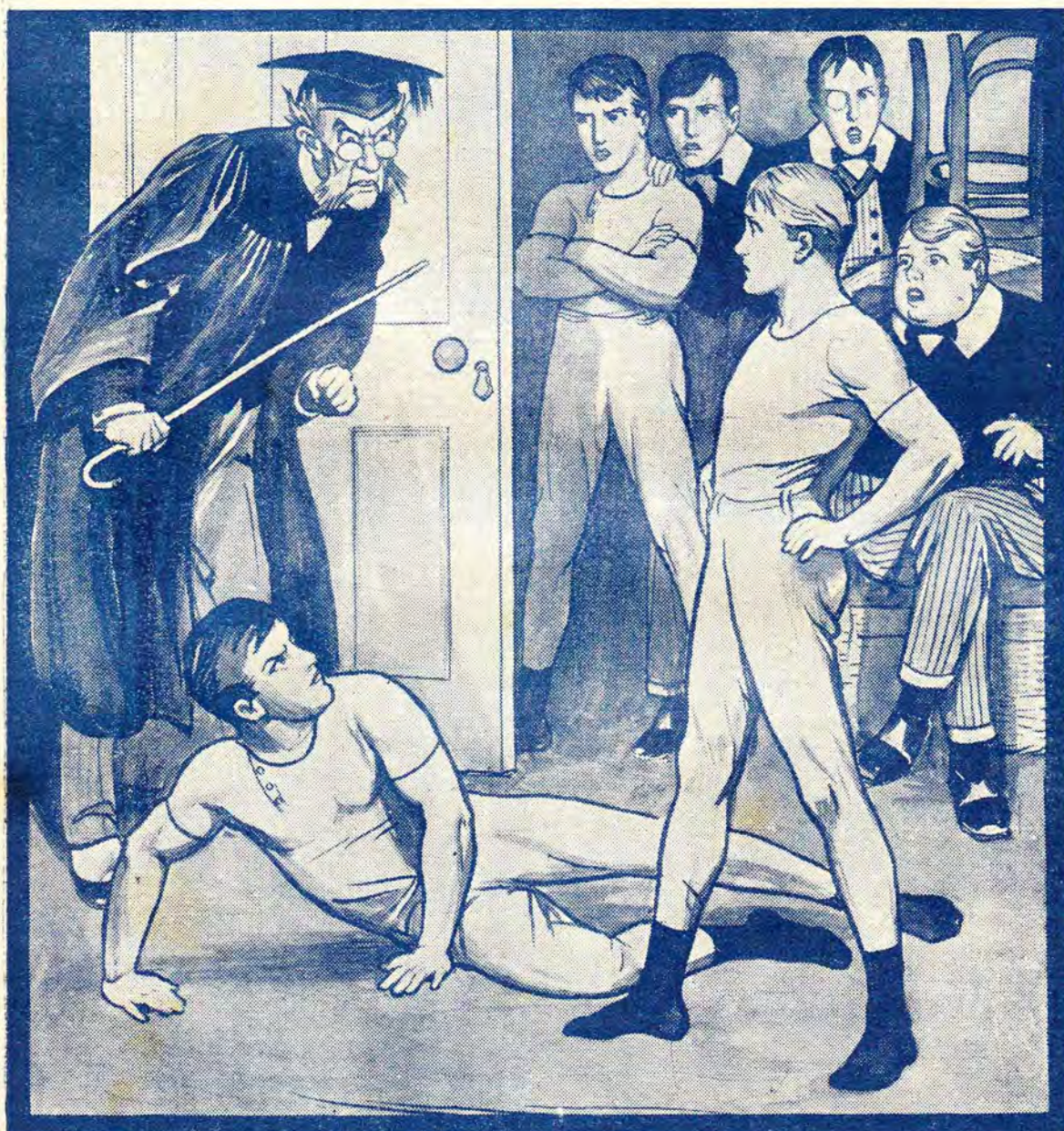


AGAINST ALL COMERS!

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

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THE WRATH OF RATTY!

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

AGAINST ALL COMERS!

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Grundy Knows All About It.

"OF course, there are different styles of wrestling!"

It was George Alfred Grundy of the Shell at St. Jim's who made that pronouncement, in his usual authoritative manner.

George Alfred stood with his sturdy legs planted wide apart in the School House junior Common-room one evening after prep, and he addressed his profound remark to a gathering which included nearly every fellow in the Shell or the Fourth who mattered, save and except the New House contingent, who were always in their own quarters at this time of day.

As a rule, Grundy found people getting impatient when he waxed eloquent.

But this evening Grundy was not cut short at once. And for that there was a reason.

Wrestling was very much in the air at St. Jim's just then. Wrestling events had been agreed upon for the Shell v. Fourth competition; but they had not yet been worked off.

Now, very few fellows in either Form knew much about wrestling. It is not a sport much in vogue at schools—at any rate, in the southern part of England.

Grundy professed to know quite a lot. He looked as if he might be a wrestler, too. He was undoubtedly the most muscular fellow in the two Forms.

So Grundy had been listened to with more patience than usual. But the profound remark set down above made more than one fellow feel doubtful.

It was Monty Lowther who answered. "Your kind and the other kind, I suppose, Grundy?" he said.

"Eh? Oh, don't be a silly ass! But I know you can't help it. You think you know a lot; but what you don't know about wrestling—"

"My ignorance often shocks you, Grundy, doesn't it?" said Lowther, in his blindest tones.

"Eh? Your ignorance? Oh, yes—you're full of it. I'm not denying that you know a bit about things that no sensible fellow would trouble his head about—Shakespeare and poetry and all such potty stuff as that—but—"

"On athletic subjects I lack your encyclopaedic misinformation, is that it?"

"That's just it! I couldn't have expressed it much better myself," replied the great George Alfred, who nearly always did misunderstand the humorist of the Shell.

"Lowther thinks wrestling is just wrestling," he added. "Naturally he would."

"What do you think it is?" asked Digby.

"Yaas, wathab, Dig! If w'estlin' isn't w'estlin', pewwaps Gwunday will be kind enough to inform us what w'estlin' is," said Arthur Augustus, with elaborate sarcasm.

"Certainly I will!" said Grundy, looking at him in a most condescending way.

"Go it!" said Jack Blake.

Blake was one of the two fellows there who really did know more than a little about the subject under discussion.

"Well, there's the Cornish and Devonshire," said Grundy.

"The Devon would be the very cream of them all, naturally," put in Lowther.

"And there's the Cumberland and Westmoreland," went on Grundy.

"Do they all go in pairs, like the animals goin' into the ark?" inquired Cardew.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Herries.

"Looks as if Grundy does know something for once. More than I do, anyway. I thought wrestling was all pretty much the same thing—getting the other fellow on his back some way."

"That's the general idea," Tom Merry said. But, of course, it's more than that. There are rules, and the holds and falls are different in the different kinds. But that's about all I know."

"Then it's about time you stopped gassing, and let someone who does know get in a word edgewise," Grundy said.

"Well, there's the Scottish style—"

"Kerr ought to know all about that," remarked Clive.

"Not likely! I don't believe there's a fellow here who knows a thing except me."

Blake grinned, and Levison said:

"About wrestling, Grundy, or about things in general?"

"Oh, well, come to that, most of you are a fairly ignorant set about everything that matters. And you won't listen to chaps who do know—me, for instance."

"Aren't we listening?" asked Dick Julian.

"And there's the catch-as-catch-can," Grundy continued.

"Till the gunpowder ran out of the heels of their boots," Lowther murmured.

"Eh? What rot are you talking now?"

"Merely a quotation, old sport. Haven't you heard of the Great Panjandrum with the little round button on top, and the lady who imprudently married the barber?"

"Blessed if I have, and hanged if I want to! And, anyway, what's it to do with what I'm talking about?"

"Because at the wedding they all played the game of 'catch-as-catch-can' till the gunpowder ran out of the heels of their boots."

"Oh, don't be a silly ass! I don't know what rot you've got hold of; but anyway it's got nothing in the world to do with wrestling. Then—if you'll allow me to go on—there's the Græco-Roman—"

"I thought that was a kind of nose," said Cardew gravely. "There are Greek noses—mine's a bit that way, I believe—so I'm told, anyhow. An' there are Roman noses—Crooke's ain't quite a true Roman—kind of debased order of architecture—oh, sorry, Crooke, dear boy—didn't know you were present, y'know—"

"Leave my nose alone!" growled Crooke.

"With pleasure—until I have occasion

to pull it again," Cardew replied coolly. "I was really talkin' about Grundy's, which is, I think, a true specimen of the Græco-Roman, or nondescript."

"What do you say my nose is?" hooted the great George Alfred.

"Oh, goodness knows!" chuckled Lowther.

"Hang it all, Lowther, I don't know whether you or Cardew is the worst!" said Herries. "You talk such utter rot that a plain chap can't get a notion of what you're driving at!"

"Though you quarrel with my choice of words, Herries, yet I must applaud yours," Monty Lowther said. "A plain chap is so absolutely correct a description that it could not be bettered."

"Br-r-r-r! What are you gassing about now, fathead?"

"Your engaging countenance, dear boy!"

"I thought Grundy's nasal organ was the topic," said Cardew mildly. "I hadn't finished my remarks upon that subject."

"And you'd better not!" roared Grundy, clenching his big hands. "My nose is no concern of yours, Cardew!"

"We were talking about wrestling," said Blake emphatically.

"Yaas, Gwunday was instructin' us in the various styles—the Devonshire Cwearn an' the Cornish Chough, an' all that."

"Cornwall and Devonshire, you potty idiot!" snapped Grundy.

"Weally, Gwunday, your mannaahs leave a gweat deal to be desiahed," said Arthur Augustus, elevating his celebrated monocle, and giving Grundy a glance of haughty disapproval through it. "I think—I weally do think—"

"You don't. You only think you think. You can't think. You haven't anything to do it with!" Grundy said scathingly.

"Where are you going, Kangy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Anywhere! I don't mind where it is as long as I get away from here," replied Harry Noble mournfully. "Grundy's bad enough, but a lecture by Grundy, varied by piffle from Lowther, rot from Cardew, and twaddle from D'Arcy, is beyond my limit. Coming along, Dane? Coming, Bernard? Tommy—"

"I'm coming," said Tom; and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn went without answering.

Manners got up from the chess-table, where he had been playing over again for the edification of Ernest Levison the game which had won for the Shell twelve points in the Form competition.

"I've had enough of this!" he said crossly. "How can you fellows expect anyone to play chess while—"

"Sure, Manners dear, we're not expectin' ye to. We don't care a straw whether ye do or not!" said Reilly.

"Besides, if a fellow can go on all through an air raid, with bombs dropping pretty nearly on his napper, he needn't mind a little thing like old Grundy's still, small voice!" added Levison, with a grin.

"Grundy's worse than fifty air raids!" snapped Manners. "I'm off. Coming, Lowther?"

Lowther and Manners departed. Racke and Crooke and Scrope followed them out. Grundy's audience was thinning.

"About time we mizzled, I think," said Kerruish; and he and Reilly and Julian and Hammond went off together. Grundy looked puzzled, but went on.

"Then there's the Lancashire style," he said.

"Had enough, dear boys?" asked Cardew.

"Too much!" answered Sidney Clive.

"Heaps too much!" agreed Levison.

And the chums of No. 9 also left the Common-room.

"And the German——"

"I'm not going to stop here to listen to anything about beastly Huns, Grundy!" put in George Gore.

"Coming, Talbot?"

"Yes, I think I'll go," Talbot said, smiling.

"Here, I say, Talbot, come back!" yelled Grundy. "You're one of the few chaps here who have any sense, you know!"

"Yes; that's why I'm going, Grundy!"

"Silly ass!" snapped the great George Alfred. "I say, Lumley-Lumley, you aren't going?"

"Your mistake, Grundy. I am!"

Lumley-Lumley left, and his study-mate, Wyatt, went with him.

Grundy's glance round was almost pathetic, but no one seemed moved by the pathos of it. Something else moved them, however. Gibbons and Boulton and Frere were all making for the door. Even Gunn and Wilkins showed signs of extreme restiveness when their chief began again.

"And the Japanese—— Hi, Gunn, where are you off to? George Wilkins, if you haven't any more sense or any more manners——"

"I haven't!" snorted Wilkins, as he vanished behind Gunn.

Almost everyone had now gone except the four chums of Study No. 6. Grundy turned a beaming smile upon them.

"You fellows have a little sense anyway," he said. "Now, Blake——"

"Oh, stop your gas, Grundy!" said Blake. "What's your particular style of wrestling?"

"I—oh—er—almost any style suits me, you know. What's yours?"

"I'm not going to say. But almost any style don't suit me, I'll own that. I've only been taught one. Still, I'm willing to take you on at any or all of them—if there's any chap in the school who knows enough to judge—and after we've done I'm willing to take on the whole Shell, one down, t'other come on, at my own special style."

"My hat! You don't half blow, Blake!" gasped Grundy.

"Hanged if that doesn't come pretty well from the fellow who was ready to take on the whole Fourth with the gloves!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I did it, and licked most of them," replied Grundy.

"I'm not going to say that I'll lick everybody," Blake said. "But I do say that I'm ready for anyone, and I believe I'm a match for most of you duffers."

"All serene, Blake! You take on me to start with in as many styles as you like."

"Or as you like," said Blake. "I don't believe myself, for all your talk, that you know one from another."

"Rats! I'll show you! And after that you tackle the rest of the Shell. You may consider that as settled."

"I suppose Tom Merry may be

allowed a word about it?" put in Herrdig; with an unwanted touch of sarcasm.

"I don't see that it's necessary," answered Grundy. "I suppose I am as well capable of settling a thing of the sort as—— What on earth are you silly asses cackling at?"

They were still cackling as they went out. Grundy's assumption of authority always amused those whom it failed to annoy, and it was usually members of the Shell who felt annoyed by it, not the Fourth-Formers.

CHAPTER 2.

The Desperate Case of the Fourth.

"WHAT'S this wrestling bizney, Blake?" asked George Figgins, of the New House, meeting Blake in the quad next day.

"What! About old Grundy, you mean, Figgy?"

"Well, yes; and about you. They say you want to take on all the Shell, one after another—same way Grundy did with us at boxing."

"It's true, come to that," Blake answered. "I think I can see my way to giving the Form a bit of a leg-up. Where's Kerr?"

"In our study; Fatty, too. Come along there, will you?"

"Hi, Herries!" shouted Blake across the quad. "Where's Dig?"

"I'll find him if you like as soon as I've chained Towser up," said Herries, who had just returned from taking his bulldog for a run. "Do you want Gussy, too?"

"Not if you can choke him off," Blake said, grinning. "Gustavus talks too much without saying anything in particular. But if you see Levison, or Clive, or Roylance, or Julian, you might send them along to Figgy's study. We're going there now."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Come along, Towser, old boy! Your Uncle Blake's calves ain't part of your meat ration, so you needn't sniff at them like that."

"Let him sniff!" Blake said indifferently.

Towser could put Arthur Augustus into a flutter, but not Jack Blake.

Herries went off. Figgins and Blake entered the New House together, and went up to the study which Figgy shared with Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

On the way up they met Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, and managed to detach Reddy from his chums, which was never an easy thing to do.

Kerr was busy with a mathematical problem, and Fatty sat in the armchair, looking doleful.

"Hallo, Blake!" he said, as the three came in. "What are you doing over here? It must be just on dinner-time."

"Ever so long yet!" replied Blake cheerily. "Why, 'tain't more than twenty minutes since we came out of classes!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Fatty, putting a hand pathetically to his well-filled waistcoat.

"He's gone up a pound and a half in weight in the last week, Blake!" said Kerr.

"Down, you chump, not up!" snapped Fatty.

"What's the odds? A pound and a half is nothing in that little lot," Blake said.

