

THE SKIPPER OF THE SHELL SECOND!

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

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An illustration in the top left corner of the masthead shows two boys in school uniforms playing football. One boy is kicking the ball while the other is running towards it.

TWO TO THE RESCUE!

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

THE SKIPPER OF THE SHELL SECOND!

By
Martin
Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Gore as Skipper.

"**H**I, Clampe!" Leslie Clampe, of the Shell Form and the New House at St. Jim's, turned with a scowl. It was George Gore who had shouted to him; and he and Gore were not on the best of terms.

Gore was just now a person of somewhat more importance than usual, and was not disposed to let other people overlook the fact.

He had been given by Tom Merry the captaincy of the Shell Second Eleven for a match which was to give either Shell or Fourth ten points in the great competition series.

Scarcely anyone had any doubt as to which side would annex those ten points.

The Shell Second Eleven were a terribly scratch lot. Gore was not a duffer. He was only just outside the Form First team. But that team included one or two who were quite moderate cricketers. And it would have been the grossest flattery to the possible members of Gore's eleven to say that they were even moderate.

These was Thompson, who could bat a little bit, and bowl a little bit, and freeze on to a catch if it came straight into his hands. There was Gibbons, who could hit, but always gave chances—and did not take the chances which the other fellows offered him. And there were Boulton, who could field, but was hopeless as both batsman and bowler; Lennox, who was the nearest approach to a wicket-keeper Gore could find; and French, whose bowling might have been quite destructive if it had only been straight. The rest was silence.

And because the rest was silence Gore had bethought himself of Clampe. The New House black sheep did not care about cricket. None of Racke's brigade cared about games.

But Clampe might have been a really useful left-hand bowler. He had an easy action, with the natural off-break which so many left-handers possess. More than once, in practice games, he had been known to go through a side apparently without effort. But he had never taken the game seriously.

"Did you speak to me, Gore?" asked Clampe, with an elaborate pretence of politeness.

"I yelled at you," replied Gore, who was no disciple of the polished Lord Chesterfield.

"Well, I don't care to be yelled at," said Clampe haughtily.

"I don't care a twopenny rap whether you care about it or not!" growled Gore. "I wanted to speak to you, so I yelled."

"I don't want to speak to you, so I'll go," Clampe said.

"No, you won't!"

George Gore had Clampe by the collar, and the weedy waster writhed in vain.

"Leggo, you cad!" he panted. "You're chuk-chuk-chokin' me!"

"I'll call Skimmy to you if you ain't careful!" growled Gore, giving his victim a hearty shake.

There was a sting in that warning. Herbert Skimpole of the Shell was not really a very terrible person. But there

were fellows both in his own Form and in the Fourth who had rather shunned him of late.

Seven of them at first. Skimmy had sworn a feud against the whole seven, vowing to fight and thrash each of them in turn. It had seemed the merest jape to all but Skimmy himself, and perhaps to Reginald Talbot, who had agreed to coach him in boxing.

And then it had ceased to be a jape to Baggy Trimble, who had faced Skimmy and been licked. Percy Mellish took the next turn, and to him also there had seemed little point in the joke, for he had gone Trimble's way—the way of defeat. And by this time Skimmy's Form had begun to have a little respect for Skimmy's form, as the humorous Lowther put it.

Cyril Chowle was the third of the seven. Chowle came, saw, and did not conquer. Talbot's lessons were certainly not being wasted upon the eccentric genius of the Shell.

That cleared off the Fourth, and Skimmy had scored two points for his Form in each encounter. Whereat Skimmy rejoiced exceedingly, yet bore his honours with modesty.

Then Racke had been taken on. Racke ought to have been able to thrash Skimmy. But he did not prove able to. No points hung upon that battle, yet it increased the renown of Skimmy, and caused the three left out of the seven to shun him more than ever.

These three were Crooke, Scrope, and Clampe; and of the three Clampe was possibly the worst funk—which is saying quite a lot.

"Sku-Sku-Sky-Skimmy be hanged!" gurgled Clampe.

"Yes, I dare say that would suit your rotten book!" returned Gore, with deep sarcasm. "But we aren't going to have old Skimmy hanged. I never thought I should begin to cherish old Skimmy; but I'm blessed if I don't now! And I shall turn him loose on you unless—"

Gore paused, perhaps to let the threat sink in.

He relaxed his hold a little, but not enough to give Clampe a chance to get away.

"Unless what?" asked the New House fellow. "Dash it, Gore, a pretty mess you've made of my collar! Your paws are filthy, by gad!"

"My what?" howled Gore.

"Well, your hands aren't over an above clean—you must own that yourself," replied Clampe sullenly.

"I don't own anything of the sort! Besides, I've been playing cricket. You can't expect them to be very clean after that," Gore said. The two statements did not fit one another very well; but Gore did not mind that.

"Well, you might keep them off a fellow's collar when they're in that state," grumbled Clampe.

"You say another word about my hands, and I'll jolly well make you lick them clean!" howled Gore.

"You couldn't. An' it's utter rot to make out that I'm afraid of a tame lunatic like Skimmy. I could lick him into a cocked hat!"

"Well, why don't you?"

"I don't want to hurt the poor imbecile."

"Rats! Racke was afraid of doing that—so he said. But old Skimmy hurt him. So he will you, and unless you do what I want I'll bring him over to your dog-kennel and force you to fight it out. Figgis & Co. will back me up all serene, so you needn't fancy you can raise the House on me."

This was undoubtedly true. Figgins & Co. were very much ashamed of Clampe. They had never been proud of him; but they had not deemed him quite such a worm as to funk Skimpole.

"What do you want me to do?" demanded Clampe sullenly.

"Play for the Second Eleven against the Fourth Second," answered Gore.

"I hate cricket! It's the most loathsome game that was ever invented."

"Well, I'm not asking you to love it. I don't care a scrap about that. I only want you to play in this one match."

"I can't bat—never could."

"My hat, who ever supposed you could! You needn't go in unless you want to. We can have you shovelled down 'absent' in the score. It don't look well, but that's no odds to a worm like you."

"You might be civil, anyway, Gore! I can't field, either. My hands were never meant for stoppin' anythin' so beastly hard as a cricket ball."

"You'll have to pretend to field, but it need only be a pretence."

"What on earth do you want me for?" snarled Clampe, although he knew perfectly well.

"To bowl the Fourth bounders out!" Gore snapped.

"But I don't see why you should think I can do that," protested Clampe weakly. "I never play except on compulsory days, an' I never try then."

"You can do it without trying, you worm! Crumbs, it's pretty rough luck that an outsider like you should have a blessed gift that plenty of decent fellows would give ever so much for!"

"Well, I don't care to play. If I could bowl the Australians out I shouldn't care to do it. I tell you I hate the rotten game and everything connected with it. Besides, we've made up our minds that we're havin' nothin' to do with your piffin' competition."

"Our what?" hooted Gore, applying pressure to Clampe's neck again.

"Gurrrr! Don't! Stoppit!"

"Our what?" howled Gore.

"Gurrrr! Groooh! Stoppit!"

"Hallo, Gore! What are you slaying Clampe for?" asked the voice of Tom Merry, skipper of the Lower School.

"Not that we mind," remarked Monty Lowther generously.

The quad had been deserted except by Gore and Clampe, when the School House fellow had hailed the New House waster. But now the juniors were coming from Little Side, and behind the Terrible Three came the chums of Study No. 6 on the Fourth passage, Blake, D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby; and the trio from No. 9—Levison major, Clive, and Cardew, and Talbot and Noble and

Dane and Glyn; and a score of others of the Fourth and the Shell.

Gore still hung on to Clampe. Gore was a dogged individual. He had not meant to make public his enlistment of Clampe as a member of the Shell Second Eleven, but he was bound to explain himself now. It had been intended as a complete surprise for the Fourth. Well, the surprise might come off yet. There were members of the Fourth Second team who were too cocksure for anything, Gore considered.

CHAPTER 2.

A Bargain Made.

"THIS ROTTER says he won't play for the Shell Second!" snapped Gore.

"But you don't want him to, surely?" said Tom Merry, in amazement. "I do, though. And, what's more, I mean to make him!" snorted Gore. "You can't make me!" squealed Clampe.

"Weally, Goah, I am surprised—" "It don't take a lot to surprise a silly ass like you, D'Arcy!"

"But what's it for?" asked Talbot. "I know Clampe's kept out of the competition so far, and we stand to lose ten points if he manages to keep out to the end. But—"

"You're goin' to lose them!" said Clampe.

But his words lacked real conviction. He knew that only the fact of his being New House had saved him so far. Figgins & Co., who led there, had no interest in forcing a Shell fellow in, and the New House Shell representatives were not masterful people.

"No one would ever think of shoving a fellow into a cricket team when it's well known that the fellow's a rank duffer, and a slacker, too," said the great George Alfred Grundy. "It's weakening the team to no purpose."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Digby. "Old Grundy thinks it's possible to weaken the Shell Second! My hat, it would take some doing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the rest. "And no one roared more loudly than the Fourth-Formers who were down to play against the Shell Second, among whom were Digby, Herries, Julian, Reilly, Owen, Lawrence, and Hammond."

"Why, Brooke could knock Clampe's bowling all over the field!" said Lumley-Lumley, who was also down to play, but who seemed to have more notion than his comrades at what Gore was driving.

Tom Merry rubbed his chin thoughtfully. He had forgotten until that moment all about Clampe's possibilities as a left-hander. But now that he was reminded of them, he could not help but see, knowing the game as he did, that there was method behind Gore's apparent madness.

"Then Brooke's the only one of the whole blessed gang of you who could, and I don't believe he could!" growled Gore. "And you wouldn't have had Brooke if it hadn't been for an accident."

"No, dear boy. But they would possibly have had me instead, y'know," drawled Ralph Reckness Cardew, who had taken Dick Brooke's place in the First Eleven game, and had distinguished himself beyond all expectation.

"You! You couldn't play Clampe! It's no merit to him. He ought to be ashamed of himself for slacking as he does. But the beast can bowl. And he don't really have to try to."

"It's all rot!" said Clampe plaintively. "If I ever did bowl well it was a beastly fluke, an' it isn't likely I ever should again. Besides, I hate the silly game! I'd sooner play marbles—there!"

"Or banker," suggested Herries.

"Oh, rather!" said Clampe fervently.

"Of course, it's rot," said Grundy—"absolute rot! And you can take it from me, Gore, that I'm not going to have it!"

"You, you fat-headed chump!" howled Gore. "What have you got to do with it?"

"As a member of the Second Eleven—I ought to have played in the First by rights, but I'm quite contented to help the Second to victory."

"Hear him, Dig!" gasped Blake. "He's quite content to help the Shell Second to victory! Oh, my only Aunt Jemima Jane Ann!"

"The Shell Second couldn't beat us in a hundred years," Dig replied confidently. "Gore's the only chap among them who's not absolutely rank, and I don't think much even of Gore!"

The skipper of the maligned eleven paid no attention to Digby. He was already attending to two things—holding on to Clampe, and withering Grundy—or trying to. George Alfred was not easily withered.

"You're not a member of the Second Eleven, Grundy!" hooted Gore.

"I'm not—what do you say, Gore?" demanded Grundy fiercely.

He could hardly believe his ears.

"I haven't finally chosen the team yet, but it ain't a bit likely your name will go in."

"Are you goin' to play Wacke an' Cwooke an' Sowope, as well as Clampe, deah boy!" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"They dashed well wouldn't play, an' I dashed well won't!" said Clampe sulkily.

"You dashed well will, if I have to drag you there by a rope round your neck!" howled Gore.

"Quite the latest in cricket skippers!" murmured Lowther. "Tommy, what a weak, tame-leader you are! I never knew you to take a player along to a match with a rope round his neck!"

"Well, you can't very well force the fellow to play," remarked Clifton Dane reasonably.

"Oh, can't I? You'll see, my pippin. Where's Skimmy?"

"Do you want Skimmy to play as well?" asked Julian. "My hat, if that isn't the giddy limit!"

"Of course I don't, you burbling jabberwock! I want him to make this crawling worm toe the line!"

"A worm with toes is a new thing in zoology, I fancy," murmured Lowther. "Almost as big a find as Gore's discovery that Clampe is a deadly, sinister trundler!"

"Gore isn't so far out as you fellows think," answered Tom quietly. "Clampe can bowl, if he likes."

"But he evidently doesn't like," said Manners.

"If he is overjoyed at the honour done him, he certainly manages to conceal the fact fairly well," Lowther rejoined.

Clampe was getting desperate. It was not pleasant to be held up like this before the majority of the two Forms, and to have opprobrious epithets hurled at one. But he dared not face Gore in fight. He was trying to make up his mind, however, to a lesser heroism.

"Who cares a scrap about Skimmy?" he said. "I don't! I'm ready to fight him this moment, if you like!"

"Good egg! I'll run and tell him," said Dig eagerly.

And he bolted. Clampe had not expected anything quite so summary. But he braced himself to the ordeal.

"But only on conditions," he added.

There was a chance here, and he had no mind to let it slip.

"What conditions?" asked Kangaroo.

"That Skimmy's arms should be tied behind his back, an' his legs hobbled, I should imagine," drawled Cardew.

"Rats!" snapped Clampe. "My condition is a very simple one. If I lick the silly ass, there's to be no more talk about this cricket rot, that's all. An' that's fair enough, by gad!"

"Yes, I think it is," Tom Merry said. "Of course, it cuts the other way, too. If Skimmy licks you, you play, and do your best."

"Oh!" returned Clampe, rather blankly. Then he seemed to brighten up. He had reflected that, however badly he might play, there could be no proof that he was not doing his best. Then, too, he really fancied that he could lick Skimpole if he made up his mind to it. Hitherto he had found a difficulty in making up his mind—that was all.

"I agree to that," he said. "You fellows are all witnesses. If I lick Skimmy, Gore leaves me alone. If I don't, I play. I sha'n't be any use; but I'll play."

"Is that all right, Gore?" asked Tom.

"I'm on," replied Gore readily. And, to prove that he meant it, he let go Clampe's collar.

Some of those who heard stared. It was hardly like George Gore to show himself so readily amenable to reason.

"Oh, I know what I'm doing," Gore said, with a grin. "Skimmy will lick this rotter all serene, you take my tip! I've had the gloves on with Skimmy myself, and he ain't half the dud you might think. Old Talbot has made him buck up no end."

Dig came back.

"Says he can't be bothered just now," he told them. "He's working out what's going to happen when the sun goes out, which, according to Professor Balm-crumpet, it's going to do in umpteen million years."

"Did you remind him that in all probability most of us would be comfortably dead by that time?" asked Lowther.

"Yes; but he said that wasn't looking at the matter in a true scientific spirit. He said our descendants would be alive when the great ice-cap began to creep up from the poles. Fancy old Skimmy's great-great-grandchildren! Oh, crumbs!"

"But is he going to let Clampe off altogether?" asked Herries, in evident disappointment.

"Yaas, that is the question, as Hamlet says, deah boy."

"Who was Hamlet?" Cardew asked, wrinkling his brows. "I fancy I have heard the name before, but—"

"Your ignorance, Cardew—"

"Never mind about old Hamlet!" snapped Blake. "Can't think why you want to drag in back numbers like him! When does Skimmy propose to massacre Clampe, Dig?"

