calmly, fixing his eyes on Mr. Ratcliff, who had just joined the crowd. "His name is Ratcliff. He is not very popular with the boys at St. Jim's School. Am I right?"

"Rather!" roared a dozen voices.

Mr. Ratcliff flushed, and walked away quickly. The Man of Mystery, he decided, was not worth listening to.

"Now," said Monty Lowther quietly, "if you innocent little boy who asked me questions just now will come up here I will read his bumps."

Tom Merry pushed his way into the centre of the crowd. Monty Lowther placed a fatherly hand on his head.

"A splendid character," he said calmly, as he felt. "He has a kindly heart and a simple, trusting nature."

"Cheese it!" growled Tom Merry. "He always speaks the truth, and he is very gentle," pursued Lowther calmly. "I can see a great future for him. I should not wonder if he rose to be the public hangman!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd. "Shut up, you chump!" muttered Tom furiously.

"I would like to warn this young man," said Lowther seriously, "to beware of bad companions. He is liable to be corrupted if he is not careful. He might even become a Member of Parliament. You may go, my little man!"

Tom Merry hastily disappeared into the crowd. He had stood quite enough from Lowther, and he was inwardly resolving that that worthy would have an opportunity of finding out whether he was such a "simple little boy."

All the same, he could not deny that Lowther was making a great impression. He talked to the villagers in the approved style, and it was evident that he was convincing them that he was quite the wonder he represented himself to be.

Manners grinned as Tom Merry returned to his side.

"Good, ain't he?" he said. "He took you off no end well!"

Tom Merry gave him a meaning look. But Manners did not notice it. The grey-bearded veteran was just working up to his climax—the point where he took the money.

"Now," they heard him say, "I have here a number of sealed packets. There are times when I see and dream great things—many things which I do not understand. But they are all connected in my mind with some person that I know I shall meet."

There was a short pause.

"I write all these things on paper, and put them into the little sealed packets. I have them here. You will observe that on the outside there is an inscription in secret signs, which I alone know. These guide me in selling them. The only condition is that they must be opened in your own homes."

"Now, I intend to offer these packages for sale at sixpence each. I shall not keep the offer open for longer than five minutes. But for a perfect revelation about yourself, you should buy one of these packages. They will tell you the future, which my dreams have read. The packages are now on sale!"

"And they're going!" said Manners triumphantly.

The people of Rylcombe were certainly rolling up with their money in their hands. Monty Lowther sold thirty copies of his "prophecies" in a surprisingly short space of time. And then, packing up his bag, he turned and made off down the street.

He reached the barn unobserved and removed his disguise, hid it, and returned to Rylcombe. The seed had been sown!

CHAPTER 13.

In His True Colours.

TOM MERRY frowned as Lowther joined him.

"Still think I'm a simple little boy?" he growled.

Monty Lowther grinned. "My dear chap," he said, "that was all in the giddy play. If I had treated you as a chap I knew, those johnnies would have smelt a rat. How did the show go?"

"Splendidly!" said Manners enthusiastically. "They'll all be reading their prophecies now. Hallo! Here comes old Sands!"

Mr. Sands, the grocer, was coming along the street, evidently in a state of great excitement. The Terrible Three could hardly suppress smiles at the sight of him.

"Master Merry," said Mr. Sands, as he dashed up, "have you seen anything of that Man of Mystery?"

"Not lately," said Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, I'm on the look-out for him myself. He cleared off suddenly."

"If I catch that bouncer," growled Mr. Sands, "I'll wring his ugly neck! He's swindled me out of sixpence! I listened to his rotten tale, and bought a prophecy from him. And it's all a lot of rot ending up 'ever been had, or something like that!'"

"The rotter!" said Tom Merry, with a very red face. "He did the same to me!"

Parker, the blacksmith, dashed up at that moment.

"Did you have one of them prophecies, Mr. Sands?" he asked.

Sands nodded, and he and the worthy village smith then proceeded to exchange views as to the ultimate fate of the Man of Mystery if he turned up again in Rykcombe.

Several more of the victims of Monty Lowther's practical joke, including Mr. Tipor, joined the irate grocer, and in a quarter of an hour Mr. Sands was at the head of a crowd of quite twenty searching the streets for the elusive Man of Mystery.

Billy Bull, who had the reputation of being the biggest blackguard in the neighbourhood, hatched on the procession when he heard that it was their intention to mob someone, and Ikey Mo, the old-clothes dealer, lingered in the vicinity as well, in case the victim should have to buy new garments after he had been dealt with.

"Vy don't they come to me?" he asked Tom Merry. "I tell everything very sheep, and dey get their tanner's worth every dime! Vot I thair it therve them right, don't it?"

"Course it does!" Tom Merry chuckled, as they followed in the wake of the procession, and left Ikey Mo to return to his shop. "By Jove! There's going to be a few fireworks in a minute!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Suddenly Manners pointed ahead. "Behold the giddy victim!" he said solemnly.

The Terrible Three looked, and laughed. The genuine Man of Mystery was just coming down the street.

He was arrayed in black robes, and wore the familiar grey beard and smoked glasses. He was the exact counterpart of the figure which Monty Lowther had cut.

He came calmly down the street, as though he rather expected that Mr. Sands was leading out a deputation to welcome him. But, as he drew near, the energetic grocer soon disillusioned him.

"There's the rogue who's pinched our money!" he roared. "Give it him!"

"I'll git it back!" roared Billy Bull, as he charged forward.

The crowd of worthy villagers charged as one man, Mr. Sands leading the attack. But no one was very far behind him.

The Man of Mystery paused as he saw the indignation meeting pouring in his direction, and then turned to run. But he was too late.

Mr. Sands sprang at him, and clutched him roughly.

"Where's my tanner?" he howled.

"Wh-what do you mean?"

"You've swindled me out of a tanner!" howled Mr. Sands. "If you don't dub up, I'll run you in!"

"And if you don't gimme back mine,"

thundered Parker, the smith, "I'll knock you flat!"

The Man of Mystery paled, and edged back.

"I—I d-don't understand you at all!"

"Shell out them tanners!" roared a dozen voices.

"If you don't gimme mine," thundered Billy Bull, "I'll bally well 'ave your watch!"

Mr. Bull, as a matter of fact, had not paid anything for a prophecy. P.C. Crump could have forecast his future at any time. But a little detail like that would not stop him taking the watch if he got the opportunity.

"And out the brass!" roared Mr. J. Screwer, the financier.

"I've not got your brass!" howled the Man of Mystery, finding himself hemmed in.

"Don't dare to touch me, or I will call the police!"

"We don't want no bluff!" raved Mr. Sands. "I want the money!"

And to emphasise his remark, he caught hold of the flowing beard of the old gentleman and pulled it. To his amazement it came away in his hand.

For a second there was complete silence, and then a roar of anger.

"Impostor!" shouted the crowd.

The Man of Mystery was grabbed on all sides. His wig was torn off, and his flowing garments ripped in pieces. He struggled desperately, but Messrs. Sands & Co. were quite determined to have their 'evenge, if they could not have their money.

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT.

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

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

"Help!" the impostor roared.

But there was no help forthcoming. The Terrible Three, who were keeping in the background, grinned as they saw the mean, cunning face of the young man who had been masquerading as the "prophet."

"He's getting what he deserves for that rotten lie about George Folland!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Let 'em carry on the good work!"

P.C. Crump, however, turned up at that moment. The rare event of a riot had caused his ample breast to swell with official pride. He strode majestically on the scene.

"Order!" he roared.

The riot continued. Crump was quite unheeded.