"Oh, isn't it, then? If I keep wasting away like that till the end of the war——"

"And the war lasts for fifty years, there won't be more than fifteen stone of you left!" put in Redfern.

"Brrr!" growled Fatty. "If you're come here to talk rot, Redfern——"

"I haven't, that I know of. I don't really know what I have come for, though," Redfern said.

"You'll know in a minute!" remarked Blake. "Here comes Herries and Dig and Levison. Oh, hang it all, there's Cardew, too—and Gussy! I did hope we should be able to talk things over without their blethering!"

Within a few seconds the five reached Figgins & Co.'s study together.

"I undahstand you want my advice, Figgy," said Arthur Augustus, beaming upon the New House junior leader through his monocle.

"Then you understand a lot more than I do!" growled George Figgins. "Still, I suppose we must let you stop, as you're here."

"Weally, Figgy, that is not too polite! In fact, it is positively wude. If I am not wanted, I shall insist upon wetiahin at once!"

"Well, 'wetiah,' then!" snapped Blake.

"I am not awah, Blake, that you have any wight to give ordahs in the studay!"

"Oh, rats, and plenty of them! Sit down in the coal-scuttle, hold your silly tongue, and listen to your betters!"

"Is D'Arcy the one silent member?" asked Cardew blandly.

"If you want the truth, we'd a heap rather you shut up!" Blake replied frankly. "But we don't expect it."

"Sit down, you fellows," said Figgins hospitably. "There's plenty of room on the floor, and three or four of you can sit on Fatty. Might help to keep the poor chap's mind off the eternal grub problem."

"Competition bizney, I suppose?" said Digby.

"Yes. I rather wanted Roylance and Clive and Julian here, as well as you fellows," replied Blake. "But I suppose we can get along without them. And when the place is cluttered up with silly fatheads——"

"Are you addweasin' me, Blake?" demanded Arthur Augustus hotly.

"No. I was only talking about you; that's all. Never mind that. What do you think of the state of affairs, Kerr?"

"Well, it certainly doesn't look too promising for us," admitted Kerr.

"Promising? I should think not!" said Levison. "Do you know that the Shellfish are fifty-four points ahead?"

"I shouldn't think there's a chap here who doesn't know it!" answered Digby.

"Except my noble kinsman, who is unfortunately incapable of countin' beyond ten, the sum of the digits of his two hands," remarked Cardew.

"Weally, Cardew! If you mean me, let me tell you——"

"That you've learned to use your toes as well—eh? Well done, kinsman! But there is still a gap between twenty and—er—was in fifty-one you said, Levison?"

"Fifty-four!" snapped Levison. "You know that as well as I do!"

"Blessed if I did! I haven't a minor who keeps the book of records. I won't say that I had forgotten all about the competition, but——"

"Oh, bai Jove, will the fellow nevah stop talkin' wot, so that we can get to biznay?" said Arthur Augustus in desperation.

"Sit on them both!" growled Herries.

"It's about the wrestling," said Blake.

"Old Grundy gave the Shell a big lift in the boxing, or they wouldn't be on top now."

Kerr shook his head.

"Won't do, Blake," he said. "I've been working the thing out—making a kind of analysis of it, you know. What Grundy did only meant a dozen points to the Shell on the balance, and a dozen come a long way short of fifty-four."

"Well, they scored on the japes," said Herries.

Again Kerr shook his head.

"No," he said, referring to a paper by his side. "We've scored more than they have in the japing line."

"That means we're badly down on the real sports events," said Levison thoughtfully.

This time Kerr nodded.

"Oh, wats! Didn't we win the football match, deah boys, an' do best in wunnin', an'—"

"But we lost both cricket-matches, and the boat-race, and the Second Eleven footer," said Figgy mournfully. "We ought not to have gone down. I can't help thinking some of you chaps took things too easily."

"But if we'd pulled off those two games we should only have been fourteen points down now, instead of fifty-four," said Reddy.

"You're wrong somewhere," said Herries, rubbing his ear in a thoughtful manner. "You must be wrong. For there were only ten points for each of those games, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you fatheads cackling about?" demanded Herries hotly.

"Yaas, weally, Hewwies, I fail entirely to see what they are cacklin' about," said Arthur Augustus, who had not joined in the laughter. "Twice ten make—"

"Shush!" breathed Cardew, raising a hand impressively. "My noble kinsman, by using both fingers an' toes to count with, has worked out a difficult problem. Silence for the statement of its solution!"

"Twice ten is twenty, you silly ass, Cardew!" roared Gussy, quite annoyed. "Erewwoday knows that, I am suah. An' I wish you would wefer to me as your kinsman. I am not pwoud of the connection, I assuah you!"

"Not?" asked Cardew sadly. "But, dash it all, I am, y'know! Consider my feelin's, dear boy, do!"

"Twice ten's twenty, as Gussy says," persisted Herries. "But Reddy's making it out it's forty."

"So it is in a case like this!" Redfern answered, grinning.

"Blessed if I can see it, though! It can't be!"

"Look here, Herries," said Kerr, taking a scrap of paper and a pencil. "Suppose each side had scored two hundred points?"

"Yes."

"Well, the Shell scores twenty more, and has two hundred and twenty."

"Anyone can see that."

"That's twenty ahead of us."

"Am I denying it, duffer?"

"Well, suppose we'd collared those twenty. We should have been twenty ahead of them—difference of forty. See?"

"Blessed if I see! How can it make a difference of forty, when anyway the side that wins only takes twenty?"

"Let's put it algebraically, then. If in an equation you shove in plus twenty on one side, and minus twenty on the other, the result is—"

"To make the beastly thing worse than over!" said Herries. "Chuck it, Kerr! P'raps I'm thick-headed."

"Oh, don't say perhaps!" put in Levison sarcastically.

"Chuck it!" snapped Blake. "You'll never make those asses see. They're a disgrace to our study, aren't they, Dig?"

"Well, I'm not going to say that," replied Digby, with unusual caution.

"But I don't mind admitting that if I had to choose a mathematical team against the Shell bounders, Gustavus and old Herries ain't the first chaps I should pick."

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"The question isn't maths," said Figgins, rather impatiently. "That's the worst of you fellows; you do gas so. Now, the real question is—"

"How long is it before dinner?" asked Patty Wynn sleepily.

CHAPTER 3.

A Surprise!

"YOU fat chump! The question isn't anything of the sort!" snapped Figgins.

"I don't know what it is; then. If grub doesn't matter, what does?"

"Oh, you—you—your gorging porpoise! What matters is catching up the Shellfish in the competition, and then getting ahead of them again."

"Let's hear how you're going to do it, then."

"Blake's got a scheme."

"Well, I won't say for catching them up," Blake said. "Fifty-four points is more than they are likely to risk on the wrestling. Fact of the matter is that most of the chaps in both Forms don't feel any too keen on it."

"I don't know about that," said Levison. "I'm keen enough, for one; but I know so blessed little about it."

"And who knows anything about it?" asked Redfern. "I don't."

"Well, Grundy says he does," drawled Cardew.

"Oh, Grundy!" snorted Figgy.

"And Grundy's Shell, anyway," Redfern said. "It might be some use if you could tell us of a Fourth-Former who knows."

"Blake does," Herries said.

"Eh? He's kept it pretty dark, then," replied Figgins.

"It was wrong keeping dark," Blake said. "And I'm not like Gustavus. I don't let on all I know because I can't help gassing."

"Weally, Blake—"

"One of the strong, silent men, Blake," observed Cardew.

"Well, there's no danger of anyone taking you for a chap of that sort," retorted Blake, a trifle ruffled.

"I should imagine not," said Cardew, grinning cheerfully. "I always give myself away, I know. Lucky for me, perhaps, that the gift is worth so desperately little."

"Gives us a chance," remarked Kerr, who had not spoken for some time.

"Blake might score on his own account, and also coach some of the rest of us to be fit to meet the Shellfish. Knowledge counts, you know—even a little of it. If we're all in the same box, knowing next door to nothing about the game, they'll get most of the points, being stronger and heavier. Blake and Herries and Figgy might score for us; but what chance would I or Gussy or Cardew have against Tom Merry or Kangaroo?"

"Speak for yourself, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "For my part, I am not prepared to admit that the best man in the Shell can put me on my back."

"It wouldn't need that," Dig remarked. "when the worst in the Fourth would have a blessed good chance of doing it!"

"How much do you know about the game, Blake?" inquired Figgins.

"Not as much as old Grundy makes out he does. But I've done some wrestling in the North-country style, you know—they call the Cumberland and Westmorland. Plenty of good judges say it's the best style. I've tried one or two of the others, and I certainly prefer it."

"Who taught you?" Kerr asked.

"Our gardener. And he used to be a champion at it. A real champion, I mean—one who beat the best men of his day, and won no end of belts and cups. I did some of it when I was

quite a kid; but I let it slide somehow, and forgot almost all about it till last hols, when old Donny persuaded me to take it up again. I'm not bragging, but he says I might be first-class at it if I stuck to it—right build, stiff in the back, firm on the pins, and quick."

"How old is Donny?" asked Redfern.

"Over military age?"

"Crumbs, yes! Seventy, if he's a day."

"If you've only tried it on with an old fossil like that—"

"Oh, it wasn't with him I wrestled, Figgy. It was with his grandson."

"And what sort of chap is the grandson? It sounds a bit more hopeful that it should be the grandson, but a heap depends upon what he was like."

"Well, my mater said last time she wrote that Bob Donny had just joined up, so he must be eighteen or thereabouts. He's rather bigger than Grundy—weighs a stone or so more. I should say—Pretty much a head taller than I am, and with big muscles. The bounder's never had a day's illness in his life, and there aren't three men in the village who could lick him in a stand-up fight."

"Sounds all right," said Figgins.

"Old Blake never brags," Dig said.

"And could you put Bob Donny on his back, Blake?" asked Kerr.

"Four times out of five," said Blake, quite modestly. "The old chap—his granddad—was horribly cut up about it at first. He'd tried to persuade himself that Bob was going to follow in his footsteps. Now his worry is that I can't very well do it, because my people wouldn't cotton to my wrestling professionally, and I'm not sure I should be keen on it myself. He's given Bob up—says he's only fit to be a soldier!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It hasn't occurred to him that we need soldiers—rather more than we do wrestlers just now, by gad!" said Cardew.

"Oh, yes, it has. Old Donny tried to join up himself. Said he was thirty-nine. Nearly squeezed through, too. He doesn't look more than about fifty."

"My apologies to Donny," Cardew said gracefully. "I know the old fellow's name. It was well known round my last school."

"Eh?" Blake looked at Cardew with new interest. "That was up north, I know. Did you go in for any wrestling there?"

"A bit. I wasn't keen on it, y'know."

"That is your pwevailin' fault, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus severely. "You are nevah weally keen on anything."

"Rats!" snapped Levison. "He only pretends he isn't."

"Don't be absurd, dear boy," drawled Cardew. "I shouldn't be bothered to pretend."

"Can you wrestle, Cardew?" asked Blake.

Blake's eyes were gleaming. Cardew's keenness might be doubtful, but there was no mistaking Blake's.

"Yaas, I suppose I can, if you put it that way, Blake."

The rest were looking at Cardew with new interest, too. The sarcastic dandy of the Fourth had shown them more than once that he could do things better than most when he cared to try.

"Will you try a fall or two with me?" asked Blake.

"My dear man, there isn't room here."

"We can go to the gym."

"Giving away too much," said Kerr shrewdly. "If there's anything at all in this bizny—and I'm beginning to believe that there's quite a lot in it—the most important thing of all is not to let on to the Shellfish that we know more than they do."

"Matter of that, we don't," Figgins

said. "Only Blake and Cardew—that is, if Cardew does."

"Which you rather doubt, dear boy, eh?" said Cardew.

Figgins flushed.

"Well, you're not exactly the chap I should have picked out as a wrestler," he admitted.

"Quite right, dear boy! I simply hate perspirin', an' it's a rare game for that. An' I don't like achin' all over. Blake will make me ache if I let him chuck me about."

"But you can wrestle," Kerr said.

"I'm not admittin' that. I know how—that's as far as I'll go."

"Oh, come on!" cried Blake.

"What! In this crowded little den, an' with the floor to fall on! No, thank you, dear boy—not any for me!"

"You've simply got to," said Herries, with immense determination.

"Who says I've got to?"

"I do!" snorted Levison.

Cardew shrugged his slim shoulders.

"Then I must, I suppose," he said pathetically. "I have never yet taken orders from No. 6—not even from my noble kinsman. But in No 9 I am—er—distinctly number three. Clive bosses me no end, an' Levison here bosses us both. Most determined bounder I ever met—Levison!"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Levison. "You're the most obstinate mule I ever came across! But you can't have everything your own way."

"Seems to me I can't have anythin'," replied Cardew pathetically. "Look at 'em all! An' I am to be 'butchered to make a Roman holiday.' I take it. Well; what must be can't be helped, as Shakespeare, or the prophet Habakkuk, or somebody or other, said. Don't ask me to give a hand in the furniture shiftin', that's all."

Nobody wanted him to do that. There was not so much furniture in the study of Figgins & Co. that it took long to shift it to one side. Even then room was none too plentiful. Everybody but Blake and Cardew had to get on top of the furniture in order to allow of space for operations. But no one grumbled except Fatty Wynn.

As Fatty sorrowfully said, he had thought himself safe from being disturbed from the armchair until dinner, as the rain was pouring down outside, and cricket was out of the question.

Cardew and Blake took off their boots, and stripped to their undergarments. Cardew did not want to do that. He said it was a beastly fog, and that he felt no certainty of having strength enough left to get his clothes on again after the bout was over. But Blake insisted, and the rest backed up Blake. So, rather, than be disrobed by force, Cardew, grumbling, disrobed himself to the extent insisted upon.

"Who's goin' to umpire?" asked Cardew.

"No one," answered Blake. "What's the use, when only you and I know anything about it?"

"Tell you what, Blake—you take on Figgins or Redfern or Herries, an' I'll umpire. I should make a nailin' good umpire, by gad, an'—"

"Oh, come on, you slacking gasbag!"

Blake was sturdy, and Cardew was slim. Every ounce of Blake was good, sound stuff. He was as fit as any fellow could be, and his broad, deep chest promised endurance beyond the ordinary.

But Cardew's slightness was deceptive in some ways. He was far more wiry than he looked; and, active as Blake was, he was not really the superior of the lounging dandy in that respect when Cardew was put to it.

The manner of his grip told Blake that he knew the game.



Found at Last!
(See Chapter II.)

The two stood up breast to breast, each leaning forward to let his chin rest on his opponent's right shoulder. They locked their arms round one another, the left arm outermost in each case. Then a tight grip of the hands, and the bout began.

Kerr noticed that both used the same grip, turning the right hand so that the knuckles touched the other fellow's back, and locking the fingers of the left hand into the hook made by the curved fingers of the right.

The bout began. Most of those who watched expected to see Cardew thrown almost at once.

But Blake seemed to be up against something pretty stiff in Ralph Reckness Cardew.

They struggled till the sweat stood out on their foreheads, and their muscles were taut with the strain. They rocked this way and that, and more than once it seemed as though the heavier fellow must bear down his antagonist. But Cardew slipped out of these tight places by his activity; and at last, when he appeared to be on the very point of being thrown, a strange thing happened.

The situations were reversed as if by magic. Only Kerr and Levison were quick enough to see how it was done. But suddenly Blake bent backward, his legs flew from under him, and he went down with a crash.

CHAPTER 4.

Herries Tries His Hand.

"BACK-HEELLED!" said Levison. "My hat! Back-heelled!" gasped Blake, staring up into the flushed face of Cardew.

"You're no slacker! You're only a giddy fraud, Cardew!"

"How did you do it?" inquired Figgins, with eager interest.