"After classes this afternoon. He says he would like to take on Scrope at the same time, too."

"What, together?" demanded Clampe eagerly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you hero!" said Kangaroo scornfully.

"Skimmy would, come to that," said Gore. "I never saw anyone who's bucked up like the old fossil has. But it wouldn't be fair to him to let him."

"I shouldn't think of it," said Clampe. "I wouldn't trust you!" retorted Kerruish.

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpy on the Warpath.

"COME along, Scrope!" said Aubrey Racke, with a malicious grin.

"I'm not coming," replied Luke Scrope sullenly. "I think it's all a lot of silly rot! I've no quarrel with Skimpole."

"He has with you, though," Crooke said. "Ha, ha!"

"Well, so he has with you, come to that," remarked Racke.

"You don't suppose I funk Skimpy, do you?" roared Crooke.

"I don't know. How should I?" answered Racke coolly.

Crooke glared at him. These two hung together. But between them there was none of the true feeling of comradeship.

Scrope began to sidle away. He had had Skimpy's defiance repeated to him at least a score of times; and each time he had heard it he had liked it less. He had even meditated offering an apology. Skimpy, who was invariably polite, except when too immersed in mighty thoughts to remember what was due in that way, surely could not refuse an apology politely offered!

But Scrope knew that the other fellows would chuckle, and Scrope was thin-skinned.

He had made up his mind that the gym was no fit place for him that afternoon. But Racke and Crooke seemed to think otherwise.

"You're safe, old sport!" said Crooke. "If he licks Clampe, he'll be just about dead-beat."

"I'm not so jolly sure of that!" mumbled Scrope.

"An' if Clampe licks him, there can't be any question of his fightin' again to-day," Racke said.

Scrope went. He was weak, and those two could lead him.

Clampe had reached the gym before them.

But this was not due to any eagerness on the part of Clampe for the fray. He was not at all that kind of person.

It was due to Figgins & Co.

By chance, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn had all been absent from the Gore-Clampe debate in the quad, as had Redfern. But, of course, they soon heard of it; and they decided that, for the honour of the New House, Clampe must be brought up to the scratch.

So he had arrived, escorted by Figgy, Kerr, Fatty Wynn, Koumi Rao, Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, Thompson, and Jimson. The last-named two said that the honour of the Form was also concerned. They were of the Shell. Redfern expressed his opinion that neither the House nor the Form was likely to get much honour out of anything Clampe did; but, as George Figgins replied, that was not the thing. Having made him toe the mark, they would have done all that they were called upon to do.

Skimpy, with Talbot and Gore, arrived just ahead of Racke & Co.

Gore's attitude to Skimpy, whom he had hitherto treated, at best, with a sort of scornful toleration, had quite changed. Skimpy was now of importance in Gore's eyes. If he licked Clampe, the Shell Second Eleven would have a left-hand bowler!

"You ought to hit quicker, Skimpy," Gore said. "You aren't bad for straightness, you know; but it don't do to take all that time taking aim. It's like telling a chap where you are going to punch him. And that's off. Isn't it, Talbot?"

Talbot nodded.

"But, my dear Gore, much as I appreciate the very kindly interest you express in my pugilistic fortunes," said Skimpole mildly, "I must make it clear to you that

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anything in the nature of deceit is abhorrent to me. If I pretended that I meant to hit Clampe in the eye, and thereafter proceeded to inflict damage upon his nasal organ, that would surely be—"

"A feint," said Talbot. "I don't know whether you're quite up to that sort of thing yet, Skimpy."

"But would it not be, in a measure, deceit?"

"Of course it wouldn't, dummy!" snapped Gore. "That's boxing, you chuckle-headed chump!"

"Indeed? Although the epithets you employ, Gore, are repugnant to my taste, I give you credit for intending well by me. I must reconsider my views. Talbot seems to agree with you, and I have strong faith in Talbot's rectitude—more so than I have in yours, my dear Gore, if you will pardon my candour. If Clampe sees me striking at his nose, and then finds one of his optical organs smitten, it will doubtless cause him some surprise, and surprise is I apprehend, an important element in strategy—or should it be tactics? Tactics, I think, as in a sense the minor branch—"

"Brrr!" growled Gore.

"It won't only be Clampe who will be surprised if you do what you're talking about, Skimpy," said Talbot, smiling. "But there's no harm in trying. I think you will lick him, in any case. That whole crowd are funks. They can't bear being hurt. You've the pull of them there."

Racke, Crooke, and Scrope, only just behind, heard, and scowled at Talbot as they passed.

One might have expected Clampe to be pleased at the appearance of his three pals. He did not seem to be, however. Chowle, who had already gone down before the bony arms of Skimpy, was to second him; and he knew that Racke & Co. would enjoy the spectacle of his defeat—if he was defeated—as much as the rest.

He did not think he was going to be licked, but he had no very confident assurance of victory.

"I observe that Scrope is present," remarked Skimpole. "When I shall have finished with Clampe—presuming that I thrash him, as I sincerely hope to do—I trust that Scrope will raise no objection to confronting me. I find that, necessary as they are, these successive combats form a serious interruption to pursuits of infinitely higher importance, and I should wish—"

"You've got Clampe to lick first!" snarled Scrope.

"Dear me, yes! I trust I am not keeping you waiting, Clampe?"

Clampe's only reply to that polite remark was a ferocious scowl.

Chowle fastened his gloves, and Gore, who had insisted upon being Skimpy's second this time, performed that office for his learned principal.

"Hit him on the boko, Skimpy—hard!" was Gore's last word.

"The—er—which? I fear, my dear Gore, that—"

"Oh, chuck it!" groaned the Kangaroo. "Go in and win! You can gas afterwards."

Clampe refused to shake hands. Skimpy reproved him in words of six or seven syllables—or, rather, began to do so. The reason why he did not go on was because Clampe hit in the middle of the second polysyllable, and also in the region of the jaw, and Skimpy saw that the occasion was really one for action instead of words.

The blow was doubtfully fair, for Skimpy had certainly not been prepared for it. But then, the laws of the Ring make no allowance for people who want to conduct long conversations after

"Time!" has been called. And the blow really did Skimpy good.

It aroused all the combativeness in his pacific nature. He was quite sure it was not fair, and he went for Clampe like a terrier at a rat.

"Bravo, Skimpy!"

"That's the style!"

"Give him another!"

In his anger Skimpy hit with far greater quickness than he had done in any previous fight. He did not stop to think where he should plant his blows. Clampe was there before him, and to punch Clampe anywhere—above the belt, of course—seemed good unto Skimpy in that moment.

Right, left! Left, right! He never thought of guarding, and there was not much for him to guard against.

Clampe was so taken by surprise at this determined onslaught that he hardly tried to hit back. Even as felt through the padded gloves, the knuckles of his opponent were distinctly bony, and Clampe was soft. He was getting hurt, and he had scarcely believed that Skimpy, whose arms were guiltless of perceptible biceps, could really hurt him.

Also he was getting licked! Thus early in the fight he knew that. He could not stand much of this punching. He did not want to be licked by Skimpy. Still less did he want to play in the Second Eleven match. But least of all did he want to get hurt. And he was being hurt!

At the end of the round he was blowing hard, and not far from weeping.

"Why don't you sail in an' let him have it?" asked Crooke.

"Why don't you come an' do it yourself?" retorted Clampe bitterly.

"I will, right enough, when my turn comes, by gad!"

"Aren't you in a hurry for your turn, Crooke?" inquired Lowther blandly.

"That's the style, old top!" said Gore, fanning Skimpy.

"Do you really think so, Gore? Now, I have my doubts whether I did not allow my natural ire—"

"Shut up your natural jaw, and save your natural breath for your job!" growled Gore, who was not the most polite fellow at St. Jim's.

But it was evident that Skimpy really felt that he ought not to have let his anger affect him. In the second round he went back to his old, deliberate style. He carefully chose the spot where he meant to punch, and then proceeded to do his conscientious best to punch it, as a matter of sheer duty.

If Clampe had been even a decent boxer he could have defended himself easily. And he ought to have been able to get in a blow heavy enough to tumble over Skimpy, who was lighter than he, and not so very firm on his feet.

But Clampe was a poor boxer, and a sorry funk into the bargain. Not even to save himself from having to appear in a cricket-match would he take much more of this!

Besides, it was not going to save him—unless he could win.

And he could not win by merely letting Skimpy hit him.

Also, as he was in it, he might as well hurt Skimpy if he could. The thought came to him suddenly, and under its inspiration he woke up.

Skimpy, meditating a feint, but oppressed by doubts as to whether it was quite right or quite prudent to change to nose the blow obviously aimed at the eye, found Clampe's fist shooting past his extended arm. He sat down hard. It may have been as much luck as judgment, and as much Skimpy's weakness on his pins as the force of Clampe's punch. But the fact remained that Skimpy had taken a

knock-down blow, and that Clampe had given one!

"Groooh! Oh dear!" said Skimmy, feeling his jaw as he lay.

CHAPTER 4.

Two Victories.

"O H, good man, Clampe!" yelled Racke.

It was only a few days before that Racke had had to confess defeat at Skimmy's hands. He enjoyed seeing his conqueror hurt.

"Seven-eight—"

So Tom Merry counted. Skimmy was still lying on the floor feeling his jaw.

"Oh, get up, you chuckle-headed idiot!" howled Gore, almost in agony. But it was of what hung upon the fight rather than of the issue of the fight itself, that Gore was thinking.

Skimmy, almost as if galvanised, bobbed up. He was only just in time to avoid being counted out.

"Go for him again, Clampe!" hooted Crooke.

But Clampe hesitated. There was a gleam in the eyes of his opponent that he did not fancy.

"Time!" said Tom Merry, and the combatants withdrew to their corners.

"Why were you in such haste that I should arise, Gore, my dear fellow?" inquired Skimpole mildly.

"Because you'd have been counted out if you hadn't got on your broomsticks that giddy second!" growled Gore.

"I am not sure that I perfectly apprehend your meaning, my dear Gore. Would it have mattered if I had been counted out?"

"Mattered, you dummy? Why, you'd have been licked! And then what—"

"But I entirely fail to see how I could have been—er—licked while still willing and perfectly competent to go on fighting," returned Skimmy, greatly puzzled.

"Oh, will someone explain to this tame lunatic what 'counted-out' means?" gasped Gore. "He's quite beyond me!"

Talbot explained briefly.

"Dear me!" said Skimmy. "You surprise me extremely. I had no idea of any such condition to the fight. My jaw was hurt, but I did not wish or intend to cease from contesting. I certainly thought, however, that a reasonable time might be given me to ascertain the extent of my damage."

"Well, to judge by the way you can work your jaw still, Clampe didn't hurt it much," said Talbot, smiling. "Dry up, now! You'll need your breath later, perhaps. But don't lie down for a rest, or, if you do, see that you're on your pins again by the time the referee gets to nine in his count."

"I will certainly bear your counsel in mind, my dear Talbot. But I do not think that Clampe will again reduce me to a recumbent position."

And Clampe didn't.

He tried something very like hugging in the third round, having hit upon the idea that Skimmy could not very well hit him hard while his head was up against Skimmy's chest, and his arms were around Skimmy's body. He was quite indignant when Tom ordered him to break away.

His wrath lent him a fierce spasm of courage, and he got home two or three in quick succession on Skimmy's serious visage. The philosopher blinked, and shook his head. Blood was running from his nose, and he regarded the red spots on the floor with something very like astonishment—which was unnecessary, as the punch must have hurt him, and when a fist hits one's nose hard enough to hurt it, the drawing of blood is not an unusual result.

Clampe gave way before the deter-



In Gore's Way!
(See Chapter 6.)

mined attack which followed. He gave way as far as the ropes would let him, and then he was brought up short.

Skimpole drew his right arm back. Then he seemed to remember something—probably Talbot's advice to use the right chiefly for guarding, and to use the left as much as possible for hitting. Anyway, he dropped his right, and drew back his left instead.

Clampe, who might have hit him half a dozen times while he was thus engaged, stood still as if mesmerised.

The left fist of Skimmy moved forward with a slow precision that was like the action of a machine. It smote Clampe upon the nose.

"Yooop!" howled Clampe.

He seemed quite astonished that his nose had been punched. He was the only fellow present who was astonished, however. Everyone else had seen the blow coming, and had known where it was intended to fall.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Shell and Fourth, School House and New House, in chorus.

A big drop of blood fell from Clampe's nose. He put up his hand to it in a wondering kind of way. Another fell, and Clampe blinked. Clampe felt very sorry indeed for himself.

The heart of Skimpole was also moved to compassion.

"I am very regretful, Clampe, that you should have imposed upon me the unpleasant necessity of shedding your blood," he said. "As a convinced Pacifist—"

"Good old Pacifist Skimmy!" roared Figgins.

"I deplore it. As, I trust, an individual of humanity, I sorrow over it. I shall be pained whenever I think of it. I—Yaroooooh!"

It was too much for Clampe to bear. In a last gust of resentment he had punched again, and Skimmy's mouth had suffered.

Skimmy had been going to explain that he had felt obliged to make Clampe's nose bleed, because Clampe had made his. But he did not wait to explain that now. Clampe had dodged away. Skimmy chased him.

Clampe turned. Skimmy hit out, without waiting to take aim at all. The blow tumbled Clampe over, and he submitted with the greatest tameness to being counted out.

"Is it over?" Skimmy asked, wiping his bleeding nose on his glove. "Perhaps now, my dear fellow, you will suffer me to communicate to you the principles which actuated me to a deed which may be—"

"Oh, go to Bath, you putty-faced fool!" snarled Clampe.

"Can this extremely rude person not be forced to get up and allow me to hit him again, Merry?" inquired the genius of the Shell, with indignation.

"Ha, ha! I'm afraid that can't be done, Skimmy," replied Tom.

"But there's Scrope simply yearning to take you on," said Cardew.

Scrope did not look as if he were yearning for anything of the sort. He had managed to get out of the neighbourhood of Racke and Crooke, and had begun to edge towards the door some minutes before.

But somehow he could not get out of the crowd. Every time he tried he found himself being forced nearer the ring.

No one said anything. If it was a conspiracy it was a silent one.

But now it was Levison whose shoulder pushed him in the wrong direction, and now Reilly and Kerruish were in his way. Then he was hustled by Mulvaney minor and the ineffable Clarence York Tompkins.

After that Redfern and Owen and Lawrence thrust him towards Lowther and Manners, who in their turn passed

him to Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins, from whom he next moved to Kangaroo and Clifton Dane.

But all the moving never brought him a stop nearer the door, and at the end of it all he found himself at the ringside, gazing with fascinated eyes, rather like unto a sheep led to the slaughter.

"If you would be so very obliging, Scrope," said Skimpole, beaming upon him. "The thing has to be done, and it would really be a convenience to me to have it done with."

"I—I—" "That's just where you mustn't hit him!" said Lowther reprovingly. "If you break his barnacles—"

"Look here, Skimmy's had enough for one day!" said Scrope nobly. "Why, the chap's nose is bleeding!"