"Cease this, in the name of the lor!" thundered the ornament of that institution.

The Man of Mystery found the attack on him weakening. He turned his scratched face round in the direction of the constable.

Mr. Crump saw him. He concluded at once that he would be a suitable arrest.

"Come with me, young man!" he said, striding up.

"But I've been attacked!" howled the man. "I want protection, not to be arrested!"

"He's an impostor!" hooted Mr. Sands. "He came here disguised as an old man, and we've just found him out. He's swindled us all!"

"I know it!" said Mr. Crump, with a superior air. "I know all about this character. I've 'ad the wire about 'im from Scotland Yard."

"Liar!" snarled the Man of Mystery.

"That will be used in evidence agin you!" said Mr. Crump sternly. "The Rykcombe police never sleeps! I knows yer!"

And with that Mr. Crump marched his captive off, leaving the crowd gasping.

"I never got my tanner!" growled Mr. Billy Bull. "I shall 'ave to report it!"

Mr. Bull did not press his large and bogus claim, but things took a serious turn when the Man of Mystery was examined.

He was identified as a young alien who had disappeared from London after being mixed up in some espionage plot, and it was soon established that he was still a spy.

P.C. Crump had the honour of turning him over to a couple of men from Scotland Yard, who would be pretty sure not to release him until very searching inquiries had been made.

Before he went, George Folland, having been told how things had panned out, came over to Rykcombe, and identified the man as his former partner. So the mystery of how he had known so much about George Folland was explained at once to Mrs. Folland, considerably to her relief, and to the relief of her son.

A week later George Folland sold his invention to the War Office for a considerable sum, and he was able to explain everything. A few words, of course, put everything right, and Mrs. Folland apologised profusely for her mistrust.

There was only one mystery which the worthy folk of Rykcombe could never understand, and that was why the Man of Mystery turned up a "second" time. But the Terrible Three, thinking things over, only told the secret to a few, and it never went any further.

THE END.

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

NOTICES.

Football—Matches Wanted by:

ST. FRANCIS' CLUB—14-5 mile radius.—W. Rawlings, 28, Beyer Street, Corton, Lancs.
FOREST ALBION—14-5 mile radius.—J. Vandervort, 17, Hearn Street, Canning Town, E.

WIMBLEDON PARK JUNIORS—15-17—away matches.—J. W. Archer, 13, Durnsford Avenue, Wimbledon Park, S.W. 19.

DUNMOW VOLUNTEERS—14-9 mile radius.—W. D. Hughes, Post Office House, Dunmow, Essex.

STANMORE—15-4 mile radius.—L. Wilder, 7, Stanley Road, West Green Road, South Tottenham, N. 16.

DAKENHAM DOCK JUNIORS—14-5 mile radius.—C. E. F. Mansfield, 6, Ripple Villas, Ripple Road, Dagenham, Essex.

CHISLEHURST WEDNESDAY—15-4 mile radius.—G. E. Harland, 56, White Horse Hill, Chislehurst.

ROYAL MINT JUNIORS—14-14-4 mile radius.—W. Swent, 20B, Peabody Buildings, Glasshouse Street, E. 1.

ST. PAUL'S UNITED—14-15-5 mile radius.—J. Rust, 7, Clarkson Road, Barking, E.

MERRYWEATHER—14-6 mile radius.—H. S. Simpson, 13, Conington Road, Lewisham, S.E.

P.P.—12-12-4 mile radius.—L. Oakley, 26, Westbury Place, Burnstet, Leeds.

HIGHAMPTON JUNIORS—12-12-6 mile radius.—O. Isaacs, 18, Beldon Lane, Great Horton, Bradford.

SOUTHGATE UNITED—15-4 mile radius.—A. G. Rose, 38, Hallford Street, Kingston, N. 1.
L.I.B.T.—Frank Wright, 42, Mayfair Avenue, The Drive, Oxford.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 520.

CADET NOTES.

MANY inquiries have reached us as to whether boys in factories and large business houses can form their own Cadet Corps, and the answer is certainly in the affirmative. In fact, it is quite the best plan for boys working together to form their own corps, so that in their spare time they can amuse themselves by talking corps "shop." There is no reason why engineers should not have an Engineer Corps, although the regulations of the War Office would seem to indicate that Infantry only is recognised. But there are plenty of exceptions to this regulation. Not only are there Engineering Cadet Corps, but there are in existence both Yeomanry units and Artillery units.

The Civil Service has long ago had its own Cadet Corps, with its headquarters at Somerset House, London. Any day in the picturesque quadrangle of this great building, the Cadets can be seen training, and a very smart lot they are. Recruits are badly wanted, and there is not a boy in a Government office who should not belong. The honorary colonel is Colonel Sir Edward Ward, who was at one time Permanent Under Secretary of State for War, while playing a considerable part in the defence of Ladysmith, where his skill in the organisation of the food supplies contributed considerably to the success in holding out till the town was relieved.

Wolverhampton is going right ahead with its Cadet Corps, and the other day 400 boys enrolled in a rally organised by the 1th Battalion Staffordshire Volunteer Regiment.

I mentioned in last week's notes the progress being made in Bristol. A committee has now been formed, consisting of representatives of the Volunteer Battalion of the city, the 6th Gloucester Cadets, the Church Lads' Brigade, the Boys' Brigade, the Boy Scouts, and the Welfare Representative for the Ministry of Munitions. This looks like business. But why should not some of the boys be represented themselves? In these days of popular government there seems no reason why the boys themselves should not have a voice in the management of their own corps.

Donny Dundee is talking of having a Cadet Corps. The land of cakes and marmalade should be a paradise for boys, and why it should not have the sport of a Cadet Corps it is hard to fathom. Is it that they are too busy eating cakes and marmalade? But this is a libel on Dundee, because they have a good Boys' Brigade and a Boy Scout Detachment. Still, there is no reason why there should not be a Cadet Corps, too.

No less a person than that great general, Sir William Robertson, G.C.B., K.C.V.O., Chief of the General Staff of the War Office, was talking to Cadets at Bristol. He defined discipline as consisting, as most things in the world do, of small things—smartness, punctuality, cleanliness, obedience to orders, loyalty, and order. General Robertson is a working man's son, and started his education at an ordinary elementary school, and entered the Army as a private, working his way up in the Army without influence to the highest position the King has to offer. He is responsible for all the strategy of the war, and he decides where our troops have got to go, and in what part of the world it is best they should fight. If a boy wants to have the same success as General Robertson, the first thing he has got to do is to get ready, right away and join a Cadet Corps.

The film of the Central Association Volunteer Regiments, showing the life of a Cadet in camp, has been busy travelling about the country. The other day it was at Shepton Mallet, and it was a revelation to the local Cadet Corps what camp life is really like, and what sport boys can have there. From there it wandered up to Dundee. If you have a favourite picture-palace, you should

ask the proprietor to make arrangements with the local Volunteer Battalion or Cadet Corps to have the film of the Central Association Volunteer Regiments shown there one week. All they have to do is to write to the headquarters of the Association, Law Courts, London.