"Yes, that's what I want to know," said Redfern. "I was watching with all my eyes; but Blake seemed to have such

a pull at the moment that I didn't much notice what Cardew was doing."

"That's just where I went wrong," explained Blake, scrambling up. "I forgot that the instant when you think you're forcing your man down is just the one when you should look out for his trying that trick. I felt, somehow, that I was ever so much stronger than Cardew."

"So you are, dear boy," drawled the dandy of the Fourth.

"I may be; not so sure now. But I'm not so clever as you are, anyway."

"Wrong there, by gad!" replied Cardew. "There's nothin' so dashed clever about back-heelin' a chap when he's forcin' you down—if the chap forgets what he ought to do."

"Oh, I know well enough what I ought to have done!" Blake confessed. "Directly I felt your heel I should have thrown my weight forward and slackened my hold. I tried to hang on to my advantage after I'd lost it, and that helped you."

Cardew nodded. Then he picked up his trousers.

"Here, I say, we haven't half-finished yet!" said Blake.

"Oh, dear! Can't I be allowed to retire on my laurels, you fellows? I've thrown Blake. I couldn't do it again in a dog's age. Nobody knows that better than I do. I don't want to try. Makes me hot."

"Slacker!" said Levison, in high scorn.

"Blake says I'm not that. Isn't that good enough, by gad? Let someone else try."

"Yaas, bai Jove! Let me twy. I feel certain that I have mastered the main principals now, an'—"

"Might trot along and fetch Chowle, Reddy," suggested Blake.

"That sitter! What for?"

"About Gustavus' mark, I think. I

don't want to kill our tame idiot, and I don't suppose Cardew does."

"Oh, wats, Blake! You know vewy well—"

"Shurrup, Gussy!" growled Herries. "I don't brag that I've mastered the principles, or any rot of that sort."

"The principles aren't exactly rot, dear man," said Cardew blandly.

"You know what I mean, fathead! It's rot for any chap to pretend he understands it all after he's seen one bout. I'm not pretending that. But I do say that a slim beggar like Cardew, ever so much lighter than I am, and without half my muscle, couldn't throw me just by getting his heel behind me; and I'm surprised at Blake for—"

"What? Surprised, are you?" roared Blake. "Why, you silly duffer, I'd throw you every time! You hopeless idiot, I could—"

"You might, though I don't believe it. Cardew couldn't!"

"Cardew's better at the game than I am, you lump of inferior gristle!"

"Wrong, dear boy!" said Cardew.

"Are you willing to try, Cardew?" asked Herries, in almost a hostile tone.

"I'm not keen," replied Cardew.

"You know you couldn't!" snapped Herries.

"No, dear boy! On the contrary, I'm pretty sure I could. But it would make me hot again."

Herries was already tearing off his upper garments, in a hurry to put the matter to the test.

There was no backing out for Cardew. But perhaps no one there but Levison guessed how little he wanted to back out. He bore no malice towards Herries; but to play with him would suit the impish strain that was strong in Cardew.

"Mustn't lose your grip, or it counts as a fall," Blake warned his chum.

"Oh! I didn't know that! Must I grip just like you did?"

"Not unless you like. How do you want to grip?"

"This way. I'm not ready yet, Cardew!"

Herries interlaced his fingers.

"Oh, I won't start till the word's given, dear boy!" drawled Cardew.

"Ready now!"

It was scarcely a second later when Herries smote the floor with a thud.

"Ooooooh!" he gasped. "I—I—"

"If you weren't ready—" began Cardew politely.

"Well, I was, really," confessed Herries. "But I don't know how you did it!"

"Oh, just as it was done to Blake," answered Cardew coolly. "It's easy enough when you know how, an' the other fellow doesn't, y'know."

"Can you do it again?" demanded Herries.

"I fancy so. You don't seem to have learned quite all about it that time."

"Well, do it!" said the undaunted Herries, standing up for another bout.

As soon as the word was given Cardew did it. And he seemed to do it without effort, too.

"My hat!" exclaimed Herries. I know now! If I only kept my hands locked—"

"Wouldn't help you," said Blake, shaking his head. "If you can pull the other chap over on top of you it's still his fall. Besides, I don't think much of your chance of keeping your lock with your fingers that way."

"Do you think it's the wrong way, Cardew?" asked Herries.

It was plain that his respect for Cardew was growing apace.

"Matter of taste, dear boy!"

"It's not!" said Blake, with decision.

"The other's the best lock. There's only

one best. Let me show you, you old duffer!"

"No, I'll show him. It's your turn to take him on now, by gad, Blake!"

But Herries insisted on tackling Cardew again.

This time he was cross-buttocked. But he did not know that until he was told. He had been looking out for another attempt to back-heel him, naturally enough.

But Cardew, with a sudden slackening of grip, his arms almost loose about the burly shoulders of his opponent, turned his left side towards Herries, swung his left leg across both of his opponent's, behind them, brought his heel sharply against Herries' calf, tightened his grip again, and hauled forward.

Not all Herries' superior strength and weight could avail him when thus taken off his balance. He floundered down, with Cardew on top of him.

Herries had had enough of Cardew by this time. He regarded him with real admiration. It seemed wonderful to Herries that this slim, dandified fellow should be able to do such things. Of course, it was chiefly knack; but there was strength, too—far more than Herries could have believed possible.

Blake took on Herries, and played with him. But Herries was learning something all the time. Not quickly—that was not the way of George Herries. Still, he was learning.

As Cardew seemed reluctant to get hot again, Blake took on in turn Figgins, Levison, and Redfern. He threw them all easily, of course. Fatty Wynn refused to stand up to be thrown; he preferred to lie down and save the bump, if he had to go down, he said. Gussy was eager; but Blake refused to wrestle with him—afraid of breaking something, was his excuse. Kerr and Dig, the light-weights of the party, did not try their luck.

"We must have another bout, Cardew!" said Blake.

"Dear man, why? It's such rot, y'know. You're a better man than I am, an' I own it. No need to prove it, surely?"

"I'm not satisfied. You've thrown me, and I haven't thrown you!" replied Blake doggedly.

"Behold a victim of the sacrifice!" said Cardew tragically.

Then they locked, and struggled hard.

No slight victory would content Jack Blake now. He went all out for the king throw of all—the buttock. It was taking a big risk, and he knew it. Cardew would have him at his mercy if he failed.

But he did not fail!

He waited his chance, wearing down his antagonist's strength. He himself seemed not to feel in the slightest the exertions he had been through. There was plenty of stamina in Blake.

It was done! Right over Blake's bending back Cardew was heaved, to bring up hard against the wall beyond.

"Yoooop!" he howled, sitting up and rubbing his head.

"I hope I haven't hurt you, old chap?" said Blake contritely.

"You haven't. The wall has!" answered Cardew.

The door opened, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, looked in.

"Great Scott!" he said sharply. "You kids are making row enough! If you don't look out, you'll have Ra—Mr. Ratcliff on your track! Why, what game do you call this?"

It was small wonder that Monteith opened his eyes widely when he observed the fact that of the ten juniors present seven were clad only in vests, pants, and socks.

"We were wrestling, Monteith," explained Figgy.

"Oh, wrestling, were you? Can any of you wrestle?" returned the prefect.

The days when Figgins & Co. had regarded Monteith as their natural enemy had passed. No one denied that Monteith was "quite a decent sort" now.

"One or two of us," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Monteith's eyes gleamed. As it chanced, wrestling interested him. He had done little of it, but he had seen a good deal.

He looked at Figgins.

"You're the biggest chap here," he said. "You or Herries, anyway. Of course, I ought to be able to put either of you over easily enough; but you're not afraid of being hurt, I know, and for that matter I won't hurt you if I can help it."

Figgy grinned.

"I'm on all right if you want me," he said. "So is Herries if you want him, I'm sure. But Blake and Cardew are our best men. I say, though, Monteith, you won't talk, will you? We don't want the Shell to know too much."

"I won't blab," said Monteith. "But—well, Blake's hefty enough—still, he's a long way short of my size and weight. As for Cardew—"

"Oh, I'm not keen," chipped in Cardew.

Blake snatched at the chance. It would be something worth doing to put a big senior like Monteith on his back. And Blake fancied he could do it!

CHAPTER 5.

Mr. Ratcliff Looks In.

"WELL, are you on, Blake?" inquired the prefect.

"Rather! Take your clobber off, Monteith, and wire in to the job!"

"H'm! I don't know about taking quite so much off as you kids have," returned the big senior, grinning.

"Oh, you can't wrestle in trousers, you know!"

Monteith must have been keen. He only hesitated a moment; then off came his coat, waistcoat, boots, and trousers, and his shirt followed. He looked a decidedly hefty opponent in his silken underclothing.

Then he and Blake stood face to face, and gripped.

"Tell me if I do anything outside the rules, Cardew," said the prefect. "I don't know them as well as I suppose you fellows do."

"Right-ho!" said Cardew.

The struggle began. Monteith's strength and weight would have made him Blake's master, if he had had only half Blake's knowledge. But he had little more than the knowledge of the intelligent spectator. He had never before stood up with a fellow who really knew the game.

He did his best; and it was no bad bet for a novice, all allowances made. There was a moment when he looked like getting Blake down.

But Blake knew better. He was playing for an unexpected move; and just when Monteith thought that his weight was bearing down his antagonist, Blake back-heeled smartly, and Monteith staggered helplessly over.

"Bravo! That's the way we do it in No. 6!" yelled Dig.

Monteith sat up.

"Could you do that again, Blake?" he asked, quite good-temperedly.

"That, or something else, I think," replied Blake. "It's a bit of a pull knowing how, you know."

"Well, let's try it. I'm interested in this game; and I'm not above learning from a kid."

That speech was a trifle too lordly for the taste of Jack Blake. He made up his mind at once that Monteith should suffer

something more than the back-heel—the first throw taught a novice, as a rule—this time.

"Give him the half-nelson, Blake, deah boy!" suggested Gussy.

"Ass! 'Tain't in the game," returned Blake scathingly.

"Oh, weally! I am quite suah—"

"That belongs to the Græco-Roman style, where it's mostly done on the ground, doesn't it, Blake?" said Monteith.

"Yes. You can always trust our Gustavus to muddle things up. The old ass doesn't properly know the difference between keeping goal and keeping wicket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, you are an uttah cwass idiot! You—"

"Ready, Blake?"

"Excuse me, Monteith, but I think you can hardly have been awaah that I was speakin'—"

"You generally are, aren't you? We can hear your jaw going even over here now and then. The current theory is that you have solved the problem of perpetual motion with that jaw of yours, D'Arcy. Sure you're ready, Blake?"

"I'm waiting!" growled the Fourth-Former.

Again they gripped. This time the struggle did not last so long. In about five seconds the senior was down again.

Blake had given him the outside stroke. He had twisted the prefect sharply to the left, and had struck hard with his left foot at the outside of his opponent's right leg.

To the spectators—except Cardew—there seemed nothing much in this to bring a big, strong fellow like Monteith to ground. But to ground he went with a thwack, and he lay there, gazing up at Blake with considerable respect in his face.

"That was a good one!" he said. "I'll get you to show me it some time. I think I should like this game if I only knew a little more about it. At present I'm not very clear about anything except that you can throw me every time."

"Oh, you'd learn fast enough," Blake answered. "Let Cardew give you a fall or two now. It all helps."

"My dear fellow, Monteith's much too big for me," objected Cardew. "I might get hurt. I don't like bein' hurt, y'know."

"Go on, slacker!" said Levison.

"You're much more likely to hurt me," said Monteith.

"I shouldn't mind that so much," drawled the dandy of the Fourth.

"Sorry we haven't one of those what-d'ye-call-em carpets you read about in the novels, where a chap's feet sink in as if it was a bed of moss, and don't make a sound, Monteith," grinned Figgy.

"Ours is certainly not quite that kind," agreed Kerr. "What little nap it ever had has been worn off bumping Fatty."

"I've noticed that I don't come down without a sound," remarked Monteith cheerfully.

Cardew and the prefect grinned. The junior showed no keenness. It was not his way to show keenness. But it was there this time.

He gave Monteith a dose of the medicine he himself had had to take from Blake; and he gave it to him quickly.

To play the buttock against a fellow so much his superior in weight and strength as Monteith meant risking something for Cardew. Monteith, though a novice, had some notion of the game; and had Cardew failed it would not have needed much skill on his opponent's part to throw him.

But he did not fail. There was a roar of applause as Monteith shot over the slim junior's back.

While the head prefect still lay huddled up on the floor, gasping for breath, the door opened, and the angry face of Mr. Ratcliff showed.

"Good gracious! Of all the preposterous and unparalleled exhibitions of—What do you mean by this absurd and disgusting—"

"It's nothing of the sort, sir!" snapped Blake. "We—"

"We've got more on than we should have in the gym," chipped in Figgy.

"Or on the river," added Levison.

"I say that it is disgusting—positively disgusting!" raved the master. "I have never regarded the scanty dress in which various—er—so-called athletic pursuits are conducted as altogether befitting. But such dress is recognised, and, therefore, in a measure justifiable—or at last permissible. I have yet to hear of any—er—sport in which the—er—participants figure in their— Monteith! You here?"

Mr. Ratcliff's voice rose almost to a scream as he saw his head prefect sit up, with flushed face, and clad in the same airy costume as the majority of the juniors.

"Yes, sir. The fact of the matter is—"

"You, and in this costume! I can hardly believe the evidence of my own eyes!"

"Well, we don't want him to," whispered Dig to Gussy. "If the frabjous old ass feels like that, why don't he say 'Dream!' and scuttle without pinching himself?"

Monteith rose to his feet. It was not quite a nice position for him.

"Put on your clothes at once, Monteith! Let us at least be decent!" snapped the New House tyrant.

"I don't admit that I've been otherwise than 'decent,'" replied Monteith, with some spirit. "I am sorry if the noise disturbed you, sir. I know there must have been a good deal of noise. But there's nothing wrong in it all besides the row it made. We were only wrestling."

"You were wrestling with mere juniors, Monteith?"

"Can't believe his ears, now," whispered Dig. "They're big enough, too. But it looks to me as if he ain't going to have much evidence against us at this rate."

"Yes. I don't see that that makes any difference. Of course, the place wasn't the right one—I admit that, sir."

"I will see you later—when I hope to find you clothed and in your right mind! Levison, Cardew, Blake, D'Arcy, Digby, Herries—you will return at once to your own House, and I shall report this to Mr. Railton. Heavy punishment should be given you for so gross a breach—"

"May we put our things on before we go across, sir?" asked Cardew blandly.

"There is nothing really improper about what we are wearing, I think; but we might create some sensation in the quad if—"

"I shall also report your gross impertinence, Cardew!"

"Yaas, sir," replied Ralph Reckness Cardew, starting for the door, with his upper clothing over his right arm, and his boots in his left hand. "I'm not sure whether Mr. Railton will quite agree with a public exhibition of this kind; but we can tell him you ordered that—"

"Shurrup, you idiot!" hissed Levison. Mr. Ratcliff, with a withering glance at Cardew, turned and stamped wrathfully downstairs.

"I think I'll put 'em on," said Cardew thoughtfully. "But Ratty really has dashed queer ideas."

"There'll be a most unholy row,"

Monteith said. "But I'll talk him over if I can. Don't count on it, though."

"We sha'n't," replied Kerr. "We know our dear Ratty by this time, I guess."

CHAPTER 6.

The Shell Agree.

"HALLO, Blake! Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom Merry, as two figures appeared at the door of No. 10 of the Shell studies in the School House. "Anything fresh on?"

"It's about the competition, of course," said Monty Lowther, with a sigh. "There's only one reason for doubting whether Figgy and Blake have competition on the brain."

"What's that?" asked George Figgins unsuspiciously.

"Oh, the silly ass means we haven't any brains to have it on!" snorted Blake. "Brains are a monopoly of the Shell, you know."