"If Skimmy does not mind that, Scrope—"

"I do mind, D'Arcy! I regret to have to confess it, but the fact vexes me in a manner somewhat short of being truly philosophical. But it should not—and it shall not—prevent my meeting Scrope!"

Somehow or other Scrope found himself in the ring.

He hardly knew how he had come there, but, being there, he saw no way out of it but to screw his courage to the sticking-point and fight.

After all, a licking would not matter much. Skimmy had beaten in turn Trimble, Mellish, Chowle, Racke, and Clampe. Of the seven only he and Crooke remained.

Scrope thought that Crooke would probably beat the genius of the Shell. He did not fancy his own chance, but it wasn't such a very dreadful fate to share a licking with five others; and he meant to see to it that Skimmy did not hurt him much.

Chowle retired. He was not going to second another rotten funk, he said. But Mellish agreed to take his place.

"You can lick him all serene if you only go in at him hard," said the sneak of the Fourth. "He's pretty nearly as blind as a bat, and he's slower than a giddy tortoise."

"He could see enough for you, and he was fast enough, too!" snarled Scrope.

"I wasn't up to the mark. Besides— Oh, never mind that! Any duffer can beat that scraggy old madman if he only tries."

Scrope was undeniably a duffer, but Mellish's speech had no cheering effect upon him.

"Sail in at him windmill fashion, Skimmy!" counseled Gore.

"But, my dear Gore, that is hardly scientific, is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore's jeering laugh nettled Skimmy. He had a suspicion that Gore had but small belief in him as a scientific boxer, and whatever he did Skimmy liked to think that he did it in a scientific fashion.

He could not hit Gore. Gore was his second, and had been treating him in quite a friendly way. So, like many other people who, being annoyed, find it difficult to go for the cause of the annoyance, he went for someone else.

Scrope was the person in the way, and Scrope got it.

Without knowing that he was doing it, Skimmy did exactly what Gore had told him to do. He went for Scrope with his arms going like windmill sails.

Scrope, who had expected nothing of the sort, was utterly taken by surprise.

To the luckless Scrope it seemed that the despised Skimmy had been transformed into a hundred-handed Briarrose, and was hitting him with at least fifty of the hands, all in blood-smeared gloves.

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at once. Scrope had never been more uncomfortable in his life.

"Yooop! Oh, stoppitt! I—I— Here, I say, I give you best!" bleated Scrope, staggering back before that fierce assault.

He did not strike a single blow. Not even Trimble had shown up quite so ingloriously. But, then, neither Baggy nor any other of the victims of Skimmy's prowess had had such a hot opening attack to face.

"Do you mean to say that you throw up the sponge already, Scrope?" demanded Tom Merry, in disgust.

"Yes, I do, then! I'm not going on. I didn't want to fight the fellow. I've got nothin' in particular against him. If he'd asked me to apologise—"

"If you will not go on, Scrope, I do not consider that it would be an unfitting thing for you to apologise to me," said Skimpole mildly.

"I don't know that you can insist on that, Skimmy," said Tom. "The funk says he's hiked before you've fairly started on him, and—"

"Oh, my hat! He's hit me all over the face an' body!" groaned Scrope.

"Go in at him, you white-livered coward!" hooted Crooke.

"Yes, go in at him!" yelled Blake. "It's too beastly tame for anything to chuck it up like that!"

"I don't want any more. I know when I've had enough," answered Scrope sullenly. "An' I sha'n't apologise— 'tain't likely after that bounder's knocked me about like this!"

"What a frost!" said Kangaroo. "And that chap's in the Shell!"

CHAPTER 5.

Racke & Co. in the Wars.

"H I, there, Clampe!"

It was again George Gore who yelled to Clampe.

That bold hero had gone out of gates with Racke, Crooke, and Scrope, and the four were some distance along Rylcombe Lane when Gore hailed the New House fellow from the rear.

"Take no dashed notice of him!" snarled Racke. "Gore's not your master, is he?"

"My hat, I should think not!" replied Clampe. "But—"

"But all the same, Clampe's goin' to stop when he's called!" sneered Crooke.

"Oh, come on, Clampe! If he doesn't chuck it, we'll all pile in on him," said Scrope. "I hate that chap Gore, anyway, an' the four of us can give him more than he'll care about carryin' home."

"You're jolly warlike to-day, old sport!" said Racke. "Pity you hadn't some of that spirit to spare yesterday."

"Well, I didn't want to fight Skimmy," answered Scrope sullenly. "I'd nothin' to fight him for, really."

"Do you hear me, Clampe?" yelled Gore.

His voice sounded much nearer now. He was hurrying to catch them up.

"Are you chaps goin' to stand by me?" asked Clampe, looking rather white about the gills.

"Oh, we'll do that," said Crooke.

The black sheep hated Gore, much as they hated Ernest Levison—probably more than they did anyone else except Tom Merry and a few of his chums.

Gore scarcely stood on the same footing with the juniors' leaders as Levison. There were still things about Gore of which they did not wholly approve. But Talbot stood by him, and on one recent occasion—which Racke had not forgotten—he had stood by Talbot with real loyalty.

His appointment to captain the Shell Second Eleven might not mean very much, seeing how lightly the Shell

Second Eleven was regarded even in the Shell. But he would not have been given even so doubtfully glorious an office in the old days. And he was taking it seriously, hence his desire to have a word with Clampe now, as Clampe guessed.

The four faced round. Gore came up at a trot, looking red and angry.

"I want you!" he said, fastening his eyes on Clampe and ignoring the other three.

"What for?" asked Clampe sulkily.

"To come and practise."

"Practise? What on earth at? You haven't started in as a pianist, have you Gore?" inquired Crooke. "If so, you must get another partner for duets. Clampe's comin' with us."

"He's not!" snapped Gore. "He's comin' to the nets!"

"It's fishin', not music," remarked Scrope, with a grin.

"Why should I go to the nets?" asked Clampe.

"You're playing to-morrow. I want to have you in some sort of form."

"I may play to-morrow, or—"

"You're bound to play! It was a bargain, and nearly all the fellows heard you make it. You'll be held to it—I can tell you that!"

"Well, suppose I am? That's nothin' to do with to-day. I never said I'd practise, an' I don't mean to."

"How do you expect to be in form if—"

"I don't expect to be in form. I don't want to be in form. I haven't any wish to play, as you know."

"You beastly slacker!" said Gore wrathfully. "If only I'd got hold of you in the quad you'd have gone like a lamb. But you're going as it is—mind that!"

"I'm not!" said Clampe. "There's no reason why I should, an' you can't force me to!"

"We want to win the match, don't we?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Crooke. "Fancy Gore's crowd winnin' a match!"

"I don't," replied Clampe. "I don't care a toss about the match."

"You're not potty, are you, Gore?" inquired Racke sneeringly. "The Shell Second simply hasn't the ghost of a chance. There isn't a chap in it who can play. When you want a duffer like Clampe it shows pretty plainly the straits you're in!"

"He'll be askin' Grundy to play next!" gibed Crooke.

"On the whole, I rather think I shall play Grundy," said Gore. "He's a rank duffer, I know, but he's keen. Some of the rest are rank duffers, too. It ain't Clampe's fault that he isn't; but it happens that he can be useful, and I mean to have him. I'll tell you what I wouldn't do, though, at any price. I wouldn't play any one of the three of you, not if I had to play three men short!"

"That's cheap talk. You can't get us," Scrope said.

"Perhaps not. I wouldn't have you, anyway. Come along, Clampe! The Green Man won't run away. You can go there another time."

"You've been there plenty of times, Gore!"

"True enough, though it is a liar that says it, Racke."

"Look here, Gore! I'll bet you ten to one in quids that the Fourth beat your scotch crew hollow!" volunteered Crooke.

"Dry up, Crooke! Did I hear you call me a liar, Gore?"

"Unless you're deaf, you did. Nothing new, is it?"

"I'm not goin' to stand it from you! An' Clampe's not comin'! I forbid him to—"

"Here, I say, Racke, you're not my giddy keeper, any more than Gore is!" protested Clampe.

"You mean, Racke, that the four of you are going to pile in on me?" said Gore, his eyes glinting.

"That's about the size of it," replied Racke.

"Well, pile in, then! I'm ready for you, you set of slack-baked rotters!"

The defiance was unexpected. They had not exactly expected Gore to show the white feather. At worst, he had more courage than any of them. But his evident willingness to take them all on if need be made Scrope and Clampe pause. Four to one was longish odds; but Gore looked as if he would hurt someone before he went under. And Clampe and Scrope were very tender about their precious skins.

"It's only that I don't mean to go with you! Just you leave me alone, and we'll leave you alone," said Clampe. But if—

"Oh, hang you! If that's what you're waiting for, here goes!" howled Gore. And he grabbed Clampe by the collar.

"Go for him!" yelled Racke. He and Crooke flung themselves upon Gore. Scrope hesitated, but only for a moment. Clampe, whose collar Gore had been obliged to release, turned and punched at him savagely.

Gore got home on Racke's nose and on Crooke's jaw. He sent Scrope spinning. But even as he turned to deal with Clampe, the other two were upon him again. Crooke got behind, and gripped him round the neck in a bearlike grip.

"Gurrrrrg!" gasped Gore. He got in one more hefty punch at Racke, and then he went down, with all four on top of him.

They were furious, and he could expect no mercy. They punched mercilessly. Scrope got in a sly kick. Clampe pushed at the others in his eagerness to get at the fellow who was down. Gore would take vengeance later, no doubt; but that was all the more reason for getting at him now.

"Rescue!" shouted Gore.

He had but little hope of any answer to his cry. Most of the fellows were on the playing-fields, and there were not many people passing along Rylecombe Lane at that hour.

"Coming!" yelled Levison.

Rescue was at hand! Two juniors rushed up and grabbed the heroic four. Cardew was Levison's companion.

Gore found himself relieved of the weight upon him, and staggered up. He collared both Scrope and Clampe, and sought balm for his injured feelings by knocking their heads together.

There was no need for him to trouble about Racke and Crooke. Racke was being attended to in a most scientific fashion by Ralph Reckness. Cardew, while Ernest Levison's fists were playing about the countenance of Crooke.

Levison's face was very grim; but Cardew seemed inclined to look upon the whole affair as a joke, which was very much Cardew's usual way of looking at things.

"Too slow, Racke!" he said, smiling. "It's no good tryin' to guard after the other chap's within an inch of your dial, y'know. Now I'm goin' to hit you on the left ear. What? Not ready for it after bein' told in advance? You'll never make a first-class boxer!"

"Chuck it!" gasped Racke, vainly endeavouring to guard the quick punches. "What do you want to meddle for, dash you? Gore's no friend of yours!"

"That's for me an' Gore to say," replied Cardew coolly. "Look out for your jaw, Racke! There! I told you to look out; but you didn't take any notice, an' now you've tumbled! I trust it did not jar you uncomfortably!"

Racke, lying on his back in the dust, glared up at Cardew with Hunnish hate. Crooke was down now, too; and Crooke's manner of regarding Levison was not actually affectionate. But it fell a little short of Racke's baleful glare at Cardew. "You can go!" said Gore, giving Scrope a kick. "You can't!" he added, shaking Clampe.

"Much damaged, dear boy?" inquired Cardew.

"Sore all over; but never mind! I'm fellows made the cads pay for it. I'm obliged to you!"

"Don't mention it!" said Levison. "We'd have done it for anyone."

Neither Levison nor Cardew had any special fondness for Gore. But Cardew was distinctly more cordial than his chum.

"But we're pleased that it should have been for you, all the same," he said politely. "What are you goin' to do with the dear Clampe?"

"He's coming to the nets with me," growled Gore.

"He does not really look as if he were in the best possible trim for cricket," said the dandy of the Fourth critically. "But I dare say you know best. Do you need any help with him?"

"I guess not," said Gore.

"Then we'll say ta-ta! We're goin' to the village. Hope you'll enjoy yourself, Clampe!"

And with that the two chums departed. Racke, Crooke, and Scrope had already mizzled.

"Gore's no end keen on this Second Eleven bizney," remarked Levison. "I shouldn't have thought of it of him. I say, I suppose he can't possibly spring the same sort of surprise on us that Glyn did in the Second team footer event?"

"Shouldn't think so. If he does, he'll deserve it. There's more in Gore than I thought, old scout!"

CHAPTER 6. Plotting a Plot.

"LOOK here, Clampe, it's absolute rot!" said Crooke. "What's a dashed promise matter?"

"Nothing at all—unless you can be made to keep it," answered the high-minded Clampe. "But it's goin' to be unhealthy for me, by gad, if I back out of this! Everyone knows about it."

"But who's goin' to interfere?" demanded Racke. "Nobody but Gore thinks you're any good. If he makes a dashed silly fuss about your cuttin' the game they'll only jape him."

"It won't be much of a jape for me, though," whined Clampe.

"Are you afraid of Gore?" snarled Crooke.

"Yes, I am, then, if you want the truth," replied Clampe, with unusual candour. "A violent beast like that is more than I can stand. You're afraid of him, too, come to that, Crooke!"

"Oh, am I? I'll dashed soon show—"

"Sit down, Crooke, you idiot!" snapped Racke. "Lammin' Clampe won't prove that you aren't funky of Gore. Anyone can hit Clampe. He'd give Baggy best rather than stand up to him. He's a worm!"

"Am I? All serene, then, I'll play to-morrow, an' do my best to beat the Fourth! That won't suit your book, Racke! You don't want your own side to come out on top. I know all about your bets with Cutts an' that crew!"

"Your playin' won't make any difference," said Scrope.

"I'm not so sure about that," answered Clampe. "I can bowl—I don't know why, an' I don't care a scrap for the rotten game; but I can bowl. I took Figgins' middle wicket at the nets to-day, an' beat Kerr two balls runnin', and puzzled Blake

an' Merry no end. I wasn't really tryin', either."

"You think you can get out the Fourth Second team cheaply?" asked Crooke.

"Pretty sure I can. But I don't want to. All the same, I shall do it if you fellows aren't a bit more civil!"

It would be too much to say that Clampe had succumbed to the spirit of the great game, and felt keen now. But it was a fact that he had found some pleasure in the praise his form had received that morning; and it was not a fact that he had not tried. For the first few minutes he had been sulky, and had howled wide; but it was easier for him to send the ball down straight, and the downfall of Figgins' wicket had marked a turning-point. After that he had done his best—which he seldom did at anything.

And now, in spite of his grudge against Gore, he did not so much mind playing. He even thought that it would be rather a score to carry his side to victory, then retire on his laurels, and refuse to play again.

Racke and Crooke looked at one another. Both had bets on the result of the competition as a whole. They had none on this particular event, for the defeat of the Shell was regarded as such a dead certainty that no one would back them. But ten points might easily make all the difference.

"It would be awful rot to play after Gore has treated you like that," said Crooke slowly.

"I don't want to play. But I shall be forced to," replied Clampe. "You fellows don't know what it's like over our side. You hang together here; but Chowle an' I are in different forms, an' everyone's down on us. Not that Chowle amounts to much, anyway."