One of the first towns to organise Cadets on a large scale was Leicester. Their corps is known as the Leicester Junior Training Corps. So great is the belief of the citizens in the future of the movement that they built, in 1914, a tremendous drill-hall for the Cadets—one of the biggest in the world—where a whole battalion can be trained without difficulty. Besides the ordinary military syllabus, instruction is given in physical drill, rifle shooting, ambulance work, while there is a cycle section, a swimming section, and drum, bugle, and fife bands. Captain Crumlie, the honorary organiser, is a genius in looking after boys, while the president is Sir Samuel Faire, J.P., who has been a generous contributor to its funds. One of the reasons for its success is that it has had the active co-operation of all the sporting organisations of the county, including the County Rugby units, the Football Association, the Cricket Association, the Harriers, the Y.M.C.A., and all the mutual Sunday School Cricket and Football Leagues, to say nothing of all the heads of the big business houses in the town. Why other towns should not have their own training-hall some of the City Councillors may well be asked. A feature of the Leicester Corps is that there are no social or religious distinctions allowed, and every boy has an equal chance for promotion.

It will not do for any of us to forget the good work done by the Church Lads' Brigade, who have their Cadet Corps run on exactly the same lines as the ordinary Cadets, and have all the same privileges and advantages. It is a good thing, if a boy is a Churchman, to belong to the corps attached to his church. He is none the worse for getting a little religion in his instruction. The Church Lads' Cadet Units come under the county organisation. The same applies to the Boys' Brigade Units, who have their own special uniform, which is recognised; and, in most cases, they, too, are to be recognised by County Associations.

This country has never been ashamed to learn from the Colonies, and though it is a mistake to think that the old Mother Country is behind in everything, the Colonies do get ahead of us in some matters. In both Australia and New Zealand every boy is a Cadet, and I am afraid that if it came to a competition in Cadet efficiency on the lines of the test match between Australia and England for cricket, we should not get even a look in. One of the reasons why the New Zealand troops have done so well at the Front is because they learnt the elements of their job long ago as Cadets.

Nothing is more stirring than to see the Volunteers—the old men of the town—marching through the streets, many of them with grey beards, and inclined to take things easy. It is not enough to look on, and boys should not be behind the old chaps in doing their best long as there is a Cadet Corps to join. If you are Scotch, you should be in kilts. In London there is a London Scottish Cadet Corps, and a great stir they make when they march through the streets in their kilts with the bagpipes at their head. There is not a town in Scotland that should not have its Cadet Corps, and boys in England with Scotch parents, if there are thirty others in the neighbourhood who call themselves Scotch, should make it their business to have a Scotch Cadet Company. Nothing makes a corps look better than to have bagpipes at its head, and a route march through the streets of a town, with the wail of the pipes disturbing the slumbers of the population, soon brings in recruits.

No Cadet Corps is complete without its social club or mess-room. These need not be a great affair to start with. Either the use of a school-room should be obtained, or a room in a cookhouse or a baker's shop. Of course, the ambition of every Cadet Corps should be to have its own Cadet Headquarters, with proper drill-hall and orderly-room. But if that cannot be obtained, most Volunteer Battalions will gladly give the Cadets a corner of their building.

I looked into the headquarters of the Central Association Volunteer Regiments at the Law Courts the other day, and found them despatching sheets of the new Cadet stamp, for which there is a tremendous demand. The ambition of every boy in a Cadet Corps is to get his 42 stamps to show that he has done his 42 drills, and thus earn the medal that he can wear when he goes to work, to show not only that he is a Cadet, but that he is an efficient one. The motto "Look Ahead" on the badge and on the stamp has become the catch-phrase of Cadets throughout the country. Are you a "Look ahead"? is going to be the question of every boy when he meets his pal; and if the reply is "No," then the answer is to be "You are behind the times."

Don't forget. Any information you want about Cadets, both as to conditions of service or the nearest unit, write or call at the Central Association Volunteer Regiments, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C.2.

NOTICES.

FOOTBALL.

Matches Wanted by :

PORT UNITED—16-17—6 mile radius.—J. Dale, 120, Sutton Court Road, Plalstow, E.13.
RAVENSHAW JUNIORS—14-15-16—10 mile radius.—R. Tidd, 97, Ravenshaw Street, Mill Lane, West Hamstead.

SUMMERSTOWN—17-8—8 mile radius.—W. Heatham, 24, Thurso Street, Tooting, S.W.17.
CRAWFORD UNITED—14-4—4 mile radius.—W. Meadows, 42, Crawford Place Dwellings, Edgware Road, W.1.

WEST END RESERVES—16-8—8 mile radius.—W. A. Wathey, 10, Orchard Street, Hockland, Notts.

ROSS VILLA—16-6—6 mile radius.—S. Mallan, 61, Turf Lane, Hollinwood, Oldham.
B.C.E.—16-8—8. Richardson, 26, Lansdowne Road, Stockwell, S.W.8.

A Highgate Club—16-1. Vilchis, 13, Cromartie Club—16. Morney Rise, N.19.

Other Footer Notices :

Cheap pair of footer boots wanted—size 8.—Edward Holmes, 2, Dunstan Street, Openshaw, Manchester.

Two players—forwards or forward and half—want to join Peckham or East Dulwich team.

Will the secretary of any junior footer team on Clapham Common wishing to give up permit write to Secretary, C.F.E.L., 25, Wivenhoe Road, Peckham, S.E.15.

Place in team, Liverpool—15.—A. Tatior, 17, Kelsor Road, Fairfield.

Correspondence.

Will A. S. write to C. P., Ireton Street, Bradford?

Wanted with readers anywhere interested in stamp-collecting.—H. Jones, 78, Llandaf Road, Cardiff.

With readers in Australia and New Zealand.—J. F. Gregory, 27, Edward Street, Cardiff.

With girl readers in Australia or South Africa.—Miss Maggie Gannon, 4, Royal View, Hunslet Carr, Leeds.

With boy readers, about 17, in the United Kingdom.—Bert Farn, 3, Cromwell Street, off Red Lane, Coventry.

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THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA.

FOR NEW READERS.

The twins are Philip Derwent, of Highcliffe, and his sister Philippa, of Cliff House. They have a cockatoo, named Cocky, which has been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Gadsby, who is plotting against him with Vavasour. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a serious accident to one of Merton's eyes in a fight with Ponsbury. In their absence Flip gets too friendly with Pon, and the rest of the nuts, and, without any real taste for it at the outset, takes to gambling. He has been to the Cliff House hockey field to see his sister, Flip, but has not seen her. On the way he has fallen in with Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars, and they walk back together. Bunter accidentally lets out something. Gadsby gets Vavasour to go and meet the new post-girl, in order to intercept an expected letter from Tunstall to Flip.

(Now read on.)

Rivals Meet.

SO Bunter was full of malice against Mr. Quelch and Wingate and today and Harry Wharton & Co., and Butstode and Mauly and Delaney and Vivian, and as he rolled along, without any fixed idea of where he was going—for he could not think of anyone in all the wide world who wanted to see him—he was devising tortures of the most bloodthirsty kind for them all!

Then he saw Gadsby and Vavasour, and a curious look came over his fat face. It was not Gadsby who caused that look. It was Vav.

In Vav Bunter recognised a hated rival! Between classes and the Wingate episode Bunter had been out of gates. He had been out on purpose to see Miss Gittins—and he had seen her.

But there had been nothing in the meeting to give him any encouragement. Quite the contrary, in fact. Miss Gittins could not love him much, or she would not have called him a fat pig and told him to trot back to his sty! That would have been too much even in joke; and she had not appeared to mean it as a joke.

Moreover, she had added that she was then expecting to meet a real swell from Highcliffe, who had a box of chocolates for her. If Bunter had got hold of anything of the sort he would have wolfed it himself, she said. That was true; but Bunter did not believe it. Only his coming into possession of the box of chocolates would have proven it to him, and even then he would have found excuses for himself.

Miss Gittins had revealed the name of the Highcliffe swell. So it was that Bunter knew Vavasour for his rival.