"Blow the competition!" snapped Manners.

"Now that the chess contests are over," returned Blake.

"Getting sarcastic in your old age, Blake?" inquired Tom, smiling.

"Well, no, I don't think so. But ever since that, Manners has been continually rubbing his nose against a chess-board, and doesn't seem to care a scrap about anything else."

"Can't see why he should," remarked Figgy. "We're willing to give the Shell best in the chess line. Of course, Kerr could lick anyone else in your lot except Manners; but Manners can lick Kerr, and that takes some doing. Kerr admits it himself."

"What is it this time?" asked Tom.

"Well, you bouncers have got a long lead of us in points, and we think it's about time we took it down," Blake replied.

"So you've come to suggest something you're sure to win at?" said Tom, with a cheery grin.

"Make it marbles, Blake," Lowther said. "We've forgotten how to play marbles. It can't be very long since you were—"

"Or hopscotch," struck in Manners, looking up from his end-game.

"We'll make it anything you like!" snapped Figgins.

"Ready for anything, from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter!" gibed Lowther. "Desperate fellows, these fags, Tommy!"

"Who are you calling fags, you Shell dummy?" roared Blake.

"It looks as if the next event would be a fight," Tom said. "Chuck it, Monty, old son! Much better look in next door and see if old Talbot's there. Then stay and talk to Skimmy. When it comes to business, you two aren't a scrap of good. Manners sticks his head among the queens and bishops and things, and you start a jawbone solo. Go, please!"

"I'll go," volunteered Manners. "There's no peace here. It will suit me better to sit with Skimmy—if Gore's away."

Manners went, and Talbot came in almost at once. But Manners returned with him. He might pretend to be fed-up with the competition, but at heart he was still keen on it.

"Blake and Figgy think it's about time they worked off some of that balance of points, Talbot," said Tom.

"Well, I'm not hindering them," replied Talbot.

"It's the wrestling," Blake said.

"Oh, the wrestling!" answered

Talbot, rather indifferently. "Yes, I suppose me must have some of that in." "Some of it in!" repeated Figgins. "Why, it's one of the most important things of all, chump!"

"Sorry! Didn't know it was so important, Figgy. We've never gone in for much of it here, and I can't make out that anybody really knows anything about it."

"Anybody in the Shell, you mean! You don't know what we know!"

"But we know lots of things you don't," put in Lowther.

"Grundy makes out he knows all there is to know about it," Talbot said. "But I can't quite believe it, for even my small knowledge shows me that there are holes in his. The difficulty about it as an event or series of events—in the competition is that it's rather rot for us to be playing at things that we don't really understand—a bit kiddish, if you want my opinion. Wrestling bouts between fellows who don't know how to wrestle, refereed by another chap who doesn't know how, either, might make quite a decent comic turn. But that's about all."

"Hang it all, do you chaps want to get out of the wrestling?" snorted Blake.

"I'm sure I don't!" replied Tom Merry at once. "I'm willing to do my bit, even if it's only a comic turn. But I see what Talbot means."

"I'll willing, too," said Talbot. "We certainly don't want to back down, Blake. The only objection is the complete ignorance of the subject which seems to be general here."

"In the Shell, you mean!" said Figgins.

"And in the Fourth!" Talbot replied.

"Don't you believe it, old scout."

"Do you claim to have fellows in your Form who can wrestle?" Tom asked.

"We do—we does," said Blake.

"Look here, Tommy. We'll strike a bargain with you. You remember Grundy's campaign? He took on every chap in the Fourth who was willing to meet him with the gloves, and he had three points for every one he licked, and lost six for every one who licked him."

"That's all very well," Manners said.

"Grundy can box—"

"Who said he couldn't, chump?"

"But he can't wrestle—at least, we don't know that he can."

"Who said he could, fathead?"

"You've got the wrong—er—lady pig by the ear, Manners," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Blake isn't suggesting that Grundy should stand forward as the wrestling champion of the Shell."

"What did he want to drag Grundy in for, then?"

"It was merely by way of illustration. Blake's scheme—"

"Look here, Lowther, do you reckon you know better than I do what my scheme is? You don't know that I've a scheme at all, come to that"

"As you were about to propound one, it doesn't exactly need a Herlock Sholmes to deduce that, my son."

"Well—er—no. That's true enough, too. Oh, stop your cackles, you fellows, and let me talk to Tommy! The notion is this. Any number of single events you like between members of the two Forms, and also that we put in the ring two men who are willing to take on anybody in the Shell—everybody in the Shell, come to that! Three points to us for every chap we can throw—six points to you for every chap that throws either of us—of ours, I mean."

"So you and Figgy—"

"Ass! I didn't say that the two were Figgy and I. We're here as Form leaders, that's all!"

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"But you will name your men in advance, Blake?" said Talbot.

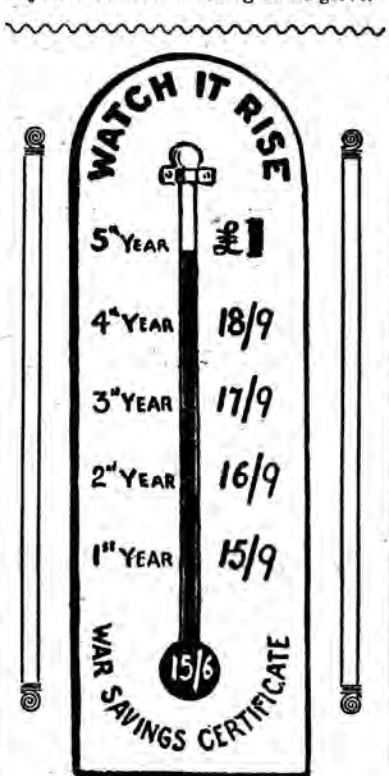
"I don't see why we should."

"Well, perhaps there isn't any reason why you should, if you don't care to. It will add a bit more interest to it," Tom said. "I dare say we can guess them easily enough."

"I'll bet you can't!" snorted Blake.

"Fact of the matter is," said Talbot, "you rather fancy that you've a pull over us in the wrestling line, through having a man or two who reckons to know the game. Is that it, Blake?"

"Yes, that's something like it; but I don't see that it's unfair—no more than the Grundy bizney was, anyway. We knew that old Grundy could whop most of our chaps, but we never tried to stop any of them from chucking in his glove."



"I didn't say and I didn't think it was unfair," Talbot replied quietly. "You and Figgy are about the last fellows we should expect anything that wasn't playing the game from. It seems to me a sound enough proposition."

"Not so sure!" put in Manners. "If they've anyone who can wrestle, and we haven't—"

"Then they've a right to score what points they can get out of the ability of their man or men," Tom said. "There's no denying that, Manners. We're the senior Form. Taken on an average we're older, heavier, and stronger than the Fourth. We ought to be, anyway. Well, then, we've given anything like scientific wrestling a miss so far, but it oughtn't to be a hard thing to pick up. There are plenty of handbooks about it. Give us a week to practise in, Blake, and we're on."

"On the lines I've suggested," asked Blake eagerly, "and North-country style?"

"On those lines, or something very like them, and in that style if you like. We must have a committee meeting to decide the exact details, but I don't see why your scheme shouldn't be adopted."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "We'll cut along and tell the other fellows."

"We've got 'em!" chortled George Figgins, as he and Blake went downstairs together.

"Mustn't be too cocksure," answered Blake gravely. "Old Tommy and Talbot and Kangaroo will take a bit of shifting, and there are others. Grundy may not go down easily, or Gore, or Thompson. Lowther and Manners aren't exactly duffers. But while they're trying to learn how out of a giddy book, Cardew and I can be coaching you chaps and getting into trim ourselves, and I rather guess half an hour's coaching from a chap who knows is going to be worth more than a lot of studying a book."

CHAPTER 7.

Getting Into Trim.

WRESTLING became a perfect craze in the Shell during the next few days.

Handbooks on the sport seemed to sprout everywhere. Even Skimpole was discovered looking into one, with a very puzzled expression on his face.

But that book belonged to Gore or Talbot. Certainly it was not Skimmy's, and Skimmy did not rush to enter himself for the coming wrestling events.

But keenness cropped up in unexpected places. On the face of it, the game seemed quite an easy one to learn. There were the instructions. You did so and so, and your opponent tumbled over; and the things you had to do were not really difficult things—not nearly as difficult, for instance, as getting eye and hand and foot all to work together in order to make a correct stroke with a cricket-bat.

In practice, however, wrestling did not turn out so easy as it had looked. While you were doing things, your opponent was also doing them; and at the critical moment when he should have tumbled it was you who did that, because he had been doing things better or more quickly than you had.

Keenness did not last in every case. Fellows put down their names in the first flush of enthusiasm, and then wished they had not.

But there were others. The Terrible Three stuck to it, though Manners grumbled a bit at the waste of time. Study No. 11—Kangaroo & Co.—also stuck to it. Talbot and Gore were keen. So were Grundy and Wilkins. Then there were Gibbons and Thompson and Jimson and Buck Finn.

Wrestling went on in the gym and on the playing-fields. There were bouts in the studies of both Houses, and lines in consequence. Cricket and the river were neglected during that week.

But with the Fourth it seemed otherwise.

Now and then some of their less distinguished members would try a fall with a Shell fellow in the gym or on the cricket-ground, but the stalwarts of the Form appeared to be taking things very easily.

They only appeared to, however.

They had their own plan of campaign.

Their practice was not done where the Shell could witness it, but they were putting in plenty of practice for all that.

When the chums of Study No. 9 set out together on their bikes, and Dick Roylance and Lumley-Lumley and Julian and Reilly went with them, the Shell had no cause for suspicion. But the Shell might have been taken by surprise if the seven could have been seen half an hour later, six of them wrestling hard, and Cardew standing by coaching.

There was nothing suspicious about it, either, when Blake & Co. went off in

company, and Figgins & Co. took the same road a bit later; and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence and Clarke started off also.

Most of the Fourth wanted to be in it. Quite half actually took up the game in real earnest, and to that half Blake and Cardew taught all they could teach in the time.

In a couple of days or so there were two more fellows able to help in the coaching. Kerr and Roylance were both quick in picking up things and good at imparting to others what they knew.

Kerr said he should be no good in the contest, but no one else thought that. Small and slight as he was, there was strength in his wiry frame. As for Roylance, it soon became evident that he would make a really good wrestler.

Others who shaped well were Herries, Figgins, Redfern, Clive, and Levison. With a little more activity Herries would have been quite the best of these. He was very difficult to shift. But the other four were all speedier than he in seizing chances.

The leaders of the Fourth were firmly convinced that they had a good thing on. Kerr, who was always more cautious than the rest, pointed out to Figgy that they had felt that way before.

"There was the Second Eleven footer match, for instance," he said. "We were going to win that hands down, but we didn't. A blessed miracle happened, and the Shell won."

"Miracles don't happen every day, old top!" said George Figgins.

"That's true enough, but another of 'em happened when our Second team started in to mop up the Shell Second at cricket. Grundy made runs and took wickets. What do you call that but a miracle? Gore ran up a century—that was another. And Clampe, bowling well, fairly put the tin-hat on it."

"Well, this is a different thing," replied Figgins.

"So were they," said Kerr wisely. "What do you think, Fatty?"

"I think it's about time for dinner," spoke Fatty Wynn, from the armchair.

"Rats! Nowhere near time yet!" snapped Figgy. "And here are Blake and Cardew coming across the quad."

Figgy and Kerr were standing together at the window of their study. Outside the rain was pouring down. The Shell wrestlers occupied the gym. The outdoor practice of the Fourth was off for that day.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Fatty Wynn.

"What's the matter now, porpoise?" snapped Figgins.

"I wish those chaps would stay in their own House!" said Fatty plaintively. "I'm fed up with this wrestling bizney. It only means rows with Ratty, and—"

"Fed up with it, you burbling jabber-wock! Why, you haven't done any of it yet!" hooted Figgy.

"And I don't mean to! Silly rot, I call it, though, of course, we can do with the points—if we can get them, that is; but old Kerr don't seem so jolly sure about that. And if we don't—"

The door opened, and Blake and Cardew appeared.

"May we come in?" asked Cardew sweetly.

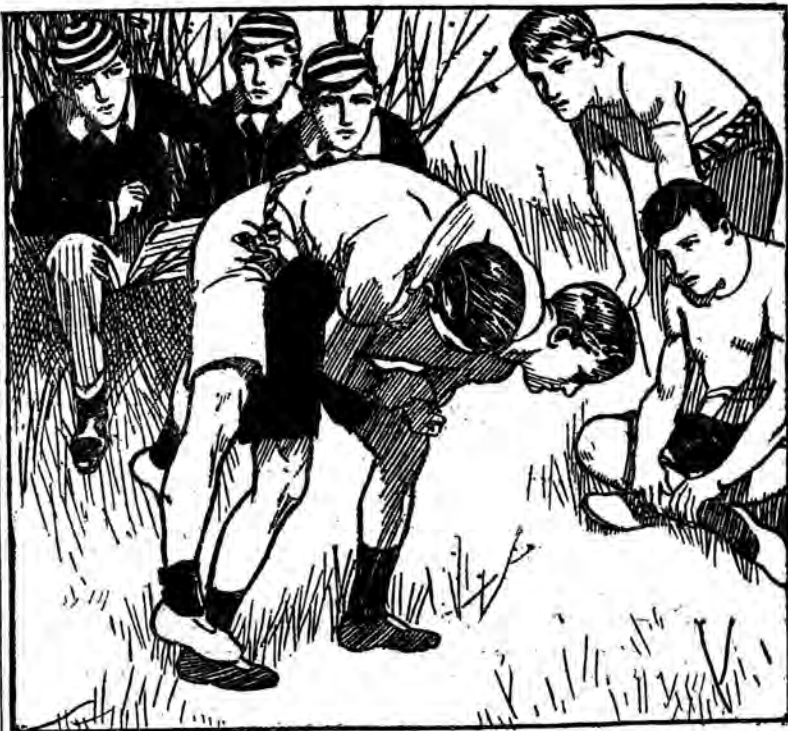
"No!" return Fatty morosely.

"Don't take any notice of the fat ass!" said Figgins. "Come to give us another tip or two?"

"Not exactly!" Blake answered. "You two are all serene now; and Fatty's a non-combatant—conscientious objector, or something, I suppose!"

"I ain't anything of the sort!" Fatty Wynn said, in an injured tone. "But I wasn't built for wrestling; you know that well enough!"

"Pardon me, Wynn, but we don't!"



Blake Throws Grundy.

(See Chapter 12.)

Cardew replied politely. "You're just the chap for it, by gad! Who could shift you, if you'd made up your mind not to be shifted?"

"But that ain't enough!" Blake objected. "What about the other chap? He's to be put over, and you don't do that by just standing still and not being shifted!"

"That's a dead easy one, by gad! Wynn would simply lean forward, and his weight would do the rest."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "You chaps think you're beastly funny!" growled Fatty.

"Figgins, we've been arguin' about our coachin' methods," said Cardew. "We want your opinion—an' Kerr's. I'm all for startin' a chap in by teachin' him the throws, the other fellow merely actin' as a dummy for the time bein'. That's the way I began with Clive an' Levison an' Roylance, an' one or two more, an' they're all comin' on fast. But Blake can't see it!"

"Not the way I was taught," said Blake. "It's so easy to throw a chap who don't struggle."

"But the chap who does struggle forces the novice to struggle, too, an' to struggle unscientifically; whereas, he would be far better learnin' the way to make the throws before he has any real opposition. You are able to make the throw because you are, for the moment, the master of the other fellow. Well, then, give the learner someone he can master to start with! An' the only way to do that is for his opponent to be merely a passive resister."

"Something in that," said Kerr—"in fact, a lot in it!"

"Then Fatty ought to be in it!" said Figgins, with a grin. "See what a first-class passive resister he would make, with all his weight!"