"But Figgins & Co. won't meddle with you for refusin'," urged Racke. "It will suit their book. An' as for the Shell chaps in your House—Thompson an' Jimson an' the rest of them—what do they amount to? Not as much as a row of beanstalks!"

"You think Figgins an' that lot would leave me alone?"

"Sure they would!" said Racke encouragingly.

"Then you're potty!"

"Oh, dash it all, you surely don't think any Fourth-Former would get at you for not helpin' to lick the Fourth? An' that gang so keen on the rotten competition, too! Talk sense!"

"You don't know them. They may be keen on it—they are, of course—but they'd say it was a disgrace to the House if I backed out after promisin'." Fair play, an' such silly rot, you know!" said Clampe, with intense bitterness.

"You're afraid of Gore!" sneered Crooke. "You're afraid of Figgins an' Kerr an' that fat ass Wynn an' cad Redfern an' Owen an' Lawrence! You're afraid of Tom Merry an' his crew! Is there anyone you ain't afraid of? Don't say Skimmy, because we know—"

"There is! I'm dashed well not afraid of you!" howled Clampe defiantly.

Crooke jumped up, and went for him. Clampe bolted, and dodged him round the study table. It really looked as though Clampe might be a little afraid of Crooke also.

"Chuck it!" said Racke authoritatively. "I've an idea. Let him alone, Crooke; it's no dashed good goodin' him into sayin' things an' then kickin' at what he says."

Crooke and Clampe paused, on opposite sides of the table, both blowing hard. "Clampe, you told me yesterday you were hard up," Racke said.

"I asked you to lend me a fiver, an' you refused, though I know you could

"Do it without missin' it," replied Clampe, keeping a wary eye on Crooke.

"Well, I've changed my mind. I'll lend you a fiver."

"Oh, good!" said Clampe.

Crooke sat down. Racke had some plot on hand, he was sure. Racke did not chuck fivers about without reason.

"On conditions," said Racke.

"What conditions?"

"That you stay out of this dashed match; an' help us to keep Gore out, too!"

"H'm!" said Clampe thoughtfully.

"An' how do you fancy it's to be done?"

"I've got a scheme all serene."

"Well, let's hear it."

"Never mind that now. I suppose the Shell team wouldn't have an earthly without that wonderful bowlin' of yours an' Gore to make all the runs—I can see him doin' it!—an' to play skipper?"

"I should say not," said Clampe.

"Gore really is their best bat, an' he's in pretty decent form, too. Besides, there isn't another chap who could captain the team. Grundy might try."

"Grundy? Oh, by gad! I wouldn't ask anythin' better than that! With Grundy as skipper any team would be jolly sure to lose."

"They'd never have Grundy," said Scrope doubtfully.

"How are you goin' to work it, Racke?" asked Crooke.

"This is the dodge I thought of. Clampe's got to make Gore feel very uneasy about whether he will play or not."

"Oh, have I?" interjected Clampe, who did not always fancy Racke's masterly manner.

"If you want that fiver, you have!" returned Racke meaningly. "Gore will kind of shepherd him, so that he shouldn't do a bunk. Well, a few minutes before the match he will do a bunk—see? He'll make a bolt for the old tower, an' one of us will be ready there to look him in."

"But what about me?" asked Clampe.

"If Gore's followin' me, it looks dashed well like my bein' locked in, too!"

"Well, you needn't mind that, by gad!" said Crooke.

"Think not? I do, though! I'd as soon be locked up with a hungry tiger as with Gore! He'll be simply ravin' mad."

"You must dodge at the last minute," Racke suggested.

"If I've to run I shan't have any breath left for dodgin'."

"Well, then, more than one of us must be there. Enough to dashed well chuck Gore where we want him when once he's inside!"

"Four wouldn't be any too many for that. An' suppose he catches me before I get there?"

"Let's have fifty more objections!" snarled Crooke.

"It's no good makin' a plan that will fall all to pieces when it comes to carryin' it out," answered Clampe.

"Some of us will see that he doesn't catch you," Racke said. "Easy enough to hamper him."

"Not enough of us," objected Clampe.

"We can get more. There's Mellish an' there's Chowle."

"They ain't much good!"

"I believe you want to play, Clampe!"

"I don't. I swear I don't! But I wouldn't go in for this dodge if it wasn't for the fiver. I don't believe in it. You'll come a rotten bloomer over it."

"Not likely! You're on, Clampe? Look here, I'll give you the fiver if it goes through all right!"

"An' lend me it if it don't? It won't be my fault if you chaps muck it up; you know."

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"Yes, I'll do that."

"Right-ho, then! I say, I must be steppin'. Time to go over the way. Shall I speak to Chowle?"

"You might do that. See you again in the mornin'."

Clampe departed. Scrope also went.

"I believe that worm wants to play, Racke," said Crooke.

"Dashed sure he does! They've been kiddin' him he can bowl."

"Tain't kiddin'. They wouldn't butter him up, he's not so dashed popular as all that. He must be a bowler, though it seems like a blessed miracle that he should be any good for anythin'."

"Well, Gerry, he won't be any good to the Shell to-morrow, I'll see to that," said Racke, with a cunning grin.

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Racke explained.

"Oh, by gad!" Crooke slapped his thigh appreciatively. "Neither of them thought of the old adage about honour among thieves. 'That's a wheeze! An' about the fiver?'"

"Clampe says that a fellow needn't keep promises unless anyone can make him," replied Racke. "Let's see if he can make me shell out that fiver!"

CHAPTER 7.

In the Ruins.

"REGGIE, old scout," said Piggott of the Third, "are you on for a lark this afternoon?"

"What kind of a lark, Piggie?" asked Manners minor, a trifle suspiciously. "I don't think much of some of your larks, you know."

Reggie Manners had become very thick with Reuben Piggott, the one black sheep of the Third, during the last few weeks.

"What do you say to cigarettes an' draughts, with a tanner on each game?" suggested Piggott.

Draughts were permissible, of course. But draughts for a money stake was quite otherwise—hence its attractiveness to Piggott.

"I can lick you every time at draughts, Piggie!"

"Then it's easy money for you, old son. An' I've got it."

Piggott jingled the silver in his trousers' pocket to show that he was telling the truth—which was not a habit of his.

"I'm on," Reggie said. "I don't care about the smokes, though. I promised my major last term I wouldn't."

"Well, last term ain't this term," said the tempter. "You take a heap too much notice of what that brother of yours says, Reggie."

"That ain't for you to say! After all, Harry's a jolly good sort; and he's done more for me than most chaps would for their minors."

"I'm not rappin' him down, kid. But wasn't he naggin' you yesterday?"

"Oh, he did give me some of his jaw. Wanted me to be chummy with that swankin' Wally an' that sickenin' young cad, Levison minor, again. That was what it was about."

"I'll bet you answered him straight enough," said Piggott oilyly.

"Well, I told him I wasn't going to have any more to do with those two at any price. I told him I was fed up with them. I told him that the Third didn't think so blessed much of D'Arcy minor and Levison minor as the Shell and Fourth seemed to. And then I told him to go and eat coke!"

"What did he say?"

"Sat and looked sorry, the silly dummy! That's what I can't stand about Harry. He takes things in such a rotten tragic way. And he can't leave a chap alone. I suppose I'm old enough to choose for myself what fellows I'll be chummy with—eh?"

"But he don't think so."

"No. He said you were a black-guardly little outsider, Piggie, and that he simply hated to see me going with you!"

Reuben Piggott gritted his teeth. He would not forget that. Piggott had in him all the makings of as complete a scoundrel as Racke or Crooke.

"Well, I shouldn't take any notice at all of what he preaches," he sneered.

"I don't mean to! I'm on for the draughts at six d. a game, Piggie; and I won't say but what I might have a cig or two. But I'm not going to smoke a lot. There's the cricket, you know."

"Right-ho, Reggie! I don't want to spoil your cricket. You're comin' on no end."

"Where shall we go? Box-room?"

"No; the ruins will be better. More out of the way."

Thus it was that soon after dinner Piggott and Manners minor slipped off to the ruins of the old tower, Reggie carrying a draught-board under his coat, and Piggott's pockets bulging with the pieces. There was nothing illegal about board or men; but conscience worked uneasily in Reggie, and Piggott was naturally sly and secretive.

"Not sure I wouldn't rather be watchin' the match, though," remarked Reggie.

"What match?"

"Shell and Fourth second teams, of course!"

"Call that a match?" sneered Piggott.

"What do you call it?"

"A howlin' farce!"

"Well, I like howling farces. Never mind, though. We needn't stay here all the giddy afternoon."

The two settled themselves down in a sunny corner, in the part of the ruins farthest from the school. Piggott had just made his opening move when Reggie whispered:

"Shush! Somebody about! Sounds like Crooke!"

Piggott sat still, listening hard. Then, on the soft breeze, came the sound of Racke's voice.

"Here's the screwdriver, old sport. You'd better do the job. You are heftier at that sort of thing than I am."

"What are they after?" whispered Reggie.

"Keep still. I'll see. But I don't want Racke to cop me," replied Piggott.

He got up from the block of fallen masonry on which he was sitting, and stole cautiously to the shelter of a buttress.

Poring round this, he saw that Crooke was fastening a padlock staple to the door of a room, half-underground, which was quite capable of making a secure prison when once furnished with a lock.

Racke stood by him, holding the screws and a padlock and key.

"What's their game?" muttered Piggott to himself.

Neither said anything to enlighten him. Racke only spoke once more—to urge speed upon Crooke. And Crooke only granted in reply.

When they had finished, Crooke gave Racke a meaning nod and went off. Racke sat down on a stone, lighted a cigarette, and waited.

Crooke had no time to spare. Just as he reached the quad Leslie Clampe came rushing out of the New House with Gore in hot pursuit.

Both were in flannels and blazers. Clampe had carried out his instructions, which were to "keep Gore on a string." He would play—he would not—he would again—and again he would not. Not that he ever said in so many words that he absolutely refused; he was too much afraid of Gore's temper for that. But he insinuated doubts that had the same effect as refusing, less the unpleasant consequences which actual refusal would mean, and by the time dinner was over Gore's nerves and temper had suffered severely.

"I'll come over and fetch you ten minutes or so before the match," he had growled. "Mind you're ready, Clampe! And don't you try to slink out! Other fellows besides me will make it hot for you if you do."

"I never said that I wanted to slink out," Clampe had answered. "I suppose I shall have to play. But I'm not keen. Three o'clock, isn't it?"

"No, dummy! Half-past two."

"Oh! Might just as well have made it three. I hate faggin' at anythin' so soon after dinner. But I hope I shall be ready."

"You'd better!"

And Clampe had been ready when Gore looked in for him—or nearly ready. He had contrived to keep the impatient School House fellow waiting for the few minutes necessary to ensure that there should be no one about to interfere with his scheme. But as the moment for putting the plan into execution drew nearer he felt his heart sink.

He heard Figgy & Co. go downstairs laughing and talking. He saw from the window Redfern and Owen and Lawrence move off to Little Side, two of the three in flannels. He knew that Thompson and French had gone. There was no one left in the New House to interfere with him—except the visitor. But it was just of the visitor that Clampe was the most afraid.

Again he glanced out of the window. Chowle and Mellish stood talking together near the fountain. Scrope



Skimpy and the Fags!
(See Chapter 8.)

lounge a little way farther off. No one else was visible, until Crooke appeared from the direction of the ruins, and joined Scrope.

Everything was in train, with the single exception of Clampe's pluck.

"Come along, you slacker!" growled Gore.

Clampe screwed up his courage, and came along. At the door Gore laid a hand on his shoulder in a very policeman-like fashion.

"I'm hanged if I will, then!" gasped Clampe, making up his mind all at once.

And he bolted.

"Why, what d'ye mean, you rotter?" stormed Gore, utterly taken aback for the moment.

But it was only for the moment. Then he started after Clampe.

"I say, Gore!" said Mellish, coming forward.

If it had not been for the fact that Mellish and Chowle got right across his path, Gore would have run Clampe down within the first forty yards. As it was he did not lose much ground. Right and left he thrust; and Mellish tumbled backwards into the fountain, and Chowle let out a yell as he measured his length on the grass.

"What d'ye mean by it, you rotter?" howled Gore.

Clampe did not reply. Already he was puffing hard, and the ruins were still some distance away.

Gore gained on him. In another second he would have caught him. But Crooke and Scrope, coming suddenly round a corner, barged into him as if by accident.

"Get out of the way, you idiots!" hooted Gore. "I'm chasing Clampe!"

"That's no reason why you should dashed well run into me, hang you!" snarled Crooke, catching him by the arm.

But Scrope failed to play up. At the critical moment he funk'd it.

The two of them could have held Gore. Crooke alone was not man enough for the job.

Gore flung him aside violently, and rushed on.

But he had lost ground, and Clampe kept ahead till they were very near the ruined tower. Then he hesitated, blowing hard.

The hesitation was mental as well as bodily. At the bottom of his heart Clampe wanted to play. After all, he might bowl out the Fourth, and it would be pleasant to win honour for once.

But he also badly needed that five. Pulled this way and that, he hesitated.

"Come on!" hissed Racke, appearing suddenly.

Gore gave a yell of rage, and fairly leaped at Clampe. They would have gone down together; but Racke rushed between them, and foiled Gore. Clampe stood in the open door of the room meant for their prison. He did not mean to enter, of course.

But Racke meant that he should. Gore dodged Racke, and seized Clampe by the collar of his blazer.

Racke fairly hurled himself at them. It was no time for half-measures now.

Together they fell forward into the fell. Racke only just saved himself from going after them by clutching the door.

"Yooop!" howled Gore, landing upon Clampe.

"Yooop!" howled Clampe, with Gore on top of him.

"A fair catch!" yelled Racke, banging the door to. "I don't fancy either of you will play for the Shell to-day, my tulips!"

CHAPTER 8.

On Little Side.

"WHERE'S that chap Gore?" inquired Digby, who was captaining the Fourth Second Eleven.

Nobody seemed to have any idea where Gore was. None of the New House fellows had chanced to see him go up to THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 536.

Clampe's study, and he had told nobody where he was going.

Except for Gore and Clampe, the two elevens were ready for the fray. The Shell nine present consisted of Boulton, Finn, French, Gibbons, Grundy, Lennox, Thompson, Walkley, and Williamson. The Fourth Eleven were Brooke, Digby, Hammond, Herries, Julian, Kerruish, Lawrence, Lumley-Lumley, Owen, Pratt, and Reilly.

The very fact that Grundy was included showed up the weakness of the Shell.

It looked any odds on the Fourth, even if Clampe did turn up trumps, and Gore made all the runs he was expected to make. Gore had been practising hard, and paying heed to the hints of those who knew the game better than he did, and he had surprised them by the way he had come on.

But Gore was not on hand, and it was already ten minutes past the time for the match to begin.

Tom Merry knitted his brows. He could not understand it a bit. Gore's keenness had been unmistakable. It did not seem possible that he had absented himself like this of his own free will, queer fellow as he was in some ways.

And Tom took it more seriously than most of the Shell. Perhaps he was the only fellow besides Gore and Clampe who believed in the possibility of the left-hander's bringing off a big surprise. Others, even after Clampe's good showing at the nets, thought that there were too many fellows who could bat on the Fourth side for Clampe to make much difference. He might get two or three of them, but his success would end there, they held.