Had it been Pon or Gadsby or Monson—had it been any nut but Vavasour—Bunter would have retired from the contest. He would not have precipitated a fight, anyway.

But Vav was a known funk, and a duffer with his fists. Bunter's breast swelled with warlike ardour. He forgot Mr. Quelch and Mauly, Toddy and Butstode, Delaney and Vivian, Harry Wharton and his chums. He felt that Vavasour was his one enemy, and he yearned to lick him.

Vav felt much the same, except that he had not so many oppressors to put aside in his mind. Bunter had no reputation at all as a fighting-man, and Vav felt confident of being able to thrash him.

Gadsby grinned as they drew nearer to one another, each quaking in his steps. Gadsby wished someone else had been there to see the fun. It was too good for even a greedy fellow to want to have it all to himself.

"I've a word or two to say to you, Bunter, you fat lout!" howled Vavasour.

He had rather expected Bunter to turn tail at that. But Bunter did nothing of the sort.

"I don't want to talk to you, Vavasour!" he shouted back. "But I've got this to give you!"

And he shook a podgy fist.

He was a trifle surprised that Vavasour still came on after that. But Vavasour came on.

"It ain't very clean," said Vav. "But if you mean you want to fight I'm on—absolutely!"

"Why, you skinny cad, you can't stand up to me for a single round! And my hands are a jolly sight cleaner than your face will be after I've rolled you in that ditch!" roared the Owl.

Still both came on. It was Gadsby's turn to be surprised now. Why wasn't their courage oozing out at their fingers' ends, like that of the chap in the play? Surely they could not both mean it?

But it appeared they did—or each thought he could bluff the other.

They were face to face now. Bunter's podgy features were confronted into a positively ferocious glare. Vavasour's aristocratic and somewhat vacuous countenance

looked even more supercilious than usual.

"Hallo! What's up?" asked a voice behind the two Highcliffians, and Flip Derwent jumped from his bicycle.

"Vav ain't Bunter going to have a dust-up," grinned Gadsby, welcoming even Flip to this treat.

"That's the post-girl," returned Flip gravely. "Helen of Troy and Cleopatra weren't in it with her, but you cripples!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you chaps up to with Bunter?" demanded Bob Cherry. And the Famous Five appeared as if by magic.

"Bunter wants to fight Vavasour," said Flip.

"He doesn't. Bunter never wants to fight anyone," growled Johnny Bull.

"But I do!" howled Bunter.

"Well, Vav don't, I'm sure," said Bob Cherry.

"But I do—absolutely!" snapped Vavasour.

"My hat! Laissez aller, then!" cried Frank Nugent, who had just been reading a story of the old knightly days.

The Great Fight.

WHAT silly ass said the day of miracles was past? asked Bob Cherry solemnly. "Bunter wants to fight Vavasour—Vav wants to fight Bunter—and they both go on wanting, after each other knows that the other wants to. My hat!"

"It ain't a giddy miracle—it's a giddy dream!" said Johnny Bull. "And it's a heap too good to be true. I'm expecting every minute to wake up."

"The surplussiveness is terrific," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "But the knock-funness will not be great."

"Oh, won't it?" howled Bunter. "Let me get at him, that's all!"

"Well, nobody's hindering you," replied Harry Wharton.

"Let's have the thing done in proper order, though," Flip said, grinning. "Anybody got two pairs of gloves in his pockets? Boxing-gloves, I mean, of course. But I dare say the other kind will do at a pinch. In that case, only Bunter needs 'em; Vav's got 'em on already."

But Vavasour was taking off his gloves.

"Rot! Who's likely to be carryin' boxin'-gloves about in his pocket, I'd like to know?" growled Gadsby.

"And I don't want them! I wouldn't have them!" Bunter roared.

"Bunter's going to slay Vavasour with his naked hands," murmured Frank Nugent.

"I think he ought to wash them first; but that's more Vav's biznez than mine. And, of course, when Vav's once comfortably and completely stewed—er—slain, I mean, of course—it really can't matter."

"That's only talking about scraping so far, though," said Bob; "and that don't amount to much. We've heard them talk about it before—both of 'em!"

"I'm ready!" puffed Bunter.

"I'm waitin'—absolutely!" drawled Vavasour.

And they both seemed to mean it.

"I suppose you'll second Vav, Gadsby?" said Flip.

"I don't see why you should butt in arrangin' things," growled Gadsby. "But, as a matter of fact, I mean to."

"Right-ho! Who's going to look after Bunter?" Flip asked cheerfully.

"That's me," said Bob. "I should like to go down to posterity as having had a hand in the greatest fight on record."

"Will you referee, Wharton?"

"Look here, Derwent—"

"Oh, if you want to arrange things, Gadsby, you're welcome. But it's no use wasting time, is it?"

"Brrr!" was Gadsby's not very intelligible reply.

"I don't mind," Harry Wharton said, smiling. "Shall I keep time, too?"

"You'd better. I wouldn't trust Derwent," snarled Gadsby. The sudden appearance of the Famous Five seemed to have made Gadsby feel morose; and, as usual with him when bad-tempered, he turned his wrath upon Flip.

Vavasour was taking off his jacket.

"I'm going to keep mine on," said Bunter boastfully. "I can lick that rotter with it on, I jolly well know that! And you needn't bother about getting your watch out, Wharton; he won't last out a round, you know."

But Wharton took his watch out. He had small belief in Vavasour's capacity for sticking it, but he had no more belief in Bunter's powers of administering punishment.

"Going to fight here?" he asked.

"Yes. What's it matter?" howled Bunter.

"Don't want to adjourn to the National Sports' Club, do you?" sneered Gadsby.

"All right!" snapped Wharton. "Usual rounds and intervals, I suppose. Ready, both of you? Time!"

Bunter came forward in quite a professional pugilistic attitude. Vav did not. His arms hung by his sides. One might have thought that he did not know the first thing about boxing, whereas one would have taken Bunter to have known just about that—and very little more!

But the Highcliffe nut knew rather more of the game than Bunter did, though once or twice in the past the Owl had been coached seriously, and with his weight he might have been a formidable opponent. But Bunter was good at forgetting things.

He looked to have a big pull in weight and strength. Vavasour was slim and weedy. But he had far more activity than Bunter.

Bunter pranced up, scowling ferociously, and aimed a deadly blow at Vavasour's aristocratic nose.

The blow failed to get home. Vavasour ducked quite deftly, and next moment his fist smote Bunter under the chin.

"Varoooooh! You cad! Do that again, if you dare!" yelled the Owl.

"Oh, absolutely!" replied Vavasour. And he did it again.

But this time it was not quite so pronounced a success. For Bunter also did something, the result of which was that Vav staggered back feeling his left ear.

They stood glaring at one another. The bloodless victory that both had anticipated seemed to have been junction to punch he

"He is!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly.

"The round ain't up yet!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Found the fat beast about the body, Vav!" counselled Gadsby. "He can't stand much of that."

Vavasour darted in on the Owl, jabbed him three or four times in the chest and upper ribs, and then dodged him.

"Foul!" roared Bunter.

"Nothing of the sort," answered Wharton. "But he hit me in the stom—"

"Your tummy comes too high, Bunter," said Flip, shaking his head. "That ain't Vav's fault. He's entitled to punch you anywhere that would be above the belt in a chap made like other chaps!"

"Yah! Tain't fair! But I'll make him smart for it! Stop running away, you Highcliffe cad, and I'll— Yooop!"

Bunter took a seat on the road. Vavasour had objection to his stop running away, but without giving notice that he intended to obey it so promptly.