"Ugh!" grunted Fatty.

"Get up and wade in, old scout!" said Kerr.

"What! Me? Not jolly well likely! Anyway, not as a chopping-block for any silly ass to learn the throws on!"

"Would you rather learn them yourself?" asked Cardew sily.

"Well, then, I would, if I'd got to do one or the other. But I haven't got to, so where's the use of talking? I can do as I like, I suppose?"

"Then there's something wrong with your supposer!" snapped Figgy. "Get up and buck up, you butter-tub!"

"Here, I say! Lemme be! Blake, you idiot! Kerr, you maniac!"

Blake had caught hold of one of Fatty's hands, and Kerr of the other, and between them they dragged him up.

"Like to see whether you could throw me, Wynn?" asked Cardew insinuatingly.

"Grunt!" "I won't try to throw you, y'know, by gad!"

Grunt! But a gleam came into Fatty's eyes. He scanned Cardew's slim frame. It did not seem possible to him that he should have any difficulty in throwing Cardew. He began to feel inclined to try.

CHAPTER 8.

Falling Foul of Ratty.

"O H, come on, slacker!" snapped Figgins.

"Right-ho! But it's understood that Cardew isn't to try to throw me. And if I put him on his back—"

"You can go back to your snooze!" broke in Cardew, smiling.

"Rot! I wasn't snoozing. A chap don't feel much like doing that these days, when he's got an aching void within him nearly all the time. I say, I needn't take off my clothes, need I?"

"Not all of them!" said Kerr, grinning.

"I mean, like you chaps did the other

day. I don't mind taking my jacket and boots off, of course; but I should think that ought to be enough!"

"Quite enough!" Cardew said.

"You see, if the dinner-bell rang, and I had to—"

"Nuff said! But your boots really must come off! Shall Figgins unlace them for you, dear boy?"

"Jolly likely, isn't it?" growled Figg.

"I can take them off for myself, I suppose?" said Fatty.

"I didn't know. Wasn't sure that you could get a view of them over the—or—mountain range between. But there's no end to the wonders rationin' has wrought, by gad!"

"You think you're beastly funny, Cardew!" snorted Fatty, struggling with an obstinate knot.

"I assure you, not at all! Ready?"

Fatty straightened up.

"I'm ready!" he said.

Blake gave him instructions.

"Cardew won't try to do anything to you," he said. "But, of course, he'll do all he knows to keep on his feet. Yes; your paws are all right, except for being so fat. Yes; chin—lowest one, of course!"

"How many chins do you suppose I've got, chump?" demanded Fatty, in wrath.

"Dunno, really! Never had time to count. But it's the lowest one you put on Cardew's shoulder, so it doesn't really matter. Now, go it!"

Fatty began to exert all his strength, which was not to be sneezed at, and his weight, which was even more considerable. Blake told him what to do. He tried his hardest to do it, but it was not so easy as he had thought it would be.

Cardew's slim figure seemed all steel and whipcord. Cardew made no counter-offensive, but he opposed to Fatty's attack activity and knowledge of the game.

So Fatty groaned and grunted and strove his hardest, and still Cardew maintained his footing.

Now Blake rapped out fresh instructions, and Fatty, who was by no means slow or stupid, followed them closely.

Cardew found the strain becoming greater. He tottered. Fatty pressed. Cardew tumbled.

"Jolly good!" cried Figgins. "Old Fatty's a wrestler all right—all right!"

"Not very good," pronounced Blake.

"It wasn't snappy and clean!"

"It wouldn't have floored you, dear boy, would it?" said Cardew.

"I really don't think it would have done. There wasn't much but weight in it; and a chap can stand against a lot of superior weight if he's firm enough on his pins."

"Ah! My understandin' was always my weak point!" said Cardew.

"You just let me have a go at you, Blake!" snorted Fatty, with the gleam of battle in his eyes.

"Right-ho! Kim on!" said Blake.

And in a moment his boots and jacket came off.

Fatty gripped him, and Cardew gave instructions in his languid tones, lacing his boots as he did so.

Blake seemed as firm as a rock. Fatty strained and strove heroically. Great beads of perspiration ran down his face. He was no longer the armchair critic of others, the fellow who seemed to have no interest in anything but his meals. This was the Fatty Wynn who bowled in such deadly style; the Fatty Wynn who kept goal with such determination and ability; the Fatty Wynn who could put all his heart and all his strength and all his weight into a tug-of-war!

And at last Blake began to give. Fatty

strove harder than ever. He had vowed to himself that he would eat no dinner if he failed to throw Jack Blake.

Thud!

Blake was down.

"What particular throw was that, Cardew?" he asked, rubbing his head, which had come into contact with the door. Blake's head was not of the eggshell type, but there seemed some reason to believe that the door was slightly harder.

"Dashed if I know, dear boy! Kind of composite, I fancy. But it did the trick; that can't be denied. You weren't listening to me, Wynn?"

"Well, no, I wasn't," confessed Fatty. "Your instructions seemed such awful rot. I just went at it my own way."

"But that's no blessed good!" snapped Blake.

"Oh, isn't it, though? You get up and see if you can throw me!"

Fatty had become defiant.

"I say, Ratty may object if Fatty's thrown," said Kerr.

"Didn't know your respected House-master was so devoted to Wynn!" Cardew rejoined.

"He's not. But the floor mightn't stand it, and the ceiling below would go bust, and then the next floor, and after that there's only another ceiling, and he'd come kerflop on Ratty's revered head!"

"Rats!" snorted Fatty.

"Ratty's out," said Figgins. "I saw him go."

"What, with it raining like this?"

"Well, he'd a gig umbrella, and a mac and leggings and goloshes, you know."

"Come on, Blake!" said Fatty, in warlike accents.

"Oh, I'll come on fast enough, and put you over my back, for all your blessed ton-weight!"

They buckled to it, breathing hard, both striving with all their strength.

There could only be one end to such a struggle. Blake knew; Fatty did not. It was to Fatty's credit that he put up a really stern resistance.

But he went at last—clean over Blake's back, as Blake had promised.

And as he shot over the door opened, and a figure in a dripping macintosh and muddy leggings and goloshes, with a huge gamp, also dripping, in its right hand, appeared.

Right into the midmost part of Mr. Ratcliff's anatomy Fatty Wynn's head went, and the shock was as the shock of a battering-ram.

Mr. Ratcliff sat down in a hurry.

"Oh, dear! Goodness gracious! Really—Urrrggh!"

It was so unexpected that no one thought of moving forward to pick up the fallen master. Fatty got up without help, and stood contemplating Mr. Ratcliff ruefully. Fatty knew who was likely to sustain the worst damage through this accident. Mr. Ratcliff might be, and no doubt was hurt. But David Llewelyn Wynn was going to be hurt more!

The furious master scrambled up, getting badly entangled with his big umbrella as he rose.

"This—this passes all bounds!" he raved. "Did I not give you clearly to understand that I would not tolerate this sort of thing in my House? Mr. Railton may—"

"We—we thought you were out, sir," said Fatty appeasingly.

"That is merely the addition of gross and flagrant deceit to your other crimes! You thought I was out, and so— I have no patience with such paltry excuses!"

As Mr. Ratcliff's patience was something very like a minus quantity at best, this statement surprised no one.

"What are you doing here, Blake and

Cardew?" roared the furious House-master.

"We were wrestling," replied Blake doggedly.

"Of that I am aware. But by what right are you in this House at all?"

"There is no rule against it, sir, that I ever heard of," answered Cardew coolly. "The rule only applies to after call-over."

"I tell you that I will not endure your presence here! Follow me, all of you!"

"Figgins and Kerr weren't—"

"Shut up, you silly, fat ass!" hissed Figg in the ear of Wynn.

The five followed Mr. Ratcliff down to his study. There he took off his macintosh and produced a cane.

Fatty had first turn, also enough to be going on with. Figgins and Kerr were not spared, but they came off a trifle better than their chum. But the caning of Cardew and Blake was absolutely vicious.

Not a cry was wrung from any of them, though Fatty groaned once, and Cardew went very pale.

"If I find either of you again in my House at any time, this will be as nothing to the punishment you will receive!" rasped out the New House tyrant.

CHAPTER 6.

The Wrestling Begins.

"HE doesn't know yet who the Fourth's two special champions are," said Tom Merry to Reginald Talbot, as they made their way together to Little Side.

"I think I can guess one of them," replied Talbot, smiling. "It's Blake. But who the other is beats me. I thought Figgins, at first."

"So did I. But I don't think so now."

"Same here. It might be Clive. He's pretty hefty."

"Yes; or Roylance. Or Herries; he's jolly strong. Or Levison. Or—oh, half a dozen others! It's not Gussy or Dig or Cardew; that's all I feel sure about."

It was the day of the wrestling bouts, and Tom and Talbot were on their way to the place of combat. Ahead of them were Lowther and Manners and Glyn. Just behind came Kangaroo and Gore and Clifton Dane. All wore light coats over the scanty costume proper to the sport in hand, for all were to play their parts in the afternoon's contests.

"We should have a difficulty in picking out our best two," Talbot remarked.

"Oh, I don't know. You and Kangy, I should say."

"Or you and Dane."

"Well, it wouldn't make much odds, I suppose you're right. There must be half a dozen or so of us who are much of a muchness. Comes from none of us knowing a lot about it to start with."

"From none of us knowing anything about it to start with," amended Talbot. "We don't know a lot now."

"That's so. But we've picked up something, and we ought to be overweight for most of the Fourth. Can't think what they've been up to, or what Blake and Figg can be thinking of. It's all very well for them to rely upon their two special men who do know the game for points. But they don't seem to have done a thing to get the others into some sort of shape, while we've been practising hard."

"Tom, old man, I rather fancy you are in for the surprise of your life this afternoon," said Talbot.

"Eh?"

"They've something big up their sleeves, those Fourth-Formers! It isn't for nothing that they have kept away from the gym, and seemed to be slacking. They haven't slacked!"

"But—"

"Wait a moment! I lay awake last night thinking this out."

"Blessed silly thing to do, when you knew you were wanted in your best form to-day!" said Tom Merry.

Talbot laughed lightly.

"Oh, I'm fit enough! Using my brains, such as they are, doesn't affect my muscles or my nerves. Thinking it over, I came to the conclusion that the Fourth have simply been throwing dust in our eyes."

"I don't quite see how," said Tom, puzzled.

"Well, for one thing, practising where we could watch them wouldn't have suited their book a little bit."

"Why not?"

"Because they have a man or two who really know the game, and, naturally, the fellows who knew it would coach the rest."

"And if they'd coached them in the gym, or anywhere else that we were, we'd have picked up nearly as much as they did—possibly more, having superior brains," Tom said. "I see! Go on, old sport!"

"That's it. Well, when I came to use my memory, it seemed to me that the fellows in the Fourth who would be most likely to make wrestlers haven't showed up as much as usual during the last week. There's been no cricket worth mentioning, and you could hardly see a boat out. They haven't been in the gym. They certainly haven't put in their time mugging in their studies. Where have they been?"

"Why, out of gates, of course," said Tom, knitting his brows; "and practising as hard as we have, I don't doubt. But do you think that their having practical coaches, while we've had to pick it up mostly out of books, is going to make a lot of difference, Talbot?"

"All the difference," said Talbot quietly. "I don't mean that they are going to sweep the board. I seem to see the best of ours coming out of it with some credit. I really think we've done all that we could in the way we've been obliged to work. We've talked things over, and tried experiments, and we've got some sort of grip of the subject. But—it's a big 'but,' Tommy—we've been working more or less in the dark all along. No one to tell us where we were wrong—no one to give us the tips that you can't put into print, but that count for so much."

"I see," replied Tom. "Well, I don't blame them, and I'm going to hope for the best. But fellows like Levison and Roylance and Julian, and lots of others, who are pretty much as strong as we are, will have a bit of a pull in getting the sort of thing we've missed. Never mind, Talbot!"

"I don't. After all, we're ahead, and ought still to be there when they have done all they can do. And I can't help admiring the way Blake and Figgy have gone about things."

On Little Side a crowd had gathered. The fags were there in full force to watch the sport, but nearly every member of the Shell and Fourth present had come to play his part in it. No one who had entered cared to forfeit points for his Form, even if his keenness had waned.

Racke & Co. were in ordinary garb, of course. Racke, Croke, Clampe, Scrope, and Mellish, that is to say. For Chowle had come in; and Baggy Trimble, who hung on to the nuts, if he was not actually one of them, had surprised everyone by entering. Baggy had a notion that it would take a lot of strength to throw him.

The draw for opponents was to be made on the ground. No one but half a dozen or so of the leaders of each Form

knew it; but that draw would not be quite what it seemed.

It would have been absurd, for instance, to pit Tom Merry against Clarence York Tompkins, or Jack Blake against Matthew Lucas. So there had been a rough division into three classes, and the two hats from which Lefevre of the Fifth would draw the names contained scraps of paper of three different colours. When he took a red scrap from the Shell lot, he would have to take also a red scrap from the Fourth lot; and if Tom Merry's name was on the first scrap, it was quite certain that Tompkins' name would not be on the second one. But, though Tom knew this, Tompkins didn't, and the feelings of Tompkins were not hurt.

"I say, have you fellows seen Blake?" asked Digby, as the Shell leaders came up.

"Not since dinner," replied Tom.

"We've seen him since that. He changed with us; but then he went off somewhere—nobody seems to know where."

"Blake is all wight, no doubt; but it is weally wathah mystewious," said Arthur Augustus.

"Do you suspect us of kidnapping him?" asked Gore roughly.

"No, Goah. I should not suspect even you of anythin' so black as that; an' I am quite suah that Tom Mewwy or Talbot or Kangawooh would be incapable of takin' such a mean advantage," replied Gussy innocently.

He could not understand why Gore should scowl.

"There are chaps about who are capable of it, though," said Herries, with a dark look towards Racke & Co., who had honoured the event with their presence.

"If you mean us," sneered Racke, "kidnappin' a Fourth-Former isn't in our line. We've bet on you kids to come out on top in the whole series, an' everybody knows it."

"Eh? You've done what?" bellowed Grundy.

"You're not deaf, I suppose?" returned Racke sulkily.

"Lucky for you if I was! So you've been betting against your own Form, have you, you low rotters? Right-ho! If the Fourth does come out on top, I shall wallop each of you for that. If it don't—and, of course, it can't—you'll be walloped, because betting isn't allowed, you scallawags!"

"Monteith isn't here yet," remarked Julian.

The head prefect of the New House had agreed to act as umpire. He knew more of wrestling—in theory, at least—than any of the other seniors.

"Blake may have gone to fetch him," said Herries.

But just then Monteith came up.

"It wants five minutes to time," he said, "so you've nothing to grumble about. No, my watch isn't slow. Seen Blake? No, I haven't seen Blake. There was no one in the quad when I came through, and both Houses looked deserted. But we can start without Blake, I suppose? He's sure to turn up before long."

"All very well for Monteith to take it so easily," said Figgy to Kerr. "But it's jolly queer. Blake's the very last chap you'd expect to have turning up late this afternoon."

"That's so," agreed Kerr. "But Herries and Dig are going off to look for him. We needn't bother."

Monteith lifted the rope, and stepped inside the ring. Lefevre dipped into the hat which Wally D'Arcy held on one side of him, and then into that which Frank Levison held on the other. The two papers he took out were white, and the

names he called were those of Baggy Trimble and Gunn.

Neither Baggy nor Gunn knew that the white paper meant Class C.

"My hat! That's an easy one for me!" said Baggy. "I shall be all over Gunn—simply all over him! You chaps watch me!"

"Crumbs!" said William Cuthbert Gunn. "If I'd known this I think I should have scratched! Fancy having to wrestle with a lump like Baggy! It ain't far short of a disgrace."