"What's to be done, you fellows?" asked Dig of Tom and Talbot and Blake and Figgy, who stood together in front of the pavilion.

"It's rather a muddling sort of bizney," Tom said. "If it were anyone else it wouldn't matter so much; but Gore's skipper, and I don't see who can fill the place till he comes."

"Is he coming at all?" Blake inquired.

Racke & Co. had shown up a few minutes earlier. It seemed to them on the whole safer to appear on the ground. They grinned as they heard Blake's query.

Crooke nudged Mellish. The black sheep were all liars; but of them all Mellish could lie with a more innocent face and greater plausibility than any of the rest—when he was not in a funk. He spoke now.

"If it interests you chaps at all," he said, "I might mention that Gore went out on his bike directly after dinner. I asked him where he was off to, and he snapped at me. He seemed in one of those sweet tempers of his when he can't be civil to anyone."

"Oh!" said Tom blankly. If Gore, for some fancied slight, had gone off in a huff, Tom felt that his own responsibility for letting down the Shell would be a heavy one. Manners had doubted whether Gore might not prove capable of doing something very like this, he remembered.

"I don't believe it," said Talbot quietly. "I don't credit for a moment any yarn that Gore means to desert his side. He may have gone out; but he intended to be back in time, I'm quite sure."

"Where's the other merchant—the left-hander who's going to out the Fourth for about twenty runs?" asked Kangaroo.

"Clampe?" said Racke coolly. "Oh, perhaps that explains it. Clampe wasn't exactly keen on playin', y'know. Gore may be chasin' him somewhere over beyond Wayland by this time."

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"I pity Clampe when he catches him, then!" remarked Clifton Dane.

"I don't!" said Figgy. "I hope he'll give the rotter the hiding of his life. But if he doesn't Clampe won't escape. We're not going to have a New House chap playing a dirty game like that!"

"Well, we can't wait all the afternoon for Gore and Clampe," said Digby. "What do you say, Herries? About time we began—eh?"

"Rather!" replied Herries.

And all the Fourth team were of the same mind. There was no particular reluctance to begin among the Shell, either. They, for the most part, anticipated a heavy licking, and preferred to get it over.

"Someone must toss with me," said Dig.

"Someone must be elected captain till Gore turns up," said Tom. "Tossing for innings isn't the only thing to be done."

"It's all right, Merry," said Grundy. "I'll take on the job. I'm really lowering my dignity in acting for another fellow after being passed over; but I can put that aside. The Form won't suffer by Gore's absence. I flatter myself—"

"You do—no end!" murmured Lowther.

"Eh? I flatter myself, I say, that with eight men, even such a set of wash-outs as these, I can do more than Gore could with ten to back him. It's not his fault. Don't think I'm blaming him. But some chaps are born to leadership; some are not. Gore wasn't. As for Clampe—pooh! I could play Clampe's bowling for a week! Of course, there's a difference of class between me and any fellow on the Fourth side—"

"We hope so," said Julian demurely.

"Bedad, yes!" chimed in Reilly.

"Hope so? Don't be an idiot! You mean you're afraid so. I shall keep Gore's lace open—Clampe's, too, for that matter. There's no one else to put in—I wouldn't have Racke and Crooke and Scrope at any price."

"Gore knew there was no one else to put in," said Herries. "That's why he shoved your name down."

"Oh, rot! Now then, Digby! I'll toss; you call."

The meekness with which the scratch Shell crew took Grundy's self-election was surprising. Only Thompson made any protest at all; and he did not persist in it after Grundy had turned upon him and asked him whether he was looking for trouble. The rest simply had no ambition for leadership, it appeared.

"Heads!" called Dig, as Grundy tossed half a crown in the air.

Heads it was. Grundy looked disappointed.

"I suppose we can borrow a couple of men to field?" he said.

"One of them must be a duffer, then," put in Kerruish. "Clampe's simply putrid in the field. Better have Racke! He's the only worse field I know."

"You're not going into the field yet," said Dig.

"Eh?"

Grundy could hardly believe his ears.

"I'm sending you in first."

"Oh, I say, Dig!" protested Lawrence.

"Best way. We want to beat them in an innings. Well, then! S'pose we go in first. We may not make enough to force them to follow-on, and then we've got the fag of getting them all out again. But if they bat first, we're simply bound to make enough in one innings to cover their total in two. And there you are!"

"You've a head on you, Dig!" said Herries.

And the Fourth Second Eleven generally seemed to agree with him.

"Dig's just a trifle cocksure," said Tom to Blake.

"Well, perhaps he is. But, even with

Gore and the marvellous Clampe, your sitters hadn't a dog's chance; and without these two I guess a licking in an innings is about what they can expect."

"Gore and Clampe may turn up yet," said Tom. "Talbot and Glyn have gone to look for them."

"Bless your innocent heart, Tommy, it won't make any odds if they do! Will it, Figgy? Will it, Kerr?"

"Of course it won't—it can't," replied George Figgins.

But canny Kerr was more cautious.

"My name, Blake, is not Elijah," was his answer.

"You'll come in first with me, Thompson," said Grundy, in his lordliest manner.

"You're going in first, Grundy?" asked the New House fellow, in surprise.

"Of course I am! Don't be a bigger ass than you can help! Who's to get the runs if I don't?"

"And what am I to do?" inquired Thompson mildly.

"Back me up. Play the steady game—like Kerr, you know. We may have the hundred up before they've time to look round if you'll only do that."

"You making the runs?"

"Yes. Don't I tell you? I feel in great form to-day; nothing would surprise me. Of course, my finger isn't quite right yet. But I could make runs one-handed if it came to that. It won't, though. I can grip the handle, if it hurts a bit—I don't mind its hurting."

That, at least, was true. Grundy was a pretty poor bat; but it was not from lack of either pluck or strength.

He sat down with a sheet of paper before him, and frowned.

"Gibbons next, I think," he said.

"Can French bat?"

"Better than you can," replied Thompson incautiously.

"What?" roared Grundy.

"I—I mean—oh, yes, French isn't so bad, as we go. I think Lennox might be better."

"Then I shall put down French next, or it's plain to me that you have no judgment whatever, Thompson! Lemme see—Boulton, Walkley, Lennox, Williamson, Finn—that's about the right order. If Gore and Clampe turn up they're numbers ten and eleven, naturally."

"If Gore turns up he'll take over the captaincy, and go in where he thinks best," answered Thompson, buckling his pad-straps.

"Are you sending your men in, Grundy?" howled Dig.

"I'm coming directly!" roared the great George Alfred. "Give a fellow time to get ready, do!"

"My bat! Grundy's coming in first!" gasped Dig.

"To bat at both ends?" inquired Lumley-Lumley sarcastically.

"Shouldn't wonder. No, Thompson's to be allowed to partner him. Do you want to start the bowling, Herries?"

"Rather!"

"Right-ho! You go on at the other end, Lawrence. But you needn't, either of you, fancy you're going to bowl all these crooks out—some more of us will be wanting a go at them!"

CHAPTER 9.

Released.

"MY hat! Racke did that jolly smartly!" said Piggott. "He's a beast; but I must say he scored there."

"What's it all about?" asked Reggie. "They don't mean that Gore or Clampe shall play in the match this afternoon, I s'pose," replied Piggott grinning.

"They? Who?"

"Racke and that gang."

"But there was only Racke there."
"You bet he wasn't alone in it, though! That's not Racke's way," said Piggott knowingly. "The rest had their little bit to do earlier, that's all."
"It's a dirty trick, I think," Reggie said.

"Oh, I dunno. They're up against Gore, you know. There was a row yesterday. Four of them piling in on Gore, an' then Cardew an' Levison came up an' wiped the floor with them. They would be jolly certain to try an' get even for that."

"I heard about that. Clampe was one of the four, though; and now Racke's shut him in with Gore. I don't make that out. But I think it's a dirty trick, anyway."

Piggott sniffed. Piggott had no objection to dirty tricks. Reggie Manners, wayward and wilful as he was, was sound enough when he let his instincts have fair play.

Reggie did not care the least little bit who won the match. But he could not feel quite easy about this dodge.

Now Piggott might have been willing to let the two out in revenge on Racke. But Piggott disliked Gore far more than he did Racke; and he preferred some sort of vengeance that could not be brought home to him. He did not want to break with his wealthy patron once and for all.

"I've a jolly good mind to let them out!" said Reggie.

"Oh, I shouldn't do that," replied Piggott.

"You wouldn't, I know. I often wonder what makes you such a cad, Piggy! You don't have to be, do you? A chap might think you didn't know what fair play meant."

"I know as much about it as you," Piggott growled, with a scowl to accompany the growl.

"I bet you don't!"
"Well, we can't let them out, anyway. It's a padlock, an' Racke's taken the key."

"H'm!" said Reggie. That certainly did make things difficult. And Reggie had no love for either Gore or Clampe.

"Who's there?" yelled Gore at that moment.

Neither fag answered.

"I can hear someone!" roared Gore.

"Well, we can't be off hearing you," replied Reggie. "Shout a bit louder, and they'll hear you at the School House!"

"Is that you, young Manners?"
"Yes, old Gore!"

"Let us out, you little sweep!"

"Not if you can't ask more prettily than that," said Reggie, grinning.

"Come along, Piggy, let's get on with the game."

Gore did not hear that, but he heard their retreating footsteps.

"Come back, you young rotters!" he howled. "Manners minor, I'll make you smart for this! Piggott, you sneaking young cad—"

"That's the beauty you wanted to let out!" sneered Piggott. "Gore's a bully-in' beast, an' I wouldn't lift a finger to help him!"

"He won't get me to by threatening me," said Reggie. "I'm not afraid of George Gore. But it's a dirty game, Piggy!"

"Oh, rate!" snarled Piggott.

They settled down to their draught-board and their cigarettes. But the cigarettes did not improve Reggie's play, and his thoughts would keep straying to the two prisoners. Gore's yells, heard from time to time, would have kept them in his mind in any case.

He was not really as much Piggott's superior at draughts as he thought himself, in any case; and he lost three games in succession, which suited Piggott.

Reggie paid up. He was in funds, as

his opponent had known, and the loss of eighteenpence did not trouble him. But being beaten by Piggott nettled his vanity; and he did not really enjoy the cigarettes; and the blue sky and the warm breeze made him long for Little Side; and altogether he felt that he was wasting an afternoon foolishly.

Within their prison Gore and Clampe had now begun to talk.

At first Clampe had pretended that he was too badly hurt to explain anything. Gore, never conspicuously tender-hearted, had wasted no sympathy upon him; but he had at least abstained from taking summary vengeance for the trick, which was something—from Clampe's point of view.

Gore had done all the shouting. But Clampe resented the imprisonment to the full as much as his fellow-victim.

This had not been in the plan as he had been told it. His own feelings gave him a clue to Racke's. He knew that his mind had not been made up to stand out of the game—that he would not have been really sorry if something had happened to upset Racke's plot. And Racke had guessed that, and had made him safe by shutting him in, too. It was no accident, Clampe was sure.

Racke did not care what Gore did to him, of course! How would Racke like to be shut up like this with the fellow, mad with rage at the trick that had been played upon him?

It was a tremendous relief to Clampe when at length Gore said:

"Look here, Clampe, I know you were in this; but they've done you down as well as me, and I'm not going to lam you now. What we've got to do is to get out and turn up on Little Side as soon as poss."

"I only wish we could!" groaned Clampe. "I'm willing enough, by gad!"

"To play?" snapped Gore.

"Yes. Don't know that I can do anything. I'm bruised all over. But I'd do all I could."

"You aren't half as bruised as I am, you rotter! Four of you piling in on me yesterday, and now chucked like a sack of coals into this place! But never mind that. If you can think of any way of getting out I'll wipe that off the slate as far as you're concerned. We're in the soup together, and it's not a bit of good squabbling."

This was quite unexpectedly reasonable, coming from George Gore; and if Clampe would have suggested a way out he would have done so at once. But he could not. The only window of the cell-like room was barred. It might be possible to force out the rusty bars; but the aperture was not big enough even for a fag to get through, and Gore was rather a burly fellow.

"I'll shout a bit if you like," said Clampe. "You must be pretty hoarse by this time."

"Oh, you can shout," replied Gore ungraciously. "It won't be a scrap of good. But you may as well be doing something."

So Clampe shouted. He shouted till his throat felt tired. He was just about to give it up in despair when a voice spoke.

"Dear me! Surely I can smell tobacco?"

"Skimpy!" hooted Gore. "Skimpy, you old donkey, let us out!"

"My dear Gore, I am surprised! I had imagined that you were playing cricket. How is it that you are here smoking cigarettes? And, by the way, where are you? I heard a voice just now which was not yours—"

"It was Clampe. We're both down here."

"Down where?"

"Here, you ass! I can see your blessed sparrow shanks! Put your clacklehead

where your silly feet are, and you'll see us!"

This was plain enough, even for Skimpy, though it lacked something in the way of perfect politeness.

Next moment the spectacled countenance of the genius of the Shell appeared at the grating.

"We'd better do a bunk while we've got the chance, young Manners!" whispered Piggott.

Reggie saw the policy of that. Gore might be in a hurry to get to the match; but he would probably spare enough time to attend to them in spite of his hurry.

They stole forth. They had to get past Skimpole, and the way was narrow. But they would have passed without difficulty but for the fact that Skimpy, about to get up, threw out his right leg. Piggott tumbled over it in his haste, and Reggie fell on top of Piggott.

"Yooop!" howled Piggott. "You silly ass, Reggie! You rotter, Skimpy! What did you go and do that for?"

"Hold 'em!" sang out Gore. "They were smoking, not us, and the young cads wouldn't let us out!"

Skimpy acted with quite surprising alacrity. Talbot's boxing lessons really seemed to have done Skimpy good in more ways than one.

He grabbed them both. They thought in the first second that it would be easy to escape from Skimpy, but they did not find it so. He hung on to them hard.

The faces of Gore and Clampe showed at the barred window.

"That's the style!" cried Gore. "Didn't think you'd got it in you, Skimpy, old top!"

"I fear that I cannot hold them long!" gasped Skimpole. "They wriggle most unpleasantly. Yaroooh!"

"Oh, you cad, Piggy!" howled Reggie.

Piggott had kicked Skimpy's shins viciously, and had escaped. Reggie did not attempt to get away. He had been on the point of kicking himself, but he was honestly disgusted with Piggott. Reggie was one of those people reader at finding excuses for themselves than for others.

"All serene, Skimpy! I won't bolt, honest Injun!" he said.

Skimpole let him free at once.

"The problem is to release Gore and Clampe, Manners minor," he said gravely, rubbing his bruised shin as he talked. "From the fact that they remain where they are, while they would undoubtedly prefer to be elsewhere, I should deduce that they were locked in, even if Gore had not told me so. Have you any information as to the whereabouts of the key? Possibly you yourself or Piggott, who is really not a nice youth—my shin pains me extremely—have it?"

"Racke's got it," replied Reggie, grinning.