It was probably the first time Vav had ever administered a knockdown blow, and he was looking very exultant as Wharton sang out "Time!"

"Bunter ain't having fair play," said Johnny Bull. "What be needs is that

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Vavasour should give him due notice that he hopes to prod him under the fifth rib on Wednesday week, weather permitting, and catch him a shorter on the proboscis the day after, all being well. Then he might be ready."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Johnny's rather laboured sarcasm seemed to tickle everyone but Bunter. Vavasour grinned quite broadly. He was beginning to fancy himself a fighting man.

But the grin faded from Vavasour's face before the second round was twenty seconds old. For Bunter, furious at the chaff, had rushed in and hit out at the hardest, and, by luck or otherwise, Vav's nose had struck one of his punches, with the result that it was Vav who now sat down to think, greatly to the detriment of a neat pair of grey trousers.

"How do you like it now?" demanded Bunter. "Get up, you funk, or you'll be counted out!"

"Shut up, Bunter! You can't talk like that to your opponent. It isn't decent!" said Wharton sharply.

"Am I the only chap that ain't allowed to say a word, then? You ain't counting, Wharton! 'Tain't fair!"

"No need. Vav to the charge again!" cried Frank Nugent.

Vavasour had got up, and was coming on again. But his movements were rather too wary to deserve the name of a charge.

The two circled round one another for a full minute, Bunter blowing hard, and Vav's nose slowly dripping blood. Then Bunter made a rush.

The Highcliffman, stepping aside, evaded it with ease. It was now becoming evident that if Vavasour kept his head and could stand a few more knocks, he must win. He was vastly the superior in mobility. If Vav was not much of a boxer, he was an excellent dancer, and dancing teaches one the use of one's feet.

But Vav was well known to be chicken-hearted; and Bunter, with all his clumsy unworldliness, might yet be able to beat him if he would only stick it out.

Vav hit Bunter on the head as he passed, but the Owl hardly felt a blow. He wheeled round clumsily; but by this time he had got face to face with his opponent again they were three yards apart.

"They ought to have pistols," said Flip. "Fists ain't much good at that distance."

"You dry up!" snapped Gadsby. "Stick it, Vav, an' run the fat lot of his beastly fat legs!"

"Time!" called Wharton.

"What are you blowing at, Bunt?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ouhh! He keeps on running away, and I get so beastly puffed!" groaned the Owl dismally.

"Huddup! Giving you a knee ain't as blessed catch when you sit down like that!" grunted Bob. "Try the ground for a change!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! What's the good of a second if he can't give a chap a knee?"

"It isn't one knee you want, Bunt; it's a dozen. But for goodness' sake buck up! Don't let yourself be licked by that slacker!"

"Licked? I'm not going to be licked—you'll see!" snorted William George.

"Keep him troikin' around till he's lost all his puff, and then sail in an' win, Vav," was Gadsby's advice to his partner.

"Sail in and finish him off now!" urged Flip. "One or two more good punches will do for that fat worm!"

"Do you want him to get licked?" snarled Gadsby, as Vav stepped up to the scratch again.

"Shouldn't weep about it," replied Flip coolly. "But if you mean an' I trying to get him licked—not! It's the sort of thing that no one but you would think of, Gadsby!"

Vav would have taken Flip's advice if he could have made up his mind for once in a way that getting hurt was of no consequence. Lots of fights are won by fellows who forget for the moment that punches hurt.

But Vav was not of the stuff of which heroes are made. When Bunter came on again he retreated.

"You can't get out of the ring, Vavasour!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"There ain't any ring!" retorted Vavasour.

"Well, you aren't coming any farther this way—that's flat! We don't want to follow

the fight—if you call it a fight—a mile or two down the road, you know."

Vav made a sudden rush forward; and smote one, two, three on the fat face of Bunter. And now it was the Owl who retreated, yelling:

"Tain't fair! You're backing up against your own side, Bull, you beast!"

"Oh, I'm just about sick of this!" said Johnny, in disgust. "I don't call it a fight."

"Well, you can't deny it's funny," remarked Flip.

"A fight ought not to be so funny. There's a difference between a fight and a knock-about turn on the stage."

"But not much, when the combatants are Bunter and Vav," grined Flip.

"Oh, go it, Vav! You've got him set! Sock it into the fat cad!" howled Gadsby.

"Here, stoppitt—stoppitt!" panted Bunter. "Wait till I get my breath!"

But Vav punched on. They were not very long punches; but they were harder than Bunter liked.

"Time!" called Wharton.

"Rats! You're cheatin', Wharton!" shouted Gadsby furiously.

"You didn't call soon enough—I know you didn't, Wharton! You want me to get licked," wailed Bunter, as he flopped down on Bob Cherry's knee. Bob would have collapsed but that Frank Nugent and Inky held him up from behind.

"I've had more than enough of this!" said Harry Wharton angrily. "When both sides accuse a referee of favouring the other—"

"So you did!" howled Gadsby.

"So you did!" puffed Bunter.

"Plus one and minus one on the same side cancels out, Wharton," said Flip. "Don't take any notice of them."

"One more round is my limit," growled Harry.

"That's all right. It's about Bunter's, too," said Bob.

But he was doing his best for Bunter, bating his fat face with Bunter's own grimy handkerchief dipped in water which Inky had fetched, and fanning him with his cap.

"Do you think he's nearly done, Derwent?" asked Vavasour-anxiously.

As near as nothing—go in and win, old scout, and gather glory for Highcliff!"

Perhaps Vav did not care a great deal about glory for Highcliff—not that there would be much of that in licking Bunter; but he was encouraged by Flip's assurance.

He came on with far more determination than Bunter. He guarded one clumsy swipe at his nose and ducked from another. Then he brought both his fists together against Bunter's chest, in something between a double punch and a shove; and Bunter toppled over, and lay where he fell while Wharton counted:

"One—two—three—"

"Oh, get up, Bunter!" yelled Bob.

"Let him alone!" growled Johnny. "The floor isn't made for his sort of fighter."

"Eight—nine—OUT!"

"You've won, Vav!" cried Flip, patting the Highcliffie dandy on the back.

Bunter Tells.

A T that Bunter sat up.

"Won't? Who's won?" he asked.

"Oh, really, Wharton, you needn't have counted at all as that! It doesn't give a fellow a chance!"

Harry Wharton turned his back in disgust.

"And I should have won if it hadn't been for you, Bull!" burred the Owl. "You toppled that cad when he was running away. Why didn't you let him run, you rotter?"

"Shut up, or you'll get bumped!" grunted Johnny.

"It's all right, Bunter. You'd have won all serene if it hadn't been for one chap," said Flip consolingly.

"Do you mean Wharton or Bull?" asked the Owl eagerly.

"Neither. I mean Vavasour!"

"Oh! I dare say you think he's a pal of yours! And Gaddy, too—they're both pals of yours, ain't they?" retorted Bunter spitefully.

"Particularly," was Flip's cool reply.

"A little more than you are, but not much."

"Could tell you something about them both if I liked!" puffed the Owl.

"Drop it!" snapped Johnny Bull. "You've let Greyfriars down enough for one day, without that sort of thing."

"Oh, let him go on!" said Flip. "It may turn out interesting."

"Come on, Vav!" urged Gadsby, changing

colour. "It's no use standin' about here. Are you comin', Derwent?"

He tried to school his voice to civility as he spoke to Flip; but it was little better than a snarl.

"Not yet. And I really don't think you ought to go, Gadsby. Just fancy what Bunter may say when once your back's turned!"