"It will be a disgrace if you don't down him," answered Grundy severely. "Neither of you know anything about the game; but if you can't tumble over a clumsy porpoise like that you deserve to be spificated!"

The two slipped under the ropes and faced one another. Gunn was rather a skinny fellow, not without muscle, but by no means specially well developed. Whether Baggy had muscle or not, it was quite impossible for a casual observer to tell. His fat was evident.

Monteith addressed to them a few warning words, to which Gunn listened. Baggy did not listen. It did not think it likely Monteith could tell him anything he did not know. But what Baggy did not know about wrestling would have filled several books.

They gripped, and Baggy threw his weight forward. He knew next to nothing about the throws, but he fancied that Gunn would be quite unable to stand up against him. To his surprise, Gunn not only did that, but also began to do other things—things which Baggy did not like at all. It even dawned upon Baggy that if he did not look out he would not win.

"Go it, Gunny!" yelled Grundy. "Back-heel the fat chump! It's easy enough!"

It might have been easy enough had Gunn known how. Gunn did not. But he did not forget the two or three things he knew, and his clinging to them—or Baggy's ignorance of them—gave the Shell first points.

Baggy was not at all satisfied with his hold. If he could grip Gunn lower down, he could do something, he was sure. But instead of shifting his arms down with hands locked, he unlocked, and tried to get a new grip.

"Bout's over!" snapped Monteith. "Gunn wins!"

"But I haven't! Oh, I say, Monteith, that isn't fair!" burred Baggy.

"You unlocked your hands. You lose on that," Monteith said curtly.

"But I didn't know. I—can't we start again?"

"No! It was one of the things I warned you about before you started. If you can't remember for fifty seconds—'nuff said!"

Frank Levison made a note of three points for the Shell. Lefevre dipped into the hats again. Kildare and Baker and Darrel came on the scene together. The lordly Cutts, with St. Leger and Gilmore, also came up.

But nothing was seen as yet of Herries and Digby, who had gone to search for the missing champion of the Fourth; and Arthur Augustus grew so anxious that he departed to join in the quest.

He was not the only one who was anxious, either. Figgins and Kerr and Fatty Wynn, Levison and Clive and Cardew, Roylance and Julian and Redfern, drew together, looking worried, and talking in low tones. They could not all go and hunt for Blake; at any moment the name of any one of them might come out of the hat.

And at that moment the name of one came.

"Dane against Cardew!" said Lefevre.

CHAPTER 10.

The Missing Champion.

"HALLO, Figgy!" It was Jack Blake who spoke those words, sticking his head into No. 4 of the Fourth Form studies in the New House.

But no one answered. Figgins & Co. had already gone off to Little Side.

"Guess I'd better find Monteith," said Blake to himself. "He'll hardly have gone down yet. Everybody else seems to have mizzled already."

Blake had something to suggest to the umpire of the day. He had meant to consult Figgins about it first; but that did not really matter very much. What he wanted Monteith to do was exactly what the New House prefect actually did without his prompting—that is, explain before the bouts began the necessity of avoiding such mistakes as trying to secure an unfair hold, unlocking a grip when once taken, and the like. Blake did not want points given against any of the Shell for ignorance.

He went along, whistling, towards the Sixth Form studies. He had completely forgotten that he had been forbidden the New House. If he had remembered he might not have whistled.

Rounding a corner in a hurry, he ran full tilt against Mr. Ratcliff, and tumbled him clean over.

"You awkward young rascal! This reckless clumsiness is absolutely inexcusable!"

So Mr. Ratcliff began. But he broke off as he recognised the fellow who had bowled him over, and his voice rose almost to a scream as he said:

"Blake! You here?"

"Yes, sir. I'm awfully sorry. Let me help you up! I came in to see—"

"Do not dare to attempt giving me aid, you disobedient and perverse boy!" shrielled Mr. Ratcliff, scrambling up in a very undignified way. "Did I not forbid you to enter this House? Tell me that!"

"Well, yes, sir, so you did," admitted Blake.

"Then how dare you—"

"I forgot. You see, sir, we've always—"

"Be silent when I speak to you, Blake!"

"You asked me a question, sir. I suppose you expected—"

"I will not allow you to bandy words with me! What does that absurd garb mean?"

Blake's light overcoat was open. It was a warm, sunny day, and the lightest of overcoats was rather in the way.

The Fourth-Former did not answer. He had been told to keep silence.

"Oh, you are mute—eh? You think thus to conceal from me—"

"I didn't think of concealing anything from you!" snapped Blake, goaded into speech. "We've wrestling on to-day, that's all."

"In this House? How dare you—"

"No. In the playing-fields. It's part of the sports competition."

"Oh, indeed! Follow me, Blake!"

There was a look of saturnine satisfaction on the sour face of Mr. Ratcliff as he led the way to his study. He smiled sardonically as he selected a cane. Then he seemed struck by a new idea.

"This way, Blake!" he said curtly, and he led the junior upstairs again.

Blake wondered, but did not even begin to suspect what the tyrant meant.

Figgy or Kerr might have guessed. They knew their Ratty better than Blake knew him. Blake only wondered.

Right up to the study floor they went, and Mr. Ratcliff led the School House junior further yet—up to the topmost floor of all.

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Now at last a dim glimmering of the truth came into Jack Blake's mind. Then, as the master entered a dusty, unoccupied room, he felt sure.

"I say, sir, you can't do this, you know!" he said hotly. "I'm not going to be locked up! This sort of thing isn't done. I—"

Mr. Ratcliff slashed at him savagely. Blake took the blow on his arm. For the moment he was sorely tempted to strike back. But he only made a dash for the door.

It may have been an accident—it may not. For Mr. Ratcliff was in the vilest of tempers, and at his best he had very little sense of fair play. Whether his foot was thrust out intentionally, or otherwise, Blake stumbled over it, and fell headlong.

The cane slashed across his shoulders. Before he could rise Mr. Ratcliff had dodged out of the room. There came the grating sound of a key turned in the lock, and Blake was a prisoner!

It seemed of no use shouting. The chances were that no one would hear. Even if anyone heard, there was the problem of getting out. Ratty would have taken the key—would probably go off with it in his pocket.

Blake fairly groaned as he thought of the throng on Little Side. The early events did not matter so much; but what was going to happen when the two dark horses of the Fourth took on any dozen of the Shell? Who was there to take his place?

Meanwhile, in the playing-fields, Clifton Dane and Ralph Reckness Cardew were at grips.

No one in the Shell ranks had much doubt as to the result of that encounter. The secret of Cardew's ability as a wrestler had been well kept. Dane was one of the best of the Shell, lithe, active, strong.

But he had met more than his match in Cardew!

The struggle was short and sharp. So short was it that many who saw failed to realise Cardew's cleverness. It looked like a fluke that he should have thrown Dane. The Canadian junior himself thought there must have been some luck in it. But Cardew knew better.

Lucas and Chowle was the next turn—hardly a star turn! Lucas was more or less a duffer at most games; but he was good enough to deal with Chowle. The Shell took three points for a throw that was made somehow—Lucas did not know how.

"Green versus Lawrence!" called Lefevre.

The contestants were both New House—Green an undistinguished member of the Shell, who had strength and had not promised ill in the practice. But Edgar Lawrence proved too good for him.

"Wilkins versus Clarke!"

The Shell had hopes of Wilkins, who was tough and sturdy. But Dick Clarke had learned more than Wilkins, and some twenty seconds were enough to finish the bout, with Wilkins gasping on his back.

"Merry versus Figgins!"

There was a cheer as those names were called. This promised to be one of the best of the trials.

Both were in deadly earnest. Figgins had picked up all that he could from Blake and Cardew. Probably he knew a little more than Tom. Still, he was only a novice, like Tom; and the Shell fellow had the advantage in weight and strength.

They struggled hard. Once Tom seemed going; but he recovered himself. Gradually he wore Figgy down, and at last cross-buttocked him. The throw might not have the cleanness and precision that a more experienced wrestler would have shown; but it was good enough.

The Shell cheered like madmen, and the Fourth were downcast. But that did not last long. After all, which of them except the two champions, could have counted on success against Tom Merry? Tom did everything well, and learned everything quickly.

"Grundy versus Blake!" called Lefevre.

George Alfred stalked imposingly up, and Lowther and Cardew lifted the rope as far as possible that he might be spared the trouble of stooping too much. Each bowed low as he did so. But if they expected Grundy to understand that they were mocking him they were disappointed. He simply gave them a nod of thanks.

"Where's Blake?"

The question sounded on all sides. But no one could answer it. Dig and Herries had returned without finding their chum.

"Can't this bout be postponed for a bit, Lefevre?" asked Figgins.

"Certainly—if Grundy has no objection."

"Well, I think Blake ought to be here," said Grundy. "I don't fancy being kept waiting, you know."

"Do you object to a postponement? That's the question," said Monteith sharply.

"Well, if it comes to that—"

"You can claim the points for your Form; but—"

"Dash the points! It's being kept waiting I don't like. But I consent!"

Grundy was sound at heart, if he lacked graciousness.

"Noble versus Roylance!"

Both Forms cheered.

Kangaroo had beaten the New Zealander in the boxing contests, though he had had to go all the way to do it. Could Roylance get his own back now?

He did—thanks to the coaching of Blake and Cardew. It was the turn of the Shell to feel downcast. They had counted on Kangaroo. He was one of their very best. But Roylance was one of the Fourth's best.

"Finn versus Wynn!"

The lean American and the Falstaff of the New House made a queer contrast. Their tussle was worth watching. Buck Finn had taken to the game, and had shown some cleverness at it. Fatty had come into it late, and had not had much coaching.

But Fatty was very hard to shift. Buck strove till he could strive no longer, and then Fatty had him at his mercy, and fairly fell upon him. It was a nondescript throw, but it counted.

Points were piling up against the Shell. They had lost five bouts and had won only three. Lowther, helped by luck, overcame Julian in the next—a set-back for the Fourth which was retrieved when Dick Redfern put paid to the account of George Gore, from whom the Shell had hoped something better.

"Talbot versus Levison!"

"I'm not having the luck to-day," remarked Levison, as he stepped forward. "Never say die, dear boy!" answered Cardew.

"I'm not going to. But—"

He left the sentence unfinished.

Levison came out of it with credit, but not with victory. Talbot had to labour very hard indeed, and twice he was nearly down. Once they came down together sideways, a "dog fall," counting to neither. At the finish the Shell fellow got in a back-heel that would not have scored earlier, when Levison was fresher, but did its work as things were.

Then Owen beat Manners, not without luck; and little Harry Hammond put Lennox on his back inside five seconds; and the Fourth had a clear nine points lead. Kerruish proved too much for Boulton, and the lead went up to twelve points. But Glyn brought it down to nine

again by overcoming Lumley-Lumley after a stern struggle.

Brooke beat Gibbons, but Thompson accounted for Dig. Herries gave Jimson the cross-buttock, and again the Fourth led by twelve. But a little later the lead was reduced to six, for Frere, slow though he was, had no great difficulty in lowering Tompkins, and, after Reilly had disposed of French, both Bates and Coutarini went under to Shell representatives of whom nothing much had been anticipated.

"Wade versus D'Arcy!"

Gussy knew nothing about the classification. He was B Class, and so was Wade. Gussy thought Wade a very poor opponent to be drawn against. But he beat the New House man. That was something.

A Shell fellow won the next tussle, and then Mulvaney minor scored for the Fourth against Williamson: At this stage the junior Form had again a nine-point lead.

Now a difficulty cropped up.

"Shell hat's empty!" said Wally of the Third.

Nobody had thought of that possibility. The Fourth was the more numerous Form, and had provided more entrants. Tom and Figgins held brief counsel.

There were nine Fourth-Formers waiting their turns.

"Shove your slips back, and let anyone who's drawn have a second bout," suggested Tom.

"Sticking to the classes, of course," said Figgy.

"Shush!" muttered Tom, with a warning nod.

"I feah I do not undahstand. What is that about classes deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, nothing. Is it fair, Tommy?" asked Figgins. "Your fellows have had one turn each, and those of ours who are left are fresh."

"We sha'n't mind that," Tom replied. The arrangement was made clear to Lefevre and Monteith, and they made it clear to the crowd. No one grumbled. It was the best way out of the difficulty.

"Noble versus Koumi Rao!"

It was a chance for the Kangaroo to win back his lost laurels, and he took his chance. But he had no light task in getting down the lithe, wiry Indian.

"Manners versus Kerr!"

Another chance for Manners! But Kerr was too clever for him.

"Glyn versus Clive!"

The South African junior was a tougher opponent than Lumley-Lumley, and the St. Jim's inventor did not win this bout.

But now the Shell had quite a run of success, through the agency of fellows of whom no great things had been expected. Lennox prevailed over Jones minor; Gibbons beat Smith minor; and Thompson easily accounted for Lorne. The Fourth lead was reduced to three points.

Macdonald put it up to six again by throwing Boulton in good style. Then in successive bouts French beat Pratt, and Gunn somehow muddled Robinson minor over.

The score was 51 to each Form, and the only bout left was the postponed one between Blake and Grundy.

But Jack Blake was still an absentee!

CHAPTER 11.

The Dark Horse.

"I SAY, Tommy, I really don't know a bit what we're to do about the special bouts," said Figgins. "Of course, you chaps had tumbled to it that Blake was one of our two who were to take on any half-dozen each of you?"

Tom nodded.

"Well, Blake isn't here, and no one can find him!"

"We can put the special bouts off to another day," suggested Tom generously.

There was a murmur of dissent in which Shell and Fourth voices mingled.

No one was more emphatic than Figgins.

"It wouldn't be the square thing," he said. "They were fixed for to-day, and we must go through with it. You fellows were jolly decent about the whole bizney, I must say; and it isn't as though Blake was the only man we could put in. There are others."

"Yourself, for one," said Talbot.

Figgins shook his head.

"Not me! Not after Tommy has put me on my back. But there's Herries—he takes a lot of shifting. And there's Reddy, and Roylance."

"Who's your other man—the dark horse?" asked Lowther. "We were all on to Blake; but none of us knows even now who the other champion is."

"The Fourth," said Kerr sententially, "can keep a secret."

"Yas; especially Trimble!" put in Cardew.

"Well, of course, it would have been all up if Baggy had known," admitted Julian.

"But who is it?" asked Talbot.

"Cardew!"

"Cardew?"

The name was repeated in various tones of surprise and inquiry. Another fellow might have flushed and felt uncomfortable. Cardew only smiled and said:

"Surprisin', isn't it, by gad? But I happened to learn the game at Wodehouse. There's somethin' in knowin' the game, y'know."

"We thought it was a fluke when you put Dane over!" growled Gore.

"Did you, dear boy?"

"Let Cardew start," Monteith said. "Blake may turn up before he's worked off his half-dozen. Plenty of time; it hasn't taken nearly as long as I expected to get off the first part of the programme. No need for Cardew to go straight ahead, unless it suits him."

"That's a good notion," Figgins agreed. "And if Blake doesn't turn up after all, we put in old Herries."

"After I've finished, if you please!" Cardew said, with quiet decision. "I'm not running down Herries; but I really am an older hand at the game than he is. Of course, I don't want to risk too many points; but I think it will be fair that, if Blake fails to show up, Herries should only chip in when someone has thrown me."

"My hat! And you don't think anyone's going to?" said Gore, staring at him.

"I don't mind goin' so far as to say that I don't know which of you can, by gad, on any form I've seen here to-day!"

There was no boasting in Cardew's tone. It was unusually serious. The dandy of the Fourth was up against it now, and he would not fail his side from any weakness or lack of pluck.

Herries clapped him on the back with a heavy hand.

"Jolly good!" he said. "I agree, any road!"

Figgy was a little more doubtful. But Cardew was strongly supported by Clive, Levison, Roylance, and Redfern. When Kerr agreed also, Figgins gave in.