"Indeed! Now I remember that a short time ago Talbot came to our study and inquired the whereabouts of Gore. I could give him no information. It was by a happy chance that I brought a volume out here to combine study with fresh air, but I much fear—"

"Oh, cut all that cackle, Skimpy, old chump!" hooted Gore. "We want to get out!"

"But if Racke has the key—"

"It's a padlock," said Reggie. "Easy enough to file through it!"

"But we have no file—"

"That's all right. I'll fetch one."

And Reggie bolted.

"Have you let that little beast go?" roared Gore.

"I could not avoid letting him go, Gore. He kicked—"

"I mean Manners minor, not Piggott, chump!"

"Manners minor will come back, I feel assured. I do not think he is quite what you term him. Now, Piggott is—"

"Bet you he won't come back!"

But Gore was wrong, and Skimpy was right. Reggie came back with a file. He used it himself. He was certain that he could do the job more speedily than Skimpy, and it is likely he was right. Anyway, it did not take him long.

CHAPTER 10.

In at the Death.

"LOOK here, Gore, I let you out," said Reggie. "I know I might have done it sooner, but—"

"That's all right, kid. I'm not going to lam you. There's someone else I'm saving that for. Skimpy, you're an awful old ass, but I'm no end obliged to you. Come along, Clampe!"

"I say, though, Gore, we're in an awful mess, both of us," said Clampe, gazing first at his own flannels and then at Gore's.

They certainly were in an awful mess. The floor of their cell had left its marks upon them.

"Oh, hang that!" growled Gore. "There's no time for changing."

"The match must be nearly over by now," Clampe said weakly.

He was rather particular about his appearance, and he did not like turning up on Little Side in this state.

"Not it! We'll be in at the death, anyway. Come along!"

And Clampe went. He was relieved to escape punishment for his share in the plot, and, weak waster as he was, there was yet in him at that moment a real desire to do something, if only out of revenge on Racke.

"Kim along, Skimpy!" said Reggie excitedly.

"Eh? Come along where?" queried Skimpole, in surprise.

"To the match, of course! It ought to be funny when Gore gets on to Racke."

"I really do not— Stay, though! On second thoughts, I find myself interested, though I cannot say that I look upon the matter as humorous, Manners minor."

But Skimpy and Reggie did not create a small sensation by arriving on Little Side together. The pace of the philosopher did not suit the fag. He rushed ahead, and nearly caught up Gore and Clampe.

He was disappointed, however. Racke & Co. had cleared off it seemed, and Gore, after one hasty glance round, appeared to forget all about them.

The Fourth were batting, but nine wickets were down for 83—a far better state of affairs than Gore had ventured to hope for. Grundy was bowling, sending down grubs. Even as Gore turned to Tom Merry to inquire how the game had gone so far a ball which sneaked all along the ground lowered the middle stump of Pratt.

"It's far better than it might be," said Tom. "Our lot were all out for 35, but—"

"Anybody make anything? Not much room for it in that score, though."

"Old Grundy made 25."

"Grundy? Oh, rats!"

"Well, he was missed six or seven times. The Fourth fielding was rotten. But he made them, all the same."

"Who's got their wickets? I never thought we'd have them out as cheaply as this!"

"Grundy, mostly," said Tom, grinning cheerfully. "He's been bowling awful tough—rank daisy-cutters. The Fourth

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are wild; but, there's nothing unfair about it, and the old bird's taken seven wickets. French and Thompson got one each, and Lennox ran out Dig rather smartly."

"Daisy-cutters!" groaned Gore. "What a dodge! Why on earth did they let him go on?"

"Well, you see, in your absence he took over the captaincy. No one else seemed keen on it."

"My hat! Grundy skipper! Grundy getting runs! Grundy taking wickets with rotten daisy-cutters!" Gore growled. "This puts the tin-hat on it!"

"You don't seem really pleased, Gore," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Pleased! Oh, hang it! But I don't know; it might have been heaps worse, I'll own."

"It's just possible that Grundy won't be any too ready to relinquish the captaincy after all he's done, old chap," said Talbot.

"I'll jolly soon see about that!" snapped Gore.

Grundy came up to them. By this time the great George Alfred had managed completely to forget that it was the merest accident that had given him the captaincy.

"Really, Gore," he said, "when I ask a fellow to play—"

"When you ask a fellow to play—when you ask, you cheap idiot! Why what—"

"Another word, and I'll order you off the field! Look at the state you're in, too! Disgraceful! You'll certainly have to change before I allow you to take any part in the game!" howled Grundy.

"Before you— Oh, hang it all, am I dreaming? Who's captain of the Shell Second, you blithering idiot?"

"I am, of course! Er—that is to say— Well, upon my word, Gore, I think it's more than a little bit thick if you're coming along to spoil everything at the moment when I'm leading the side to victory. Where have you been all this time?"

"Oh, you explain to the ass, Tom Merry! I'm blessed if I've patience for it!" growled Gore.

Tom took Grundy aside. Talbot said a few quiet words to Gore. The upshot of it was that both were considerably mollified. Grundy was indignant at hearing of the trick played upon Gore. Gore had to admit that Grundy's captaincy had not been so disastrous as might reasonably have been expected, and they actually spoke civilly to one another.

"I'm going in first," said Gore. "Look here, Grundy, you can come in with me if you like."

Grundy had to swallow down something in his throat before he could bring himself to accept that offer. But he was keen on going in first again. He quite expected to make his century this time. So he did accept.

Clampe went off to change his flannels. Gore never even thought about him.

Tom Merry & Co. gave him a cheer as he came out of the pavilion with Grundy. Gore's real keenness had pleased them. He was rough still. He might not be a fellow it was easy to like, but he was a far better fellow than the George Gore of old.

Gore took no notice of the encouraging cheer. Grundy accepted it as his due, and raised his cap with a fine gesture in response.

The Fourth took the field again in no very good humour. Blake and Kerr and Figgins had explained to them that as grubs were not against the rules of the game Grundy had been perfectly justified in bowling them. Their success was, in itself, a justification, indeed.

But very few of them could see it that way.

"Let's give them a dose of their own physic!" said Digby. "Can you bowl sneakers, Julian?"

"No, I can't! I don't call it bowling!" replied Dick Julian.

"Can you, Herries?"

"I wouldn't if I could!" growled Herries.

"Faith, I can, Dig!" said Reilly.

And Reilly was allowed to try his hand. Meanwhile, Clampe, reaching the New House, had met Chowle.

"Look here, Clampe, aren't you goin' to cut that silly game?" asked the Fourth-Former insinuatingly. "There's a fiver on it—"

"The fiver be hanged!" snapped Clampe. "Do you think I'd be fool enough to trust Racke after the rotten way he did me down? Clear out of my road, or I'll punch your ugly head!"

"You punch my head? I'd like to see you, by gad!"

"There you are, then!" roared Clampe, and he punched.

"Yaroooo!" howled Chowle. He had never believed Clampe could hit so hard.

Leslie Clampe hardly knew himself. He was keen—actually keen! If he could help the Shell Second to victory he meant to do it.

His motives were not noble ones. The chief of them was hot resentment at his treatment by Racke. But at least he was really keen, and that counted for something.

CHAPTER 11.

The Greatness of Gore!

"TALBOT," said Skimpy, on the ground, "Clampe appears to have gone. I do not think that he will come back. Do you think it would be in order if I volunteered my services?"

"I don't think you will be needed, old man," answered Talbot, smiling.

"Clampe will come back, I fancy."

"But, even so, I am persuaded that I could be of more use than Clampe, Talbot! You will doubtless recall the fact that I once made twenty? I am sure that Clampe has never made so many. And to-day I feel that I could do even greater things. I should very much like to help the Shell," said Skimpy wistfully, blinking up at the handsome athlete who was by far the best friend he had at St. Jim's.

Talbot did not laugh at him. He was even a little touched—Skimpy was in such utter earnest.

"You have helped the Shell, old boy," he said, with a hand on the bony shoulder of Skimpy. "We'll see, if Clampe doesn't come back. But, of course, he's a right to a place if he does!"

Clampe came back. Skimpy was disappointed, but soon resigned himself. He settled down in front of the pavilion, looking up every now and then from the pages of Balmcrumpet as if surprised to find himself there.

When Clampe returned Gore and Grundy were still together, and the score was over 40. Gore had made most of them, batting really well, and playing with grim determination. Neither he nor Grundy had shown any dread of Reilly's grubs, which were possibly of a less deadly type than Grundy's. But the other bowlers had puzzled Grundy, and he had given a couple of easy chances. Kerruish had dropped one, and Dig had rated him for it. In the next over Dig had dropped one, and there had been silence—as far as Dig was concerned. Some of the others had said things, however.

The Fourth were paying the penalty of taking their opponents too cheaply. Dig, unused to leading a side, was not an ideal skipper; but he was not greatly to blame for the poor show. Except for Brooke and Lawrence, the fielding was far below par, and Owen at the wicket was not at all up to form.

It was Dig who caught Grundy at last. An over later he bowled Lennox, and two were out for 51—only 3 runs ahead. But the single innings victory which the Fourth had counted upon was no longer even a possibility.

Thompson helped Gore to make quite a decent stand, and after Brooke had bowled Thompson, French played up very well. But it was Gore who mattered. The Fourth were all certain that once they disposed of him the innings would collapse. His form was not wonderful. It would not have caused Kildare to give him an invitation to play for the First Eleven of St. Jim's. But, shown earlier, it would easily have given him a place in the Shell first team. He picked the right balls to hit, he hit hard when he did hit, and he never gave a chance.

Others came and went, only Gibbons of them all staying more than an over or two after French's dismissal. But Gore kept on, and still he had given no chance. His score was 96 when the ninth wicket fell and Clampe whipped in.

Temptation assailed Clampe. Why should he help this fellow to get his century? They were not friends; he owed Gore a grudge, indeed. If Gore reached three figures he would have achieved such fame as had never come to him before at St. Jim's.

Then some decent impulse—something of the spirit of the cleanest of all games—came to Leslie Clampe. How he did it he hardly knew; but he kept three dead straight balls out of his wicket somehow. And everyone had been certain that the first straight one would have him.

Gore faced Dig, ran out, slammed blindly, and knew, by the ringing cheers of the Shell, that he had achieved his desire. He slammed just as blindly at the next ball. All his caution had gone down the wind now. Another cheer broke out. But it wavered. Gore, getting back home from the second run, saw Dick Brooke in the long field throwing up the ball. Brooke had taken a fine running catch.

The Shell total was 208, and the Fourth needed 161 for victory. They had expected to make more than that in their first innings. Now they were not so confident.

But they did not fear the bowling. They laughed at the notion of Clampe's getting them out. They would not fall victims to Grundy again—not likely! In order to make sure that they should not, each batsman, before going in, sampled Reilly's grubs in a net in the corner.

Gore, however, was not relying on Grundy. He put on Clampe and Thompson to start with.

"Now, don't you try to be clever," he told Clampe. "Pitch them as near as you can just outside the off stump, and let that break of yours do the work itself."

And Tom Merry, hearing, knew that the advice was good. The best thing Clampe could do was to imagine himself a machine.

A yell went up when Clampe's second ball came in, and clean bowled Herries, who had gone in first with Dig. Lumley-Lumley and his skipper took the score to twenty-five before the former was out; but both had to be very careful with Clampe, who sent down few loose ones. Gore gave him a rest after a bit, putting on French, who at 41 disposed of Julian. Digby was playing a good, steady

SCORE OF THE GREAT MATCH.

Shell Second XI. v. Fourth Form Second XI.

SHELL SECOND XI.			
First Innings.		Second Innings.	
G. A. Grundy, b Digby.....	25	c Digby, b Brooke.....	16
H. Thompson, c Owen, by Lawrence.....	2	b Brooke.....	17
H. Gibbons, b Lawrence.....	0	c Lawrence, b Julian.....	18
L. French, c Reilly, b Herries.....	3	c & b Herries.....	20
R. F. Boulton, b Herries.....	0	b Lawrence.....	5
P. Walkley, b Lawrence.....	1	b Julian.....	0
J. Lennox, st Owen, b Herries.....	2	b Digby.....	1
R. G. Williamson, b Digby.....	0	b Lumley-Lumley.....	5
B. Finn, not out.....	5	0 run out.....	5
G. Gore, absent.....	0	c Brooke, b Digby.....	100
L. Clampe, absent.....	0	0 not out.....	0
Extras.....	2	Extras.....	25
Total 35		Total 208	

FOURTH FORM SECOND XI.			
First Innings.		Second Innings.	
R. A. Digby, run out.....	16	b Clampe.....	30
G. Herries, c & b French.....	17	b Clampe.....	0
J. Lumley-Lumley, b Grundy.....	3	b Thompson.....	18
R. Julian, st Lennox, b Grundy.....	0	c Finn, b French.....	19
R. Brooke, c Walkley, b Thompson.....	19	c Gore, b Clampe.....	91
K. Lawrence, b Grundy.....	0	c Gore, b Clampe.....	12
L. Owen, st Lennox, b Grundy.....	3	b Grundy.....	15
P. Reilly, b Grundy.....	8	b Grundy.....	2
H. Hammond, hit w., b Grundy.....	3	st Lennox, b Clampe.....	0
P. Pratt, b Grundy.....	4	c Gore, b Clampe.....	0
E. Kerruish, not out.....	4	0 not out.....	4
Extras.....	10	Extras.....	11
Total 83		Total 156	

game, and he and Dick Brooke together made the Fourth quite hopeful. The score had reached 75 when Clampe was given another show. His first ball whipped in sharply from the off, and Dig's middle and leg stumps tottered and fell.

Lawrence and Owen both played steadily, while Dick Brooke showed capital form. The score was 105 for five when Gore, at point, caught Lawrence off Clampe. It had been raised to 142 before Owen fell a victim to Grundy, who had been complaining bitterly at not being given a chance. Two runs later Reilly also succumbed to one of the hated grubs.

But there were still three batsmen to come, and Brooke was there yet, and did not look like getting out. The 17 runs wanted ought to be got all right. But it was a nearer thing than the Fourth had bargained for.

Lennox got flustered, and let two balls past him, each for 4 byes. The Fourth cheered those byes as if they had been fine strokes.

Brooke hit a lovely 4 off Clampe. Only 5 needed now!

Then a groan went up. Brooke had played too soon at a ball coming in from the off. It went up in the air, and came down with a nasty spin on it. But the spin did not beat Gore. He took it coolly, and well.

Now, indeed, it was a close thing! Five still wanted, and only Harry Hammond and Pratt to help Kerruish, who had kept up an end for the last five minutes. No one of the three was a duffer, but such a critical situation as this might well prove too much for them.

It did! Hammond missed a ball from Clampe, which almost shaved his wicket. He stumbled forward, and before he could get bat or foot back inside the crease, Lennox, with trembling hands, had taken the ball and lifted his bail. Pratt whipped in, and put up his first ball.

"Mine!" yelled Gore, seeing that Walkley was going for the catch.

Perhaps it was not Gore's really; but he got to it, and he held it, in spite of

Walkley's barging into him in his excitement.

Thus the Shell won by 4 runs, and took ten points for that narrow victory, the work mainly of the two against whom Rakce & Co. had plotted, though Grundy had also his share of glory.