"I don't care a dashed halfpenny what the fat cad says, by gad!" growled Gadsby, going still redder. "Everyone knows what a liar he is."

"Well, stick on and hear. It may prevent him from lying too much."

"I'm a fat cad, am I, Gadsby?" hooped Bunter. "Well, that's better than being a thief, anyway!"

"A bit, perhaps," remarked Johnny Bull. "Unless the fat cad happens to be a general."

"Don't, Johnny!" struck in Wharton. "Bunter will let us down enough himself."

"He's done it already. I'm off—fed up with the whole affair!" Johnny growled. But he did not go, for no one else seemed willing to.

Gadsby stepped forward threateningly.

"So you say I'm a thief, Bunter, do you?" he snarled. "Say it again!"

"I will! You are a thief!" yelled the Owl, dodging behind Bob Cherry. "Don't let him hit me, Bob! I ain't in a fit condition to stand up to him!"

On the faces of the Famous Five were expressions of disgust. Vav's ensuing countenance matched Gadsby's for colour. Only Flip smiled. But it was not exactly a pleasant smile.

Better say what Gadsby has stolen," he said.

"Do you mean to say that you believe that fat lot of lies, Derwent?" raved Gadsby.

"Depends upon what they are. We haven't heard them yet. Go on, Bunter."

"You'd better be dashed careful what you say, Bunter!"

Is it worth while for Bunter to say anything," asked Wharton. "I fancy I know what he's driving at. Do you want it to go any farther, Derwent?"

"On the whole, I think I do," replied Flip coolly. "It may surprise you, Wharton, but I rather like to know my friends from my enemies. Have you got anything out of Hazeldene?"

"That's it!" howled Bunter, keeping carefully behind the stalwart Bob. "It was Gadsby who stole your cockatoo, Derwent! And that rotter Vavasour was in it, too. I shouldn't wonder if he put Gaddy up to it. And Hazel helped them!"

"You didn't, did you?" snapped Gadsby.

"Oh, let me get at him, Cherry!"

"I think not," said Bob. "We'll attend to him for his share in the dirty trick; but there don't seem to be any good reason why you should be allowed to slobber him."

"Leave Bunter alone, Gadsby!" said Flip. "You've reckoned with me, you know. That was a cad's game of yours."

"It was a cad's game," said Gadsby, seeing that denial was of no avail. "No one could be such a dashed fool as to think we meant to steal the bird. An' we didn't hurt the thing, either. He was only put over the wall into the Cliff House garden."

"That wasn't where he was found," said Flip.

The Famous Five were surprised that he didn't show more resentment.

But Flip felt as if something had gone dead in him. He was not furious with Gadsby, as he would have been a week earlier. It did not seem to matter much now, though it had mattered a good deal at the time. He had received no reply to his letter to Tunstall, and that was what seemed to matter. Cocky was safe in Flip's charge, and he had never reckoned Gadsby and Vavasour as friends, anyway. He was not ready to forgive them. His frame of mind was anything but forgiving. But he felt that this could wait.

"Don't let's go into it with these chaps," said Gadsby, gruffly enough, but appealingly, too.

"Right-ho! No need to wash our dirty linen in public, is there?" returned Flip. "So long, you fellows! Take care of Bunter! He's a rare and precious specimen, you know."

And the three Highcliffians walked off, scarcely in amity, but in a kind of armed neutrality.

Wharton looked after them.

"There's something wrong with Derwent,"

he said. "It's a pity, for he's a decent fellow."

"He seems bitter and reckless," replied Frank Nugent. "I can't make him out. He grined at the fight, but as soon as it was over all the cheerfulness went out of him."

"Call it a fight, do you?" growled Johnny. "I don't! Come along, you bloated disgrace to a decent school!"

That was to Bunter, of course.

"The warlikefulness of the ludicrous and disgusting Bunter scornfully proved of the first class," said thrice Jamset Ram Singh. "It was pitiful, for I have the thankfulness that the warlikefulness of the esteemed and despised Vav would not have been of the extremest endurance. But there is sorrowfulness in my heart for the honourable Derwent, for I think that he is of the doubtful nob because of his chum."

Not Too Cheerful.

"H AVE you heard from Tunstall, Flip?"

"They were the first words Flip had from his sister as he met her near the gate of Cliff House next day."

"If Flip had heard he would have thought the question was long asked before he was greeted the most natural thing in the world."

But he hadn't heard, and he was smarting under a feeling of undeserved neglect. He felt unusually morose, and he showed it.

"No!" he answered briefly.

Marjorie, Clara, and Phyllis had all stopped with Flip. But now Miss Trevelyn tossed her head and walked on. As she retained her hold on the arm of Phyllis, Miss Howell had also to walk on—unless she chose to drag herself free. And she did not appear to think that worth while.

But Marjorie stayed. Gentle, tender-hearted Marjorie had more sympathy with anyone buty under the weather than Phyllis or Clara. She was always ready to make excuses for people who were not quite up to their proper form.

And Flip certainly wasn't up to his usual cheerful standard. One could see that with half an eye.

He was very depressed. It had seemed impossible that Tunstall should not answer his letter; but no answer had come. And he could not guess that the friendliest of replies had been kept back by the knavery of Gadsby and Vavassor, and lay now at the bottom of Vav's box.

If he had had that he would have been getting ready to go. He had been moaning over to his chums now, instead of mooning over to Cliff House. hands in pockets, kicking stones along the road as he went, feeling that there wasn't a thing in the world that was worth while, and only going to see Flip because he knew that she would be expecting to see him, and just a little because he felt that she was the only chum he had just then.

For really, Pon was not a very satisfactory chum. It was not exactly pleasant for Flip to feel that he was keeping from his sister what would have worried her a good deal had she known of it. He did not attach much importance to it himself. A game of cards was not a crime, and losing or winning a little money did not matter among fellows who could afford it.

That was how he thought about it at Highcliffe, anyway.

It seemed rather different here, when he had the clear eyes of Flip and Marjorie to meet.

For it was impossible to leave Marjorie out. She had made a place for herself in his heart, as she had in so many others. Clara and Phyllis might go their way. Flip told himself that he did not mind. But he could not have persuaded himself that it did not matter if Marjorie had turned her back on him.

"It's queer," said Flip.

And somehow Flip had the feeling that she believed, as he did, that all was at an end between himself and the two chums who had meant so much to him—more than he had ever known till they had gone. Somehow, too, he was unreasonably angry with her for believing that.

"There must be some reason for it," said Marjorie.

"There is!" Flip said grimly. "They've thrown me over. They can't forgive me for not making up my mind at once that they were all right and Pon was all wrong."

"Well, they were right and Ponsonby was wrong," said Flip, with decision. "I don't say that they ought to be bitter against you about it; but a good deal would depend on what you said when you wrote to Tunstall."

"I said I was sorry," Flip replied, almost

saftely. "I couldn't say more—a chap can't. And a decent fellow don't ask for more. It's that, isn't enough, well, then, nothing is! Some things can't be put right. Perhaps this is one of them. But I know if I were old Merton, and he were in my place—"

He broke off, lapsing into moody silence.

Flip looked at Marjorie. Flip did not know what to say. Marjorie's friends were rather apt to look at her at such times. "If you feel that, Flip, I think you ought to count on Merton—and on Tunstall, too," said Marjorie.

No reply from Flip.

He had tried to go on believing. But that could not last for ever, and he had just about reached the end of his tether.

"Nobody here has," Marjorie heard, "said Flip, almost as hopelessly as Flip."