"Who are your twelve, Tom?" he asked.

"Wait a moment! We haven't chosen them yet—waited to see, you know."

Tom, Talbot, Kangaroo, and Bernard Glyn put their heads together, and announced their choice.

They were all four included, of course. The other eight chosen were Gore, Grundy, Dane, Thompson, Wilkins, Lowther, Manners, and Gibbons.

"Fairer way would be to put all the

names into a hat and let the draw settle in what order we should tackle Cardew," said Tom Merry.

"You're a sport, Tommy!" said Kerr. And all agreed.

A dozen of the Fourth had set off to search for Blake. If they had gone across the quad they could hardly have failed to see him—or to hear him, for, of course, he would have shouted to them. But no one even thought of his being in the New House, and the School House had been searched most thoroughly. And, by chance, none of the eager seekers came within sight.

"Manners!" said Lefevre.

Manners gave a wry grin. He had wanted to resign his place to Jimson. But if Manners could not throw Cardew, Jimson could not—the Shell leaders were sure of that.

And Manners could not! They had hardly looked before he was down. Cardew was altogether too clever for him.

"Dane!"

Clifton Dane came forward with real eagerness. He wanted to win back the credit that he felt he had lost when Cardew had thrown him in the earlier bout.

And this time he lasted out longer, for he was very quick and active, and the knowledge of how much the Fourth thought of Cardew's form helped him to be careful.

But the best he could do was not good enough. After fifty seconds or so of tense struggle he got the outside stroke, and went down.

"Thompson!" called Lefevre next.

The New House fellow had strength and stamina; but he lacked Cardew's electric quickness, and, of course, he had nothing like Cardew's knowledge of the game. The hipec settled him in less than half the time Clifton Dane had lasted.

Clarke of the New House, who had been helping to search for Blake, came running up.

"Found him?" yelled Figgins.

"No. It's Monteith who's wanted. His governor has turned up."

"I wasn't expecting him," said the New House prefect. "But I must cut, Kildare, will you take over my job?"

"If the wrestlers don't mind a fellow who really doesn't know the game meddling," replied the skipper, smiling.

"Oh, you'll do, Kildare! You know enough," Tom Merry said.

Figgins agreed. Kildare stepped into the ring, and Monteith hurried off to the New House.

As he drew near he happened to cast his eyes up towards the roof, and saw a flutter of something white not far below it.

He stopped, gazing up. A voice came down to him.

"Hallo, Monteith! Hallo!"

"What are you after up there?" yelled the prefect.

"Ratty's locked me up!"

Monteith darted into the House and upstairs. He forgot about his father. He was thinking of the fellows waiting on Little Side for Blake's coming—of Cardew keeping up his end meanwhile. The spirit of the game had got into James Monteith; and he was thoroughly indignant with Mr. Ratchiff's tyranny.

"Door's locked, and Ratty's got the key!" called Blake from inside.

"Hang the sour old rascal! I'll get it from him! This sort of thing is right beyond the dashed limit."

"He's gone out," answered Blake. "Saw him go."

Monteith's reply was a crash at the door. But door and lock alike were strong. There was nothing doing that way.

"They're waiting for you, Blake!" the senior shouted.

Blake almost groaned.
"I know they are! I can't help it. The old rotter—"

"But they aren't really waiting—that's the worst of it, in a way," Monteith corrected himself. "Cardew's taking the whole dozen of the Shell. Herries is to take your place, but not until Cardew's been thrown."

"That's going to take some doing," replied Blake. "But he'll never be able to work off a dozen of them, and old Herries isn't class enough. How did we get on in the ordinary bouts?"

"Level pegging, and your turn to come—with Grundy."

"Well, that will be three to the good for us," said Blake modestly. "I'd hoped for more, though. Oh, hang it, if I could only get out!"

"Half a moment! I've an idea!" cried the prefect.

He rushed off, but was back again very soon.

"I'm going to get up on the roof, through the skylight," he said. "I've a good strong rope, and I can haul you up all serene from the window-ledge. Be careful when you shin out, though!"

"What about Ratty?" inquired Blake.

"He'll kick up no end of a fuss."

"Hang Ratty!" snapped Monteith.

A minute or two later a rope dangled in front of the window. Blake climbed out on to the ledge, never thinking about the long drop if he should slip, never even glancing down.

Monteith, with the rope fast to a chimney-stack in case of accidents, hauled him up. It was not so easy at the last, and Blake's knees were barked and Monteith's hands were raw before the junior was in safety.

"I'm no end obliged to you, Monteith," he said gratefully. "It isn't every fellow who would have—"

"If you mean Ratty, Ratty he hanged!" snapped Monteith. "I'm ripe for any kind of a row with the old idiot! A fellow can be punished by detention—I know that. But locking a chap up like this at such a time isn't proper punishment at all—it's merely petty spite!"

"I'll buzz off," said Blake. "If you don't mind the old fossil, I don't."

"Afraid you won't be very fit for your job," the prefect remarked.

"Oh, I'm all serene!" answered the junior.

But he did not feel too fit, and he began to realise that as he ran for Little Side. The time of waiting had tried temper and nerves hard; and the scramble to get upon the roof had strained muscles.

He heard cheering from Little Side as he ran—thought he recognised the voices of Figgis and Herries and Clive, and guessed that Cardew was carrying on in his absence.

—And he was right!

CHAPTER 12.

Cardew the Conqueror.

WILKINS had gone down to a cross-buttock. Glyn had been back-heeled within five seconds. Then had come Harry Noble—a far doughtier opponent, though Roylance, who was not Cardew's equal, had defeated him.

Kangaroo put up a stern struggle. He succumbed at last to a hipec. It was a daring stroke for Cardew to attempt against him, for Kangaroo was not a light-weight, and the lift in the hipec needs strength; but its very unexpectedness spelt success. Noble had never thought his slim opponent would try it.

Cardew had looked as fresh as paint

when Glyn went down. No one but Dane had given him any real trouble thus far. But when he had finished with Kangaroo he was panting and perspiring.

"Grundy!" called Lefevre.

"Cardew had better take a rest first," said Kildare sympathetically. "He's done his bit, properly looked at."

"Oh, not at all!" said the dandy of the Fourth lightly. "I'm quite ready to go on."

"I'm not!" growled Grundy. "I don't want to take credit for throwing a chap who's dead beat."

"But you're not goin' to throw me, my good man!" said Cardew.

"What? I tell you—"

"Don't! Let me tell you this—if you aren't ready when I am—an I'm ready this moment—I shall claim forfeit of three points for your failure!"

"Brrrr!" growled Grundy; and he stood up to Cardew.

If the great George Alfred had been less clumsy and more ready to be taught, he might have made quite a fair wrestler. As it was, he was not an easy man to throw; and Cardew had to put in some really hard work.

But Grundy went at last—to his own great astonishment. It was the outside stroke this time. Cardew had done enough weight-lifting.

The Fourth cheered their champion to the echo. Lefevre drew another slip from the hat.

"No hurry," he said. "But Merry's the next on the list!"

A thrill swept the crowd. If anyone in the Shell was likely to defeat Cardew, Tom Merry was the man.

There was Talbot still to come, too. But perhaps he would fall to the share of Herries. No one much doubted which of those two would win. And there were Gore, Gibbons, and Lowther still left. All of them were pretty hefty.

Then a roar rose from the outskirts of the crowd.

"Blake! Here's old Blake!"

Jack Blake came running up, breathing just a little hard, his knees scored, his scanty raiment showing signs of the struggle to get upon the roof.

"Just in time!" yelled Figgis, in delight. "Cardew's downed seven of them, and it's your turn to take on Tommy!"

"Oh, good!" said Blake.

"Me first!" said Grundy, with dignity.

"You? Why, you silly chump, Cardew's just settled you!" said Clive.

"By a fluke—a sheer fluke! But I insist upon having my postponed turn with Blake now!"

"I think Grundy has a claim," said Lefevre. And Kildare agreed.

"Oh, all right!" snapped Blake.

He and Grundy locked. A few seconds' tense struggling, and then Grundy went flying over Blake's back—buttoked fairly and squarely!

"Come on, Tommy!" said Blake.

But even as he spoke a spasm of pain distorted his face, and he put his hand to his side.

"You're not fit!" said Tom sharply.

"I—I— Hang it all, I don't really believe I am!" admitted Blake. "I've strained something—I don't know what. I don't know whether I did it scrambling up on the roof or throwing Grundy."

"The roof! What do you mean?"

"I say, though, Blake, I'm sorry!" mumbled Grundy.

"I thought you looked so when I threw you," replied Blake, with a wry grin.

"I can go on, dear boy," Cardew said, laying a hand on Blake's shoulder.

"Go on, then!"

Tom and Cardew faced each other, breast to breast. A long, tense duel followed. The veins stood out like knotted cords on Cardew's temples, and Tom could not have recognised his own face had he seen it in a mirror. Once Cardew only just saved himself by his dexterity in going down, managing to make a "dog fall" of it. But in the end skill told, and a sudden back-heel sent the Shell's best man flying.

"Lowther!" said Lefevre, drawing again. "But you really must have a rest first, Cardew."

"Fraid I must," admitted Cardew ruefully.

"See here, let me take on Lowther!" said Herries eagerly. "I can throw him, I guess, and it's fair enough, for Blake hasn't lent a hand, and we bargained for two."

Cardew bit his lip. Perhaps not even his best chums understood how very much the slim dandy wanted to accomplish the whole task. There was something better than mere swank in it. But there was some swank, and Cardew knew it; and in that moment he showed up better than he realised. He thought of his Form before himself.

"Proceed, dear boy!" he said lightly.

It was no easy task for Herries; but Herries did it. Then he took on Gibbons, and flogged him very quickly.

"Gore!" said Lefevre.

Gore was a biggish handful; but Herries mastered him with a cross-buttock.

Talbot only remained. Now it was the turn of Herries to put aside self. And Herries did it!

"You're rested, Cardew," he growled. "I'm not up to 'old Talbot's form—at least, I don't think so. Of course, I'm willing enough."

Cardew stepped forward without a word for the last bout of all; and there were some even among the Shell who could not help hoping he might win. He had done great things that day, and it would be rough luck indeed if he failed in that last tussle of all.

And it looked like failure for him at the outset. Thrice he seemed on the very point of being thrown, but recovered himself as by a miracle each time. Twice he nearly had Talbot down, but lacked the strength to push home the advantage at the critical second.

No buttock or cross-buttock, no hipec or swinging hipec was on the board for Cardew this bout! He lacked the strength for any of them, and Talbot was fresh and lusty. The breast-stroke was out of the question. Cardew played for the simple back-heel or the swift outside stroke. But he had this advantage—Talbot lacked the experience which would have told him that.

It came at last, and Fourth and Shell cheered alike as Talbot lay on his back, a smile on his flushed, handsome face, and Cardew, smiling, too, gazed down at him.

So had Cardew and Herries—but mostly Cardew—held the lists against all comers, and the Fourth had lost not a single point through the base tyranny of Mr. Ratcliff! Thirty-nine in all had they scored on the day, and now they had a chance again.

Neither Monteith nor Blake was brought to book. Perhaps Mr. Ratcliff forgot—perhaps not!

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

THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA.

FOR NEW READERS.

The twins are Philip Derwent, of Highcliffe, and his sister Philippa, of Cliff House. They have a cockatoo, named Cocky, which has been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Gadsby, who is plotting against him with Vavasour. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a serious accident to one of Merton's eyes in a fight with Pousonby. In their absence Flip gets too friendly with Pon and the rest of the nuts and, without any real taste for it at the outset, takes to gambling. He goes with the nuts to a gambling den at Courtfield, quarrels with Pon, and is knocked senseless just as the warning "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 Hazeldene, who has run away from Greyfriars. Goggs, of Franklingham, comes to Highcliffe. Flip and Hazel go to London, and are robbed by roughs. They meet an officer friend of Flip's. Hazel runs off and Flip follows. Johnny Goggs meets the pretty post-girl, and a general argument ensues between Chiker, Goggs, the nuts, the Caterpillar, and Miss Gittins.

Bringing Gadsby to Book.

"THIS," drawled the Caterpillar, "is interestin'—extremely interestin'! Proceed, Mr. Chiker, pray!" Chiker had grabbed Gaddy by the collar.

No one interposed. The nuts did not care to risk meddling. Goggs and the Caterpillar had no cause to serve by doing so. As for Miss Gittins, she laughed.

"It's no business of yours, my lord duke!" growled Chiker.

"Oh, granted! But it's a mistake to discuss such very private matters on a public road, y'know, my friend. I wouldn't listen at a door—at least, unless there was some really excellent reason for doin' so, by gad! But the things that people talk about in tones that can be heard on the opposite side of the road oughtn't to be so very private; they really oughtn't. An' if you are bent on havin' out with Gadsby the whole trouble in connection with Derwent's kidnapping, I'm not goin' to pretend that I'm not interested. For I am no end. I don't bar your takin' Gaddy away an' havin' it out with him elsewhere, but if you're goin' to do it here I mean to listen, an' I'm afraid my jawin'-tackle is slung too loosely to permit of my listenin' without comment."

"You an' your jawin'-tackle! You'd jaw the 'ind-leg off a donkey!" snarled Chiker.

"Rather dangerous for you to stay, Vavasour, I consider," remarked Goggs.

Miss Gittins giggled. Vavasour scowled. Gadsby gasped and gurgled.

For all the time that the Caterpillar had taken in getting off his long speech in his usual drawl Chiker had been shaking Gaddy furiously.

Mr. Chiker had had too much to drink at Friardale. It was cheaper to stand him drinks than to go too closely into accounts with him—so Messrs. Cobb and Hawke considered. But he was not so easily diverted from his errand that the many drinks had wiped out of his mind all memory of his grievance against the two precious swindlers, and he had come away seething with rage. Before he met Bullen the fresh air had worked a partially sobering effect upon him. But Bullen's sneers about his niece had not improved his temper, and what had passed since had made it much worse.

And he had a very real grievance against Gaddy, as well as against Messrs. Cobb and Hawke. Gaddy had employed him, and had not paid him. Gaddy had dodged him when asked for an appointment. And now he had got Gaddy by the collar it seemed to his fuddled mind that there was but one thing to be done, and that was to have the matter settled there and then.

In all this, of course, he was not considering the feelings of Reginald Gadsby in the very least. But as far as that goes Gadsby would not have considered his. The debt he owed did not weigh upon Gaddy's mind, apart from any unpleasant consequences it might have.

But to have the whole story coming out in the hearing of the Caterpillar was quite sufficiently unpleasant. Even that, however, was not so bad as to be choked to death or shaken into unconsciousness by Chiker.

"Help, Pon! Gurrig! Yow! Help, De Courcy!" gasped Gaddy.

Pousonby made no move to the rescue. But the Caterpillar stepped forward, and laid a slim, white hand on the rough sleeve of Chiker.

"My good fellow," he said lightly, "apart from any moral objections that may be entertained to your chokin' this specimen once an' for all—I haven't any objections of the sort, I assure you, so I speak without bias—there is the personal drawback that it will be bound to get you into trouble. Moreover, it may prevent our hearin' any more of the very

interestin' story of the kidnappin' of Derwent. On the whole, therefore, I should strongly advise your lettin' your victim take a breath or two before chokin' him further—if, only that at the present rate you are not likely to get much more change out of it, as he will be permanently choked in about half a jiffy, by gad!"

Gadsby had no love for Rupert de Courcy at the best of times; but he had never before hated him quite as much as he did then.

The Caterpillar had not hurried himself in the least. He had drawled out that long speech as though the choking of Gadsby were a subject in which he took no real interest. Rather, perhaps, as though he approved of it, only that at the present rate it was not carried far enough to cause trouble to anyone but Gadsby.