Gore was the hero of the hour, of course. He growled when congratulated, but his growls did not mean that he was not pleased.

Rakce, Crooke, Scrope, Mellish, and Chowle did not escape. A dormitory ragging of the most severe kind awaited them all. But Clampe found himself for once almost popular—even with the Fourth, which was queer enough, all things considered. He had taken six wickets for 31 runs, and on his form that day would have been quite useful in the St. Jim's Junior Eleven. But it was not likely that he would ever play in it. It was likely enough that he would never play cricket again in earnest.

Within three days he and Rakce had made up their differences, and Leslie Clampe was the slacker and black sheep of old. If any good result remained of his one effort, it was that George Gore had a different feeling for him. Gore knew how easily Clampe could have robbed him of that coveted century. He would not forget it, and the day might come when Clampe would be glad he should remember!

Somehow Gore was a little less rough on Skimpy after that day, too. In fact, there were several directions in which a change for the better, due as much as anything to the fact that he could feel that he had now earned for himself a better footing in his Form, was to be seen in the fellow who had been skipper of the Shell Second—that collection of duffers whom Digby and his merry men had been so certain of beating in an innings!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"FRIENDS THOUGH DIVIDED!" by Martin Clifford.)

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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 had 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 Ponsonby. In their absence Flip gets too friendly with Pon and the rest of the nuts, and, without any real taste for is at the outset, takes to gambling. He goes with the nuts to a gambling den at Courtfield, quarrels with Pon, and is knocked senseless just as the waming "Police!" is heard. Flip comes to himself in a cellar, bound hand and foot. He is let out, however. He makes up his mind that the only thing for him to do is to run away, as returning to Highcliffe means certain expulsion. Then he meets Peter Hazaldene, who has run away from Greyfriars. He goes to Highcliffe in the night, and sees the Caterpillar. He and Hazel sleep under a haystack, and, after buying caps—the school caps being unsafe—get breakfast at an eating-house. Goggs, of Franklingham, comes to Highcliffe. Flip and Hazel go to London. Johnny Goggs meets the pretty post-girl. (Now read on.)

Goggs and the Post-girl.

"**T**HANK you very much!" said Johnny Goggs. "I will be perfectly frank. You are, right in supposing that there was a motive for what I said. Have you never, in the past, handed letters to anyone whom you would not willingly trust now?"

The girl wrinkled her brows in an effort of memory. It is to be feared that Miss Gittins did not always take her duties as seriously as the Courtfield postmaster would have expected her to. She had handed many letters to people to whom they did not belong; it saved trouble. But she had never thought of possible danger in it till now.

Her mind was quick, and she had that feminine intuition that is so much swifter than masculine reasoning. It flashed upon her that this questioning in some way concerned Flip Derwent.

And then she remembered—Vavasour—the letters she had given him one morning! She had not known Flip then; but she could recall the name. And she certainly did not trust Adolphus Theodore in these days. She had cut him off her list of friends, and would not even look at him when he passed.

"I know!" she said. "You mean that puppy Vavasour? I oughtn't to have done it. And he is a wrong 'un! But I hope—oh, I do hope—that no harm—that Philip Derwent—that—"

There were tears in her eyes now, and she broke off, too moved to finish.

Goggs laid a hand on her shoulder in a way that was full of comradeship—a comradeship in which, as she felt instinctively, the fact that she was a girl, and a pretty one, was a fact that really did not matter.

"It was Vavasour I meant," he said. "But don't let it trouble you. I have reason to believe that he may have kept back a letter that meant a good deal to Derwent. I should not tell you this but that I know you can be trusted all the way, as you say I can be. We are both Derwent's friends, and we do not want him wronged."

"Was it—that is, through that he—he had to leave—that he ran away?" faltered the girl, wiping her eyes quite frankly, and trying to smile.

"No. It had nothing to do with that. I cannot explain it fully."

"If it wasn't that, it isn't quite so bad," replied Miss Gittins, more cheerfully. "If you knew all about it you'd understand that I can't help feeling pretty miserable about that affair. I'm more mixed up in it than I like, though I never knew him till—till after it had been done."

"I want to know all about it," said Goggs. "For Derwent's sake. It will be for his good that I should know; and I have promised him—I have promised to do what I can to get him out of the scrape he's in."

"Well, I don't know. It would be a bit like sneaking. There's Bert Chiker, and—Yes, I will, then! But not now. And not here. So you needn't say you'll meet me to-morrow."

"Anywhere you like, and at any time you like," replied Goggs readily.

"My word! You're middling giddy, aren't you? I didn't know that the masters at Highcliffe—"

"I am not giddy at all! And I think you are aware of that!" struck in Goggs, rather stiffly.

"Well, I am, then—no, I don't mean that I'm giddy, though I can't deny that. I mean I know you're not; and I should think you could talk any master's hind-leg off if you once started in. Will you meet me about half-way to Courtfield this evening after dark?"

"With pleasure! But after dark is rather vague."

"Say at six o'clock, then."

"Certainly!"

"Now give me back those letters!"

"But I shall have pleasure in—"

"No, you won't! I don't need to be told twice what my duty is. From this on I'm going to deliver them myself; not to hand them over to doubtful people—like you!"

Goggs smiled as he gave them back. Perhaps it was as well Miss Gittins should have learned that lesson.

"Now I'll go on to Highcliffe, and you can go the other way a bit," she said. "I say, though!"

"Well?"

"If I were Miss Derwent I shouldn't worry a bit about your face. It ain't really pretty, but I've seen worse; and you're a long way off being as soft as you look. Good-bye, grandfather!"

In the Great City.

"**O**H, yes, we have a double-bedded room!" said the grey-bearded man in the little hatch inside the door of the seventh hotel Flip and Hazel had tried.

Flip breathed a sigh of relief. He had begun to fear that they would not be able to find a lodging anywhere. But Hazel was not satisfied.

"That old merchant looked at us in a jolly queer way," he said, when they had been shown up to their room and left alone there.

"Didn't notice it," replied Flip.

"All right. You'll see."

"What do you think he takes us for, Hazel—criminals?"

"No; for just what we are—runaway schoolboys."

"Why should he think that?"

"Any ass could tell we're schoolboys; and it isn't a big jump from that to guessing that we have done a bunk."

"I don't suppose he's thinking about us at all. Hurry up with your washing, old fellow. I want some grub."

It was still early in the evening when they had finished their meal. Hazel suggested that they should go out, and Flip was willing enough. They went upstairs for their overcoats, and Hazel cast an eye of disfavour on the portmanteau.

"He'll get poking his nose into that while we are away," he said. "And then the game will be up!"

"He won't. But even if he did, why should the game be up?"

"Those Eton jackets. He suspects already, and they'll give it away to him."

"He'll be a jolly clever old fife if he gets a clue out of them!" said Flip, with a grin.

"Any ass could!"

"Not as things are. I scrapped the jackets at the Chequers this morning. I thought they'd done enough in the way of telling tales."

"My hat! You do think of things, Flip!" "Necessary things, old chap. I don't go worrying about the other sort. Ready?"

They passed downstairs and out together. Flip handed over the key of their room to the elderly man in the hatch.

"He was looking at us jolly hard out of the corner of his eye," Hazel said, when they were outside. "I twigged him, if you didn't."

Flip halted.

"Let's go back and ask him what the merry dickens he means by it," he said, with a touch of dry sarcasm not quite like him. The tears of Hazel were getting on Flip's nerves a bit.

"Oh, rats! You're so dead certain it's all right, so don't let us say any more about it."

"I'll undertake to dry up if you will, Hazel."

They passed through several quiet and dimly-lighted side-streets, and then came suddenly to a corner past which the full tide of life was flowing. By comparison with the streets they had left behind, it seemed quite brilliantly lighted, too.

"Where are we now?" asked Flip.

"Charing Cross. I should have thought you would have known it," Hazel answered.

"I was never here but, once before, and then it was in the day-time, and on the top of a bus. Where's Trafalgar Square?"

"Just over there to the right."

"Let's go and have a look at the lions. I want to see them close to."

There isn't light enough to see anything properly. Besides, the lions are nothing. Sleepy-looking old things, without a roar in them."

"I liked them," said Flip simply. "But never mind, if you'd rather not. Then the Hotel Metropole is over there, and Westminster Abbey down there, and Victoria farther on past it?"

He pointed in the directions he meant to indicate.

"Yes, you've got the lie of the land all right," Hazel said. "But don't point. You'll have people noticing you and twiggling us."

"Can't you forget for half a minute that you've done a bunk from school, Hazel?"

"Of course I can't! Can you?"

"Oh, easily, if you'd ever let me! I like this place. Let's cross over to that jolly-looking cook-shop. Wish we'd come out to grub! The feed at the hotel wasn't top-notch. That place looks all right to me!"

They crossed to the other pavement, where the crowd was even more dense. There was plenty of khaki in the crowd, as always in war-time London, and Australians were very much in evidence. It was easy to distinguish them by their headgear; but it occurred to Hazel that even without that there would have been no mistaking them. They did not look like foreigners in an English crowd; but they looked different somehow.

It was not that their faces were almost invariably clean-shaven and clear-cut. Clean-shaven men, soldiers or civilians, were in the majority, and clear-cut features are not so rare among Britons as to be remarkable.

It was not the slight something in their walk, as distinctive as the roll of a sailor, which an enemy might call swagger, but which is nothing of the sort.

It was not even the look of their eyes, though most of them had a way of looking as though they were not used to having their range of vision bounded by the houses on the other side of the way. Or perhaps it was all these things together.

Anyway, to Hazel it seemed that his comrade had the something that marked these men out, and that some of them, meeting his frank gaze, seemed half inclined to stop and speak to him. And now he remembered that Squiff and Tom Brown had the same look, too—something that was more free and frank than the average English boy.

"Lots of our chaps here," Flip said. "I like to see them."

"They're on to you being Australian, too, Flip."

"Yes, I thought some of them were. But I haven't seen a Tassie yet. Not sure that I could help speaking to one if I saw him."

"Look here, don't be an ass, Flip!"

"Oh, he wouldn't think it cheek! My pater's known all over the island, and if I said who I was—"

"And that you'd done a bunk from Highcliffe—eh?"

"Well, I forgot that. But none of them would give me away."

"Let's go in here and have a cup of coffee," Hazel suggested.

In and out of the swing-doors of the big restaurant many people were passing—women in plenty, some of them in gay raiment, others in the black that meant in most cases a war loss; men in khaki and in civilian clothes, but most in khaki; boys and girls no older than the two fugitives themselves. Inside there was the glow of many-coloured lights, and the food had an attractive look that had been wanting in that set before them at their last meal.

They went in. At a table near the door three bronzed Australians sat at dinner. One of them looked up as the two boys passed.

His eyes fell upon Flip, and he started.

"My word! If it isn't young Flip Derwent!" he exclaimed.

"Hallo, Walter!" said Flip.

A man at the next table turned suddenly, and Hazel clutched frantically at Flip's sleeve.

"Mobby!" he hissed into his comrade's ear.

The hands of Flip and the lieutenant from far Tasmania had almost met. They did not quite touch, for, to the utter astonishment of Walter Leith, Flip turned tail and bolted! It was the only thing to be done; but he hated it.

The hot flush of shame crimsoned his face as he caught the look of surprise, almost of consternation, on the tanned countenance of his old friend, a neighbour in the far-away island in the Southern Seas, the brother-in-arms of his own folk "over there." It seemed to him at the moment that he would never forget that look, never be able to meet Walter Leith's eyes again.

Yet what was there for him to do but bolt? A moment's delay might have been fatal; and it would have taken far more than a moment to explain.

"Stop them!" They are runaway school-boys!" sounded the shrill voice of Mr. Albert Hicks Mobbs, as the two shouldered their way out. It was no time for standing upon ceremony, and fortunately there were no ladies passing in.

One man got his hand to Flip's collar, but Flip writhed free, and dealt a hefty punch at his would-be captor as he tried again. Then the crowd swallowed them up, and Hazel led the way down a side-street.

They passed the big South-Eastern station, and at the foot of the street, the Underground station, and found themselves upon the Embankment.

"Safe enough here, I should say," Flip remarked.

"Not likely!" panted Hazel, gazing about him wildly. "Here, let's get on to one of these trams!"

"Oh, any old thing that snits you!" answered Flip resignedly. "But I think we've fairly dodged the Mobby-bird."

They hopped on to a tram going east, and passed to the upper deck.

"Look!" said Hazel, pointing to the wide roadway.

There, peering round him, stood Mr. Mobbs!

"He'd have had us, Flip!"

The tram had left the Highcliffe master behind, and it was plain that he had not spotted them in it.

"Well, he'd have had me," said Flip. "I'm not sure he could have held me, though. Mobby's a worm, and, as things are, I don't see any particular reason why I should keep my hands off him if he laid his on me. I don't think he would have meddled with you, though."

"Bet you he would, if it was only for spitefulness."

"I don't think so. Now, your man Quelch and old Wingate would have nabbed us both. They'd have thought it their duty to collar me, and they're the sort who do what they think is their duty. Mobby don't; and he'd have left you alone so as to have both hands free to deal with me. He'd have needed them both, too!"

It was not said boastfully. But the Australian seldom lacks knowledge of his own helplessness, and is seldom slow to express it briefly; and Flip was a typical Australian.

"I wouldn't trust him," said Hazel, with a shiver of fear. "Besides, if he'd nabbed you and marched you off, what could I do? It isn't only that you've got the cash—though that counts—it's that you've the brains and the pluck, and everything else that matters. If I lost you I shouldn't go back to Greyfriars; I couldn't stand that! But I should go under altogether."

One shifty-faced man seated behind them nudged his companion. He had caught the word "cash," and that was enough to make him curious. Whether he understood the rest of what was said may well be doubtful; but he leaned forward and listened intently to the rest of the conversation, while the other fellow, a burly brute with the face of a vicious bulldog, sat so that he screened the listener's attitude.

Neither of the boys had noticed the men, or had any suspicion that they were overheard.

"Rats!" Flip said sharply. "You're a long sight better man than you make yourself out to be, Hazel! Of course, it would be rough on either of us if the other was collared."

"It wouldn't be rough on you if they collared me. You'd be a heap better off alone!" Hazel said despondently. "I'm only a beastly drag on you!"

In a sense it was true enough, and Flip would have been more than human if he had not thought it once or twice.

But he had promised Marjorie to stand by her brother, and it was up to him to keep that promise, in spite of any difficulties it might entail. And there was more than that in it. Perhaps it was because Hazel's dependence upon him touched him, even flattered him; but, anyway, he had come to have a strong feeling of friendship for this wayward, headstrong, weak fellow, who now and then flashed out something that showed the good that was in him, overlaid though that good might be by weakness and folly.

"I should miss you no end," Flip said frankly. "We're in this together, sink or swim; and perhaps it would be best that if one was caught the other should give himself up. But not till then. And we sha'n't be caught easily."

It would certainly be better for Hazel to give himself up if Flip were caught, for he would have been pretty helpless alone. But he could not make up his mind to promise.

"Are you on to agree to that?" Flip asked.

Hazel shook his head.

"I can't!" he said. "Whatever happens, I could never go back to Greyfriars. I'd far sooner be dead!"