"But we shall hear. I feel sure some of us will," Marjorie said.

Flip did not look as if she felt sure. "They will shan't," said her brother. "They will never come back, and we shall never hear from them. Perhaps we shall never hear from them."

"If you feel that, Flip, I think you ought to count on Merton—and on Tunstall, too," said Marjorie.

"I hate that wretched Ponsonby!" cried Flip, stamping her foot angrily. "I did from the first! And if there was a time when I thought better of him for a few minutes, it was only because he talked me out of it. He talked you over, Flip, till you think him all that!"

"You don't know what I think of Pon!" said Flip roughly. "And I'm rather glad to hear that I'm not the only one he can talk over—though I don't remember that he ever talked me over specially. It was an accident on Pon's part. A girl may hate a fellow for good accident, but the accused is his unreasonable. It's a catfish sort of thing to do, and—"

"That's enough, Flip!" Flip cried, quite out of temper with him. "I didn't ever expect to hear you call me catfish. And you know I'm not—you do know it, whatever you say."

Before he could get out a word in reply she had gone. Her shoulders were shaking. Perhaps it was because she could not help crying that she went. Flip hated anyone to see her cry, just as a boy hates it.

"Now I've done it!" said Flip. "Aren't you going, too, Marjorie? Everybody had better chuck me at once, and then I can go to the dogs comfortably, knowing nobody cares!"

It was a silly, boyish speech, but Marjorie saw the pathos as well as the folly of it. Flip was taking things hard for the first time in his life. He had never encountered real, heavy trouble before, and it may be that he was not as well prepared to meet it as he had thought himself, and as others had thought him.

"Flip doesn't mean to chuck you, any more than you meant to hurt her," said Marjorie.

"That ain't very comforting, because, on the whole, I think I did mean to hurt her," Flip confessed candidly. "She was rather rough on me, you know."

"I think she said more than she meant," answered the gentle peacemaker.

"Well, I know I did. But you needn't tell her so. I'm glad you don't think me a hopeless case, Marjorie! A fellow likes someone to believe in him."

"I will believe in you, Flip. It's a bad time, and none of our tempers is quite what it might be, perhaps—mine isn't. I know, but I have faith in its all coming right in the end."

"You've got heaps of faith, Marjorie! Well, give Cocky my love. I suppose I mustn't send it to Flip—to say nothing of Clara and Phyllis!"

"Flip, wait a moment."

Marjorie looked quite tremulous now. Flip wondered.

"What is it? Look here, old girl, if it's anything I can do for you—well, I don't care what it is—I'll do it! For if ever there was a trick you are one!"

Marjorie smiled—a wan, little, tearful smile.

"I don't know that you can do anything, Flip. And yet you might be able to. It's Hazel. He's in trouble again, and I can't get him to tell me what it is."

"Well, he wouldn't tell me!" growled Flip, who had good reason to dislike Peter Hazeldene as much as he liked Peter Hazeldene's sister. "And there's Wharton. He keeps an eye on him, doesn't he? Wharton's worth a hundred of me for that sort of job. That sounds as if I was trying to crawl out. I'm

not, though. You can count on me all the way. Marjorie—honest Injun! If ever I can do your brother a good turn, I'll do it—for your sake!"

And with that Flip Derwent put away from him once for all any thought of ever bringing Hazeldene to account for his share in the abduction of Cocky. It was no very great sacrifice to make, making, but considering how Flip felt then, one may see in it some small merit.

"Thank you very much, Flip. You know that you can depend on me. And—well, you mustn't be put out with Flip."

"I'm not—not now. But it's all pretty cheerless, isn't it?" said Marjorie.

"Don't lose heart, Flip!"

"I'll try not to. So-long, Marjorie!"

Trouble at Cliff House.

F LIP passed Clara and Phyllis as he made his way back to Highcliffe. He did not stop, but he merely lifted his cap and walked on.

"We've offended his Highness!" said Clara, with a toss of her pretty head.

"Well, we really weren't very civil to him, were we?" returned Phyllis.

"I don't see why we should be. Flip hasn't played the game!"

"Are you sure of that? I'm not. I've been thinking, and it seems to me that perhaps he has—as he sees it."

"But he doesn't see it right."

"You mean we think he doesn't. Suppose you were to quarrel with Marjorie, Clara"

"I couldn't. No one could!"

"Oh, yes, they could! They would probably be in the wrong, for Marjorie's generally right. But suppose you did—would you think it the square thing for me to take Marjorie's part without question?"

"Of course not! Don't be absurd, my dear!"

"And would you think it right if I took yours without any question?"

"Well, that wouldn't be quite so wicked. I should like that better, of course. But—no, it would not be really fair, Phyllis. I don't think that's how poor old Flip was placed—Ponsonby on one side, and Merton on the other."

"But Ponsonby—how could anyone care about that—that cad?"

"That's not the thing, Clara. Flip doesn't think him a cad. If you were Ponsonby—"

"That's enough, Phyllis! I'm not going to ask myself to be compared—"

"Well, then, if Marjorie were Ponsonby—"

"But that's worse than ever! You're simply horrid, Phyllis, and I refuse to argue with you any more!"

Miss Clara snatched her arm away. Not another word passed between them till they reached the gates. Phyllis's well-meant attempt to show that Flip Derwent was not quite beyond the pale of forgiveness had not met with the success it merited.

"Oh, here you are, you two!" said little Molly Gray, her red head appearing above the gate. "We've been looking for you everywhere. Mith Primrose! Mith Primrose! There's a row on, I think."

"What on earth can be the matter?" said Phyllis.

"Goodness knows! And, as you are well aware, I am not exactly goodness, Phyllis, so I don't."

"I think it's about the hockey," said Molly, shaking her red mop solemnly.

"There hasn't been much hockey lately to make a row about. And why should there be a row about it, anyway?" asked Phyllis.

But that Molly did not know.

The three joined the throng in the big school-room. All the Cliff House girls were now there, and no one looked very happy. Certainly Miss Primrose did not.

"Ahem!" she said, as the three fell into their places. "I have called you together at an unusual hour, young ladies, because I have to speak to you on a serious and somewhat unpleasant subject."

"Toll her! It was the cat!" whispered Clara to Phyllis. "I don't know what she's missed, and it's an old yarn, but it might do. Miss Prim's fairly innocent."

"Clara Trevelyn, you are talking!"

"Sorry, Miss Primrose, really I don't wish to be so troublesome, but you are truly contrite. Please do not let it occur again."

"I shall have to cut my tongue out!" whispered Clara.

"Oh, shut up!" replied Phyllis, with quite a boyish growl.

"I consider an anonymous letter-writer a

contemptible creature," said Miss Primrose, with a sniff.

"Good egg! That's not me, anyway," said the irrepressible Clara. "Never wrote an anonymous—what d'ye callum letter in my life!"

"But there are times when one has no choice but to take notice of such missives," went on the headmistress. "I have received a letter, so ill-written and ill-spelled that it would appear to come from a person of very defective education, in which a charge is made against my school. It is not a charge which involves actual misbehaviour, I am glad to say; but it does involve a breach of decorum and a regrettable disregard of rules—unwritten rules, it may be, yet perfectly understood ones."

"Sounds more like me, that," said Clara. "But I never did understand unwritten rules—not all the written ones, for that matter."

"Shurrup!" hissed Phyllis.

"Somebody is talking again!" said Miss Primrose, her wrath rising.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Clara. "Muzzle me, do!"

"Unless this ceases, you will all be sent to bed at once!" snapped the lady in command. And then they knew that she was really angry, and even Clara dried up.