And that may have been very much the feeling he had. Rupert de Courcy had a hard strain in him, and the enemies of his friends had small hope of mercy at his hands. Treachery he hated; and Gaddy had played a treacherous game. Altogether, the Caterpillar may have felt that Chiker was not hurting Gaddy more than Gaddy deserved. "You're too blessed interested in what ain't any concern of yours!" growled Chiker, ceasing to shake Gadsby at last, but retaining his hold on his victim's collar.

"I have frequently observed that fallin' in myself," admitted the Caterpillar. "But this is interestin' enough to intrigue anyone. Who are the Highcliffe fellows who have a stake financially in the gamblin'-den which you help to run, may I ask?"

"Eh? What do you know about that?" howled Chiker.

"Not much. Still, somethin'. Really, Mr. Chiker, you an' your friend Samuel should lower your voices when you are engaged in confidences!"

"You 'eard me an' Sam Bullen talkin', you young 'ound?"

"Easy does it, Mr. Chiker! If you are abusive again I shall be compelled to hit you. You will hit back, an' I shall be hurt. My friend Goggs will then intervene, an' it will be your turn for gettin' hurt. Meanwhile, our mutual friend Gadsby—I should loosen my grip, I think, if I were you—he really seems to be chokin'!"

"Gurrig!" gasped Gaddy, upon whose throat Chiker was pressing harder than he realised.

"Will utilise his last remainin' fragment of strength in runnin' away an' expirin' elsewhere," continued the Caterpillar, with the utmost coolness. "That may tend to raise doubt as to whether you were actually responsible for his takin' off. On the other hand, it will prevent your goin' through us clothes, as you doubtless intend to do when you have choked him sufficiently."

Pon and Vavasour were sniggering uneasily. There was nothing uneasy about the giggling of Miss Gittins. Plainly she was enjoying herself, with as complete indifference to any discomfort Gaddy suffered as the Caterpillar himself had. Miss Gittins was quite sure now that she did not like the Highcliffe nuts.

As for Goggs, he might have been a graven image for any sound he made. The Caterpillar had taken the centre of the stage for the time being, and Goggs was well content that he should take it.

Again Chiker gave Gaddy a chance to breathe freely. Rupert de Courcy puzzled Chiker even more than Goggs did. He could not place the Caterpillar in the least. He was a Highcliffe boy, of course—Chiker had played footer against him. But he talked like a man, though like no man Chiker had ever known; and he had a consummate coolness that impressed the burly fellow.

"Look 'ere, best thing for you to do is to cut off," Chiker said. "You may be several

kinds of a duke, an' all that; but this ain't your trouble. It's young Gadsby I want to talk to, not you, my lord!"

"Oh, you want to talk to Gaddy, do you, by gad? Now, I rather thought the notion was chokin' him. I might go if such were the case, as I shouldn't care to be put on trial as an accessory. But if it's talkin', I stay! I am interested. So is my friend Goggs. So, I imagine, is your fair niece—to whom, by the way, I have had no introduction; an excusable omission on your part, Mr. Chiker, considerin' the position, but strange on the part of such a mirror of politeness as my friend Goggs!"

Then Goggs spoke. As if he took the rebuke seriously, he said:

"A thousand pardons! Miss Gittins, this is my friend De Courcy! De Courcy, Miss Gittins!"

"Oh, I know him! He's one of the nuts!" said the post-girl. And she put out a small paw, which the Caterpillar's slim, white hand clasped at once.

"Er—hardly one of the nuts, Miss Gittins!" drawled De Courcy. "I should not like to be confounded with them in your mind, after havin' heard your opinion of them, by gad!"

"I don't mean that lot!" replied the fair Gwendoline, with a contempt for Pon & Co. which she took no pains to conceal. "I'm not so silly as to think you or grandfather here are their sort."

"If you will only class me with grandfather I shall be happy indeed!" murmured the Caterpillar.

"Swelp me if they ain't all carryin' on like folks in a play!" growled Mr. Chiker. "I dunno where you learned that sort of thing from, Gwennie, but it weren't from me!"

"It certainly was not!" snapped Miss Gittins, with an upward tilt of her small nose. "Don't shake the poor thing like that, Bert Chiker! You'll have his teeth dropping out!"

"Gurrig! Yow! Oh, dear! Oh, by gad, stoppitt!" gasped Gaddy, as he got another respite.

"Are you goin' to 'and over the chink you promised me?" demanded Chiker.

"Now, murmured the Caterpillar, "we come to the really interestin' chapters! Proceed to recount the circumstances in which Gaddy became your debtor, Mr. Chiker, pray!"

"E knows well enough, 'ang 'im!" snarled Chiker, giving Gadsby another vicious shake. "But we don't—at least, not well enough! An' we want to, by gad!" said the Caterpillar.

"Tell them, Bert Chiker!" said Miss Gittins. "If you ain't asbamed of the game you played, you jolly well ought to be! And if you don't tell, I shall—so there!"

"I reckon as you've told all you know a'ready, my gal!" Chiker replied surlily. "That's what you was after with 'im you call grandfather there, I can see. 'Tain't in nature as you should 'ave been spoonin' along of a glass-eyed curate; but—"

"I have a very pronounced objection to that misdescription, Chiker; and if you repeat it I shall be reluctantly compelled to resort to forcible measures!" struck in Goggs gravely.

"Oh, lumme! What with you an' the dook there, a plain chap like me don't know whether 'e's standin' on 'is blessed 'ead or 'is blessed 'eels!" groaned Chiker. "You do so talk, an'—"

"You aren't plain, Uncle Albert. Ugly is the word for you," Miss Gittins put in.

"Shut your mouth, Miss Sauce-box!" replied Chiker, almost good-humouredly.

The drink was dying down in him, and both the Caterpillar and Goggs had impressed him. Something of a brute, something of a bully, not too honest, Chiker had yet in him the makings of a man. He found

himself now with a curious feeling that, on the whole, he was on the side of Goggs and his niece and the eloquent swell as against the nats. He was not in the least stricken by remorse at the memory of the way in which he had treated Flip Derwent; but he did feel that he would have far greater satisfaction in treating Gadsby in the same manner. And he had not the slightest compunction in giving Gadsby away.

"That," said Goggs reprovingly, "is not the usual mode of addressing a lady."

Chiker gave a great, rumbling laugh. "She ain't a lady," he said. "She's jest a post-girl, an' my niece. But I do believe as you treated 'er like a lady, an' I don't think none the worse of you for that, young feller. Now then, Sixpenn'orth-o'-bad-'a'pence, are you goin' to cough up, or am I goin' to tell the yarn?"

This query was to Gaddy's address, of course. Chiker emphasised it by another savage shake, which did not improve the already tremulous condition of Reginald Havers Gadsby.

Gaddy had never in his life been in a more awkward situation. He was more than half choked. His blackest and most cherished secrets were more than half exposed, and he had little hope now that all would not come out. Even if Chiker did not tell it, the Caterpillar would be on the track; and, with-

out absolute proof, the Caterpillar could make matters exceedingly warm for the unfortunate Gaddy at Highcliffe.

In Pon and Vav there was no help—not a scrap. Gadsby was not at all sure that they wanted to help him. Likely enough they were enjoying his discomfiture. Likely enough they wanted the story told. The Caterpillar would know then that neither of them had been a principal in the blackest treachery against Flip Derwent. He alone had fixed on the kidnapping with Chiker. Until now his chums, whatever their suspicions may have been, had not known the whole truth.

But when Chiker let go his collar Gaddy tried a last despairing appeal to Pon.

"Lend me a fiver to buy this brute off, Pon, old top!" he gasped.

"What's the dashed good?" inquired Pon cynically. "He's told all that matters now. An' I'm hanged if I'd pay him a dashed bob if I were in your boots! Glad I'm not. You've been sailin' very near the wind, dear boy. You seem to have forgotten that Derwent was a pal of mine, too."

"Must have been!" said the Caterpillar sardonically. "It is so very like you, Pon, to leave a pal in the lurch at a time of stress."

"Oh, you go an' eat coke!" snarled Pon.

"De Courey, won't you—"

"Settle up with our dear friend Chiker?"

But wouldn't that make me an accessory after the fact, Gaddy? I don't like that word accessory; it has a nasty, legal, hangin' sort of sound. I couldn't think of becomin' an accessory after the fact. But I don't mind payin' off the respectable Chiker—for the honour of Highcliffe—if there is any of it left—an' the memory of the time when you an' I, Gaddy, in the words, more or less, of the poet Burns:

"Paddit barefit in the burn,
An' p'd the gowans—"

Or was it rowans?—I'm never quite sure which is which—in short, of the merry old times when we were nats together, Gaddy, dear boy, ere Courtenay came along—an' snatched me as a brand from the burnin'—"

"Oh, Jeerusalem!" gasped Chiker. "You 'ad ought to be in Parlyment, my lord dook!"

"I will pay off our dear friend, Gadsby, on one condition."

"Any old thing!" gasped Gadsby recklessly.

"On the condition," finished the Caterpillar, "that he tells us here an' now everything he knows about the plot an' the connection of you bouders with the wretched kamblin'-den at Courtfield; an' that he never breathes a word about it again to anyone unless I ask him to!"

(To be continued next week.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"SIX ON THE SCOUT!"

(By Martin Clifford.)

This story, though it belongs to the competition series, deals with an event that can hardly be described as a sports one, though it might be termed a sporting one.

Skimpole suffers a loss. D'Arcy makes a suggestion. The upshot is that three members of the Shell—the Terrible Three—and a trio of the Fourth—Kerr, Levison, and Roylance—are chosen to represent their respective Forms in a kind of detective contest.

Which side do you think wins? I am not going to tell you here. But I wonder whether you will guess the solution of the mystery as early as I did? I fancy not—or, at any rate, that only a few of you will. It is very simple, really; but it would be easy for anyone to be led astray by the many apparent clues offered. Was it Crooke who played the rascal? Was it Manners minor? Suspicion falls upon both. It could not have been Mr. Railton, though Skimmy was foolish enough to think that. And if it wasn't Crooke, and it wasn't Manners minor, who was it, since the researches of the rival detectives tend to show that no one else could have been on the spot?

You will see next week!

THE FLAX HARVEST SCHEME.

Will those of you whose interest has been aroused by this buy, beg, or borrow—I don't mind which—a copy of this week's "Magnet"? I have something to say about it in my Chat in that paper; and in these days, when space is so precious, I think it should be enough to refer you there, though I gave publicity to the scheme in both papers originally. Most of you read the "Magnet," I know, and those who do not should not find it difficult to get a look at this week's number.

LIST OF TOM MERRY'S STORIES IN THE "GEM"—(continued.)

- 201.—"Ashamed of His Sister."
- 202.—"The Runaway Schoolboy."
- 203.—"Disowned by His Brother."
- 204.—"Captain D'Arcy."
- 205.—"His False Position."
- 206.—"The Lancashire Lad's Invention."
- 207.—"Their Dishonourable Chum."
- 208.—"The Terrible Three's Recruit."
- 209.—"The Schoolboy Nihilist."
- 210.—"Tom Merry & Co.'s Music-Hall."
- 211.—"The New Firm at St. Jim's."
- 212.—"The Great Barrington at St. Jim's."
- 213.—"Figgins & Co.'s New Master."
- 214.—"The Hero of St. Jim's."
- 215.—"A Disgrace to the School."
- 216.—"Gussy's April Fools."

Your Editor.

CADET NOTES.

WE continue to receive a very large number of inquiries from boys anxious to join the Royal Air Force as mechanics. For their information, and that of others who may be thinking of taking the same course, it should be stated that the enlistment of such boys has now been again entirely suspended. It was reopened for a short time in April and May, but we gather that the number of applicants was so great that all the available vacancies were filled up practically in a few days. So far as we can discover, it is highly improbable that the recruiting of lads for this section of the Force will be reopened again at all—at any rate, not for a very long time—and, in the circumstances, those of our readers who were thinking of making application for the Force should turn their efforts into some other direction. They would do well to join the nearest local Cadet Corps, and so secure useful training and knowledge which will stand them in good stead later on when they reach the age for joining the Regular Forces. Information about the nearest corps, etc., will be sent, as usual, on application to the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments, Judges' Quadrangle, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C.2.

The presentation of medals awarded by the French Government to various Cadet Corps and Boy Scout Troops took place in the Guildhall on Saturday, May 4th. The Lord Mayor presided over a very large gathering and Major-General le Vicomte de la Panouse, C.B., C.V.O., presented the medals on behalf of the French Government. Subsequently addresses were given by Major-General the Earl of Scarborough, Lieutenant-General Sir Nevill Macready, Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, General Sir Ian Hamilton, and others. Representative units of the following Cadet Battalions received medals on behalf of their corps, viz.: 1st Cadet Battalion R.R.C., 1st Cadet Battalion Middlesex Regiment, the Church Lads' Brigade, Boys' Brigade, Catholic Boys' Brigade, Jewish Lads' Brigade, and the London Diocesan Church Lads' Brigade. And for the Boy Scouts the medals were presented to representatives of the following troops, viz.: 24th Bournemouth (St. Luke's), 1st Southampton (All Saints), 1st Stepney, 7th Bethnal Green, Bow Church Wolf Pack, 13th Bournemouth (St. Peter's) Wolf Pack, and the Highfield 14th Southampton. In each case detachments of ten boys, representing the Cadet Corps or Boy Scout Troop, under the command of an officer, attended to receive the medals on behalf of their unit. The ceremony was most successful, and a very interesting one.

Large numbers of boys are being required for work on the land in connection with the harvest and gathering in the flax crops, etc., and we understand that arrangements are

being made through the War Office for this to be done by relays of Cadets wherever possible. The scheme has already appeared in our pages, and offers an excellent opportunity for lads belonging to corps to get a good holiday at no expense, and at the same time to render a useful service to the country. Those of our readers who are members of Cadet Corps should bring the matter to the notice of their officer commanding, who might take it up and endeavour to make arrangements for the corps to take part in this useful work.

The Northumberland Cadet Movement, to which we have made reference in these notes before, is now well established, and enrolment of recruits has commenced, and met with a very encouraging response. Already more than 500 boys have joined, and it is anticipated that the numbers of the proposed establishment of 1,200 Cadets will be easily reached, and may have to be considerably extended in the near future. The headquarters of the corps are at the Hutton Terrace Drill Hall, Sandyford Road, Newcastle, and local detachments are already formed at North Shields, Blyth, Hexham, Alnwick, Gosforth, and Berwick. All our readers residing in any of these places should not hesitate to join and support the movement, which is being so strongly supported by all classes of the community in the county of Northumberland.

There are some keen lads in Eltham who promise to become good shots with the rifle. A team shooting competition was arranged between six men of the Royal Engineers Cadets and six of the Royal West Kent Cadets, under the direction of Sergeant-Instructor C. W. Walker, and the teams met on a recent Monday and Tuesday, with the following result: Royal Engineers Cadets—Sergt. Page scored 98, Lance-Corpl. Adams 98, Sergt. Saliba 95, Pte. Hickman 95, Pte. Fryer 94, Pte. Dunn 91; total 569; average 94.5-6ths. Royal West Kent Cadets—Pte. Keeble scored 97, Capt. Edgar 96, Sergt.-Major Glanfield 91, Lance-Corpl. Shaipr 89, Sergt. Botell 87, Corpl. Robinson 85; total 545; average 90.5-6ths. The Royal Engineers Cadets were the winners. The losers issued a challenge for a return match.

A Cadet Company has been raised in connection with the 1st Battalion of the Norfolk Volunteer Regiment at Norwich. The present strength of the company is about 70, and it has been duly recognised by the War Office and the local Territorial Force Association. It is stated that the lads are very keen, and first-class instructors are provided, who take the greatest interest in their work, and there is every prospect of enrolling further recruits. Our readers in Norwich would do well to get into touch with this new Cadet Company, and join and support it.