There was an awkward silence for a few seconds after that. Hazel's continual return to that desperate notion that he would be better dead worried Flip, as it might have worried an older and more experienced fellow. One could not keep on arguing such a question; and yet to let Hazel go on brooding upon the subject seemed dangerous.

"Look here, Hazel," Flip said, as the tram ran over Blackfriars Bridge, and Hazel turned a gloomy face to gaze down into the dark river, with a light reflected here and there from its surface. "Look here, Hazel, about the cash. You had better take half of it—the lot, if you like. I'll make you treasurer to the expedition."

"No, I can't do that," muttered Hazel uneasily. "It's yours."

"Rot! It's no more mine than yours. We agreed to share. There's over eight pounds still left."

The shifty-faced man pricked up his ears, and his elbow sought the fat-covered ribs of the burly brute beside him.

"I'll think about it," Hazel said dismally.

"Silly young fool!" murmured the shifty-faced one to himself, in tones of deep feeling.

"What's this street?" Flip asked.

"I don't know. Oh, yes, I do, though! It's Blackfriars Road, of course."

"I don't think much of it," Flip said.

"Charing Cross is heaps ahead of it."

"I don't suppose anyone ever did think much of it," Hazel replied gloomily. "But it gets worse before it gets any better."

"I vote we don't go much farther, then. We can get a tram back."

"Not to Charing Cross, though," said Hazel.

It was at the Elephant and Castle that they got off. The junction of so many tramlines attracted Flip by its light and cheerfulness at first glance. It seemed to promise better things than the Blackfriars Road.

But the cheeriness of the Elephant and Castle is delusive. The trams clang up with their coloured lights, and there is a crowd, and that is all. Nothing else there that anyone would want to look at twice.

Neither of the runaways noticed that the two men who had sat behind them on the tram had got off when they did, and were now following them. In fact, neither had noticed the two men at all.

"May as well have a look round before we go back," Flip said, "though I can't say I

think much of this. It ought to be the Camel and Castle, for it's enough to give anyone the giddy lump!"

Going to Meet Miss Gittins.

"GOIN' out, Goggs?" asked the Caterpillar.

"Yes, De Courcy. I have an appointment."

"Oh, have you, by gad? This isn't precisely the hour at which the powers that be expect us to keep appointments, y'know. Not that I mind, by gad!"

Goggs looked pained.

"I do not regard that detail with the same indifference which you appear to feel, my dear fellow," he said. "I should wish, during my stay here, long or brief, to behave with due decorum. I will not say to set an example to others, for—"

"Oh, they could do with it, Goggs, dear boy—they could do with it!" drawled the Caterpillar. "Oh, yass! But I'm not sure that you're the boy to be givin' it, y'know, Goggs. You're rather a rip, I fear. Goin' out to meet a girl—eh, what?"

"Please allow me to draw a very necessary distinction, De Courcy. It is a fact that I am going out to meet a girl. And yet to state the fact in that blunt manner, without explanation of the circumstances, is to do me a very real injustice, I assure you. It becomes one of those half-truths which we are told to—"

"Oh, dash it all! You're too clever for me, dear boy! Mine's a very limited mind—doosid limited, really! A chap's goin' out. Well, there are hundreds of other things he may be goin' out for besides meetin' a gal, by gad; but, even so, he's either goin' out to meet a gal, or he's not—eh, what? Is that logic, Goggs?"

"Very poor logic, since—"

"Do you want me to come along with you, by gads?"

Goggs paused a moment before answering.

"On the whole, and with due regard to the circumstances of the case, I shall be happy to have your company, De Courcy," he said solemnly.

"Oh, would you? Then I give in, by gad! You're not goin' out to meet a gal—not in any sense that matters? An', by the way, who is the gal?"

"Miss Gittins, the pretty post-girl, of whom you told me."

"Oh, that's the game! You've got on to it quickly, old man!"

"My face is, so to speak, my fortune, I think," said Goggs meekly. "It has a plain simplicity that seems to inspire confidence. I am not sure that Miss Gittins would have promised to meet you, De Courcy."

"Dare say not, dear boy. I'm not sure, y'know, that I should have asked her to."

"You are a handsome fellow. Even my dear grandmother never called me that. She said sometimes, with an air of resignation, that she had seen worse—or, at least, heard of them. Miss Gittins, I believe, regards me as more than usually homely. But she is quite nice about it. She even assures me that some members of her sex don't mind a bit about faces. Encouraging, is it not?"

And Goggs put his head on one side in the curious bird-like way he had at times, and looked very solemnly, almost sadly, into the handsome, languid face of Rupert de Courcy.

The look of boredom was not there now, however. The Caterpillar grinned with delight.

"Goggs, old top, I'm beginnin' fairly to love you," he said. "You talk rot as if you believed every word of it; and I'm never dead sure that you don't, by gad!"

"I am not sure myself, De Courcy. Is it rot, by the way?"

"It's rot about your bein' such an ugly beggar. You're not. Plenty worse than you!"

"More encouragement!" murmured Goggs, clasping his hands. "I thank you, De Courcy. I never expected to have anyone admiring me."

"Strikes me you will have here before you're through, my boy. You are also extremely likely to have some people batin' you. But even if they get home on you in very drastic fashion—an' I wouldn't trust them not to try—you will have the consolation of knowin' that you have helped to relieve the tedium of one poor beggar's life—even more than Pen does, by gad! An' that's sayin' a heap."

"It is time I started, De Courcy. Do you mean to accompany me? I will not disguise from you a doubt as to whether the fair Miss Gittins will talk as freely to us both as she might do to me alone, but—"

"I'm not goin' to risk anythin' there, dear boy! Miss Gittins, will not see me. I am content to wait humbly at a distance. But I'm certainly comin' out with you. I know the ropes here, an' you don't. Besides, you're so dashed simple an' innocent that you might lose your way—I don't think!"

It was near the hour of prep, and there was a distinct risk that the two might be missed and inquiries instituted. That was why the Caterpillar meant to go with Goggs, as the Frankingham junior perfectly understood.

But he did not protest. He would have offended De Courcy if he had done so, and he knew it. Moreover, he had a way of taking it for granted that his friends were willing to share his risks. Bags and Tricks and Wagtail at Frankingham knew that way, and liked it. At St. Jim's, too, on the occasion of his visit there, Goggs had impressed other fellows with a feeling that he took as a thing not to be argued about that they had the same pluck and disregard of unpleasant consequences that inspired him.

And that may have had something to do with his undoubted talent for leadership. One will not lead far if one doubts one's followers.

The way out was over the wall. To use the gate at a time so near its closing was to invite suspicion.

"Shall I bunk you up, Goggs?" the Caterpillar asked.

"I thank you, De Courcy, but it is not necessary."

"Then you may bunk me up, by gad!"

"With pleasure!"

That was like the lazy Caterpillar. He was surprised when, as he dropped from the wall, Goggs dropped beside him.

"How do you do it, dear boy?" he asked, almost pathetically. "You must be simply brimful of energy; but you can't have any strength worth mentionin'."

"I really think I may have more than you imagine," said Goggs modestly.

The Caterpillar's hand grasped his right biceps. Goggs flexed it.

"Oh, by Jove! Plenty of them bigger, but not often heftier. Legs—er—the same?"

"I believe so. But it is not necessary that you—"

"Oh, I'll take your word for it, by gad! I say, do you play footer?"

"I have played."

"I must tell Franky. There's a match or two still before the end of term, an' he might be willin' to have you instead of me."

"But I could not think of taking your place, De Courcy."

"Oh, here's another of 'em!" groaned the Caterpillar. "Dash it all! Why not? I don't want to play footer; I only do it to please Franky."

"By the way, did you tell Courtenay where you were coming to?"

"Yaas—no, I mean. I told him he needn't go huntin' round for me if I wasn't at home for prep. Same thing. Frank's my father confessor, of course. Everybody knows that. But when I don't think he'll approve, I don't tell him where I'm goin' till after I've been, by gad! See?"

(To be continued.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"FRIENDS THOUGH DIVIDED!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's story continues the great sports series, and its principal event from that point of view is the eight-oared boat-race between Fourth and Shell. I am not going to tell you who won that. Wait and see!

But there is a good deal in it besides the boat-race. The three minors play big parts; and we see Reggie Manners in one of his tantrums, as the Third calls them. He does not want to have anything more to do with Wally D'Arcy and Frank Levison, so he says. He gets very chummy with Piggott. But when danger comes Piggott deserts him, and Wally and Frank stand by him.

The feud is healed, of course. Reggie is not really a bad fellow—only a young ass.

I wonder how many of my readers play chess? Not a very great proportion, I suppose. Those who do will have something to please them in this story, and that which follows it; and those who don't will not have any cause to complain. I don't know very much about the game myself; but I grinned many times over the chapter in which Arthur Augustus, who regards chess as merely draughts with a greater variety of pieces, talks to Harry Manners, who is far and away the best chess player at St. Jim's.

LIST OF TOM MERRY STORIES IN THE "GEM"—continued.

- 109.—"Piggins & Co.'s Plot."
- 110.—"Tom St. Jim's Surprise."
- 111.—"Tom Merry's Carnival."
- 112.—"Tom Merry at Monte Carlo."
- 113.—"Skimpole's Comet."
- 114.—"The Third-Formers' Raid."
- 115.—"Glyn's Great Wheeze."
- 116.—"Raiding the Raiders."
- 117.—"Tom Merry's Master-Stroke."
- 118.—"The St. Jim's Pageant."
- 119.—"The Leader of the New House."
- 120.—"The Terrible Three's Committee."
- 121.—"Well Played!"
- 122.—"The Sealoway of the Third."
- 123.—"D'Arcy's Party."
- 124.—"D'Arcy's Cricket Week."
- 125.—"The Jape Against St. Jim's."
- 126.—"The Mystery of the Moat House."
- 127.—"D'Arcy's Bank-Book."
- 128.—"The St. Jim's Regatta."
- 129.—"A Rank Outsider."
- 130.—"The Terrible Three's Cricket Week."
- 131.—"Cousin Ethel's Treat."
- 132.—"Tom Merry & Co. at the Exhibition."
- 133.—"The Form-master's Mistake."
- 134.—"Lumley-Lumley's Luck."
- 135.—"The Outsider's Chance."
- 136.—"Herries' First Prize."
- 137.—"Lumley-Lumley's Rival."
- 138.—"Lumley-Lumley, Hero."
- 139.—"The Mystery of the Mill."
- 140.—"The Rugger Fourth."

Upon Editor

CADET NOTES.

AMONG the numerous inquiries received from readers of the GEM with reference to the Cadet matters we are frequently asked whether it is possible for lads who are members of the corps themselves to receive commissions as lieutenants in connection with their own unit. It does not appear to be a general rule to confer commissions on lads in such circumstances, but we understand that there is no objection whatever to members of Cadet Corps receiving commissions in their respective units, subject, of course, to the usual recommendation by the officer commanding the corps, and the acceptance of the same by the local Territorial Force Association. This ought to set the matter at rest, and stop further inquiries on this particular point; but, as hitherto, any other questions can be addressed to the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments, Judges' Quadrangle, Royal Courts of Justice, London, W.C. 2, and will be dealt with in due course.

We referred in these notes some weeks ago to the presentation of medals and diplomas from the French Government to various units of the Cadet Corps and Boy Scouts. These medals, etc., were presented to the selected bodies at a meeting in the Guildhall, London, on Saturday, May 4th. The Right Hon. the Lord Mayor presided, and Major-General the Vicomte de la Panouse, C.B., C.V.O., presented the medals on behalf of His Excellency the French Ambassador. There was a very large attendance of the members of the various corps to receive this honour at the hands of the French Government.

In the regimental orders of the 1st Cadet Battalion of the London Regiment (The Queens) issued by Lieutenant-Colonel C. A. Nussey, V.D., Commanding Officer, the battalion is notified of the exceptional bravery of Sergeant W. F. Burman, late member of "D" Company (Blackheath) of the battalion, to whom the Victoria Cross has been awarded. The following account is given of the circumstances under which Sergeant Burman obtained this great distinction:

"When the advance of his company in attack was held up by machine-gun firing at point-blank range, he shouted to the men next to him to wait a few minutes; and, going forward alone to what seemed certain death, killed the enemy gunner and carried the gun to the company's objective, where he used it with great effect. By this exceptionally gallant deed the progress of the attack was assured. About fifteen minutes later it was observed that the battalion on the right was being impeded by about 40 enemy, who were enfilading them. Burman, with two others, ran forward and got behind the enemy, killing six and capturing two officers and 20 other ranks."

Reflection of this honour is thrown upon the Cadet Battalion of which Sergeant Burman was formerly a member, and should help to bring forward many new recruits to join and support it.

Six companies of the South-West London Cadet Battalion spent Easter in billets in

buildings at Mr. Poynter's Farm, Hayes, Kent, where excellent warm and dry accommodation was provided for them. Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Southam was in command, with Major Hammon as second. Much excellent work was done, Friday afternoon being devoted to close-order drill, and on the Saturday—morning two tactical schemes were carried out on Hayes Common, where 200 acres of gorse and timber afforded a splendid manoeuvring ground. There was also a route-march to Bromley. Other useful and interesting events took place on the Sunday and Monday, including, on the latter day, a football match on the Bromley County School ground. Most of the lads returned home on Monday evening. Lieutenant-Colonel Southam, addressing a full parade of the companies before their departure, said he had been most satisfied with everything, and the camp had been a complete success.

Keen disappointment awaited the 5,000 or more boys who were to have been inspected on the Downs at Bristol on a recent Saturday afternoon by Lieutenant-General Sir H. Sclater, G.C.B., G.O.C. Southern Command. The heavy and continuous rain of the previous week had made the ground waterlogged, and General Sir Robert Seillon had no hesitation in cancelling the parade, feeling that the risk to the boys' healths, unequipped as they are for such conditions, was too great. No doubt the parents will appreciate the kindly thought which dictated the action of the distinguished soldier, but the boys themselves were much disappointed. Subsequently a meeting was held in the Mansion House at Bristol, at which the objects and methods of the Cadet Movement were explained, and the co-ordination of the various boys' societies under one strong and representative committee or association was advocated.

For some time past the Ipswich Cadet Battalion, of which Major Fisk is the commanding officer, has been rapidly increasing its numbers, and local interest in it has been much augmented. With a view to raising further interest the 1st Volunteer Cadet Battalion held a meeting in the Town Hall recently, presided over by the mayor, at which a large number of representative people were present. The meeting decided to do everything in its power to assist to place the Cadet Movement of the borough on a sound basis, and a Cadet Advisory and Help Committee was set up to carry on this useful work. Some subscriptions were announced, and it is hoped, as a result of the interest displayed, that the movement will receive considerable impetus in Ipswich and district.

A social evening in connection with the St. Thomas' Company of the King's Royal Rifle Cadets at Coventry was held recently, and an enjoyable evening was spent by the lads and their friends. During the evening the medals for regular attendance were presented, and several promotions were made. The Reverend G. C. Scurlin, the officer commanding the corps, said a few words of encouragement to the members before his departure to another district. The corps is making good progress, and has recently received considerable contributions towards its work.