"Is it a fact that boys from Highcliffe have several times taken part in games of hockey on the school field?" demanded Miss Primrose.

No one answered that for the moment. It certainly was a fact, and Marjorie had warned the rest at the time that there would be trouble if Miss Primrose came to know of it. But it had been some little time ago, and most of the girls concerned felt that it was rather too bad to rake it up now.

"I perceive that it is true, as quite certainly some of you would have denied it had such not been the case. Have you any possible excuse to make?"

She looked towards the senior girls as she spoke. It was quite natural to hold them responsible, but perhaps it was hardly fair, as things were. For the Cliff House seniors were not specially keen on hockey, and were rather given to cutting practice. One or two of them might have been present at the mixed games, but they had had very little to do with any encouragement given to the Highcliffe juniors. Flip and his chums were mere small fry to these young ladies of seventeen and eighteen.

Flap stepped forward.

"I really think I was most to blame, Miss Primrose," she said pluckily.

"You, Philippa?"

The tones of Miss Primrose expressed great surprise.

But Flap did not get the chance to answer. Marjorie and Phyllis were at her side now, and Clara was coming. Just for a second Clara had held back, but it was only for a second.

"Flap—Philippa, I mean—is no more to blame than we are," said Phyllis frankly. "And the senior Form is not to blame at all. The Highcliffe boys were—are, I mean—our friends. Philip Derwent may have been one of them; but if he is Flap—Philippa's brother

he is our friend, so that it really makes no difference."

"Who were the other boys?"

"Merton and Tunstall," answered Phyllis. There was no question of sneaking; it was not the Highcliffe hockey players who would suffer. "And once Ponsonby and Vavasour. But we did not want them, and they didn't really play."

"They admit that you encouraged the others?"

"They could not very well have played if we had said they were not to," murmured Clara, not quite sure whether she wanted Miss Primrose to hear or not.

"I will not brook impertinence from you, Miss Trevlin!" rapped out the headmistress sharply.

Clara wilted. She had not meant to be exactly impertinent, and she certainly did not want to incur the wrath of Miss Primrose.

"It with me, too, Mith Primrothe!" piped up Molly Gray, coming out to stand by the rest.

In spite of her anger Miss Primrose smiled.

"You thee, Algy—Merton, I mean—with a friend of mine at home. And—and—oh, really, you know there watn't any harm in it, Mith Primrothe?"

"You must allow me to be judge of that, Molly. But your frankness is to be commended, though I cannot hold you, a mere child, in any way responsible. You may return to your place."

"If you pleathe, Mith Primrothe, I'd rather not! If Marjorie and the rehti are to be punished, I think I ought to be!"

She was allowed to stay.

Marjorie's hand reached down, and the small girl slipped hers inside it. And somehow Miss Primrose looked a trifle less wrathful.

"Which of you seniors were present on any occasion when this thing happened?" asked the headmistress.

Half a dozen rose, one or two looking haughtily unconcerned, others very uncomfortable.

"Very well! I do not intend to punish you. I will only say that I am surprised that you should not have shown more sense of decorum. You must know that allowing boys to take part in the games was not the kind of thing of which I should approve. That will do—you may all go, except the four before me."

"Five, pleathe, Mith Primrothe!" said Molly Gray firmly.

That correction was not answered. But Molly stayed.

"I am not going to scold you girls," said Miss Primrose, when the rest, with the assistant-mistresses had departed. "But I must punish you, and I must tell you that I am disappointed in you—that I have lost some part of the faith I have in your honour and candour. I think you should have known that I should not approve. Marjorie, answer me that! Did you not know?"

"Yes, I knew," replied Marjorie, blushing. "And she said so, too!" said Flap. "It's not Marjorie's fault, anyway!"

"As she countenanced the proceedings by her presence, I cannot accept that theory, Philippa!" Miss Primrose said sternly.

And it was true that Marjorie had countenanced the proceedings not only by her presence but by putting up a particularly good and vigorous game. She could not be held guiltless if any of them were to be held guilty.

"For the rest of this term I cannot allow any boys to be asked to tea here," said Miss Primrose. "I am a firm believer in the provision of suitable opportunities for the young of both sexes to meet; but there are limits to be observed. Also, for the next ten days none of you four—"

"Five, Mith Primrothe!" murmured Molly. "None of you five, then, will go outside the gates for the next ten days unless with a mistress. That is all. I hope that your behaviour in future may be better, and that I may soon have cause to regain the good opinion of you that I have had hitherto."

"And Miss Primrose swept out of the room. "My law," said Clara. "I, Marj, old girl, don't worry! It really wasn't your fault; and, whatever Miss Prim may say, she thinks as much of you as ever. No one could help it!"

"You are really the silliest ass I know, Clara!" said Phyllis frankly. "You would go on saying that I was the most decent of you; but you weren't to blame, and you simply forced Miss Prim to put you in with us criminals!"

"It's all right, Phyllith," said Molly Gray. "If Marjorie'th to be punished, I'd rather, to me."

There seemed something like a conspiracy to comfort Marjorie.

None of them quite knew how much she needed comfort, though. She was terribly worried about her brother; and this sentence of gating meant that she would have no chance to meet him for ten days.

Hazel would not make a chance, she knew—except that when things got to the worst he might come whining to her for help, as he had done before. And if he could not see her then he would get desperate.

A tear stole down her cheek as she thought of Hazel—then another, and another.

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(To be continued next week.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:
"FOES OF THE SCHOOL HOUSE!"

By Martin Clifford.

This story was announced for this week, but it had to be postponed on account of the failure of the illustrations to get here in time, and "The Man of Mystery" which I chanced to have in hand, already illustrated, was substituted. Next week's fine yarn will tell you how Manners persisted in his feud against the new Juniors, Roynance, in spite of all his friends could say, and what came of his unreasonable attitude. It will tell, too, of a scoundrelly trick played by Racke, who hates Manners, and has recently had fresh cause to be up against him in the matter of Cardew's wheeze about the tooth-powder posters.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 3 of this series—Fatty Wynn—will appear next week. I had room for it this week, but no time to get it done. As I have already explained, these articles are not easy

things to write; and there has been heavy pressure of work lately.

CADET NOTES.

I hope that these will interest many of you, and send you along to join up. That is my notion in inserting them. Last week I had to leave out the Chat in order to make room for them; this week I am shortening it. But I think and hope you will find the notes quite as interesting.

BACK NUMBERS WANTED.

I am in urgent need of Nos. 282-307 inclusive of the Gem, and also the issue containing the story entitled "The Floating School." If any readers have all or any of these numbers I shall be very glad if they will communicate with me, stating the numbers of the issues of which they are willing to dispose, and the price they require for them. Please note, however, the copies must be perfectly clean. Damaged or unclean copies will be of no use to me.

By P. Lewis, 38, White Lion Street, Angel,

Islington, N.1.—GEM and "Magnet," 1912. 1915—good price offered.

By R. Taylor, 6, Thornley Avenue, Smith-hills, Bolton—GEM and "Magnet," any numbers before change to white covers was made.

By Jack Skipper, 33, Oaklands Road, West Jesmond, Newcastle-on-Tyne—GEM and "Magnet," numbers before 200.

By A. J. Eames, Grafton House, 46, Calabaria Road, Highbury, N.—Numbers of "Magnet" dealing with Wharton's fight for the captaincy—11d. each offered.

By Albert Black, 315, Commercial Road, Poplar, E.—"W.W. Lung's Secret," "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "Schoolboys Never Shall be Slaves"—clean copies.

Your Editor